

A New Research Centre for Interdisciplinary and Artistic Exploration of Cities Will Benefit Legal Scholars and Practitioners

by Professor Peer Zumbansen



Regulating la Cité Imaginée: Innovative Urban Governance Research at Osgoode

For almost two years now, the Collaborative Urban Research Laboratory (CURL or the 'Lab'), under the auspices of Osgoode's Critical Research Laboratory in Law & Society (www.criticalresearchlab.org) has been adding a complex and layered perspective to the study of cities through an unusual mix of research and artistic production. CURL takes an innovative, interdisciplinary as well as visual approach to the study of cities and urbanity today. Global cities such as Toronto, Paris, London, Tokyo or Mumbai have long been the research target of social scientists, lawyers, geography and urban studies scholars. CURL builds on this work, but challenges the boundaries between the academic enterprise and the cité imaginée, the city in its centuries-old artistic, visual and literary depiction and representation. This presents an unprecedented and

Global cities such as Toronto, Paris, London, Tokyo or Mumbai have long been the research target of social scientists, lawyers, geography and urban studies scholars.

unparalleled opportunity for lawyers and urban studies theorists to interact with photographers, digital media artists and documentary filmmakers with a view to mutual exchange, challenge and collaborative production.

EXPANDING THE STUDY OF CITIES

Why now? Urban studies have become a regular component of today's interdisciplinary social science curriculum at leading universities, at York and around the world. By connecting scholars of local government, global cities or transnational migration with artists exploring these themes through traditional and digital media, the Lab reinvigorates the meaning of interdisciplinarity. Why Osgoode? At a law school, the creation of the Lab constitutes an altogether daring, risky initiative, but it is driven by the belief that legal scholars and practitioners can be both drivers and beneficiaries of this type of research innovation. CURL explores and pushes the compatibility of different approaches, vocabularies and methodologies. This process presents inevitable challenges for lawyers to question the strengths and weaknesses of their own discipline. Besides the fruitful interaction between academia and art, CURL marks the crucial and still rarely found introduction of law to the increasingly comprehensive disciplinary mix, which constitutes urban studies. Approaching urban governance as a regulatory field of crucial importance, law must rethink notions of property, public and private, access to local infrastructure and services, and even larger questions of democratic representation.



RESEARCH INNOVATION

CURL was made possible through Osgoode's second substantive infrastructure grant awarded in the winter of 2007 by the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and the Ontario Innovation Trust (OIT) and through in-kind contributions from leading firms in multimedia production. During Osgoode's renovation, CURL is housed in the Computer Methods Building on York's Keele campus, offering a state-of-the-art multimedia and research facility for scholars, faculty and students as well as practitioners and artists. They have access to a unique and unparalleled environment for research and artistic multimedia creation with individual working spaces, a gathering area and small conference room with screening facility for seminars and lectures, along with suites with photo/film/video and sound editing equipment. The Lab's equipment is available for approved project proposals on urban governance that demonstrate a strong collaborative element, says Mars Horodyski, a filmmaker and CURL's artistic director for 2009-2010 (www.cinemars.ca). "There are a lot of artists doing really interesting work on cities," says Horodyski, whose work won several prizes and who in 2009 shot: "Where the Sidewalk Begins: The University and the Global City, CURL's first documentary featuring interviews with Toronto's university presidents and some of the world's leading urban governance experts. With a script co-written by Horodyski and Zumbansen, it was produced for and with support from York's 50th Anniversary, screened in June 2009 and is now available on the CURL Web site at <http://www.criticalresearchlab.org/curl/>.

COLLABORATIVE SPACES

CURL has started the 'Reading Lab', a weekly, university-wide, multidisciplinary research forum. 'We discuss work by legal and other scholars, filmmakers and art theorists brought together as widely

varied as we can in order to explore the multifaceted nature of the City', says Gregory Smith, a PhD student at Osgoode and CURL's acting academic director. The Lab further hosts Artists-in-Residence (CURL-AiR) and offers a Screening Series of classical and new films on cities. CURL's first annual conference was convened in March 2009 under the theme of "The Learning City", organized by Osgoode faculty and graduate students with support from the 'Harry Arthurs Fund' and York. Inspired by the conference's great success, featuring speakers such as Toronto Mayor David Miller, along with numerous lawyers, activists and scholars, CURL will publish the presented papers in a collection under the leadership of Danielle Allen, who holds a BA in Urban Studies from York and a 2009 JD from Osgoode. The other follow-up project from the 'Learning City' is the inauguration of the "The Knowledgeable City" public forum, starting in the fall of 2010, as an unprecedented platform for multi-stakeholder discussions of current urban governance issues in Toronto and beyond. For more information on how to get involved, visit the CURL Web site. ☘



Professor Peer Zumbansen is the Canada Research Chair in Transnational Economic Governance and Legal Theory at Osgoode. He teaches Globalization and the Law, Comparative Corporate Governance and

Political Economy, Business Associations and Legal Theory and is founder/director of the Critical Research Laboratory in Law & Society. His new book is entitled *Rough Consensus and Running Code: A Theory of Transnational Private Law* (Hart Publishing: Oxford 2010, with Galf-Peter Calliess).