

**ESF Exploratory Workshop
'Making Sense in the City:
Culture, Community and Identity in an Urban World'.**

Ghent University, Belgium: 17-20 December 2006.

Aula of Ghent University, Ghent.

Convened by: Prof. Dr. Rik Pinxten (Ghent University, Department of Comparative Science of Culture)
and Dr. Chia Longman (Post-doctoral researcher Flemish Research Foundation, Ghent University, Department of Comparative Science of Culture).

Co-convenors: Prof. Dr. A. Gingrich (University of Vienna, Austria, Department of Anthropology) (cancellation)
Prof. Dr. A. de Ruijter (K.University of Brabant, The Netherlands, Dean Faculty of Social Sciences) (cancellation due to illness).

Organisational help: Dr. An van Dienderen (assistant Department of Comparative Science of Culture, Ghent University) and
Dra. Lisa Dikomitis (assistant Department of Comparative Sciences of Culture, Ghent University).

Summary:

During three and a half (from the afternoon 17th till noon of the 20th December) a set of great international scholars gathered in Ghent, at the Aula of the University, to think and speak about the impact of worldwide urbanisation on the meaning of life and the transfer of lifestyle and life stance values and ideas from generation to generation. The main sponsor of the event was the European Science Foundation (grant EW05-248 (SCSS)), supplemented by grants from the Research Foundation Flanders (Belgium), the Fonds National de Recherche Scientifique (Wallonia, Belgium), Ghent University and the Dept. Comparative Science of Culture, –CICI research group (Ghent University).

The workshop was organized in the following way: seven scholars had prepared a substantial keynote address, which they presented in full. Each of the keynotes was focused on one theme, making for a continuation of discussion over the whole workshop. Each

keynote speaker was then confronted with two to four discussants, who prepared a critical response beforehand on the basis of the keynote texts which they received digitally well in advance (in the form of a brochure, containing all the keynote addresses). Each discussant responded for a quarter of an hour on his/her keynote speaker. The keynote speaker then answered, after which the discussion went on in the workshop group as a whole. For each such session a convener was appointed beforehand, with instructions keep track of the discussion and managing the time schedule.

Because of the subject matter of the workshop (its interest for a lay audience in the cities, notably) it was granted to the organisers after lengthy negotiations with the ESF sponsor, that six of the seven keynote speakers would go out of the workshop for two hours and present the keynote a second time to the larger audience of a parallel event in the city theatre. The organisers of that event took care of all material facilities for that particular event, situating the keynote addresses in a larger program (with theatre performances and other cultural events). After the workshop hours the organisers of both events agreed to have common meeting moments during dinners. Budgets were kept strictly separate, but the collaboration was beneficial to both: the city organisation benefited from the scientific insights (both the opening statement by Pinxten & Dikomitis, and the conclusions by L. Nader were repeated outside of the workshop, to the benefit of the larger audience) and the workshop members were able to assist as audience to one cultural event produced for the occasion (Brandhaarden: Seats of Fire) and received a complimentary book with (abstracts of) the scientific texts and some artworks produced for the occasion.

Scientific content of the workshop:

In the opening keynote address (convened by P. Loizos) Pinxten & Dikomitis sketched the problem area: in a world which is progressively urbanised (over 60% of the humanity lives as an urbanite presently) the problem is raised what the impact of this human condition will be on the 'meaning of life' or 'sense giving and sense making' contents and procedures. The traditional formats, to be found in traditional religions and life stances, are increasingly inadequate, as witnessed by their loss of attraction for the new generations. A series of questions follow, addressed in each of the subsequent themes of the workshop. V. Argyrou questioned whether this is a predicament of the West (against the rest) or rather a

development towards different types of secularism in a postcolonial world. J. Gundara followed suit by elaborating on the dividing forces in most religious traditions. In view of the modernist construction of Human Rights he developed a strong plea for intercultural and inter-faith education around the world. The discussion picked up all these issues and focused especially on the notion(s) of secularism (N. Rätzl) and on the Enlightenment project, with special emphasis on differential developments in urban areas in different regions, with inequality as a major driving force for the coming decades (esp. A. de Ruijter in a written presentation). L. Nader introduced the study of power as an important avenue in the postcolonial world. F. Kentel added a lengthy analysis of the recent development on this complex of issues in Turkey.

In a subsequent session keynote speaker U. Hannerz addressed the theme of 'the urban context and its community building features' on the basis of an ethnographic sketch of Tel Aviv, complemented by the theoretical frame he developed over the years as an urban anthropologist. The notions of 'street wisdom' and its counterpart of 'fear' in the urbanite were central, yielding an adaptation of the life stance of cosmopolitanism. In the discussion Argyrou stressed the problematic nature of cosmopolitanism as voluntarism and idealism. Several discussants picked up these points: Moulaert rephrased it as 'relationalism' from the point of view of the 'relational geographer'. Coryn countered that 'fear' is overrated as a negative feeling and that the urbanite's exploration of places in combination with street wisdom should be a central issue of education, such that anxiety (rather than fear) could be re-appreciated as a positive value for the city dweller. T. Fenster gave an elaborate example of fear from the point of view of the Israeli citizen. P. Bacchetta, F. Ginsburg and R. Rubinstein highlighted different aspects of the role of the media in the manipulation of fear in the city context.

In the session 'the city context and/versus traditions' M. Arkoun gave a powerful analysis of the denial of historical consciousness regarding Islamic great thinkers, both in the West and in Islamic countries. The former relegate Islam from the early Christian deployment in Europe (with 732 Poitiers as a pivotal point in time, once again reiterated by Pope Benedict XVI in 2005) to non-history, while the latter react via fundamentalist movements within the frame of the mytho-historical Islam, rather than the reclaiming of the historical Islamic traditions of thought. Philosophically, this dual false representation attributes 'logos' to the Christian tradition and the 'mythos' (or theology) to Islam. The laïcité tradition (France and Turkey) is

situated in the same line of 'deleting the other from one's knowledge'. Arkoun pleads for a radical criticism, both within Islam and in the thought tradition of the West. Discussants P. Baekelmans and A. Battaquay both elaborated on the issue of radical criticism. Their comments tried to situate the role of city contexts in the picture. Both Rubinstein and Gundara rephrased Arkoun's critique against mytho-historical analysis by adding examples of new centrism (Euro- and Islamocentrism). L. Nader picked up the thread on cosmopolitanism as a possible way out, but rather pleaded for the construction of a comparatively oriented 'planetary civilization'.

In the session on 'the urban context as a cosmopolitan versus a cultural phenomenon' keynote P. Bacchetta picked up the theme of 'making sense in the city' of the introductory keynote and developed the case of RSS political sense making in India. This Hindu extreme nationalist movement is decidedly anti-women and anti-Islam. It rejects the heritage of M. Gandhi in his home town, and offers a new kind of urbanite 'fascism', based on a mythological view on the super sexual masculinity of the male Muslim, linked with a deconstruction and renewed control of women (redefined exclusively as mothers and housewives) in a purely 'Hindu state'. The actual policy and political action are focused on city neighbourhoods (with bloody pogroms against Muslims in 2002). Fenster commented that the example shows what can be seen in other cities as well: the power relations are defined in a layered structure (from the body, over the neighbourhood, to the city and the nation). Kentel illustrated how the struggle over the urban context in Istanbul runs counter to the evolution sketched in India, but meets it on particular points. The issue of (post)colonialism in the case of India is taken up by several members, pointing out that the international context is crucial in the scholarly appreciation here (with the differential relationships between India, USA, EU, the Middle East and Israel in particular). N. Rätzzel offered the intriguing concept of 'rebellious subordination' to characterize gendered racism in the new nation states.

In the session titled 'urban context and media/types of communication' keynote F. Ginsburg developed a frame of reference on the artistic communication formats in the urban context, by focussing on the film and video-production of Australian Aboriginals over the past decades. The developments after the bi-centennial saw a booming of film and video by Aboriginals who now redefine their own identity in the urbanized world in Australia and far beyond by means of the critical feature films they produced. The racial issue became central over the years, while new forms of communication between (white) dominant and subordinated groups

are devised in creative visual work. Special guest B. Keunen (Ghent University) offered a comment distinguishing between an attitude of artists who express 'coming home in the city' (with reference to H. Darsi and others working on the 'immaterial city') and that of the artist who focuses on 'the arrival in the city' (like Zola, Dos Passos and others in literature). Pinxten emphasized that the UNESCO convention on cultural products crosscuts these movements today. Nader emphasized that types of ethnocentrism seem to be (re)emerging in cities, which hamper the empowerment of cultural groups in an urbanised world.

In the session on 'built environment and power structure' keynote AM Simone focused on the particular forms of power structures and conflict resolution formats in the megapolises of the south. He uses the notion of 'the global south' to that effect: the uniformity of 'cityness' seems to be lost, except for such generic features like 'the indeterminacy of time' (the city is always under de-construction) and 'the conversion of all things' (everything can change at any time in a city, in contrast to the rural life). This yields new market mechanisms as well as the 'making of in-between economies' (or informalisation of economy). P. Hervik objected that Simone's analysis spoke too much about or 'from above', rather than with or through the different social groups involved. R. Maier joined in by focusing on the study of power relations from the perspective of those who are involved in them (starting from Boltanski's theory). Other discussants sought to modify the model presented by emphasizing the temporal and contextual processes of structure formation through Prigogine's dissipation theory (Pinxten) and the fluidity of social and cultural existence (Hannerz). Onghena referred to the Cuban 1930-thinker Ortiz, followed up by recent Latin American thinkers such as Canclini, who developed a proposal for political sense making in terms of hybridity or creolization.

Dr. Henk Stronkhorst (as representative of ESF) then took the stand with a presentation of a Power Point on the new programs and funding possibilities in ESF. The round of questions from the workshop members was quite substantial.

In the final session L. Nader sketched a broad panorama of the issues that cut across the particular presentations: globalisation can be seen a historical context and as a trigger of European exceptionalism (since Genghis Khan in fact). The acceleration and multiplication of formats and mechanisms triggered the loss of control of local groups on their own fate and allowed for trans-national and neo-liberal power relations. Thirdly, reminding of J. Jacobs and her own work on anthropological study in context, Nader pleads for an integral research of

urban areas: 'up, down and sideways' at the same time. This would imply the study of the slums and the banks at the same time, and of the controlling processes at each and every level. The citizen's impact is centrally the issue of 'making sense' in the city. R. Maier and U. Hannerz point to the role research policies and of audit-society in the present predicament. Fenster and others develop the idea of the role of the planner and other experts in this new city context. Nader replies that experts should be systematically challenged and new groups in society should be recognized in their knowledgeability. Several other discussants stress that the 'city of hope' within the emerging context of the 'proximity of difference' in the urban context should be a central focus of future social scientific research.

In the final round of questions the centrality of two notions is agreed upon, in view of future research: urbanity as a basic condition of humanity, and the role of the context in any study of social sciences. Power is a major theme of the contextual sort, and both small transformations and corporate power are to be taken into account. In that respect the understanding of processes of control, and of ways to make sense in and beyond such processes is a central concern of the researcher on urban issues.

Assessment of the results and contribution to future research:

The workshop brought together a group of specialists from various disciplines and different parts of the world and focussed on the problem of urbanization in the context of European traditional views on the city (and civilization and sense making) as expressed in traditional religions and life stances on the one hand (even referring to St Augustine's 'City of God' as a so-called historical marker) and on the massive and ill-understood urbanization processes in the present era, in Europe and all over the planet. In the metropolitan vast cities of the world as well as in the historical cities of Europe sense making and meaning transfer between generations is rapidly changing. The classical referents of genealogy and small control groups are disappearing, and new dimensions of meaning are interwoven in ever so many differing and diverging constellations: gendering, diversity thinking, new power relations, networking, economic informalisation, and information technologies. The workshop highlighted all these issues in particular clusters of attention, focusing on particular geographical sites (from large cities in India or the south, to neighbourhood patterns in cities of the northern hemisphere), but also on different social and cultural constellations (neighbourhoods, professional circles, educational formats, etc.).

With the structuring of the workshop in terms of content by means of the ‘themes of the workshop’ we were able to explore a tentative line of ordering of research:

- making sense as an urbanite: R. Pinxten & L. Dikomitis
- the urban context and its community building features: (its constraints and their effects on sense making): U. Hannerz
- the city context and/versus traditions of sense making: Islam, evangelical/Pentecostal missions: M. Arkoun
- the urban context as a cosmopolitan versus a cultural phenomenon (e.g. India and the West): P. Bacchetta
- urban context and media/types of communication : F. Ginzburg
- the urban context as built environment and power structure: triggering conflicts on making sense: AM. Simone
- conclusions: L. Nader

The conveners have a provisional agreement with the academic publisher Berghahn Books of Oxford to compose at least one book out of this workshop. In the coming months both keynote speakers and several discussants will be approached to write or rewrite a chapter for that book. The themes of the book will be focused more on the basis of the workshop discussions, and the product will be a genuine academic book (rather than a congress volume). The booklet of *A Prior*, the artistic journal which produced a special publication for the occasion on ‘Making sense in the city’, will stand as a prepublication, and the academic book will take several steps ahead with reference to this valuable booklet. A committee of editors will be appointed imminently.

At the closing of the workshop an informal group gathered and decided on two issues: the Turkish representative (F. Kentel) offered to organise a sequel of the workshop in Istanbul on the occasion of ‘Istanbul, cultural capital of Europe’ in 2010. This offer is investigated and needs to be negotiated with ESF. On the other hand, groups of members offered to collaborate in an attempt to launch a research project (in the frame of EUROCORES) on a central topic of the present Workshop, namely: ‘different notions of secularism(s), in a comparative perspective’. Members from the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK, Denmark and Spain will take the initiative to explore such a joint research proposal. Professor R. Pinxten will centralise information and send out incentives on both issues.

Programme of the workshop and role of members:

University Aula, Volderstraat 9, 9000 Ghent

-Sunday 17th December 2006:

15-16h: registration and small reception in the Aula

17h : Welcome by Dean of the Faculty of Letters and philosophy

Prof. Dr. F. Mortier

Introduction: Culture and city.

Drs. G. Mortier, director of the Opera of Paris, France

Welcome by the Chancellor of Ghent University

Prof. Dr. P. Van Cauwenberge

17h45: Keynote: What to Make of Life When You Are an Urbanite? Religion and Secularisation: the Meaning of Life as a Modern Predicament.

Prof. Dr. R. Pinxten, Ghent University

Session 1:

19h-20h: welcome by the convenor Prof. Dr. R. Pinxten (practical rules and formats)

20h: dinner.

-Monday 18th December 2006:

Session 2:

9h-9h30: Workshop introduction, planning, setting of goals and research objectives.

Explanation of the themes of the workshop.

Dr. C. Longman

9h30-12h: What to make of life as an urbanite? Summary and main questions.

Convenor; P. Loizos (LSE, UK and Cyprus Interuniversity)

Discussants: V. Argyrou (Hull Univ., UK), J. Gundara (London Univ., UK), N. Rätzzel

(Umea Univ.,Sweden)

12h- lunch break

Session 3:

14h-16h30: “The Urban Context and its Community Building Features”:

Convenor: L. Bonet (CIDOB, Barcelona, Spain)

At Home with Uncertainty: reflections on living with diversity and danger.

U. Hannerz (Stockholm Univ., Sweden)

Discussants: V. Argyrou (Hull Univ., UK), E. Coryn (F.U. Brussels, Belgium), F. Moulaert (Univ. Newcastle, UK).

16h30: coffee break

Session 4

17h- 19h: “Urban Context and /versus Traditions of Sense Making”

Convenor Y. Onghena (CIDOB, Barcelona, Spain)

Religious Experiences of Living in an Urban Context.

Prof. Em. Dr. M. Arkoun (Sorbonne, Paris, France)

Discussants : P. Baekelmans (ORIENS, Tokyo, Japan), R.A. Rubinstein (Maxwell School, Syracuse Univ., NY, USA)

19h: dinner

20h30: ‘Seats of Fire’, City Theatre.

-Tuesday 19th December:

Session 5

9h30-12h: “The Urban Context as a Cosmopolitan and a Cultural Phenomenon”

Convenor: W. Callebaut (K. Lorenz Institute for Evolution and Cognitive Research, Vienna, Austria)

Producing the Hindu Nationalist City: the RSS and its Women’s Wing.

P. Bacchetta (UC Berkeley, USA)

Discussants: T. Fenster (Univ. Tel Aviv, Israel), F. Kentel (Univ. Bilgi, Istanbul, Turkey), S. Hunt (Univ. West England, Bristol, UK)

12h: lunch

Session 6

14h-16h30: “Urban Context and Inequality of Power”

Convenor: C. Karnoouh (INALCO, Paris, France)

Urban Media Communities.

F. Ginsburg (NY University, NY, USA)

Discussants: B. Keunen (Ghent, University, Belgium)

16h30: coffee break

Session 7

17h-19h: "The Urban Context as Built Environment"

Convenor: F. De Boeck (Catholic University Leuven, Belgium)

The Unrelenting City: Practices and Times of Urban Change in the Global South.

A.M. Simone (London University, UK)

Discussants: P. Hervik (Malmö University, Sweden), R. Maier (R.U.Utrecht, The Netherlands)

19h: Walking Dinner, performance by the New Swallows (Els Dietvorst, Brussels, Belgium)

-Wednesday 20th December:

Session 8

Convenor R. Pinxten and C. Longman

9h30: presentation (Power Point) on ESF: H. Stronkhorst

10h30-12h: "Ways Forward"

Conclusions and Ways Forward.

L. Nader (UC Berkeley, USA)

12h: lunch and closure of the ESF workshop.

15h: "Public presentation of the conclusion"

Making sense in the city. Conclusions.

L. Nader (UC Berkeley, USA) at the City Theatre.

List of ESF Workshop members:

ESF invited participants

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Statistics:

31 participants.

By age:

-7 over 65y

-12 between 50 and 65y

-10 between 40 and 50y

-2 under 40y

By gender:

7 F / 24 M