



ISSRPL News

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{2008 ISSRPL Begins Bridge to 2010}

The 2008 ISSRPL in Birmingham titled *The Good City: Living Together Differently* was a powerful experience! Building on the ISSRPL history of participatory learning, lectures were interwoven with visits to community projects and places of religious engagement. The experience was made all the more relevant by the interaction of a dynamic and exceptionally talented group of participants. The success of 2008 has led University of Birmingham to host the school again in 2009 and to establish a permanent “satellite” summer school. Together with **Diana Skelton** (France/USA, 2008) of the ATD Fourth World Movement we are advancing our plans to hold the 2010 school in France.

{Reunions Planned}

The purpose of the reunions is to build the regional network of ISSRPL alumni and encourage opportunities to support the collaborative work they undertake. A reunion for our alumni in the Middle East — Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Jordan — is planned for February 2009 in Jerusalem. Discussions are also underway for a reunion of our North American alumni in the spring of 2009. Future alumni reunions will be taking place in various regions in the coming years.

{ISSRPL Cosponsor Talk with BU and SMSC}

In February 2008 ISSRPL and the Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations at Boston University cosponsored a lecture by **Enes Karić**, professor in the faculty of Islamic Studies at the University of Sarajevo. [Link to the lecture on our website.](#)

{Occasional Paper Series Launched}

We have launched the ISSRPL Occasional Paper Series! The Occasional Paper Series aims to initiate discussion about the role of practice and embodied knowledge in understanding issues of religion and public life. Contributors include ISSRPL alumni, staff, and associates who have been connected to the ISSRPL experience and write from within their local contexts on issues of religion and public life. The papers seek to develop a space where the academic, religious, political, and development worlds intersect to yield new insights on the challenges of everyday life and the need to better live with difference. The first Occasional Paper, *Pedagogic Principles and Reflections Developing Out of ISSRPL Practice* is by **Adam Seligman**. We encourage alumni to utilize this forum to share their work with others. Those interested in submitting a paper for review should contact **David Montgomery** at montgomery@issrpl.org.

{Fellows on the 2008 School in Birmingham}

Participating as a Fellow at the sixth ISSRPL in Birmingham was one of the most profound emotional and intellectual experiences I have had in a very long time. As far as the setting of this year's school is concerned, I'm a "local"—I live in Birmingham and am employed by the University that hosted the event—and not the least effect of being part of the school was to unsettle and defamiliarize my perception of an urban environment I professed to know intimately. This was largely because of the amazingly international make-up of the group, who brought an enormous variety of perspectives to bear on the places and sites we visited. The small discussion groups were the



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most poignant part of the two-week experience. From very early on in these groups, it became impossible to continue to cling to the studied veneers of conviviality that too often characterize conversations among people of differing backgrounds and perceptions. At the start of each session, I found myself wrestling inwardly with how far I dared reach down to mine seams of discomfort I now know I had been carefully hiding away. While this was extremely challenging, it was at the same time powerfully rewarding, and even liberating. Possibly more important than these specific experiences, though, is how I feel these sessions have carried over into my subsequent thinking. As I look back over the summer school—something I increasingly find I can't avoid doing—I realize that it has struck at the core of the way I engage with my professional work as an academic, and in some quite unsettling ways. I don't mean this on the superficial level of having internalized the messages of the summer school to the extent of making my work somehow more "critical" or "insightful." This would imply that the summer school had some crystalline prescriptions for how to "negotiate cultural otherness," as postmodernist vogue might put it. Rather, I realize with increasing clarity that the summer school has fundamentally altered my sense of the value of academia as a profession, at least in its present target-driven, status-conscious form. Although I don't have ready answers for how academia generally might move beyond the narrow contours within which it presently circulates, I do know that my engagement with it will change, making a play for a far more concerted integration of practical and analytical activities.

—**Richard Gale** (United Kingdom, 2008)

Participating in the summer school meant to me a whole new world of ideas regarding how to live together differently. Apart from clarifying what I should do in my research work in the field of religious education, the summer school taught me how to be tolerant toward different people of not just other faiths, but of my own faith.

—**Rahimjon Abdugafurov** (Uzbekistan, 2008)

In daily life, I am immersed in piles of books dealing with the freedom of religion. I try to find my way through judgments of the European Court of Human Rights on this matter, and I struggle through intricate theories on the relations between state and religion. All this is done with the final objective to deliver an articulate and well-considered dissertation. By now, I know the legal scope of the freedom of religion. But before participating in the ISSRPL I had never seen a mosque from the inside. The books taught me that a wide variety of religious manifestations can be protected. But not often do I hear personally about a religious person's motives for manifesting his religion or belief in the way that he does. Throughout the first year-and-a-half that I have been working on my dissertation I have attended quite a number of conferences

and presented at some of them. But none of them applied such a comprehensive approach as the ISSRPL where I was encouraged to interconnect issues on cognitive, mental, and emotional levels. For me, it deimpersonalized "Muslim," or "Jew," or any denomination for that matter. It made me realize the limitations of the current liberal framework. It has allowed me to spend the next two-and-a-half years working on my dissertation with a deeper and more human understanding of the issues I am researching.

—**Hana Van Ooijen** (Netherlands, 2007, 2008)



{ISSRPL Alumnae Activity}

This past summer Aigine Research Center in Kyrgyzstan—which has contributed three Fellows to the ISSRPL **Gulnara Aitpaeva** (2006), **Elena Molchanova** (2007), and **Zemfira Inogamova** (2008)—both continued its involvement in the three-year project "Building Anthropology in Eurasia" and served as the local organizer of the First Regional Conference of the Central Eurasian Studies Society. Aigine's research agenda focuses on the documentation and study of sacred sites and the Center recently began a project on the relationship of moldos (mullahs), Islam, and tradition in Kyrgyzstan.

Jorida Cila (Albania, 2007) recently attended the FUTURE (Future Urban Research in Europe) summer school in Germany, titled "The Ethnically Diverse City." Bringing together insights and discussions from the 2007 Istanbul ISSRPL on tolerance, identity, and boundaries, she was able to make unique contributions to the urban research perspective on diversity, ethnicity, culture, and segregation.

Debbie Weissman (Israel, 2006) was recently elected president of the International Council of Christians and Jews, becoming only the second female president of ICCJ in its sixty-year history. In June, the ICCJ held its annual conference in Jerusalem, which brought together 180 people from twenty countries. The theme was "The Contribution of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue to Peace-Building in the Middle East," and Debbie was a co-chair of the conference.