

Urban Agency?

Towards a New Urban History of Europe Since 1500

Call for Papers

Urban Governance and Civil Society

Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester, 29/30 April 2015

Organisers: Simon Gunn (sg201@le.ac.uk) and Rosemary Sweet (rhs4@le.ac.uk)

The concept of civil society has become an essential heuristic tool in analyses of urban governance, particularly in the modern era. It has frequently been associated with the principles of self-governance and as an element in Foucauldian models of governmentality. However, the historical relationship between civil society and governance and their evolution in the urban context has been only patchily conceptualized and described. The structures of association characteristic of civil society that bind individuals together in horizontal ties, as opposed to the top down model of traditional power relations, allow a more complex, multi-layered picture of the exercise and mediation of power in urban society to evolve in any period and not just the modern era. Civil society cannot be considered as something aboriginal which exists *a priori* or acts in opposition to state authority and hegemony. Indeed, the concept of civil society itself is predicated upon normative ideas of the conduct of politics and the virtuous individual which are historically contingent upon political and ideological contexts which themselves demand interrogation.

We seek papers which will explore the following questions across geographical and chronological boundaries. We are particularly interested in papers that address areas outside north-west Europe and which offer alternative chronologies or modalities.

- How have urban social organizations, and the social in general, been implicated in the 'art of government' or 'government at a distance'?
- How has participation in civil society developed across Europe and beyond, and how has this been related to shifts in either policy and governance or concepts of individualism and subjectivity?
- How can the relationship between civil society and political philosophy be understood (in relation for example, to ideas of republicanism and guild ethos, civil society versus natural society, civil society versus the state)?
- How should we understand the relationship between 'civil society' and the city as a material and technical reality and the city as an imagined community?

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- How has informal self-governance for collective ends come about and been implemented at different times and in different places and to what ends?
- How should the transformation from early modern urban governance to nineteenth and twentieth century forms of governance be understood? Was there a shift from direct forms of participation to governing at a distance, and if so, why did this come about?

This will be the third conference of the *Urban Agency* network, organized by the Centre for Urban History at the University of Antwerp and the Centre for Urban History at the University of Leicester. Proposals for papers should be sent to Simon Gunn, sg201@le.ac.uk and Rosemary Sweet, rhs4@le.ac.uk by **30 September 2014**.



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