

## **Workshop announcement and invitation for participation**

# **Crises regimes and emerging urban social movements in cities of Southern Europe**

### **Invitation for participation**

In early February 2013 we are organising a three-day international workshop in Athens titled “Crisis regimes and emerging urban social movements in cities of Southern Europe”. The intention of the workshop is to provide an opportunity for exchanging experiences concerning the current crisis in South European cities (in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) and explore alternatives with two main goals:

- a) to critically explore the impact of the crisis on South European cities and their inhabitants, the dominant policies implemented, as well as new issues and novel social claims that are emerging, and
- b) to bring together activists from current/emerging movements and scholars, in order to exchange ideas and experiences from concrete practices, initiatives and struggles and to collectively think about alternatives for radical action.

We would like to invite activists and researchers from South European cities who are involved in social movements in their cities or who conduct relevant research to actively participate in this workshop, by presenting and discussing their ideas and experiences concerning the ‘Crisis Regimes in cities of Southern Europe’, or in particular along the three themes presented below.

### **Rationale of the workshop**

Since the outburst of the current crisis the countries of Southern Europe (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain) are facing rather unprecedented social, political and economic transformations. With fairly similar historical, socio-political and cultural backgrounds they constitute, to a great extent, a marginal European periphery, despite their own particularities. Since the beginning of the current crisis, inequalities have multiplied affirming and reproducing previous patterns of uneven geographical development and renewing the discourse about the problems of the European structure and politics.

However, the crisis itself can also be perceived as a common context. Although it broke out differently in each country, its causes, consequences and policies adopted in order to address it seem to follow similar patterns. Following a long period of neoliberal reforms that mostly led to today’s crisis, further aggressive adjustments are

imposed, both from international and domestic actors and interests; all portrayed as an inevitable solution. Under a “state of emergency”, more authoritarian policies are adopted, often violating or abolishing human, political and social rights and leading to social and economic collapse.

In this context, cities once more become the main places to accommodate both the discontent and the struggles. In conditions of increasing poverty and minimisation of already inefficient welfare provisions, a wide range of urban social movements is emerging, trying to address the pressing needs of broader social groups. As a response to the crisis, new survival strategies, solidarity practices and social networks are being created locally, regionally and nationally. These movements and practices acquire multiple forms and organizational structures and, although they are territorially based, their claims relate to all scales of decision-making. Their claims and actions challenge the current conditions of exclusion and inequality and introduce new collective forms of organizing everyday life in the city.

## **Workshop themes**

The workshop will be structured around three thematic sessions that will be held in the form of facilitated open discussions, including focused presentations on selected topics. The sessions will also be open to individuals and groups interested to attend and contribute to the discussions.

### **Theme I \_ Ultra-neoliberal urban development.**

Facilitating investments, privatisations and dispossessions have always been central features of neoliberalism. Yet, in the context of the current crisis in Southern Europe, we can observe the persistence of an aggressive neoliberalism that steps upon the “emergency” of the crisis to directly link the notion of the “public good” with the repayment of public debt. In this context, cities and urban land become privileged terrains for implementing relevant policies and measures. There is a coercive push for rapidly privatizing and/or selling state property and infrastructure, for increased deregulation of planning and weakening of public control, as well as for the development of mega-projects. These measures tend to be part of broader urban development agendas that are presented as “the” solution. Against these rapid transformations, forms of resistance are emerging as well as efforts for challenging dominant growth models and establishing alternative practices of urban development.

## **Theme II \_ Housing in crisis**

The housing question has been essential in the current global crisis, most evidently manifested by the subprime mortgage crisis in the USA and the construction bubble in Spain. In Southern Europe, the housing sector has been a major economic driver, both historically but also due to the recent financialisation of housing production and consumption. In this context housing emerges as a pivotal issue, albeit from different perspectives. Yet, in all countries the crisis and its associated policies have affected both the housing conditions for a broad range of social groups, as well as the housing markets. At the same time, discussions concerning the right to housing and the security of tenure are gaining far greater public attention and greater significance in claims and actions of urban social movements.

## **Theme III \_ The local as a reference for new mobilizations, solidarity networks and actions.**

While the discussion about the crisis concerns mainly its global or state dimensions, the adverse effects of the crisis are strongly experienced in local everyday realities. However, these realities vary in different countries and cities, with particular neighbourhoods being hit harder than others, where the withdrawal of the welfare state and the effects of increasing poverty and unemployment are much more visible. In this context, the local embodies both the negative effects of the crisis, as well as a potential for the future. However, these local potentialities do not exist in isolation; rather they are networked with other places, people and initiatives. Thus, even more than before, the local emerges now as a very privileged terrain for thinking and acting politically for the city and its residents.

## **Organisers**

**Encounter Athens** (<http://encounterathens.wordpress.com/>) is a group of young researchers who live and work in Athens and deal with urban and spatial issues. The group aims to formulate and voice a “critical / alternative” discourse for the city, while arguing for a just city (“another city is possible”). The group was formed in 2010 when, in the context of an escalating crisis affecting the majority of Athens’ residents, the need for a critical discourse for the centre of Athens was very much felt, also in order to counter the distortions promoted by dominant discourses.

**INURA Athens** (<http://inuraathens.wordpress.com/>) is a non-profit organisation affiliated with the International Network of Urban Research and Action (INURA). It was created by members of INURA in Athens in 2008 as an institutional vehicle to host the 18th International INURA conference, held in Athens 3rd-10th of October 2008

(<http://inurao8.wordpress.com/>). Since then its members continue to participate actively in the annual meetings of the network as well as to the working meetings and the elaboration of the collective common project on the New Metropolitan Mainstream.

**The Institut de Govern i Polítiques Públiques** (<http://igop.uab.es/>) is an interdisciplinary research institute that belongs to the Autonomous University of Barcelona. It draws together mainly political scientists and sociologists, but also researchers coming from other disciplines within social sciences. Since 2001 the institute has successfully carried out more than 160 research projects, including some EU sponsored projects. One area of priority interest is the study of urban governance, urban policies and its impacts. For instance, we are carrying on a three year project about current urban policies in Spain in the crisis scenario funded by Ministry of Science.

**The Department of Urban and Regional Planning of the National Technical University of Athens** (<http://www.ntua.gr/>) has a strong presence in teaching and research, around the following main themes: regional development in a European perspective; urban planning and governance; urban diversity and social exclusion/inclusion; gender theory and gender approaches to urban studies; tourism and local development; geographies of migration. The scope of research in the Department is mainly European, with a particular emphasis on Southern Europe. Academic staff has substantial experience in the coordination of national and European research projects and networks.

## **Funding**

The workshop is supported by a Regional Workshop Award from the Antipode Foundation (<http://antipodefoundation.org/>). With the support of this award we will be able to cover travel and accommodation expenses for invited participants. In order to ensure the participation of as many people as possible from the different countries, it would be better to arrange for cheaper travel options, while alternative accommodation options (home-stay) will be provided. Thus please register your availability as soon as possible!!!

For more information visit the blog **urbanrise.net**

or contact **encounterathens.mail@gmail.com**