



**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

# **URBAN NARRATIVES**

**THE USE OF HISTORY IN URBAN CHANGE**

**PARIS - IVRY-SUR-SEINE**

**6-7 JUNE 2019**

**CALL FOR ABSTRACTS**

*Conference organised by*

*Groupe Transversal “Usages de l’histoire et devenir urbains”  
of LABEX Futurs Urbains (University Paris-Est, France)*

*and*

*Instituto Universitario de Urbanística of the University of  
Valladolid (Spain)*

### **Calendar of the call**

Call for papers: 3<sup>dr</sup> April 2018

Deadline for abstract submission: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018

Acceptation/refusal of submissions: 15<sup>th</sup> October 2018

Dates of the conference 6-7 June 2019

### **Formatting for submissions**

Submissions (in English, French or Spanish) will include the title and the abstract (750-1000 characters end space in total) as well as a short bio of the author.

They have to be sent to: [recitsdeville@institutourbanistica.com](mailto:recitsdeville@institutourbanistica.com) before the 15th june 2018.

## **Presentation**

Since city foundation myths till contemporaneous storytelling, urban narratives have accompanied the global urbanization process. Urban change is certainly not a linear process and urban societies have frequently produced narratives to tell these transformations.

This call for papers aims to reflect on urban narratives. It relies on the following hypothesis. Narratives play an important role in the affirmation and the legitimation of urban transformations. Furthermore, urban narratives are linked in multiple and different ways to urban projects, master plans, renovation strategies and urban policies. That is, they are connected to all forms of city transformation, whether intentional or not. This conference aims to throw light on the links between urban narratives and the specific issues of both urban change and urban planning.

Furthermore, urban narratives are a use of history. Urban studies cannot just consider them as literary works, even if they are fictional. Urban narratives constitute a dimension of the making of the city. They are embedded in temporalities and representations which are related to different modes of city transformation. These modes can take the form of common regulatory frameworks (as zoning plans) or specific projects (as master plans). They can aim to preserve or revitalize the city or to break with the past (urban renewal). They can be global (whether small cities or giant metropolis) or limited to a specific urban neighbourhood. We would like to reflect on the connections between urban narratives and city making in an interdisciplinary way.

The papers can completely or partially deal with the following topics:

### ***Urban narratives as a consensus: production, communication and diffusion***

Whether produced in an institutional framework or not, urban narratives aim to provide a general picture which reveals the key actors, the major places or the markers defining urban futures. However, what kind of intellectual or even material analysis can be made? How can the social and political context of the making of urban narratives be studied? How may the authorized experts (architects, planners, contractors or representatives, but also historians, hagiographers, writers etc) be defined? How can the exchanges between them be traced? Defining how these narratives build consensus seems therefore crucial.

### ***Urban narratives as a place of memory: conflicts, obliterations and oblivions***

Urban narratives are works of memory. They select and emphasize the actors, the places and the events (foundations, oppositions, riots, reconstructions, etc.) which supposedly build the city. This selection leads to the production of divergent narratives. Human sciences have traditionally emphasized the antagonism between the discourse of the conquerors and the silence of the conquered. Yet, this conference aims to go beyond this classical opposition and focus on the restoration of the process of obliteration which characterizes a number of official narratives.

Furthermore, in the digital age, do urban narratives risk from being obscured by the amount of factual data? Does massive data analysis relativize urban history? Working on urban narratives leads to question the digital revolution and how obliteration is achieved. What can we learn from urban oblivion, that is, from vague or erased urban narratives?

## ***Urban narratives as an instrument: issues, projects and appropriations***

The starting point of this conference is that urban narratives are a form of "articulated narrative", which is oriented to the production of urban space. However, do all urban narratives aim to produce an imaginary of the urban making? In France, the persistent calls for the collective construction of a "metropolitan narrative" raise precisely this question. But is this call taken into account? And by who? New narratives can turn away from existing ones. Yet, what do they do with the narratives which were based on heavy infrastructures such as defensive walls, boulevards or significant squares? Do urban plans serve (as it is usually assumed) to give meaning to urban futures? Do they contribute to the fabrication of a common narrative of urban change?

Furthermore, the question of the political uses of urban narratives is also raised. How do the actors who are responsible of urban policies appropriate or reshape the past? Beyond epistemological issues, the urban narratives produced by planning can be questioned with regard to the nature and the status of knowledge that they produce. They can be questioned about their relation to urban heritage, collective memory and political and urban identities.

The thematic diversity of this call for papers highlights the variety of disciplines concerned by urban narratives: geography, history, sociology, urban studies, but also architecture, urban planning or engineering. Finally, understanding urban narratives as instruments for urban change raises a last question: the links between planning knowhows and urban narratives. The term "diagnostic" questions the operability of urban history, a discipline which is more familiar with long searches in archives and libraries. Are narratives an opportunity to find a social use for urban history and social sciences?

## **Organizing committee**

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**GRUPE TRANSVERSAL  
USAGES DE L'HISTOIRE  
ET DEVENIRS URBAINS**



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