12th Naerus Conference 2011, Madrid, 20th to 22nd October

THE CITY AT A HUMAN SCALE

CALL FOR PAPERS

For 12 years Naerus has been supporting innovative processes and sharing thoughts, doubts and lessons about how to orientate and apply research to tackle urban problems of the most vulnerable population. This process has showed us that there are indeed many local initiatives which are more inclusive, fair and respectful towards the planet than the dominant neoliberal model. Nevertheless they have a marginal character compared to the dimensions of the problem at a global scale.

In the next conference we intend to explore the main challenges to overcome urban inequality and to widen the scope of successful ongoing alternatives. We would like to consider carefully how urban research could contribute to face those challenges. And we intend to do it within the “development at a human scale” framework that was launched in Chile 25 years ago, by Max-Neef, Elizalde and Hopenhayn. Nowadays we may still question the “inefficiency of the existing representative political mechanisms in coping with the actions of the financial power elite,” the “lack of control of the citizenry over public bureaucracies”, the “increase in technological control over society” or the “increasing fragmentation of socio-cultural identities”.

Talking about human scale implies putting people at the centre of the process. People ought to be the main actors to satisfy their needs, in a comprehensive approach which does not focus on lack or scarcity, but on the “potential of motivation, mobilization and commitment”. Within this approach, satisfaction can not be imposed; it has to be achieved by bottom-up processes. We try to apply these concepts to the City at a Human Scale, to promote an endogenous development and the use of plentiful and non conventional resources, such as solidarity, which increase when being shared.

The conference aims to exchange information about research on, and interventions in, deprived human settlements, which understand the city at a human scale as a potential system of synergic satisfiers to fulfill fundamental human needs. This is not a new utopian or abstract urban theory; we are talking about real transformation of concrete urban life. At least one third of the world’s urban population lives in deprived settlements or slums. How should we apply scientific information and local knowledge to the understanding and overcoming of poverty, achieving basic services and avoiding environmental degradation? And how to cope with all those challenges, in order to contribute to the development of deprived settlements in processes driven by the population? How to reshape instruments, techniques and processes to achieve those goals? How can our research encourage the efforts of grass-root movements under pressure in adverse national and international contexts?

In order to make progress in our search for answers and alternatives, the conference is structured along three themes:

- **Synergic strategies** to satisfy basic needs, recognizing the extraordinary richness and diversity of people, making the best of scarce resources.
- Approaches that combine urban upgrading of deprived neighbourhoods with strategies of political transformation to eradicate social and economical exclusion.
- Shifting planning and management instruments to regulate our cities at a human scale.

For each of these themes we welcome contributions on professional and civic experiences, scientific results, specific proposals, design concepts and technical solutions.

Abstracts of max. 300 words should be submitted before 15th May 2011, in .rtf or .doc at sec-naerus2011@ee.upm.es and calls@n-aerus.net. Please visit the N-AERUS website http://www.n-aerus.net to find more information.