

## Welcome to Vancouver

International Sociological Association Research Committee on Urban and Regional Development (RC21) conference, "Urban Justice and Sustainability."

*Elvin Wyly, August 22, 2007*

On behalf of the UBC Urban Studies Program, I want to welcome you to the Urban Justice and Sustainability conference. When Brian talked with me about a year ago about the possibility of hosting this important event, I told him that I had no time, but I did have a little money. So thanks to Brian for all the time he invested in planning the conference, and thanks to the Faculty of Arts and the Department of Geography, who provide financial support for Urban Studies.

And thank you for being here, in a city that was once described this way by Loretta Lees: "On a tour of Granville Island and False Creek, I remember saying to David Ley that I thought Vancouver was 'unreal, too perfect, a chocolate box city.' I thought it resembled a 'city on Prozac.' It was the image of Vancouver that struck me initially, but I had much more to learn." Indeed, we all have much more to learn, newcomers, visitors, and established residents alike, given the pace of change in this place where first nations lands have been turned into what Harvey Molotch would probably call the "city as a real estate growth machine." And this machine has been busy. Not far from where we stand is Canada's wealthiest postal code, and also the block described by the local press as "Vancouver's worst neighborhood...probably Canada's worst neighbourhood," right at the epicenter of a protest over an old department store turned into condos that sold out in a single day under the advertising banner of "An Intellectual Property" ... "Be Bold or Move to Suburbia." Not far from that, the Olympic Village is under construction, behind long banners telling us precisely where we are: "A World Address." If we believe that ever-widening inequality and urban injustice are unsustainable, then we hope that the advertising for the latest condo project in Gastown is not a promotion, but a promise: there's a banner on the building for The Terminus Lofts that says: "The End is Near."

This place offers us a vantage point for understanding the world urban system of urban justice, injustice, and (un)sustainability. Our job at this conference is urgent, and indeed it seems to be *insurgent*, given that many of us have been known to go to meetings without our cellphones, to be capable of authoring the sophisticated texts that militant groups might consider using, and to use words like "inequality" and "gentrification," like Andrej and Matthias, urban scholars charged under terrorism conspiracy laws under Section 129A. It is my understanding that Andrej has been released from solitary confinement today, but the charges remain.

So we have a lot of work to do, and I thank all of you for coming. The conference program is a wonderful directory of the most prominent urbanists and the most promising rising stars of urban studies. And at the peak of our own global city-system intellectual hierarchy, we are fortunate to have John Friedmann. Professor Keil will provide a more formal introduction, but I just want to publicly thank Professor Friedmann. Many of us have learned a great deal from his work over the years, but he was especially kind and patient with me after I decided that his influential "World City Hypothesis" needed to be updated for the urbanism of the New American Century, with all its violence, insecurity, and torture. When I sent him a copy of a chapter titled, "The

Terror City Hypothesis,” he was very gracious in response to my aggressive act of title theft. He was also much more hopeful than I was. Thank you, John.

Now, Professor Keil will introduce Professor Friedmann.