CHANGING CITIES
Spatial, morphological, formal, & socio-economic dimensions
Skiathos, Greece, 18-21 June 2013

special session on
Diversity, ethnic economies and the urban space

Call for Papers

Two contradictory narratives seem to be dominant in the imagery of today’s diverse metropolises. One the one hand, contemporary cities are often perceived as loci of inequalities and anomy, whereby diversity is often considered a problem. On the other, they are imagined as bustling cosmopolitan centres, where diversity is seen as an advantage. The former has long-dominated social theory and research, e.g. focusing on issues of segregation or socio-spatial exclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities; the latter is rather emerging and mostly centred around the world’s major cities and concerned with diversity’s economic potential.

The study of ethnic entrepreneurship, to the extent it may entail a spatial dimension, seems to be nested within these narratives. Ethnic businesses tend to mushroom in areas of low rents and high concentrations of immigrants and ethnic minorities, and are connected to processes of immigrant settlement and the formation of ethnic communities. It is in such areas where clustering and specialisation may give way to the formation of specific market niches and/or ethnic enclaves, which may render diversity ‘visible’ upon the space of the city. Ultimately, trends of revalorisation of the urban space in ‘ethnic’ places have been observed, in some cases involving ethnic businesses as important agents of urban regeneration or gentrification processes.

The aim of this Special Session is to bring together researchers from across the social sciences – human and economic geographers, urban sociologists or anthropologists, spatial planners, etc. – who are interested in ethnic economies and the urban space in multiethnic metropolises. We are motivated from our own work on an ongoing research project entitled “Emerging ethnic economies at times of crisis: socio-economic and spatial dimensions of immigrant entrepreneurship in Athens” (funded by the Hellenic Observatory at the LSE). We would like to open up a discussion situating the recent Greek experience in the international context, and comparing the trends observed in Athens to those in other cities in Europe and beyond. More specifically, we invite papers reflecting on the socio-spatial dimensions of immigrants’ independent economic activities in contemporary cities, for instance in respect to:

- the ways they develop within, impact on, and attain meaning for ethnic/ migrant ‘communities’, and the relevance of local and transnational networks;
- the role they may play in everyday negotiations of urban symbiosis and the mundane politics of diversity at a local, urban or national level;
- the modes in which they intersect with the production of space, or with processes of urban transformation and change, locally or in wider spatial contexts.

Please send your title and abstract to the session organisers by 20 December 2012:
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For more information on the conference please visit its website:
http://www.changingcities.prd.uth.gr/