

PARTICIPATION, RESIDENTS' INITIATIVES AND INFORMAL POLITICS: URBAN GOVERNANCE AND THE CHANGING STATE IN/OF THE CITY

Academic workshop, November 20th-21st, 2017
Anthropology and Development Studies, Radboud University
Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Organizers: Sven da Silva, Flávio Eiró and Martijn Koster

Participation, self-responsibility and active citizenship: terms that have, in the last decade, become part of the mainstream discourse of governance in many cities across the globe. As a consequence of neoliberal reforms, city administrations have cut their social budgets in various domains of society and outsourced responsibilities to private companies and to citizens. In the Global North, governments summon citizens to assume new responsibilities and carry out tasks that were formerly conducted by the state. In the Global South, city administrations have experimented with forms of participatory budgeting and planning. Across the world, cities are used as laboratories for implementing novel policy arrangements that claim to create opportunities for improving people's living conditions and enhancing their influence on how the city is governed. However, worldwide, we see how urban inequality is increasing.

In cities across the globe, the state encourages residents to organize their own networks and to start community initiatives. In so doing, residents – especially local coordinators, mediators or brokers – become increasingly visible actors in local governance projects. Their contact with state representatives, e.g. negotiating access to resources, is largely based on informal relationships. The importance of such personal networks emphasizes the need to study the impact of informal actions and transactions in the field of urban governance, especially when these give rise to an unequal distribution of resources.

This workshop will explore the changing manifestations of the state in the city and the impact of these changes on residents' lives. In particular, we will explore how deprived urbanites are affected by these changes. How do residents (collectively) struggle for a place in the city or for improvement of their living conditions, and how do these struggles change in light of new governance structures? How do they participate in state-designed programmes around housing, land rights, care and security? What kinds of grassroots initiatives do they engage in and how do these relate to the changing governance structures? What is the role of their informal politics in 'formal' city governance? How do residents imagine the state and their 'selves', and are these imaginations changing with the transitions? To the background of the shifts in governance, how can we develop our understandings of governance, citizenship, informality and participation in order to better analyze the changing state *in* the city? Furthermore, taking account of these changes, what concepts do we need to understand the present state *of* the city?

The workshop will bring together a relatively small group of researchers who work on issues of (participatory) governance, residents' initiatives, citizenship and informal politics in different cities across the globe in order to establish a fruitful dialogue between different research projects. We will present and discuss our research, exchange ideas and explore opportunities for future forms of collaboration.

The workshop is organized as part of the anthropological research project 'Participatory Urban Governance between Democracy and Clientelism: Brokers and (In)formal Politics', funded by an ERC Starting Grant and coordinated by Martijn Koster (www.anthrobrokers.com). In this project, four PhDs and a postdoctoral researcher (Lieke van der Veer, Janne Heederik, Adam Moore, Sven da Silva and Flávio Eiró) study the themes covered by this workshop in four different cities across two continents: Manchester (UK), Rotterdam (The Netherlands), Cochabamba (Bolivia) and Recife (Brazil).