

## DIALOGUES: CITY+CRISIS INITIATIVE

### A CONVERSATION WITH ERIK SWYNGEDOUW ON THE QUEST FOR A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE CITY

This is an edited transcription of an hourly conversation that took place on Saturday 26 April 2014. To reproduce any parts of this transcript in any form please contact Grigoris Kafkalas at [gkafkala@arch.auth.gr](mailto:gkafkala@arch.auth.gr).



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**Grigoris Kafkalas.** Thank you for accepting this invitation. There are already more than five years since the outbreak of the financial crisis of 2008. Has the crisis affected cities differently than their respective national economies? Do cities differ in respect to their resilience and/or vulnerability against the impacts of the crisis?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** We have to be clear about the vocabulary and the understanding of what are the key terms here, which are ‘crisis’ and ‘cities’. The vocabulary of the crisis is very confusing and different things are often being put

under the same banner without sufficient distinction. For example, the notion of crisis often fails to distinguish between the causes of the crisis and the consequences of the crisis. For example, Greek cities are clearly suffering from the consequences of the crisis and its political-economic management; cities are in crisis, but we should not forget that only some people within those cities suffer. The minority of wealthy Greeks have already decamped their wealth to other places and cities (like London where Greeks are now major

players in a burgeoning real estate market). So, first there are the consequences of the management of the crisis, which itself produces an intense crisis for some (but not for others). The central question is, of course, what caused the crisis. We should not forget in our analysis that the current crisis is ultimately a crisis of financial capitalism that started in 2007 and was triggered by what is a classical overaccumulation of fictitious capital that had been expanding extraordinarily everywhere and certainly in the global north over the past ten years, primarily through urbanization. The way in which this accumulation of fictitious financial capital was performing is via extended financial accumulation through the built environment and, therefore, directly the causes of the crisis are directly related to the particular post-1980s form of production of urbanity. That explains why in the US, the crisis is clearly related to the housing market crisis; 'toxic mortgages' are actually the popular word that is used to identify the crisis. This actually shows the urban connectivity of the crisis and is very obvious in the cases of the US, Ireland or Spain. The crisis is, therefore, nothing else than a condition in which financial capital (of which there is an extraordinary amount) does not any longer finds profitable outlets and refuses to commit itself to investment. It is actually a real problem for capitalists – they have the money but little opportunity to turn it into capital. That is why all global forces are

geared at restoring or creating new spaces for viable (that is profitable) investment. The 'crisis' today is actually a strike by financial capital. We should not forget that class struggle is primarily fought by the capitalist class, and a strike (refusal to invest) is its key and very formidable weapon in this struggle.

What then happened, and this is really rather extraordinary, is that the hegemonic neoliberal wisdom that markets self-regulate was completely abandoned. So great was the elites' fears for the economic condition they had engineered that the fantasy of the neoliberal doctrine was set aside completely as fear from economic disintegration grew rapidly. Indeed, the new dominant view became one that argued that the social order would be seriously challenged if we were to let the market do its job, that is to let failing financial institutions go bankrupt, as is normal under competitive capitalism. That was not accepted this time. Thus, a classic elite-socialist strategy was chosen. The (national and European) state was mobilized in order to save the banks from bankruptcy. This turned the crisis into a sovereign debt crisis of the state and was triggered by the gigantic collective effort to provide a safety net under the crumbling financial order. That came, of course, with a gigantic social cost and led to a very particular expression of the crisis. In Greece, in particular, it was particularly strong but you can see it

elsewhere too in the shape of a fiscal crisis of the state, the consequences of which - as we all know - was a massive retrenchment of public spending. That has led to a situation in which those social groups that are most dependent on public services and public spending are suffering the most. Nonetheless, the structural competence of the state as a police agent for the elites was kept intact (if not re-enforced) as well as its security and military role. There has been no cut of funding in these domains. On the other hand, there was an extraordinary cut to social expenses, i.e. housing, health, education etc. That occurs everywhere and affects a large number of people whose sustainability and everyday life is dependent on collective support policies. These people found themselves in severe crisis. Many of them are urbanites. If you look at those who are most vulnerable to reduced state transfers, it is urban residents and especially the poor ones. That is why I do not want to speak of an urban crisis in general but of the specific urban forms of the financial crisis, both in terms of the causes of the crisis and its consequences.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** Lets clarify this. You are saying that the financial crisis was created partially through fictitious capital formation, that was occurring everywhere but in particular in certain countries and if we turn to the side of the impact of the crisis we see how different areas, for example cities in various countries such as in Greece, were affected by the crisis

though they are not themselves part of its cause. Do you agree with this description?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** No..no I disagree. We should be careful not to make cities anthropomorphic. Cities are heterogeneous, and are composed of people holding various social and economic positions, some of whom were key agents in this financialised urbanization process. For example, some of the great urban changes in the 80s and 90s were precisely animated by the elite architects of this financialised fictitious capital in cities such as NY, Paris, London, which are of course classic examples, but you can see this also in Athens where the financial capital build-up in the 2000s was gigantic. Yet, those who have benefited then are today not suffering at all. For them, the crisis is actually an opportunity and as the saying often goes, it is too good to waste a good crisis. You can think here of the way in which financial markets have rebounded over the past two years and of the success by which neoliberal elites managed to impose their austerity packages on the state. Look at the Athens stock market or at the elite neighborhoods, there is no crisis there. But at the same time those of the lower end of the social strata are struggling for survival. We do not know the exact numbers but perhaps they represent 40% of the urban population. For them the crisis is very visible, they can smell it, they can touch it. So as is usually

the case, there is extraordinary polarisation, sharpening the impacts of the crisis for certain people and certain areas. That is why we should not speak of an urban crisis per se. It is a crisis manufactured by an urban elite through the remaking of cities during the last two decades, while it is precisely these financial architects that are suffering least from the predicament in which many urban residents find themselves today.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** May we say that in this sense cities do not differ from what is happening in society at large but it is in cities that the consequences of the crisis become visible, especially for the weakest parts of the urban population?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** Let's say that cities always have been the places in which social and economic heterogeneity expresses in the most clear way the social and economic conditions under which societies evolve. Cities are laboratories if you wish to understand the world, you should look through cities in order to find the causes and the consequences of the current crisis.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** Cities are considered to be the centers of socio-political evolution for either the consolidation of the established regimes or their overthrow. Does the crisis weaken or strengthen the significance of cities as arenas for the orientation of social change?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** That's a very difficult question to answer. I fully agree with your initial statement that cities have always been political places par excellence, and now more intensely so than in the recent past. Cities are the places where the struggles for maintaining the existing order or the opposite are most fiercely enacted. We have many theories and empirical examples of how precisely these two poles are continuously at play and whether transformative or consolidating and reactionary forces are stronger at work. So, that certainly makes cities to be the pivotal sites for political struggle in whichever way that might go. Whether there is or how precisely there is a link between the crisis and this dialectic between the reactionary and transformative political forces is uncertain. If you would have asked me fifteen or twenty years ago I would say yes...there is a necessary and clear connectivity between the socio-economic conditions that cities find themselves and the choreography of the political struggles that are unfolding within cities. I don't want to fully reject that argument today though obviously, if one looks at some of the emerging politicizations that take place today, particularly in Europe, there are both right wing and reactionary political mobilizations as progressive ones. Both are associated with the crisis conditions and the way in which they have been handled, but the political resonance of these conflicting politicizations is not

directly reflected by the economic conditions, but rather by the belief or will of the participants to take part in political mobilizations, to really take their struggle seriously.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** On what side you put this right wing mobilization, on the consolidation of the existing order or on its transformation to something else?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** I would argue that the nationalist right wing movement is the only political movement that is really at work today in Europe...and it is transformative because it wants something else. They too reject cosmopolitan capitalism; they are anti-capitalist, anti-liberal, and anti-cosmopolitan, but want to return to a territorialized and inward looking, extremely reactionary and anti-democratic society. I do not wish to defend that, but it is revolutionary in the sense that it wants something really different from the existing order; it aims at transforming the existing inegalitarian order, but does so in very exclusive, nationalist, ethnicity-based forms.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** This takes us back to the initial question whether the crisis strengthens or weakens the ability of cities to become the areas of transformation...because if it is a global financial crisis as you said earlier...it is perhaps an issue at a different and higher order.

**Erik Swyngedouw.** This is true in a sense...but I do not wish to think of cities

as purely territorial constructs, it is urbanization that gives form to cities and leads to the uneven and combined geographical development of capital at the global scale.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** What about the possibility of a federation of cities outside their national territories that might become the subjects of a historical change?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** I know that there are arguments that cities today might be seen as the new vehicles for new forms of politicization, but I do not agree. However, I find it interesting to the extent that I agree with the necessity to upscale political mobilization and of course transnational networking as one of the ways in which to upscale localized practices and become more transformative and effective at the global scale. So, rather than cities as entities engaging in transnational mobilization, I see greater prospects in transnational mobilizations of the progressive and insurgent activists that we have seen operating in many cities around Europe and elsewhere.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** Do you think that cities in order to become transformative they should be linked together in order to match the power of global processes?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** Though this is a bit formal, cities do not exist as political entities in order to act that way. I am much more interested in how it is possible for an urban political movement to trans-

nationalize and through that to become more effective. Again, I have to admire how the extreme right nationalist movements have managed to build a European alliance. They are nationalists, but they work together at the transnational scale in order to become more effective at a variety of geographical scales. On the other side of the political spectrum, many insurgent urban movements have arisen and many progressive urban movements emerged, but they have not yet been very successful at upscaling their insurgencies and to network effectively at a transnational scale. One of the sides of the crisis is that we have seen the extraordinary proliferation of alternative forms of politicization other than purely right wing. We have seen it in Spain, in Latin America, in Athens, in Istanbul; there is an extraordinary expression of a political desire for something different than the dominant neoliberal regime. This trend expresses itself as a desire for real democratization, equality, emancipation and inclusion. I find the political energy of these deeply urban manifestations of an alternative dream extraordinary and a source of hope and inspiration. However, these progressive urban mobilizations have thus far really failed to organize at a transnational level and have not succeeded in really challenging the neoliberal urban order. And such transnationalization of radical urban politicizing movements is precisely what is required today.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** I cannot resist the temptation as you said that the right nationalists seems to offer a different revolutionary agenda, to wonder whether there is anything revolutionary on behalf of the left as it seems that the left agenda is compatible with the neoliberal agenda of cosmopolitanism...is this a possible contradiction?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** Absolutely. This is for me the key issue, i.e. that there is no real transnational left anymore. Despite the fact that we have very strong social democratic parties, they are all fully incorporated within the neo-liberal cosmopolitan hegemony. I do not believe that there is hope any longer for a socialist democratic or social-democratic configuration. We are beyond that. On the other hand, there is also no hope in going back to past practices and to be nostalgic of an emancipatory progressive state. That is gone too. Nonetheless, realizing that the nationalist socialist programs of 20<sup>th</sup> century are over, opens up key theoretical and practical question for today. And that is whether a progressive, emancipatory, sustainable, just urbanity can still be sought, thought and practiced today. If the answer to this is a tentative yes, how does such thought articulate with the growing number of people who are completely fed up with the existing institutions and want something else but do not really know how to get it or what it might look like. I think that it is precisely here that the great challenge for progressive urban intellectual resides. Can a new urbanity,

one that is sensitive to the emancipatory and democratizing sensitivities of today's progressive movements, still be thought?

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** The interplay of local and global forces forges the profile of cities. Do the forces unleashed by the crisis favour a uniform post-crisis urban condition by eliminating the differences? Alternatively, do cities respond and/or adapt to the crisis on the basis of their particular profiles?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** I do not think there is a flattening effect. It is of course true that every city has its own trajectory and what is happening in Athens is different from what is happening in Madrid and so on. On the one hand the city planners, city policy makers, they all want to have a sustainable and competitive city, using the same metaphors that are used everywhere by urban consultants who go from one city to the other with their planning and policy tool bags selling the same consensual metaphors of sustainability, 'smartness', and competitiveness. Richard Florida is such an example. These seem to suggest that there is indeed a flattening process in the sense that all cities are trying to achieve the same things, though in practice they are doing different things using the same metaphors. Things are not flattening in other ways too. Within cities for example there is enormous differentiation, enormous heterogeneity. There are all manner of proliferating precarious conditions: excluded undocumented immigrants, informal

workers, university graduates with no or insecure jobs, etc..., while at the same time traditional elites keep on doing what they always were doing, i.e. circulating money and searching for places where the highest returns can be found.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** I see that you argue that even if there is a flattening trend between cities it is more important that there are growing differences within cities.

**Erik Swyngedouw.** Indeed. But also at a global scale, there is certainly no flattening urban process. Consider, for example, the process of what Henri Lefebvre in the 1980s called planetary urbanization. Neil Brenner argues convincingly that the configuration of cities has to be understood as the outcome of a process of global urbanization. This refers to a situation in which urban life anywhere is sustained through networks that are planetary in nature. The best illustration is our urban IT life. The ICTs connecting technologies which are seen by so many as both an ecological and social as well as an economic solution for urban growth and sustainability. Of the smart city kind of stuff. Nonetheless, the further deepening of smart city individual and collective technologies (like smart phones, computers, and the like) is predicated on a proliferating but deeply uneven social and ecological catastrophe. For example, rare minerals such as Coltan that is used in electronic devices are found around the great lakes in central Africa where

Chinese and other companies are trying to disposses local communities and finance the genocide or ecocide that is going on there in order to sustain the urban ITC revolution. At the other end of the network, when old ITC equipment is discarded, it is 'recycled' in the suburban wastelands of Delhi, Mumbai or Dhaka. This no flattening at all, but a deepening of the combined and uneven socio-spatial and socio-ecological devevelopment that characterizes capitalist planetary urbanization.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** This questions what for some is the future hope of smart sustainability and you argue that this is not the case.

**Erik Swyngedouw.** A supposedly clean IT urban economy in the Global North is predicated upon extraordinary dirty, ecologically and socially speaking, exploitation of resources and people in the Global South. So planetary urbanization today is predicated upon the production of a combined and uneven social and ecological apocalypse. I would argue that a clean life where we live in the cities of the global North is predicated upon ecocide in other parts of the world.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** So it seems that we should focus not upon cities but on the urbanization process.

**Erik Swyngedouw.** Exactly.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** The achievement of a just and sustainable city seems to be a widely acceptable moral and political vision. Does this vision remain a priority during the crisis or do other issues tend to take its place (i.e. attraction of new investment, competitiveness of the economy, quality of the urban environment, security for citizens, etc.?)

**Erik Swyngedouw.** This is paradoxical...but it should be taken seriously. There is indeed a consensus, I agree with you, even among the elites that cities and wider societies should be just and sustainable...so there is full consensus across the ideological and political divides. Or so it seems ...For example, the few who still argue against sustainability or deny the reality of climate change and ecological degradation are relegated to the margins of intellectual and public respectability. Yet, despite this consensus around the ecological difficulties we are in, all political and economic power has been mobilized in recent year to make sure that nothing will really change and that neoliberal capitalism can survive intact and indeed it has survived ...although in the form of what Jamie Peck called 'zombie' neoliberalism in the sense that no one really believes in it anymore, not even the elites as they too now turn to the state for help. Nonetheless, and despite the fact that no one believes in it, extraordinary means have been mobilized to save the neoliberal economic framework while ecological issues have been relegated to the backburner of the policy agenda. It has been calculated that the amount of money

that has been mobilized to save the Western financial system was of the order of two and a half trillion dollars. I like to mention here this back of the envelope calculation. We know that more than a billion people do not have access to clean and safe water; people die unnecessarily because there is no access to water.

According to the UN, it costs on average 150 dollars a year to provide a person with sufficient quantity of good quality water to live a healthy life. With the money mobilized to save financialized capitalism, we could provide all those who lack basic sanitation with free water for the next thirty years. However, most political and economic effort went into re-igniting the economic engine, despite the fact that everyone knows that this leads to greater injustice and inequalities.

In fact, no one denies that in Spain or in Greece and Ireland, the poor suffer hard, but nonetheless this suffering is presented as being necessary (and ultimately beneficial to all) in order to save the system. While many agree that the austerity and crisis measures lead to greater social and environmental injustices, the signifier of sustainability – impotent as it may be – continues to be widely used all the time. Think of the mobilization of concepts like sustainable technologies, sustainable growth, sustainable competition, sustainable cities, even sustainable capitalism. It seems that neoliberal capitalism is the key objective of sustainability today; the focus of the

hegemonic sustainability discourse and practice is geared towards preserving the status quo – it is inherently reactionary..

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** It seems to me that by arguing that way you somehow destabilize the use of sustainability...not only for the neoliberal agenda, what should take its place.

**Erik Swyngedouw.** I prefer not to use sustainability, as there is nothing in it anymore if one is concerned with a socially more equitable and environmentally more sane urban development than the one we have today. ‘Sustainability’ has become an empty signifier. I would prefer to see it replaced by a political and intellectual mobilization around the need for egalitarian political and socio-ecological configurations in which the principle of equality becomes the main transformative force. We should think of equality here as the equal capacity of each and all to have a recognized voice as well as the equal ability to access, transform and appropriate nature and its socio-metabolic products. ‘Sustainability’ does not gesture to an emancipatory and ecologically sensitive transformation of the existing socio-ecological order. In that sense, the notion of sustainability is strictly ideological: it gestures to the need to change things dramatically so that nothing really has to change.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** What is the vision of a just and sustainable city after the crisis?

How urgent and/or feasible is to adopt goals such as the redistribution of income in order to achieve real equality, the promotion of collective vis a vis private initiatives, the effort to reach consensus among conflicting interests on the basis of parity of access to jobs and services, etc.?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** That I don't know. All I can say is that the dominant elite configurations are geared to sustain the dominance of the neoliberal capitalist system in its financialized form. Doing so necessarily involves taking the matter of the environment seriously. It is the elites that know best how the ecological conditions pose serious problems for the continuation of a growth and accumulation based system. Ultimately, it is the elites that really take the ecological condition seriously, although they cannot solve the ecological conundrum either. For example, EXXON or APPLE know so well that sustainable growth and accumulation is predicated upon expanding the use of ecological and natural resources of the earth and they are really concerned that these resources remain as sustainable as possible so that they can be used as long as possible, but without of course jeopardizing profits in the short run. That is the consensus that we have at the moment. When you said that there is a consensus on sustainability that is precisely the content of this consensus. There is indeed a consensus that the natural conditions have to be taken seriously; otherwise we will end up in a deep mess. Thus we invent a series of

technological and institutional fixes or combinations of these, exemplified by initiatives such as smart cities, eco-cities, retrofitting, alternative energy sources, institutional arrangements such as Kyoto protocol for CO2 emissions, etc. Of course the goal behind the combination of both eco-economic technological change and institutional fixe, is to assure that the existing and highly unequal socio-ecological order will continue for a while longer.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** So it seems that there is a built-in inequality within the system that is protected by the sustainability narrative. Do you think that there is nothing that will benefit the wider social strata than the elites by pursuing sustainability?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** Precisely, because the sustainability challenge is a challenge for the elites wishing to make sure that their dream of how cities and world should look like will continue. This will of course have beneficial effects for some. Smart technologies, ecological gentrification and more environmentally sensitive urban eco-planning and eco-technologies are to be welcomed. We all enjoy a greener and ecologically attractive urban environment. And of course their promise is that in the end we will all be included in this dream of a sustainable urban life without recognizing that in fact sustaining the capitalist socio-ecological order is predicated upon differentiation, heterogeneity and socio-ecological

inequality. What I find interesting in the neoliberal promise on which some of its successes are based is that they thrust upon us their recipes, arguing that though they understand the difficulties of today, they will in the long run benefit everyone. What they systematically disavow is that though this might apply to some people in cities in the global North and a few in the South (but not to all), this is also predicated upon socio-ecological destruction elsewhere. Green technologies do not come without a major social and ecological cost.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** Is it possible that the crisis provides the opportunities to move faster towards a just a sustainable city? Is this an issue to be decided hierarchically as a hegemonic project from above or it will be forged as the result of social and political conflicts?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** I would argue that the very name of the ‘political’ is a name that signifies conflict and that this is precisely what the neoliberal hegemony of the past 25 or 30 years is trying to disavow. What we have seen emerging during the past five or six years of crisis is the return of dissensus, of conflict, of disagreement, not simply over technical or managerial themes but over social and political-economic matters. Fundamental disagreements about how the city and the world should look like have arisen. Unfortunately, today, the most visible way of the return of the political as conflict is right wing nationalism (like Golden Dawn

in Greece) and of occasional outbursts of violent urban protest. While one manifestation of the return of the political takes the form of right wing nationalism there is also the form of religious fundamentalism such as islam which is also anticapitalist. But I see that there is a third option that operates much more under the generic banner of equality and democracy. This is the return of the ‘democratic’ and emancipatory political, most notably present in the wide range of urban protests, occupations and *indignado* movements that have dotted the urban landscape over the past few years. That is where I put my hope. As I see it, political conflict is staged in a very urban form in variety of a heterogeneous places, such as the Arab Spring, Istanbul, Buenos Aires, New York, Madrid, Rio de Janeiro, Athens, Barcelona, London. The list is now endless. And although these urban insurrections, which in fact attempt to stage a new way of being-in-common, are very heterogeneous, they nonetheless operate under a desire of equality and democracy. These are oppositional political movements in proper political terms. I would argue that proper politics is about expressing equality in a context of actually existing inequalities. In these insurgencies, I see at least a hesitant return of the name of equality in an explicitly politicised way. In their insurrectional staging of discontent and demand for equality, the insurgents are fighting for a new and different, but socially equitable

and politically democratic, institutional order.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** In Greece, the crisis came later and more violently and the country is still in the maelstrom of its consequences. Do you wish to make any specific comment in relation to Greece?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** I fully agree with you that the crisis in Greece is deeper and lasted longer and that makes Greece really important in terms of what might happen next, where we might go. Because the future looks rather bleak given the complete absence of radical imaginaries of a different form of urbanity and with that for a different Europe. In that sense, I find it difficult to defend the current dominant European vision nurtured by the elites. This is not my Europe. So, I think it is really important to try to find and recuperate a different imaginary for the city in Europe. I believe that the Greek condition, despite its very complex and heterogeneous configuration, opens up possible avenues for hope. I see two things that are happening simultaneously that might be seen as potentially very promising. First, there is a very strong mobilization of people who have given up on traditional neoliberal attitudes and policies. Some have of course gone to apathy and others have embraced the extreme right, but there are still a large and growing number of people that are experimenting with and are expressing desires for a possible more equal,

inclusive, more democratic and solidarity based urban future. There are plenty of those people in Greece, and you can find them elsewhere too, like in Spain, Turkey, or Brazil. Second, what you have here in Greece is a left political party organization that is performative and politically significant. I am of course aware of the internal complexities, but a party like SYRIZA, that tries to connect to the new emancipatory urban movements, stands not only in Greece as the only performative forces that tries to articulate somehow some alternative and radical imaginary, but gives hope elsewhere too. For example, *Podemos* in Spain is a promising new political movement. They are at least experimenting with new ideas and attempt to articulate with the heterogeneous groups of people that wish for and work towards a different urbanity, a different country and a different vision for Europe. And this kind of political force is unique; no other country in Europe has such a strong political movement. What I would hope is how this can be Europeanized. I really think that if SYRIZA would become a real force the impact would be astronomical in Europe. Two weeks ago the German minister of finance said, I think in *Der Spiegel*, how disastrous it would be if SYRIZA would become a political force to reckon with. This suggests that the elites are really worried, if not scared, of this leftist coalition. And if the elites are worried I start paying attention.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** Do you wish to comment on any other issue in relation to our discussion so far?

**Erik Swyngedouw.** As an intellectual interested in urban change and urban justice, I am trying also to think what is it that we should think and write about, and what to say and try to understand. Urban intellectuals basically think. Our biggest act is 'thinking'. I believe that our generation made a mistake. It might be really important to think through again some of the political assumptions our generation made. We have argued for a long time that substantive socio-urban theory and critical urban thought as pioneered by thinkers such as David Harvey, Doreen Massey, Manuel Castells and many others would be politically important, politically performative in changing city and society. It was assumed that critical urban social theory is vital for the formulation of a just and sustainable urban strategy in politics. It worked as a hypothesis and the cost of it was that the systematic focus on critical urban social theory on issues such as class, gender, ethnicity, etc. led to the disappearance of emancipatory critical urban political thought and practice. There is still no critical urban political theory today, a theory that is politically adequate to deal with situation we are in and that can articulate with the emancipatory urban insurgencies I mentioned above. When I started to become interested in urban

insurgencies of the kind we talked about above, what they stand for, what they express, it became clear that they are not traditional urban social movements asking for better jobs, environments, housing, etc.... For me, these insurrectional movements are intrinsically political movements. And they just popped up and were quite effective in Egypt or Tunisia.. They changed things politically and we don't have any theory to explain this or to account for the emergence of such urban politicizing movements. They are nonetheless catalysts of something new and potentially politically important. They embody to a certain extent the values of democracy, equality, solidarity, active political participation etc. There is something non-systemic and progressive that is going on. If we as urban intellectuals wish to be really serious about a different, socially more equitable and ecologically more sensitive city, we have to urgently articulate our thoughts with the insurgents' new urban practices.

**Grigoris Kafkalas.** I am not sure whether our mistakes and the lack of theory on urban politics are signs of optimism but your views have opened the agenda and might save us from our own fantasies. Thank you very much for this interesting and enjoyable discussion.