



# The 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Critical Geography in Frankfurt, Germany

## Introduction to the keynote lectures

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The following two papers were delivered as the keynote lectures at the 6<sup>th</sup> *International Conference of Critical Geography* that was held August 16-20, 2011, in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. As one of the speakers of the local organizing committee, I want to use this brief introduction to the papers to highlight some aspects of the conference. First, to explain the reason why we chose these particular keynote lectures, and second, to introduce the authors to an international audience.

### 1. The 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Critical Geography

The Frankfurt conference followed very successful conferences in Vancouver (1997), Taegu (2000), Békéscsaba (2002), Mexico City (2005) and Mumbai (2007). Much like all the previous conferences, a local group also organized this one<sup>2</sup> with the help from the *International Group of Critical*



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<sup>2</sup> The *Local Organizing Committee* consisted of: *Speakers*: Bernd Belina (Frankfurt), Lawrence Berg (UBC) and Ulrich Best (York University); *Members*: Jenny Künkel, Iris Dzudzek, Sebastian Schipper, Tino Petzold, Veit Bachmann, Karl Außerhalb, Daniel Mullis, Michael Blickhan, Felix Silomon-Pflug, Nadine Marquardt (all Frankfurt), Beth DeVolder, Levi Gahman (both UBC), Matthias Naumann (Erkner); *Website, online registration, maps*: Elke Alban (Frankfurt); *Bookkeeping*: Ursula Wohlmann (Frankfurt); *Berlin excursion*: Kristine Müller, Thomas Bürk (both Erkner); the *Antipode travel grant anonymous review committee*; and the theme coordinators: Christian Abrahamsson (Wageningen), Veit Bachmann (Frankfurt), Sybille Bauriedl

*Geography*, a rather loose global network of critical geographers.<sup>3</sup> The conference was organized into ten “themes”<sup>4</sup> and were coordinated by colleagues from various backgrounds. The conference included more than 100 sessions and was attended by 450 participants from more than 30 countries who met to discuss various aspects of critical geographical research and political practice. The conference also featured two keynote lectures and several field trips in and around the Frankfurt area. Participants were also invited to common dinners that were held each night at the student run “Students’ House” (*Studierendenhaus*), and they were also able to have drinks at the student run “Café KoZ,” or at the squatted radical space “Institute for Comparative Irrelevance” (*Institut für Vergleichende Irrelevanz*) just across the street from the main conference site. Located just a short distance from the Bockenheimer campus (where the conference was held) a public lecture with Peter Marcuse was organized at the *Club Voltaire* – a radical space in downtown Frankfurt since 1962. There was also a discussion (in German) with the “Right to the City” initiatives from around the country at another radical space, the *Café ExZess*, in the Bockenheimer neighborhood. The conference also tried to intervene with the city by passing a resolution concerning the use of the site of the Bockenheimer campus after the university’s final move to another campus in 2013. The resolution that coincided with the sale of the site was taken up in the local sections of both Frankfurt based national papers (Göpfert 2011; rsch. 2011).

As the general theme of the conference, we chose: “Crises – Causes, Dimensions, Reactions”, as a reminder that, despite commentaries claiming the opposite in Germany in early 2011, there actually (still) is a crisis going on (cf. the logo of the conference [Figure 1]). The crisis of finance-dominated accumulation and neoliberalism that first became visible in the USA in 2007 and that has spread over the globe ever since, materializing differently in different contexts, was an economic crisis that was turned into a fiscal crisis of the state by the rescue of banks in many places that are now met with austerity measures, was and in many respects still is strangely absent from political discourse in Germany (cf. Bachmann/Belina, forthcoming). Germany did not witness any protest movements of significance that parallel the ones around the Mediterranean Sea for example. This was discussed in the session “Spanish Revolution – Mediterranean Revolutions?” at the Frankfurt conference (and partly published: Espinar and

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(Kassel), Lawrence Berg (UBC), Ulrich Best (York University), Luiza Bialasiewicz (Royal Holloway), Iris Dzudzek (Frankfurt), Nik Heynen (Georgia), Mélina Germes (Erlangen), Jen Gieseking (New York/Berlin), Kanishka Goonewardena (Toronto), Shadia Hussein de Araújo (Erlangen), Philippe Kersting (Mainz), Wendy Lerner (Bristol), Anders Lund Hansen (Lund), Claudio Minca (Wageningen), Jerónimo Montero (Durham), Jörg Mose (Münster), Blanca R. Ramírez (Mexico), Anke Strüver (Hamburg), Juanita Sundberg (UBC), Markus Wissen (Vienna) and Anne Vogelpohl (Berlin/Frankfurt).

<sup>3</sup> <http://internationalcriticalgeography.org>

<sup>4</sup> “Financial, economic and fiscal crisis”, “Urban crisis”, “Ecological crisis”, “Subjectivities – in crisis?”, “Oppositional struggles worldwide”, “Geopolitics, Biopolitics and the Critical Spaces of the Political”, “Mobilities in crisis”, “Universities / geography in crisis”, “Babel-crisis – Critique through translation?” and “Europe and its Others”

Abellán, 2012; Janoschka and Sequera, 2012; Eizenberg, 2012). And even today (April 2012), as billion after billion is shoveled around the EU to ‘win back the trust of the markets’ and protests in many places around the EU against the imposition of austerity programs and the implementation of ‘expert governments’ loom large, everyday life in Germany seems to be largely unaffected by the crisis.



Figure 1: The logo of the 6<sup>th</sup> ICCG, designed by Martin Krämer (Freiburg).

## 2. A brief introduction to the keynote lectures

The two keynote lectures were chosen for a number of reasons. First, we wanted the keynote lecturers to be individuals who are and have been active in both radical scholarship and politics. Second, we wanted them to be from the German community of radical scholars — not for nationalistic reasons, but to get international critical and radical geographers in contact with some of the strands of radical theory that are of importance around here and that we believe an international critical geography can profit from. Third, we wanted to have one

lecture that reflected the wider context of the current crisis from the background of materialist state theory, as we believe that this is one field where especially interesting debates have been going on in the German context for decades that were only rarely taken up in an international context (but cf. Holloway and Picciotto, 1977; Jessop, 2007; Brenner, 2009); and one that dealt with Frankfurt's most important theoretical legacy, the Frankfurt School. Given these considerations, we were very happy that our first choices, Heide Gerstenberger and Alex Demirović, were both willing and available to deliver a keynote.

Heide Gerstenberger was a professor for the theory of the bourgeois state at Bremen University. She is member of the scientific board of *attac Germany* and has co-founded the homeless refuge *Die Tasse* in Bremen. She has published widely on the history and theory of the capitalist state (cf. for a recent piece in English: Gerstenberger, 2011), arguing early on that the derivation of the state needed more historical scrutiny (Gerstenberger, 1973), and doing just that in her, by now, classic assessment of the history of the bourgeois state in England and France, first published in German in 1990 (2<sup>nd</sup> and revised edition 2006), that was published in English translation in 2007; and also on many other topics such as the merchant shipping industry, flags of convenience and live on board of merchant ships (cf. Gerstenberger and Wilke 2004).

Alex Demirović is professor of political science at Technical University Berlin, co-editor of the journal for critical social sciences *Prokla* (<http://www.prokla.de>), member of the scientific board of *attac Germany* and one of the founding members of the *Assoziation für kritische Gesellschaftsforschung / Association for Critical Social Research* (<http://www.akg-online.org>). He has published widely on state theory, the Frankfurt School, Foucault, the notion of "critique" and many other topics. His study on Nicos Poulantzas (Demirović, 1987, 2<sup>nd</sup> and revised edition 2007) was one of the starting points for the Poulantzas revival in German state theory in recent years (cf. Gallas et al., 2006, 2011; Demirović et al., 2010); and his study on Adorno's and Horkheimer's "politics of truth" (Demirović, 1999) is one of the central theoretical and political assessments of the Frankfurt School.

### **3. Finally**

The location and date of a possible 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Critical Geography are being discussed by the steering committee of the International Group of Critical Geography that was newly formed during the Frankfurt conference in a transparent and multi-stage process. As with all previous conferences, the colleagues and comrades in charge will give the ICCG their special flavor. We hope to see you all again at that occasion.

In the name of the organizing committee, I want to thank both keynote lecturers, everybody who has put work and effort into the conference for their help, all attendants for making the conference one of intense critical and radical discussion, the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, the *Antipode Foundation*, the

*Vereinigung von Freunden und Förderern der Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität*, the *Bodo Sponholz-Stiftung* and the Department of Human Geography at Goethe University for financial support of the conference, and finally ACME for agreeing to publish the keynotes.

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