Session 4

Information Infrastructure and the Redevelopment of Inner Cities

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In the last two sessions, Joe and Fabio provided us a general framework about planning strategies and information infrastructure that might facilitate 'community empowerment' and innovative community development strategies . This session can be seen as a special case of this framework in the redevelopment of US inner cities.

The economic distress of American's inner cities is one of the most pressing issues facing the nation. There are substantial researches and development programs focusing on the revitalization of economically dilapidated inner city neighborhoods. Though differing in their approaches, many analysts have described the unmet retail demand in inner city neighborhoods and the potential of translating this demand into investment. Tapping the unmet retail demand has been considered as one import strategy to accelerate the economic development in inner cities. However, there is a 'gloomy vision' among market actors towards the inner cities: i n the Unite d States, the term 'inner city' is perhaps most widely understood to mean the poorer parts at the center of a major city, which is riddled with crime and uneducated labor and is a ghost town for business. When such 'gloomy vision' prevails, the market potential of inner cities as business locations either will be not perceived at all or will be largely undervalued. In these circumstances, the inner cities are experiencing a shortage of investment and market activities.

Today, a large and growing number of local agencies and community organization are actively engaged in efforts to quantify and evaluate the social economic, and cultural health of their neighborhoods, and provide more accurate 'knowledge' to policy makers and market actors . These effort involve the use of various public and private data, accelerated by the improvement in computing, GIS, RDBMS, information and communication technologies.

This session will concentrate on the role that information technology can play in the understanding of inner city markets and the redevelopment of inner city neighborhoods.

Please read the articles below and consider the following questions to discuss on Tuesday.

Discussion questions:

1. What are the main differences among the strategies to revitalize inner city neighborhoods?

2. Why is the 'gloomy vision' towards inner cities pervasive? Why are the comparative advantages of inner cities not perceived at all or largely undervalued ? What is wrong in the "information cycle"?
3. To draw a true picture of inner city markets, w hat kind s of neighborhood indicators may be useful ? What are the main obstacles in building up such neighborhood indicator systems?
4. How can the overall structure, as well as specific tools, shown in the MIT/MAPC UMI project be used in the revitalization of inner city?
5. What may be the main obstacles in the implementation of the MIT/MAPC UMI approach ? How can we solve these problems with technical and institutional renovation?