

The general assembly of the International Geographical Union at the 31<sup>st</sup> International Congress in Tunisia August 12-14 2008 voted in favour of continuation of our commission with the new name: **“Commission C04.30: IGU Urban Commission: Emerging Urban Transformations”**. The general assembly also approved that Christian Matthiessen is the president 2008-2012. The discussion at the general assembly made it clear that participating in the large IGU-congresses is in high demand, and that cooperation with other IGU-commissions and task forces (for example: T08.02 Megacities) must be given priority.

Establishment of the new commission has been a long process and many members of old commissions have done substantial work to get to the final solution. The commission is designed to encourage geographical research on new urban problems, and to further the exchange of findings among urban geographers from many countries. Cities, with their distinctive processes and problems and with their links and the system they constitute, are major features of the modern world, and it is vital that we focus on their characteristics, problems and solutions in a comparative global context.

The United Nations have pronounced 2007 as the year when the world will have more people living in urban settlements than in rural areas. Although the transition from rural to urban lifestyles has already taken place in many countries, this urban change now affects the whole world. While the demographic explosion is a major cause of urban growth, we can also point to new communication and industrial technologies, the growth of service sectors, rapidly expanded spatial interaction and migrations, and the increasing speed and wider penetration of global capitalism by reduced trade barriers due to the reduction of trade restrictions and the spread of neo-liberal ideas. The intrinsic properties of urban systems and urban settlements have become the most important determinants of human life.

Within this newly urban world, the size and characteristics of the cities in which we live shape our life chances, our economic and social opportunities and our quality of life, especially within the huge metropolitan concentrations. But a series of emerging trends are rapidly transforming the character of these cities and hinterlands which influence so much of our day-to-day lives. These are seen in new combinations of urban land use mixes, varied degrees of concentration or de-concentration, changing spatial distributions of employment, income and ethnicity, a revived emphasis on civic culture and policies, increasing concern about the new hazards of the city life, in addition to an increasing recognition of the need to incorporate historical heritages and address the quality of life and amenities in cities. At the same time, these urban transformations have imposed even greater pressures upon the nearby countryside. A growing population consumes the resources from nearby communities and exports a variety of contaminants, creating an expanding ‘footprint’ of environmental impact, often with negative consequences for the quality of urban life. This has led to the increasing interest in the notions of ‘sustainability’, as well as the determinants of the ‘quality of life’, all of which support a variety of new and important research projects for urban geographers. Although the various processes causing these urban transformations are common to many countries, the new changes in urban systems and the internal geography of cities, as well as concerns about sustainability, take different forms in different places. The result is increasingly complex patterns of urban systems and urban structures. The many transformations that are taking place are contingent upon local and regional circumstances, and the results are frequently

indeterminate, often with varied and unanticipated consequences. Thus there is a pressing need to identify, monitor and explain these new and emerging patterns of differentiation in our urban world, through international co-operation - patterns that have been summarized in the subtitle of our commission: “Emerging Urban Transformations”.

The organisation of our commission is in the hands of a new Steering Committee, but every one of the participants must be involved in the work. We must recruit young persons and to that end we established a Young Scholars Committee at the commission meeting in Tunisia:

Dr Niamh Moore, University College Dublin, Ireland (Chair)

Dr Tetsuya Ito, University of Rissho, Japan

Dr Maria Jose Pineira Mantinan, University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

This committee has its own presence on this website. It is necessary that all established members of the commission give Niamh, Tetsuya and Maria the best support (write to them with your ideas on recruitment and other activities).

In Tunisia it was also decided that a few senior participants should each take care of formulating and drive a “task force” or a “theme” within their own expertise in order to take responsibility for sessions at our next meetings. So far the list consists of:

Professor Adrian Aquilar

Professor Andre Horn

Professor Petros Petsimeris

Professor Celine Rozenblat

Professor Wayne Davies

The next meeting of the commission in Hyderabad July 29. – August 10. 2009 is almost planned and Geetha Reddy Anant is soon going to distribute invitations.

Christian Matthiessen

President