

## DIVERSITY AND PUBLIC SPACE

- by invitation only -

**20-21 January 2014**

Centre for Urban Studies, University of Amsterdam and  
Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

This event is concerned with the manifestation, experience and regulation of diversity in the city. We take as our starting point the idea that all social phenomena – diversity included – are strongly shaped by their unique spatial setting, local context and urban form. Recognising that public space has long played a prominent role in mediating social and cultural differences, this event is particularly concerned with the new types of public space that are emerging in highly diverse urban contexts and what these places tell us about broader patterns of social and political change.

Building on meetings over the last three years among the International Working Group on Public Space and Diversity [<http://www.mmhg.mpg.de/subsites/public-space-and-diversity/homepage/>], this meeting will take the form of a writer's workshop jointly funded by the Max Planck Institute for Religious and Ethnic Diversity and the University of Amsterdam Centre for Urban Studies. Based on the Group's work thus far, the workshop will make three contributions to our understanding of the relationship between diversity and public space:



***Criteria for defining spaces as 'public'*** – discussions will address a set of process-oriented criteria to determine when and in what circumstances spaces become public. In this respect, this collection will infuse subsequent discussions with the means to differentiate between those forms of encounter in public space that foster minor and indeterminate responses from individuals and groups, and those that have a lasting impact on the content and character of a broader 'public sphere'.

***'Diversity' as a methodological imperative*** – here debate will encourage theorists to move from a position which regards diversity as an ontological observation to one which accepts that the concept of diversity needs to be ingrained into the way we engage in processes of research design. In particular, the workshop seeks to demonstrate the importance of research strategies that actively seek to countenance and understand differences between the forms of public space encountered in the developed and developing urban worlds.

***A 'Realist' Position on the Transformative Potential of Public Space*** – when the various participants in this Group deploy this more refined set principles, the result is a more sanguine reading of the connection between diversity and public space. In a series of empirical accounts spanning research contexts in Europe, North America, Asia and Africa, contributors cast doubt on the assessment that more and better-planned public spaces will resolve the heightened and increasingly complex differences amongst populations in contemporary cities and lay the ground for a more realistic assessment of the emergence of an inclusive urban sphere.

Workshop participants will be:

**Kurt Iveson** - University of Sydney, **Setha Low** - The Graduate Center of the City University of New York,  
**Don Mitchell** - Syracuse University, **Lynn Staeheli** - Durham University, **Kafui Attah** - Syracuse University,  
**Stéphane Tonnelat** - CNRS LAVUE, **Darshan Vigneswaran** - University of Amsterdam (formerly MPI-MMG), and  
**Sophie Watson** - Open University.

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