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INTRODUCTION

This volume is a result of the efforts of the Urban Commission at the IGU (International Geographical Union) regional conference held at Tel Aviv on July 2010. About 50 papers have been presented in the conference focusing on a wide range of urban issues. The commission brings together scholars from about 30 countries in four continents in order to exchange ideas and stimulate research from a comparative perspective. This volume brings together six articles, which focus on the ways in which cities are dealing with challenges set by the era of globalization. Each paper deals with one case study but by bringing them together some comparative perspective is highlighted.

Three main issues are raised. The first one evaluates the connection of cities to the network society and how to maintain local memories in the landscape of global flows. Fijalkov asks how can urban planning respect and maintain local memory and narrative in urban planning. He analyses the struggle of a local community to influence the planning of Paris. Gonzalez and his associates show that Spanish cities were late to absorb ICT technologies like computers and Internet. Yet, disparities in levels of absorption are extremely high. Madrid, Barcelona and some of the young upper-middle class suburbs highly adopted the new technologies while other areas are far behind.

The second issue relates to aspects of the transition of cities from a communist to a post communist political milieu. Parysek goes one step further asking what types of policies can post communist cities adopt in order to take into consideration disadvantages institutionalized during the communist era on the one hand and meeting the EU regulations on the other hand? Ancuta studies the performance of a marginal area in post communist Romania comparing data for 1992 and 2002. She shows how disparities within the region are growing with the core of the area rapidly developing and the rest being left behind.

The third issue relates to the way cities confront social diversity increased by globalization. Processes like gentrification and the entrance of migrant workers increases social diversity in urban societies. Israel is a unique case in this sense as an immigrant society. Omer analyses the social areas in Tel-Aviv-Jaffa showing the growing heterogeneity of social areas and the increasing diversity between ethnicity and socio-economic statuses in the city since the sixties. Rozenholc penetrates into one of the more heterogeneous neighborhoods in Tel Aviv, which inhabits gentrifies, migrant workers and Israelis from different ethnicities. She reconstructs the social life emerging in such a neighborhood located in the back yard of the CBD as an example of such neighborhoods in many Western cities.

Two main challenges are set in most articles: the growing social diversity within the studied territorial units whether it is the state, the region or the city, and the growing gaps in development. These two challenges raise the question of social cohesiveness in these societies. Further study is required in order to develop effective policies to deal with these issues.

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