

# HOW PEOPLE MAKE THE CITY

**Patterns in the urban routines of vulnerable and average people as a source of social and spatial quality: cases, research methods, intermediate findings and discussion**

*An initiative from the Brussels Stadsplatform [UAB Urban Studies Network] and Cosmopolis co-organised by ISEG –KULeuven*

---

**Research seminar by Paul Blondeel | Monday 31st of May 2010, 12u00 – 14u00 | VUB campus Etterbeek 6F326 (building F – 6th floor, room 326)**

Please confirm your participation in advance: mail or call Jessica van de Ven:  
T: +32 2 629 3741 | F: +32 2 629 28 61 | E: [jevdeven@vub.ac.be](mailto:jevdeven@vub.ac.be)

## **Abstract**

Although the ways in which people make use of their urban environment may appear rather casual they allow us to discover crucial information about a neighborhood and its social and spatial qualities. By mapping these daily routines and combining them with other givens, we can design an urban renewal policy which is more sustainable and socially orientated. Some of the cases we researched during the past two decades will illustrate both the methodology and some of the main concepts we used. We'll focus on the idea of a neighborhood – *habitus* and on two of three generative *genres* of urban routines that people apparently use in a globalised city.

In this seminar we illustrate how the experiences of average and even poor people contain crucial information about a neighborhood and its issues at stake. Their knowledge is revealed by the very specific ways they (have to) use their urban environment rather than by the words and stories they use to describe their 'neighborhood'. In these routines they contribute to the maintenance of the local and even broader urban life. We are able to systematically reveal this routinuous expertise so that this local knowledge becomes operational for professional practice: it has to be looked at in the very specific ways which non average groups deal with the city; the expertise embedded in routines, and practical strategies of youngsters, of people with an irregular or low income, of many elderly people, of people working in shifts or during the night, .... In these lives and experiences we find basic information which can be used for a more socially sustainable urban renewal. When these stories are told and listened to, we discover different urban dynamics than those heard by mainstream policy makers. We are able to formulate different objectives for the urban development of a given neighborhood and its communities. The very specific ways in which people structure their lives and daily environments, are hazardous for mainstream urban renewal. This is probably an explanation for the fact that this expertise remains invisible or is not honored when it was available in a given neighborhood or project.

This seminar consists of three rounds of lecture and discussion. The debate is organized in a way that participants can discuss both technical and more societal aspects of the approach, both the methodology and the potential implications for professional practice. The seminar is part of my PhD. and will be assisted by my two promotors, professor Eric Corijn (VUB Cosmopolis) and professor Maarten Loopmans (ISEG - KULeuven).