The French National Board of Geography - Commission Cities and Metropolization and the Research Programme JUGURTA "Spatial justice, urban governance and territorialization in cities of the South" (ANR-SUDS) will organize an International Conference at the University of Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

January 19-21, 2012

The Competitive City, at what price?
Faced with a competition, on a worldwide scale for the largest of them, metropolises must today aim for excellence. Numerous fields are concerned: the economy, innovation, education, research but also culture, sports, urban planning, media etc. Significant funds and resources are mobilised, given the importance of the task: equipment, networks, human resources, image policy, lobbying, and supports of all sorts for investments. At the same time, in order to maintain their internal cohesion, cities must seek social justice while their investments tend to increase the gap between gifted and less gifted, rich and poor, connected and non-connected. Likewise the funding and the resources mobilised are in this respect significant, due to the importance of the challenge: personal subsidies, prevention and animation policies, as well as large urban rehabilitation projects strongly commit local budgets. The need for local administrators to jointly address both pressing and somewhat contradictory demands constitutes what Yves Barel referred to as a “paradox”.

It is on this paradox, on this “contradiction” between economic efficiency and social justice, that the conference will focus, endeavouring to “keep together” the two components of the double constraint and the need to take into account the way in which the pair evolves over time, notably in the context of current changes.

**A changing role of space**

In this paradox, as in the responses of local actors, space plays a crucial role. Space is the privileged receptacle of the constraints, contradictions and regulations the city experiences. Better still, space is in its visible and material as well as symbolic dimensions the product, the crucible and an important agent of their transformation. The appearance and the development of technological networks have increased the number of scales the city must juggle with. However, zoning, localisation, “borders”, and infrastructure continue to play a role in terms of proximity and distance, which immaterial networks have far from eliminated and often reinforce.
The issue of proximity and distance is all the more important today, with the expansion of the city in its metropolitan form. With the speed of urban growth, well beyond what cities have experienced up to this point, the administrative and political frameworks become inadequate, points of reference are upset, social categories are weakened, new scales and inevitably new management and regulation procedures emerge. While the metropolitan scale is mainly that of large projects and of the image, city-dwellers find it difficult to perceive it through experiences other than the tedious, daily back-and-forth. The other scales should not be forgotten all the more so, given the recurrent calls of very influential international actors for “urban participation” in their discourse on “governance” and the concomitant rise in local demands.

New questions arise with the extension of the city’s dimensions. Whereas the range of scales within the city, from the metropolis to the neighbourhood or to the building, is expanding, modes of territorialisation also result from increasingly diverse logics, be they administrative logics (the territorialisation of public policies) or the result of urban collectives due to local mobilisation and identity claims, or mobilisations of a religious, charismatic or mafia-related nature. The issue of the articulation between the different levels, as well as that of regulation, are made more pressing by the interferences, the importance of the challenges, the attempts of public institutions as well as collective and individual representations and the gap between the two. How, in particular, to respond to the new expectations and demands of the urban population regarding justice, a justice whose spatial and scalar aspects must henceforth also be taken into account, that is to say by mobilising the concept of spatial justice and its various dimensions, notably distributive and procedural.

**Questions**

The aim of this conference will be to answer this central question: how do cities try to reconcile economic efficiency and social justice, which articulations and disarticulations do they make of it, and what roles do space and spatial scales play in this process? Holding together the two constraints of economic efficiency and social justice in the analysis is not an easy task. Do metropolitan administrations express concern for this issue? What visions, ideologies, and representations is this concern based on? In addition, responses to these two challenges may not fall in the competencies of the same actors, of the same services, the same institutions, the same territorial levels and, within the same time-frame. Which set-ups, which management procedures and management of the urban complexity can we observe?
Thus:

- In the elaboration of their responses which models do cities have access to? How are these models transmitted and what are their channels of diffusion? In the implementation, what hybridisation can be seen and what innovations appear? Are these innovations transferred between metropolises and how?

- How is the dilemma between economic efficiency and social justice addressed? Which levels, which administrations are responsible? Is the management thought of globally, is it monitored during its implementation or is it subject to a multitude of partial regulations? Is the management the subject of compromises, of compartmentalisation or of policies fluctuating over time? How is this perceptible, with particular regard to funding?

- Between the state, the city regions, the various administrative entities, the communities and neighbourhoods, which scales are affected by the question of economic competitiveness and social justice? Although we have moved beyond the illusion of the “pertinent” level to answer such questions, is the territorial structure conceptualised in those terms? What makes up these various scales, economically, politically, socially and culturally; who embodies them, are they based on conflicts and forms of regulation? How are they articulated amongst themselves?

- What debates arise in metropolises from the dilemma of economic competitiveness and social justice? What are their components and their human, social, cultural and of course financial implications? Which circles do these debates reach and how are they expressed? Are the responsible administrations sensitive to these debates, do they participate, is their action modified as a result?

With some distance, researchers will also consider the long term, which allows for retrospective readings and taking evolutions into account. Times of crisis, an issue of particular relevance today, also raise questions regarding changes in the basic data, the logics of action, the dynamics, or even the definition of economic efficiency.

Do attempts to reconcile economic efficiency and social justice take place to the advantage or disadvantage of either pole? In what respect does one constitute a constraint for the other? Beyond the constraints, what courses of action remain available to cities, what “tricks” do they make use of in their responses? Are they able, at times, to articulate both constraints in more dynamic and strategic ways? Where, when, by whom, according to what models and what influences, in what conditions, to what end, through what vectors, with what means, and what is the result with regard to space? Can social justice and economic efficiency be mutually reinforcing and can they create synergies?

Is this already the case, occasionally or in a durable way, through virtuous circles resulting in an increase of the means available to local authorities, or through citizen mobilisation and ingenuous scalar articulations, as a result of a valorisation in the media of innovative practices, or by any other channel whose process must be identified?
This reflection must draw, in a meaningful way and avoiding purely rhetorical uses, on ideas of governance and sustainable development to understand the –possible– emergence of new values, new logics for how societies, economies and space function as well as new practices and regulations. Can we observe, in addition to the appearance of new definitions of the “competitiveness” of cities taking into account the society and its stakes, the effective and operational use of these definitions by local authorities and decision-makers? What becomes of space in such perspectives? Finally, although the paradox is by definition an insurmountable contradiction “in an undetermined horizon”, do current evolutions point to a horizon which will enable us to move beyond the paradox of economic efficiency and social justice? In sum, is the reconciliation of economic efficiency and social justice a condition for metropolises to become effective synapses of globalisation?

**Scope of the reflection**

These questions focus primarily on metropolises, hubs of globalisation, junctions of planetary flows, which both concentrate and symbolise the contradictions of the world. These, however, extend to all levels of cities as, irrelevant of their size, they compete with other cities on their level and are confronted with the issue of internal cohesion. Likewise, though raised differently, these questions do not favour particular regions of the world. In this respect, diversity is indispensable. On the one hand it enables the confrontation of multiple experiences and reinforces theoretical reflections. On the other hand, through the variety of cultures and ways of thinking and acting taken into account, multiple and potentially original approaches to the question of management dilemmas and regulations emerge.

The aim of this research conference is to observe the way in which cities “hold” through space the two facets of economic efficiency and social justice (an issue that strongly echoes the topic of sustainable development), and how social science research addresses this question on both the theoretical and the methodological levels.

Contributions will be selected on this basis. In this perspective, both theoretical and field studies will be welcomed, particularly if they combine both angles. However, operational experiences linking to the body of theory will not be excluded.
Call for papers

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Proposals

Calendar

February, 1st, 2011  Deadline for receiving proposals
May 2011  Answers to proposals
October 2011  Deadline for receiving full papers
(30 000 characters, spaces included)

Proposals from various human and social sciences will specify the problematics and the methodology used (3000 signs and five key words maximum, in PDF format).

A priority will be given to collective proposals.

Languages of the symposium: French and English

Data sheet to send with the proposal

NAME
First name
Institution
Academic Discipline
Status
Usual address

Usual phone
Mail
Professional address (if different)
Would like to present a paper on the topic

Address for sending papers

colloque.cvm.2012@gmail.com

Registration contribution

A registration contribution will be asked later for the Conference:
Normal contribution  100 €
Students, PhD students and reduced rates  20 €