The University as Urban Cultural and Social Engine

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Can the university regain its position as a community cultural and social powerhouse? This challenging question asked at the opening of the 3rd conference on urban culture studies hosted by the Inter-University of Dubrovnik, the city pearl of the Adriatic, set the stage for two days of presentations and panel discussions involving researchers and activists from academic centers in Asia, Europe and the United States.

The IUC Executive Secretary Nada Bruer Lubisic in her welcoming address reminded of the proud history of the Inter-University Center established in Dubrovnik in 1972 as an independent international consortium of universities, bringing together scholars and students from different countries, cultures and disciplines and from its very beginning serving as a bridge between East of West. In a relaxed atmosphere of understanding, and tolerance and building on experiences from the administration of the IUC network of 180 institutions world wide, new connections are steadily formed leading to the opening of new fields of study geared toward serving cultural and social needs.

It was a special privilege at this conference to welcome Professor Shin Nakagawa from Osaka City University, the founder of the Urban Research Plaza network. The Urban Research Plaza features mobile research units (local plazas) in the field of urban studies. These facilities provide spaces for joint research and urban activi-

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ties for community development with citizens and private and public sectors. The aim of the Urban Research Plaza is to become a research institution in accord with urban communities and "to share pain, pleasure and rage with the citizens" In his presentation *The Role of Universities for Urban Community Regeneration* Professor Shun Nakagawa gave concrete examples from community outreach activities led by the URP in Osaka City.

On the backdrop of her ground braking research on the culture of urban minorities and disadvantaged groups and populations Professor Zuzana Jurkova of the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University in her home city of Prague has played a major role also within the ICTM (International Council for Traditional Music) in establishing a new base for research and social outreach. Among her numerous publications *Crossing Bridges and Theory and Method of Urban Ethnomusicology* (Thematic issue of *Urban People, 2/17 and 2/14)* as well as the collection Voices of the Week have been instrumental in enlarging the scope of both research and activism within the musicological disciplines.

In Dubrovnik her presentation *Dangers and Potential for an University as Urban Social and Cultural Engine: A Post-totalitarian Experience* brought examples of successes and failures of contemporary academic practice at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University as a background for discussing future threats to freedom of learning and discovery even outside totalitarian regimes. and the need to examine anew the foundation of contemporary academic research and consequent application.



Figure 1. The walled city of Dubrovnik.

The observant JUCR reader may have noticed our focus on the reciprocal relationship between projects of research and outreach profiling recent academic urban programs. In her paper presentation Professor Bussakorn Binson, the newly elected Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok and the Chair of the Thai Urban Research Plaza held up a unique model for interaction with the aim of promoting urban cultural continuity and growth.

Keeping It Alive: Mapping Bangkok´s Diverse Living Cultures refers to a cooperative research project of cultural mapping involving all of Bangkok´s 50 districts and

covering a comprehensive range of local cultural activities including the performing arts, rites, sports, recreational facilities and the domestic arts, mirroring the cultural and ethnic heterogeneity of its residents. In conclusion the report notes: "The living local culture sites uncovered in the research have been sustained in a variety of ways by their respective owners that bring together the culturally dynamic urban-blended community known as Bangkok," but then issues this warning:

"However, there remains many cultural caretakers that face assured extinction without prompt changes in cultural management and targeted support. It was found that over 70% of Bangkok´s 50 districts have no comprehensive policy in developing and supporting their living cultural sites. The authors suggest that the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) should create a centralized umbrella policy of cultural management in order to assist in maintain and developing these sites throughout the city…"

Since the publication of this report more that 5 years ago universities both nationally and globally are waking up to acknowledge their responsibility for community development. A unique initiative and a big step forward toward promoting citizen communication for all, giving hitherto disadvantaged groups a voice was presented by Dr. Kamolrat Intaratat Associate Professor of at the Faculty of Communication, Sukhothai Open University, Bangkok. Formerly acting as Chair of the Asia-Pacific Telecentre Network (APTN) and now Director of the Expertise Center CCDKM (Research Centre of Communication and Development Knowledge Management) she has devoted her life to empower marginalized communities and disadvantage groups including tribal communities to master and use new media technology, focusing on ICT4D (ICT for Development).



Figure 2. Hallway poster session at the Inter-university Center, Dubrovnik, an academic hub for 180 universities world wide.

Realizing that universities world wide are strengthening the burgeoning field of theory and practice at the nexus of creativity, arts, culture, social justice and conflict transformation Professor Cynthia Cohen, Director of Brandeis University´s Program in Peace building and the Arts in her presentation and final panel emphasized the need to form a global network to document creative community practices, amplifying voices of community people and cultural workers and presenting learning in formats that are accessible to learners throughout the world. She appealed to universities to host design labs and fora for trans-disciplinary inquiry, addressing community people and cultural workers, presenting learning in formats that are accessible to key constituencies including community people, policy-makers and funders. Universities should facilitate exchanges amongst artists, cultural workers and peace building scholars/practicioners across boundaries. In short: Creating a global university based infrastructure for the arts and social conflict transformation.

On this note the 3rd Urban Research Conference hosted by the Dubrovnik Inter-university Centre for advanced learning provided a joint determination to embrace the challenges presented at the previous URP conferences in Dubrovnik and the last Bangkok March Forum as reported on by Dr. Cornelia Dragusin of Holland.

In another perspective this years Dubrovnik conference could also be seen as a link in two university jubilee celebrations – The Centennial for the founding of the first Thai university in 1917 and the building of the leading mediaeval Muslim center of learning – The Ulugbek Madrassah of Samarkand in 1417- 600 years ago, for which the celebratory jubilee speech was given by Marie Ingand, noted historian of Arabic cultural and musical history

In line with last years post-conference excursions participants were this year invited to join Marie Ingand and noted choreographer Muhamed Tufekcic in a two day excursion to the historical island of Korcula, reviving east-west cultures in the footsteps of Marco Polo and experiencing the re-enaction and re-interpretation of the historic Moresca dance from functioning as celebration of victory in war to a dance for peace.

(The contributions of three participants – Professors George Owusu and Dickson Adom representing the University of Ghana and Professor Mohamadreza Shahidipak from the University of Tehran, who were unable to join us, were discussed in plenum. We hope to make their presentations available to our readers in forthcoming volumes).