

## **Urban geography study group sponsored session**

### **Harmony, trust and participation in culturally diverse cities**

**Convenors: Kevin Dunn (University of Western Sydney) & Jim Forrest (Macquarie University)**

For some decades now, urban scholars have eschewed the suggestion of the heartless city, and have 'found' community within larger settlements where there is high population density. However, it is still too often assumed that circumstances of cultural diversity are inconsistent with the formation of civic virtues like harmony, participation, interaction, trust and community. Recent research on contact theory has outlined how cross cultural interactions can produce both better and worse community relations. The more pessimistic assessments have concluded that isolation and segregation are expected outcomes of cultural diversity within the city. The empirical work of Robert Putnam (USA) has found that such isolation is likely for new migrants, who 'turtle' for the early years of their settlement (i.e. they don't participate in civics nor build bridges outside of their community). Empirical studies in Australia have attempted to replicate the work of Putnam, with somewhat similar results (Cummins, 2008; Markus et al 2008). The data can be used by those who do not favour cultural diversity, who can latch on to the evidence of friction and turtling, and use that to critique policies of multiculturalism.

This session of papers will reflect on the following important questions:

1. Are the negative effects of new diversity unavoidable and universal?
2. Are the negative effects of new diversity universal across space and time?
3. Do negative effects always precede positive effects or can negative effects continue in perpetuity?
4. And can the negative and positive effects of diversity co-exist in the same space?
5. Do the dominant conceptualisations of community give too much emphasis to harmony?
6. As cultural difference is worked-out, or up, does the valencies of positive or negative effects all depend on the context?