

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

International Urban Symposium – IUS
Commission on Urban Anthropology (CUA)
University of Peloponnese, Corinth

7-9 July 2017, Corinth, Greece

The Informal and the Formal in Times of Crisis: Ethnographic Insights

This Conference aims at understanding the roles and meanings of informal practices in the context of the current political and economic crisis in Western society. Using a notion of informality that encompasses the economic, the social and the political realms, this conference seeks to explore the importance of informal practices in cities and asks the key question Is the informal a panacea in times of crisis?

In today's global scenario, urban settings are a dominant form of associated life that encapsulate the socio-economic impact of increasingly significant international regulations, and selective management of capital, knowledge and people. Over the last three decades, the crisis, and subsequent discredit, of polarized ideologies which had characterized international politics since the Second World War has apparently determined the supremacy of economics over politics, an acceleration of economic globalization and a progressive erosion of democracy. In many cases, however, politics in the form of authoritarian decision-making and superimposed adverse policies have jeopardised the democratic covenant and the attendant terrains of representation, responsibility and accountability in the exercise of the power to rule. This process has often brought about the loss of important parts of sovereignty, as wealthier nations and powerful supranational interest groups have been seen to bully weaker nations, often also resulting in ever-growing fiscal demands and withdrawal of credit throughout the social scale, which has often been paralleled by national and local governance riding roughshod over the broader society. At the micro-level, this combination of events has engendered harsh living conditions for many ordinary people. Major casualties have been individuals' access to basic rights and governments' responsibility and accountability in the management of power. Mass migration from poorer countries to richer or relatively richer countries, or to countries that are *perceived* to be richer, has contributed to make this problem worse, often turning traditional cultures of tolerance into toleration and, sometimes, violent rejection of non-autochthonous people.

Anthropologists have addressed in-depth the significance of the informal in people's managing existence. In the economic field they have addressed informal practices that develop beyond official employment and unemployment. In the social and political fields they have studied in depth cronyism, clientelism, obscure awards of public contracts and various forms of collusion that turn citizens' rights into privileges; on the other hand, they have addressed informal

exchanges of services, help, information, knowledge, and so on, that take place at the grassroots in response to ever-shrinking — sometimes factually inexistent — social welfare systems. Gradations of these grassroots informal activities draw on access to community resources beyond official allocation; in the economic field, they defy attempts of the state to monitor, regulate and extract revenue from the production, circulation and consumption of goods. Empirical analysis has also suggested that in most cases we are not faced with a duality between formality and informality because in many cases the two are intimately interlocked in people's lives. In the economic field it has been found that the informal and the formal are complex interlinking and interacting sectors of one economy that may be lethally affected by the aforementioned difficulty, or in some cases by the impossibility to access capital.

In the above outlined scenario, informal activities and modes of exchange — economic and non-economic — have often grown and they may have contributed to people survival; in other cases, long-established informal economic activities have disappeared alongside informal exchanges, while secure formal employment has become a chimera for many and zero-hour contracts, unpaid “internships” and similar, variously named cons, have multiplied. At the same time, new forms of informality are emerging — particularly but not only in the “on-line world” — that appear to be acquiring the status of resource as they raise new challenges to the bullies and “roughshod riders”.

This Conference will bring together high-quality ethnographic studies of these processes with the three-pronged aim of clarifying grassroots dynamics, contributing to a comparative analysis of the present situation and developing a theoretically viable discussion of potential way-outs.

The Conference welcomes contributions and panels from anthropologists and scholars from other disciplines and encourages participation of research students.

Abstracts (300 words maximum) should be emailed by the 27th of February 2017 to Dr Giuliana B. Prato (g.b.prato@kent.ac.uk), Dr Italo Pardo (I.Pardo@kent.ac.uk) and Dr Manos Spyridakis (maspy@uop.gr). Selected papers and panels will be announced by the 13th March 2017.

A selection of revised papers that speak to each other will be brought together for publication in a Special Issue of *Urbanities*. Revised papers not included in this Special Issue will be considered individually for publication in *Urbanities*.

The Organizing Committee will make all possible efforts to cover accommodation costs (hotel and meals) for the participants.

Registration Fee

Registration fee, to be paid by 20th March 2017: 60 Euros.

Postgraduate students, on-site registration fee: 15 Euros.

Organizing Committee

Dr Giuliana Prato, G.B.Prato@kent.ac.uk

Dr Italo Pardo, I.Pardo@kent.ac.uk

Dr Manos Spyridakis, maspy@uop.gr

Dr Maria Velioti, mvel2009@hotmail.com

Scientific Committee

Dr Giuliana Prato (University of Kent)

Dr Italo Pardo (University of Kent)

Dr Manos Spyridakis (University of Peloponnese)

Dr Maria Velioti, (University of the Peloponnese)

On behalf of the Scientific Committee,

Dr Italo Pardo

President, International Urban Symposium - IUS

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