

**Call for papers  
International conference  
May 27-29, 2015**

**Urban Planning and Social Mobilization from the Middle Ages to the Present  
(Europe and the Colonial World)**

In Mai 2013, about 50 local residents living nearby Taksim Square in Istanbul decided to peacefully occupy the square in order to protest against a construction project that was threatening to demolish Taksim Gezi Parc in order to erect a shopping centre. The movement soon gained a national character and attracted the attention of the Western press that compared it to the mobilization on Cairo's Tahrir Square as well as to the Occupy movements of Kuala Lumpur, San Francisco, Wall Street, Montreal and other places. However, such a merging of different contemporary urban social movements obscures their complexity and hardly adds to their understanding. Like urban planning, urban mobilization looks back on a longer history that needs to be explored in view of the social urban movements of all epochs.

This conference is concerned with different forms of collective mobilization that had a particular focus on larger cities from the Middle Ages onwards, in Europe as well as in the colonial world. On the basis of case studies that are rooted in empirical inquiry, the conference aims to explore the variety of mobilizable bodies and groups, seeking to understand the social relations that develop when social groups (who will have to be characterized and defined) see the material space in which they inscribe themselves change – or, on the contrary, the social relations that emerge when they engage in favour of alternative transformations. Moreover, the various concepts in use will have to be contextualized, from “town planning” up to “public policies” whose protagonists and frames of reference vary from one period to another.

Social mobilization can have different aims (like active defence or resistance). It can make use of different forms or repertoires of action (indictments, petitions, law suits, occupations, round table discussions, demonstrations, riots), and focus on various types of intervention; interventions that concern circulations and transport systems or that consist in clearances, alignments, and constructions, in urban renewal, slum clearance and the establishment or replacement of facilities (factories, graveyards, prisons, shopping venues). Social mobilization can induce a group to organize itself (in associations or defence committees), or it can reactivate bodies that are already in existence (like corporations or unions). Moreover, social movements are animated and lead by a large variety of actors that intervene at different levels depending on their expectations and their means of action.

The conference historicizes how “modernization” – or rather what has been presented as modernizing acts – came to be resisted and questioned in the long term. It brings together papers that identify and specify different approaches to the practices, groups, and material spaces involved, as well as to their construction as objects of research. Another objective is to explore the interests and (shared or controversial) representations impacting on social mobilizations, doing justice to the different dynamics at work. The conference's particular emphasis on spatial dimensions is justified by the fact that actors repeatedly refer to a space or local place as to their common cause. Nevertheless, this anchorage in space does not necessarily correspond to a physical attachment – via the place of residence or workplace – and can take on different appearances.

The comparison of different case studies will help to illustrate how diverse populations envisaged urban transformations, ranging from expectation to opposition, how they came to be mobilized, and how they used a wide range of arguments (like the reference to urban heritage, modernization, insalubrity, poor housing, local belonging), whereby these arguments need to be related to their respective social realities as well as to their rapport with political authorities. Also, participants can explore the effects and consequences a movement had – be it directly on the object of its activities or be it on a larger political or social scale. However, they will have to take the temporal dimensions into account in order to make sense of the discrepancy or simultaneity between the mobilization against and the implementation of a project.

If what triggers a movement is inscribed into the bounded space of the city, historians also need to regard social mobilizations as local manifestations of more encompassing social transformations that are put into question. Only then does the diversity of motivations come into view that animate actors who are criticizing or contesting construction projects, and who demand or initiate alternative forms of urban planning. It is in this context that the question of the political significance of conflicts needs to be raised; a question that in turn allows to elaborate on the nature of “politics”. Moreover, it allows making sense of the different contexts and temporalities at play in the territorialization of social questions.

Papers on a variety of subjects are welcome, among them: the correlation between social mobilization and urban planning, the use of surveys, the relationship between social movements and the representations in the mass media or in the academic field, the particular forms and practices of conflicts and their negotiation, the analysis of groups that take action.

There is less interest in propositions that simply make use of the city in order to describe a social conflict, so that the city solely serves as a framework (for example for the revolutions of 1848 or the Arab Spring). In a similar vein, papers should not just postulate that an attachment to the past (in the form of the ancient city or a past urban sociability) serves as an affirmation of identity, but they need to document and analyze it.

Particularly welcome are papers in the field of social history that explore practices and actors of all kinds and that do not confine themselves to the investigation of discourses (of urban planners or public authorities). Analyses on the interconnections between practices and ideas are equally welcome.

By choosing a long-term perspective, the conference allows to de-naturalize the process of ordering and planning urban space that is context- and time-specific – and that can be approached with a view to various levels of action and decision-making.

The conference will take place at the EHESS, Paris and Marne-la-Vallée over the course of three days.

### **Organization committee :**

Isabelle Backouche (EHESS/CRH), Annie Fourcaut (Université de Paris I/CHS), Nicolas Lyon-Caen (CNRS/CRHQ), Nathalie Montel (Université de Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée/LATTS), Valérie Theis (Université de Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée/ACP), Loïc Vadelorge (Université de Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée/ACP), Charlotte Vorms (Université de Paris I/CHS).

### **Scientific advisory board :**

Thierry Allain (Université de Montpellier 3), Sylvie Aprile (Université de Lille 3), Francesco Bartolini (Université de Macerata), Christoph Bernhardt (Erkner/Leibniz-IRS), Patrick Boucheron (Université de Paris I/LAMOP), Vanessa Caru (EHESS/CEIAS), María Castrillo

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Paper proposals should be handed in no later than May 15, 2014 in the form of up to one page, elaborating on the problem, the research field and/or the type of sources used. They may be written in French or English.

Please note your email address as well as your institutional affiliation so that the organizers can inform you on their decision by the end of June, 2014.

All proposals should be sent to : Diane Carron, EHESS/CRH : [diane.carron@ehess.fr](mailto:diane.carron@ehess.fr)