

# Towards a New Urban History of Europe since 1500

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## The rationale for a new urban history of Europe

As historians of urban Europe are aware, the history of European towns and cities since the Middle Ages – especially those of Western Europe – has exerted a powerful influence internationally about what a city is and what urbanism means. From Weber and Mumford to the ideal type of European city of Bagnasco and Le Galés, the European urban experience has exerted a magnetic hold, serving as a model by which other global forms of urbanity have been judged – and often found wanting.<sup>1</sup> In recent times, however, a series of developments have shaken this confidence in the centrality of the European urban experience to the modern world. While Europe's urban centres have been shaped by their encounter with other extra-European territories and urbanisms since at least the late Middle Ages, often in relationships of asymmetrical power,<sup>2</sup> urbanization is now largely a non-European process, which has moreover been shown to be subject to 'global' economic and technological forces.<sup>3</sup> As a result, many historians now propose that the encounter between Europe and its 'others' must stand close to the centre of any account of Europe's own urban experience.

Yet we are also conscious of the fact that path dependency and the local context continue to shape urbanization and urbanity all over the world. While global capital and information networks appear to be powerful determinants, the local level cannot be ignored. After all, what most histories of European urbanization show at least implicitly is the importance of historical contingency.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, they show that much of what has been written under the name of 'European history' has been inscribed with an implicit geographical hierarchy of value even within Europe. Urban historians have privileged national and regional histories of Britain, France, the German states, the Italian peninsula, Netherlands, and Spain, while ignoring much else: Scandinavia, Central, South and Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup> Recent enlargement of the EU among other developments has underscored just how provincial this hierarchy and its histories are. Any properly 'European' urban history will thus also need to take on board the different histories of urbanism across the Continent and to rethink the Western European experience in the light of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Arnaldo Bagnasco and Patrick Le Galés, *Cities in Contemporary Europe* (Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Paul H. Hohenberg and Lynn Hollen Lees, *The Making of Urban Europe, 1000-1950* (Cambridge etc, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> See for example Leonardo Benevolo, *The European City* (London, 1993); Hohenberg and Lees, *Making of Urban Europe*.

<sup>5</sup> A recent state of the art and references in Peter Clark, *European Cities and Towns, 400-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

In 'provincializing Europe', to borrow Dipesh Chakrabarty's metaphor, we will inevitably have to face and tackle the 'modernity' of the European town.<sup>6</sup> The history of European urbanization and urbanity is fundamentally intertwined with the master narrative of European modernity, whether in the Marxist or Weberian sense of the term. While urbanization as a phenomenon has been explained from the perspective of both a human ecological (functional) model and a political economy (structural) model, the European urban experience is linked variously to the growth of rationality and freedom or the capitalist mode of production and specific instantiations of class, division of labour, and alienation.<sup>7</sup> Rewriting the history of European urbanization and urbanity thus inevitably entails coming to terms with theories that have challenged European and Western master narratives.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, over the last decade and more urban history itself has been transformed by significant changes in historiography. The successive 'turns' – cultural, material, spatial and so on – have all left their mark on urban history. In many cases, indeed, the city has been central to their theoretical and historiographical elaboration.<sup>9</sup>

However, the impress of these changes has not been registered evenly across the wide field that is the early modern and modern history of urban Europe; it has been felt only in some parts of that field, mainly those to do with urban technologies and governance since 1800. In fact, recent agenda-setting books have tended to reproduce European master-narratives anew. Both Robert Putnam and Katherine Lynch, for instance, have made strong claims about the role of European towns and urbanization in the advent of a modern civil society which Lynch defines as 'a sphere of public life lying outside the narrow confines of the household or family, but that is distinguishable from formal political life'.<sup>10</sup> Putnam situated the cradle of civil society in the guilds and brotherhoods of late medieval (Northern Italian) cities and city states<sup>11</sup>; and Katherine Lynch has linked the emergence of guilds and brotherhoods and their provision of social activities and mutual aid to the specificity of the urban demographic and social fabric in Europe (i.e., the 'nuclear hardship thesis'). In a similar vein, Richard Florida and others have seen nineteenth- and twentieth-century European cities as the breeding ground of a 'creative class', whose existence Florida attributed to the openness, tolerance and diversity of their urban cultures.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Peter Saunders, *Social Theory and the Urban Question* (London etc, 1981).

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Gurminder K. Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity. Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (New York, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition* (London, 2001); Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, *Cities: Re-Imagining the Urban* (Cambridge, 2002). See also the works by Joyce and Otter cited below.

<sup>10</sup> K.A. Lynch, *Individuals, Families, and Communities in Europe, 1200-1800. The Urban Foundation of Western Society* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 19. See also Antony Black, *Guild and State. European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Charles Landry, *The Creative City: a Toolkit for Urban Innovators* (New York, 2000); Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York, 2002); Idem, *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York, 2004).

While individual scholars have criticised the teleological and normative character of these arguments, it has rarely been done in a systematic way.<sup>13</sup> A further extension of these critiques would, we argue, substantially transform the field as a whole, opening up new perspectives in areas such as migration, social inequality, and city-state relations. The purpose of this project is thus to lay the basis for a new urban history of post-medieval Europe. Organised by two major centres of urban history, Antwerp and Leicester, the project draws together leading historians to produce a new four-volume history of urban Europe. The volumes will represent current cutting-edge research on Europe's urban inheritance and help define the parameters of debate for the next generation of research. The aim of this paper is to elucidate the ideas that lie behind the project and the principles that will inform the writing of the new multi-volume history.

### Urban agency as a research problem

Most urban historians start from the assumption that cities have generated specific practices and behaviour, norms and values. Under the influence of the so-called Chicago (or ecological) school of sociology, in which human behaviour was seen as determined by social and environmental factors, urbanism is considered to have had an impact on social relationships, political culture, criminality, taste and consumption, leisure, the production of knowledge and culture, economic innovation, the perception of environmental problems and – last but not least – modernity.<sup>14</sup> However, is agency not something one should attribute to people, or at least to living beings, rather than to something as abstract and spatial as a city? Are not cities themselves the *result* of agency, in other words of immigration, entrepreneurial activity, and the aspirations of political and intellectual elites?

The matter of urban agency naturally brings with it the question of the nature and definition of a city. Many places have urban characteristics without necessarily being cities and vice versa. Is Silicon Valley a city? Where, in the absence of city walls, does the urban stop and the countryside begin? What about slums and squatter camps? Are they part of a city or do they rather resemble refugee camps?<sup>15</sup> In much contemporary sociological and economic writing the term city is interchangeable with such concepts as metropolitan areas, economic agglomerations and the like. The adjective 'urban' can often just as well be replaced with 'densely populated'. The question of urban agency therefore involves isolating the urban as a specific variable. It involves finding out whether cities are more than the sum of their parts, and if so, why and how.

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<sup>13</sup> Recent case studies in Martina Hessler and Clemens Zimmermann (eds), *Creative Urban Milieus: Historical Perspectives on Culture, Economy, and the City* (Frankfurt, 2008); Miriam R. Levin, Sophie Forgan, Martina Hessler, Robert H. Kargon and Morris Low, *Urban Modernity: Cultural Innovation in the Second Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, Ma, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> See e.g., Robert E. Park, 'The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Behavior in the City Environment', *American Journal of Sociology* 20 (1915) 579-83; Louis Wirth, 'Urbanism as a way of life: The city and contemporary civilization', *American Journal of Sociology*, 44 (1938), 1-24; Theodore Hershberg, 'The New Urban History: Toward an Interdisciplinary History of the City', *Journal of Urban History*, 5 (1978) 3-40; Jacques Le Goff, *The Town as an Agent of Civilisation c.1200-c.1500* (Collins, 1971) Fontana economic history of Europe, vol. 1.

<sup>15</sup> A question that the present-day megalopolises of the urban South has thrown into sharp relief – see Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London, 2006).

Agency itself is a problematic concept of course. Still more than a social structure, a city is a spatialized entity, which is why historians and social theorists have tried to tackle the question of urban agency from this perspective. According to the Marxist Henri Lefebvre every mode of production not only produces its own type of space, but space also produces specific types of thought and action.<sup>16</sup> Here agency is situated in the actions and strategies of urban governors and planners. In a well-known chapter on walking in the city Michel de Certeau has shown that people inhabit and appropriate spatial environments. They give meaning to them in ways not envisaged by the political, economic and cultural elites who have helped to devise, plan and build them. However, urban dwellers can do so only within certain limits. As a kind of consumer, they can, using their conscious and unconscious tactics, only 'poach' upon a terrain already prefigured (in terms of spatial organization and meaning) by others.<sup>17</sup> Hence, from de Certeau's perspective as well agency is ultimately to be situated in the actions and strategies of urban elites, or else in such abstract categories as modes of production and the embodiment of capital.

Abstractions such as 'class', 'capital' and 'public sphere' are what postcolonial theories have criticized for their universalistic claims but we still face the risk of mistaking them for explanations. In urban history, this problem is related to the fact that cities are typically addressed as bounded entities. From Walter Christaller's central place theory to recent ideas of the 'dual' or 'divided city'<sup>18</sup>, the city is conceived of as being a political-economic actor with a kind of essence or core.<sup>19</sup> Something similar often applies to approaches in which the urban is seen as a 'node' in (global) networks or as one 'scale' among others (i.e., the local, the national and the global). Even genuine attempts to identify the post- or non-cityness of certain areas build upon the idea of the city as a unified and bounded entity.<sup>20</sup> At its worst, the urban is associated with 'civilization' through the politically charged adjective civic or civil (or else with creativity and tolerance) which can be traced back to the Latin *civis*, and hence to an urban citizen. Yet this sloppy identification enables us also to glean an important insight: that urbanity has been a political claim from the start. From a European perspective it all began with charters, burghership and city walls. Being a city came along with norms, values, political discourses and knowledge systems in which the urban way of live and doing politics was explicitly linked to civility, civilization and modernity. This points the way towards a new urban history in which the city as a material reality and as a cluster of ideas are tackled simultaneously.

One approach might be to come to grips with the relevance of place as opposed to both 'urban' and 'space'. Places are spaces with meaning attached to them by actors. They have agency because of the connection between location, materiality and meaning.<sup>21</sup> Economic geographers have strengthened this connection by emphasizing the importance of spatial

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<sup>16</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Michel de Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien. Vol. I: Arts de faire* (Paris, 1980), ch 7.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Christaller, *Die zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland* (Jena, 1933); John H. Mollenkopf and Manuel Castells, *Dual City: Restructuring New York* (New York, 1991); Susan S. Faintstein, Ian Gordon and Michael Harloe, *Divided Cities: New York and London in the Contemporary World* (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Ignacio Farías, 'Introduction. Decentering the Object of Urban Studies', in Ignacio Farías and Thomas Bender (eds), *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory changes Urban Studies* (London/New York, 2010) 1-24.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., Edward Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas F. Gieryn, 'A Space for Place in Sociology', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26 (2006) 463-496. See also A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, 1996).

contiguity. They have linked geographic concentration to economic performance and superior competitiveness, but what matters for them is proximity. Proximity and spatial clustering produce economies of agglomeration through the sharing of specialized inputs and infrastructure (including institutions), the elastic supply of skills and specialized workers, the reduction of search and information costs, and – last but not least – knowledge externalities and innovation.<sup>22</sup> From here, we could go a long way towards explaining the growth and dynamics of cities. After all, successful cities attract immigrants of all sorts and migration in turn creates the clustering of different ideas and the proximity of a diverse set of cultural frames of reference that yield new combinations and, hence, innovation. Moreover, institutional thickness and path dependency come into play. Spatial clustering creates distinctive economic trajectories, but also durable patterns of specialization and competitiveness between countries and regions.<sup>23</sup> What is significant about all this, though, is that it is spatial proximity not urbanity *per se* that accounts for economic dynamism; the city dissolves into the background.

Should we, then, abandon the idea of urban agency or even the urban altogether? Urban historians are in any case at risk of reproducing the city as a normative ideal whenever they use the term urban agency. As soon as we claim that a city is more than the sum of its parts, we are actually attributing to the material and the spatial something which is not given but historically created. While a city is generated by the strategies of ‘producers’ such as governments, corporations and other institutions, the point is that they not only build the city in a literal sense but as an imaginary reality at the same time – among other things through images, signs and maps. Of course, creating representations or technologies such as these always involves ideas of the proper functioning of infrastructure and the appropriate behaviour of persons, along with the imagination needed to plan and design. But the point is that these representations cannot be reduced to economic patterns and instrumental political strategies. Planning and the use of urban infrastructures alike involve ideas about the ideal city, about the city as the embodiment of, for instance, orderliness, publicness and transparency, economic performance, individual freedom or communitarian ideals. Moreover, these ideas are very often fed by social theory. As we have already indicated, influential thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas’ and Robert Putnam have made strong claims about the urban environment as the catalyst of modern social relations and have exercised significant influence over politics – or more concretely, over the city as an imagined reality.

## **New perspectives**

So once we have reached an understanding of the limits and possibilities of urban agency, the challenge for future research is to rethink the relationship between human agency and the material fabric of the urban world. To that end, there are a number of concepts and

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<sup>22</sup> Anders Malmberg and Peter Maskell, ‘Towards an Explanation of Regional Specialization and Industry Agglomeration’, *European Planning Studies*, 5:1 (1997) 25-41; Peter Maskell et.al., *Competitiveness, Localised Learning and Regional Development: Specialization and Prosperity in Small Open Economies* (London, 1998); Allen J. Scott, *The Cultural Economy of Cities. Essays on the Geography of Image-Producing Industries* (London etc., 2000); Ron A. Bochma and Robert C. Kloosterman (eds), *Learning from Clusters: A Critical Assessment from an Economic-Geographical Perspective* (Dordrecht, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Richard D. Whitley, *Divergent Capitalisms: the Social Structuring and Change of Business Systems* (Oxford, 1999); James Mahoney, ‘Path Dependence in Historical Sociology’, *Theory and Society*, 29: 4 ( 2000) 507-548.

perspectives which in our view might be helpful. In the remainder of this platform text we present two clusters of theories, which have been used in recent research to reconsider urban transformations and to rewrite particular urban histories. Both clusters of theories enable us to rethink urban agency and the European model by

- 1) a focus on power, governance, and subjectivity,
  - 2) including the production of knowledge, expertise and the social sciences itself in the history to be written, and
  - 3) taking into account the city as a material and technical reality.
- Above all, they enable us to tackle the European 'provincialism' of both the historical reality and the intellectual tradition that have shaped urban agency.

### **From hegemony to governmentality and beyond**

As concepts both agency and urbanity are related to questions of policy and power. Our thinking about power has changed fundamentally during the last few decades. To put it briefly, critical social theory has experienced a shift from a Marxist to a Foucauldian approach (or in other terms, from hegemony to governmentality).<sup>24</sup> In a Marxist sense power relations resulted from, on the one hand, modes of production and class relations and, on the other, ideology and hegemonic institutions. Urban historians translated this into economic forces - production, distribution and exchange, patterns of landholding and labour discipline – and socio-political domination of urban space. For the neo-Marxist Henri Lefebvre, every mode of production produces its own type of space, which, in turn, serves as a tool of class control – or at least produces specific types of thought and action.<sup>25</sup> In Foucault's writings, on the other hand, power loses its two-tier architecture (base versus superstructure). Foucault looks for the technologies and the microphysics of power, which are related less to the relations of production in a socio-economic sense than to the production of knowledge and 'truth'. For Foucault (especially in his earlier writings), power is intimately related to the legitimacy of discursive practices. The latter include practices in such institutions as hospitals, asylums, jails and schools, in which material conditions such as the panopticon instantiate specific 'truth regimes' and vice versa.

Perhaps the most disturbing element for Marxists was Foucault's deliberate neglect of the relation between 'civil society' and 'state'. While this framework was crucial in the Marxist frame of reference, for Foucault it made little sense to distinguish the state from civil society and to look for the hand of the state pulling the strings. While power is omnipresent in any layer and dimension of society, it is never fixed, one way, or immutable. This becomes clear in particular in Foucault's subsequent discussion of 'governmentality'. Foucault did not fully elaborate upon this concept himself, but a number of his students and followers have singled it out as central to his later thinking.<sup>26</sup> They define *gouvernementalité* as the 'art of

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<sup>24</sup> See e.g., P. Joyce, 'The End of Social History?', *Social History*, 20:1 (1995) 73-91; Simon Gunn, 'From Hegemony to Governmentality: Changing Conceptions of Power in Social History', *Journal of Social History*, 39:3 (2006) 705-720. Also: Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1989); Patrick Joyce (ed.), *Class* (New York 1995); Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (eds), *Beyond the Cultural Turn* (Berkeley, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

<sup>26</sup> Our introduction to the concept of governmentality is based on Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction', in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect. Studies in*

government' or the 'rationality of government', as such referring to both the techniques of governance *and* the ideas and mentalities that inform it. While governmentality is generally referred to as the 'conduct of conduct' or the 'power to act on the action of others', it can also be seen as a sort of 'governing at a distance', i.e. governing through institutions, through the organization of space and the market, through civil society and communities, and last but not least, through individuals governing themselves. One important assumption here is that the definition of power and governance presupposes rather than annuls the capacity of agents to act. From an historical point of view, this implies that power is not only distributed differently over time (with some groups gaining power at the expense of others), but that the way power *works* changes as well. Part of the task of urban history is therefore to create a differentiated account of the mechanics of power in different urban locations and time-periods.

In practice, the rationality of government altered fundamentally over time. Following his course at the Collège de France *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault characterized modern history by a shift from sovereignty to discipline and, finally, governmentality as distinct modes of (state) power.<sup>27</sup> The starting point for Foucault is the emergence of the concept of *raison d'état* (reason of state) as a doctrine in sixteenth-century Europe. The ultimate ground for the principles of government moved from the prince to the state as an autonomous and perpetual reality. This change is related in Foucault to a shift in focus from territories and bodies to abstract populations as the target of political action. While the strength of the state became located in the wealth and productivity of its inhabitants, an ever growing corpus of experts produced an ever growing body of knowledge on the state and its population. Typical in this respect were the Cameralist or mercantilist thinkers and the German/Prussian *Polizeiwissenschaft* (the science of police or policy) which in the eighteenth century were preoccupied with, on the one hand, the surveillance of prices and production, trade and immigration, health and hygiene and, on the other, gathering the information and data necessary to calculate and plan the actions appropriate to the well-being of the state and its population.

The radical break here is that the goal of the state and the goal of each and every subject are seen to have merged. As both the state and the individual strive for wealth and fortune, ideas like happiness and prosperity link the state to its subjects. In addition, government is geared towards the population as a whole and, at the same time, to every individual subject (the so-called liberal 'individual' who is simultaneously autonomous from all other individuals yet identical in his/her needs and desires).<sup>28</sup> To a large extent, the advent of liberalism, to which the concept of governmentality is linked in a narrow sense, can be seen as originating in this *Polizeistaat*. Liberalism for Foucault is not simply an ideology or a

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*Governmentality* (Chicago, 1991) 1-52. See also Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham, *Foucault and Law* (London, 1995); Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose (eds), *Foucault and Political Reason. Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government* (London, 1996); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality. Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London, 1999); Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann and Thomas Lemke (eds), *Gouvernementalität der Gegenwart. Studien zur Ökonomisierung des Sozialen* (Frankfurt, 2000); Jack Z. Bratich, Jeremy Packer and Cameron McCarthy (eds), *Foucault, Cultural Studies, and Governmentality* (New York, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> For Foucault's public lectures at the collège de France, see Michel Foucault, *Résumés de cours*, Collège de France (Paris, 1989). An English translation of the crucial lectures: Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France (1978-1979)* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics. Lectures at the College de France (1978-1979)* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body* (Chicago, 1995), chs. 1 and 2.

political doctrine, but rather an 'art of governing'. This art starts from the recognition of the state's limited capacity to know. Adam Smith's ideas can be seen as based upon the impossibility of a perfect correspondence between knowledge and governance. Hence his recourse to an 'invisible hand' and the laws of nature innate to the human being and to the idea that *laissez-faire* would reconcile the interests of the state with those of the state's subjects. To be sure, this is not to say that Enlightenment contract-theory (e.g. Locke, Rousseau) has the final word. Using the concept of *security*, Foucault points to a continued concern for the adequate modalities and technicalities of governmental action. The role of state intervention is to assure the security of the natural 'processes of population' upon which governance is based.

In short, in liberalism governance is a way of acting from a distance, through the production of knowledge, procedures and techniques which align the needs and goals of the governed and governors. Historians of cities have been among the first to use these concepts as a grid in their work on urbanity and urban transformations. Some have shifted their attention to the micro-physics of power, away from scientific discourse to everyday practices, urban planning and the materiality of daily life. In his eye-opening book *The Rule of Freedom*, Patrick Joyce has argued that freedom itself was a technique (rather than the absence) of rule in liberal governmentality. Considering the ideas and actions of politicians, engineers and urban dwellers alike, and focusing upon a range of 'technologies' including maps and plans and sewers, libraries, and new streets, Joyce reveals the hidden forms of power and individual subject-formation in the cities of nineteenth-century Europe.<sup>29</sup> Starting from the Foucauldian idea that liberalism as an art of governance was based on the cultivation of an autonomous and reflexive self, he considers freedom as something that was ruled *through*. According to Joyce, liberal governance in cities like Manchester and London aimed at the production of self-governing subjects. Urban authorities did not rule and discipline citizens in a narrow sense, rather they transformed the material form of the city in a manner that encouraged the production of the free, self-ruling citizen. In this vein, the arrival of running water in the home and the capacity to defecate in private is seen simultaneously to have generated the hygienisation of the city and the creation of the moral self-regulating subject.

Clearly, these ideas involve a critique of the European master-narrative in that they highlight the contingency of the notion of freedom - a contingency moreover that is defined in a material and technical way. In a similar fashion, Chris Otter examines the use of vision and light as part of the history of freedom and governance in his book *The Victorian Eye*.<sup>30</sup> Otter starts from a critique of the argument that the 'expansion of illumination' is, in Western narratives, related to the rise of modernity and the disenchantment of the world. Vision and power, according to Otter, have been addressed by historians and theorists either from the perspective of surveillance (discipline) or that of spectacle (seduction). On the one hand, light and illumination is conventionally tied to Bentham's Panopticon and the idea that disciplining works through the creation of visibility. On the other hand, visibility is connected to the archetypal figure of the *flâneur*, who was drawn 'mothlike, to the light of seduction'.<sup>31</sup> Both visual display and seduction are of course related to specific types of individuality and urban consumerism. But in order to understand this adequately, Otter

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<sup>29</sup> Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom. Liberalism and the Modern City* (London, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye. A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800-1910* (Chicago and London, 2008).

<sup>31</sup> Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, 6.



argues, the current range of concepts provided by urban history is too limited. Instead, he sees the expansion of gas and electricity as part of the development of a 'technological state' in which the nature of governance changed along with technological infrastructure. To paraphrase the words of Saint-Simon, the government of persons was replaced with the administration of things.<sup>32</sup> In the nineteenth century, this happened in such a way that the liberal, self-governing subject was formed through the agency of the material environment. The introduction of such material devices as plate glass and light switches transformed power and the self-regulation of individuals and groups. Examples include the mutual monitoring of groups within nineteenth-century libraries, museums, reading rooms and art galleries, as well as the encouragement of self-inspection and introspection in private and enclosed spaces equipped with lamps and mirrors. Urban technologies, from water to lighting, thus fundamentally altered the terms on which self and society were activated in the nineteenth century city.

### **The urban as a matter-of-concern**

Otter's approach brings to the fore another set of concepts, in which the material and the technical are even more important. Foucault's concepts and methods have often been reduced to the analysis of discourses, and hence associated with post-structuralism and a concomitant neglect of materiality. But in recent years, under the heading of the so-called 'material turn', a broad range of scholars have pointed out that post-structuralist approaches – which were also heavily influenced by the semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure – have totally eliminated or at least eclipsed the agency of matter.<sup>33</sup> If not simply neglected, objects were reduced to signifiers, the meaning, value and agency of which was a function of their place among a taxonomy of signifiers.<sup>34</sup> Foucault's approach, however, did take into account material environments and technologies – hence our use of the term 'discursive practices' rather than 'discourses' above. The notion of governmentality too has been strongly identified with technologies through which governance or rule is secured.

Nevertheless, a more radical cluster of theories focused on the material environment has emerged, known as Science and Technology Studies (STS) or – more specific – Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Among other things, this body of theory has been critical of the use of abstractions such as 'capital', 'class', and 'society' (to which could also be added the 'urban') in the explanation of virtually all economic, social, cultural and political phenomena. One of the chief spokespersons of ANT, Bruno Latour, has insisted that 'social structures' have no explanatory power but should instead be explained themselves. While this has again been argued by others before (including Foucault and Patrick Joyce)<sup>35</sup> Latour has explicitly attacked post-structuralist thinking for its neglect of objects and technologies. He radically refuses to search for a reality 'behind' or 'underneath' objects and events and takes the 'real stuff' as his point of departure.

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<sup>32</sup> Otter, *The Victorian Eye*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Webb Keane, 'Signs Are not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things', in Daniel Miller (ed.), *Materiality* (Durham, 2006) 182-205.

<sup>34</sup> See further Fred Myers (ed.), *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture* (School of American Research Press, 2001) 65-90; Christopher Tilley et al (eds), *Handbook of Material Culture* (Thousands oaks, 2006); Miller (ed.), *Materiality*.

<sup>35</sup> Joyce, 'The end'.

Instead of examining how class or capital explain economic, social, cultural or political phenomena, Latour (along with Michel Callon, John Law and others) focuses on the way the social is 'constructed' or 'assembled' in practice.<sup>36</sup> While networks in this cluster of theories substitute for the social, they should not be seen as lying beneath reality, or acting behind the scene. Networks are rather to be taken literally, as a set of real connections and associations. Moreover, the construction of networks is as much a process of non-humans as it is one of humans. ANT is often described as a sociology of association or translation in which both human and non-human actors are enrolled in the network (association) and are defined and formed by the network (translation).<sup>37</sup> While non-human actors (or actants) thus have an agency too, the social is formed in processes of translation, in which mediators (both human and non-human) are connected and networks are formed. As such, networks are not conveyors of causality but concatenations of mediators which make other mediators do things through processes of translation. What ANT thus emphasizes is that it is not simply people who produce and use material artefacts or attribute meaning to them, but that objects and technology create actors and meaning as well. The relationship between people and things is not one-way or even two-way; their significance lies in the way they work together as networks and assemblages. While material elements are what make social relations asymmetrical and durable, it is the network that produces forms of agency and identity.<sup>38</sup> CEOs, managers and workers exist because of the material and technical reality of factories, firms and capital.

At first sight, this approach may seem abstract to urban historians, who are, after all, interested in the empirical. But in fact, Latour's work points towards an increased realism, in which the social (and the urban) is again given its 'missing mass' in a rather literal sense.<sup>39</sup> Rather than urban people as historical subjects being located in towns or cities, which function here as a kind of epistemological background, Latour urges us to think people and urban place together in relationships of networks and assemblage. Urban markets, for example, cease in a Latourian formulation to be either abstract places of economic exchange or sites of cultural ritual, but assemblages of commodities which are part of longer chains of supply and demand, physical sites (the market-place) and sources of information ('market intelligence'), together with human actors such as traders, buyers and local officials. Agency in this assemblage does not belong to any one actant; it is a product of the ensemble with its material, technological and social dimensions.<sup>40</sup> This perspective, in effect, enables us to see both urban places and the processes that go on within them as socio-technical formations without simply privileging one domain (e.g. human organization and decision-making) or another (e.g. technological determinism). It allows us to think of cities as hybrid places,

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<sup>36</sup> For an introduction, see Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> See also Michel Callon, 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Briec Bay', in John Law (ed.), *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1986) 196-233.

<sup>38</sup> See also Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, 'Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macrostructure Reality and how Sociologists help them to do so', in Karin Knorr-Cetina and Aaron V. Cicourel (eds.), *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology. Toward an Integration of Micro- and Macro-Sociologies* (Boston etc., 1981) 277-303.

<sup>39</sup> Bruno Latour, 'Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts', in Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (eds), *Shaping Technology / Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change* (Cambridge, Ma, 1992) 225-258.

<sup>40</sup> For further discussion see Michel Callon (ed.), *Laws of Markets* (Oxford, 1998).

complex assemblages of material and human components, in dynamic and by no means always predictable or stable relations with one another.<sup>41</sup>

Nor does it eclipse power relations and ideologies. Just as for Foucault, power is related here to the construction of knowledge. The roots of ANT are to be found in the sociology of science, in which the construction of ‘matters of fact’ has been the central research focus for over a generation now.<sup>42</sup> Rather than asserting the ‘objectivity’ of matter or advocating a technological determinism, Latour and his colleagues have raised the question of ‘what the *real* world is *really* like’.<sup>43</sup> Latour has tried to go beyond the (Kantian) idea that reality and objectivity are related to the physical world while perception, construction and subjectivity are to be found solely in the human mind. Refusing the position that ‘it is all in the mind’ or, alternatively, that things have an inner essence beyond human perception, he has argued that a ‘thing’ is defined by its effects and alliances. While for traditional realists things become more real the less they are connected to the human mind, for Latour things become real when they are enrolled and become connected to ‘allies’. They become real, in other words, thanks to their associations, and the more (human and non-human) associations, the more real they become.<sup>44</sup> This is clearly true for climate change and quarks, which exist thanks to the attention, rules and practices of scientists, next to a range of equipment for measurement and visualization. But looking at it historically it may indeed also apply to, say, waste and electricity, human degeneration and hysteria, civil society and, indeed, democracy and capitalism, which can all be understood as more or less durable networks of humans and non-humans.<sup>45</sup>

The challenge for urban historians (no less than other social scientists), then, is no longer to search for the ‘matters of fact’ behind the ideological or discursive screen, but to make visible the mechanisms with which matters of fact and states of affairs are constituted and maintained. This is what Michel Callon did when arguing that a modern economy is embedded not just in social relations, but in economics and tools and disciplines based on economic theory.<sup>46</sup> In a similar vein, in his *Rule of Experts* Timothy Mitchell tries to move beyond the opposition between, on the one hand, a view of modernity and global capitalism as the result of the historical unfolding of an inner logic and, on the other hand, a social constructivist approach, in which the ingredients of modernity and global capitalism – e.g., the nation, the modern consumer – are but inventions of discourses and/or the social sciences involved. For Mitchell, the emergence of the economy in its modern shape and meaning is not solely the result of language and the social imaginary.<sup>47</sup> It rather emerged out of a series of ‘extra-economic’ events and professional fields including political crises, ecological disasters and expansion of statistical knowledge. While the economy can be seen as being put in place by a ‘new politics of calculation’ (and hence of statistics, measuring

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<sup>41</sup> For an attempt to extend these ideas see Thrift and Amin, *Cities*, esp. chs. 2 and 4.

<sup>42</sup> Bruno Latour and Steven Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: the Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Los Angeles, 1979). For a brilliant historical account, see Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the air-pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> Latour, *Reassembling*, 117.

<sup>44</sup> Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Ma, 1999); Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks. Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne, 2009), esp. ch 4.

<sup>45</sup> One example in Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge, Ma, 1988).

<sup>46</sup> Callon, *The Laws of the Markets* and ‘Why Virtualism Paves the Way to Political Impotence’, *Economic Sociology - the European electronic newsletter* 6:2 (2005).

<sup>47</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts. Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, 2002).

devices etc.) its birth involved a set of real political shifts, including the realignment of state, economy and colonial power. In the process, the making of a modern economy (which Mitchell dates from the 1930s) re-inscribed a series of binary oppositions: economy and society, the material and the ideological, the human and the non-human.<sup>48</sup>

In the end what Latour proposes is a shift from matters-of-facts to matters-of-concern.<sup>49</sup> For Latour, matters of fact are but very polemical and political renderings of matters of concern - matters of debate, attention, measurement, construction, representation. The task for the critically minded historian (or social scientist) is to make visible the mechanisms with which matters of fact or states of affairs are made durable. At first sight, the risk is then of course to lose the real 'hard' facts with which a critical attitude has been associated ever since the Enlightenment. But for Latour, a critical attitude is limited neither to a process of deconstruction and debunking, nor to the discovery of the real hard facts obscured by ideology and history. A critical mind accepts that facts cannot be separated from values in an absolute way and that science (or knowledge) is a form of politics insofar as it is in the business of arguing and representing (better) versions of the world. For historians, of course, this brings about new challenges, in particular when considering that the creation of matters-of-fact has been at the core of what is often called 'modernity', but which is of course a cluster of phenomena assembled under the headings of 'scientific revolution' and 'Enlightenment'.

For Latour, modernity is a historical process through which philosophers, scientists and others have sought to separate nature from culture (science) and object from subject in a ceaseless – but ultimately impossible – effort of 'purification'. At the heart of modernity is thus the myth of Cartesian and Kantian dualism in which humans are seen as distinct from nature, although in reality they are always linked through the proliferation of 'hybrids'.<sup>50</sup> In a very paradoxical way, modernity has bred the attempt to study nature objectively along with an ever expanding range of technologies and matters-of-fact – of which diseases and environmental threats are but the most obvious ones – and in which nature and culture are fundamentally intertwined. While historians have only begun to understand the potential impact of these ideas, urban historians may grasp the opportunity this offers to tackle the modern European city as an ensemble made durable by the combined effects of materialities, technologies and ideas .

### **Towards a new urban history of modern Europe?**

In short, these perspectives enable us to tackle old questions about urbanization and urban patterns in new ways. In particular, they enable us to link the urban as a material reality and political space to changing historical ideas about towns, citizens and the urban environment.

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<sup>48</sup> Michell, *Rule of Experts*, 8-10.

<sup>49</sup> Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry* (Winter 2004) 225-248; Idem, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or How to Make Things Public', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds), *Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, 2005); Idem, Latour, B., *Iconoclash. Gibt es eine Welt jenseits des Bilderkrieges?* (Berlin, 2002).

<sup>50</sup> Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique* (Paris, 1991). In English: *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Ma, 1993).

In the late middle ages and the early modern period European cities were distinguished from parishes, villages and industrial districts by material artefacts: urban charters, city walls and belfries. In addition, symbols and rituals were created that enabled citizens to perform the city and to attribute meaning to it as a material environment. On the part of urban elites and middling groups this happened with an eye to distinguishing the city both politically and economically. From a political and juridical perspective, Europe's cities were to become freed from princely and territorial authorities; from an economic perspective, their products and skills were to be distinguished from the products made in the countryside. In both cases, the urban way was considered superior – as was urban culture, which was distinguished, albeit in constant processes of negotiation with territorial rulers, from both the boorish behavior of the countryside and the more lavish and formal way of life at courts.<sup>51</sup> It goes without saying that a good deal of boosterism was involved here, not only with regard to urban culture but the superiority of urban products as well. Some products, especially products with a high value added in terms of skills and genius, should – according to urban citizens – be made exclusively within the city walls. The underlying political idea was that guild-based artisans, who were burghers of the city by definition, were superior as producers because of their moral and political qualities.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, political philosophy comes into play. Urban self-rule was legitimized with references to Republicanism and civic virtue in particular. The opposition to what was called slavery and oppression was to a large extent associated with urban liberties and an individual committed to the urban common good. So urbanity was linked to specific political ideas and a specific type of individual, deemed superior in both an economic and a political sense. In turn, the city was a product of political philosophy, of knowledge.

In the nineteenth century, city walls were destroyed and processes of urbanization and urban sprawl intensified. Gradually Europe's cities lost their political autonomy and nation states became more important cultural frames of reference (or so the conventional narrative has it). So the autonomy of cities and perhaps also the distinction between the urban and the non-urban tended to fade. Related to this, however, the technicalities and materialities of rule fundamentally changed. While guilds and traditional markers of urban citizenship declined, passports, work books, house numbering, municipal registers and surveys gradually became an everyday reality, alongside and related to new forms of law and juridical regulation, new kinds of identity formation, and the push and pull factors which immigrants faced.<sup>53</sup> In the economic realm, capital and equipment contributed to the re-shaping of manufactories in which new hierarchies, power relations, and disciplining

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<sup>51</sup> E.g. Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca, 1996); Martha C. Howell, 'The Spaces of Late Medieval Urbanity', in Marc Boone and Peter Stabel (eds), *Shaping Urban Identity in Late Medieval Europe* (Leuven, 2000) 3-23; Michael Camille, 'Signs of the City: Place, Power and Public Fantasy in Medieval Paris', in Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michael Kobialka (eds), *Medieval Practices of Space* (Minneapolis, 2000); E. Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des cérémonies : essai sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons* (Turnhout 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Bert De Munck, 'Skills, Trust and Changing Consumer Preferences. The decline of Antwerp's Craft Guilds from the Perspective of the Product Market, ca. 1500 – ca. 1800', *International Review of Social History*, 53:2 (2008) 197-233 and 'One Counter and Your Own Account. Redefining Illicit Labour in Early Modern Antwerp', *Urban History* 37:1 (2010) 26-44.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g., Vincent Milliot, Marie-Claude Blanc-Chaléard, Caroline Douki and Nicole Dyonet (eds), *Police et migrants. France 1667-1939* (Rennes Cedex, 2001); 'Espaces policiers, XVIIe-XXe siècle', special issue *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 50 :1, January-March 2003 (eds Catherine Denys and Vincent Milliot).

practices materialized.<sup>54</sup> At the same time, the transformations related to consumption, retail and advertisement can be seen as technical and material transformations.<sup>55</sup> If a modern consumer emerged, s/he was shaped by both the spatiality and materiality of shopping and the technicalities of advertising.<sup>56</sup> Both were in turn related to the form of the city and even the city as an idea, as the disappearance of guild and city marks and the emergence of the 'made in' mark bear witness.<sup>57</sup>

Policies related to migration or directly affecting cultural industries were not the only manifestations of the link between the urban as a material reality and the changing rationality of rule. Equally important were new technologies of building, such as the iron-frame and plate-glass, which enabled city centres across Europe to be made over from the 1840s. The modernity of cities in the nineteenth century was identified by contemporaries not only with their appearance as spectacle (whether Manchester, Paris or St Petersburg) or capacities for production and consumption but also with their material and technological novelty, epitomized by gas lighting, smooth asphalt streets, monumental glass roofs and the like.<sup>58</sup> Spaces such as the public park, the dance-hall or the park came to define both the urban and a modern selfhood, the latter materializing in new forms of interiority, of civic etiquette or even indifference.<sup>59</sup> This understanding of environmental agency is not to revert to a material determinism, rather to insist that 'space matters'. As Chris Otter has put it, material systems 'produce certain spectra of possibility. We might say that the discourse and practice of polite conduct and civility make more sense in a park, museum or boulevard than a communal privy; a certain set of probabilities is etched into their stones'.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See the brilliant account of Richard Biernacki. *The Fabrication of Labor: Germany and Britain, 1640-1914* (Berkeley, 1995) Studies on the History of Society and Culture, Vol 22.

<sup>55</sup> The expanding culture of consumerism is addressed from the perspective of a changing 'activity of looking' in Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> See e.g., Neil McKendrick, 'Josiah Wedgwood: an Eighteenth-Century Entrepreneur in Salesmanship and Marketing Techniques', *Economic History Review*, 12 (1960) 408-433; Eric Robinson, 'Eighteenth-century Commerce and Fashion: Matthew Boulton's Marketing Techniques', *Economic History Review*, 16 (1963) 39-60; Clements Wisherman and Elliott Shore (eds), *Advertising and the European city: Historical Perspectives* (Aldershot, 2000) 89-95; Andrew Hann and Jon Stobart, 'Sites of Consumption: the Display of Goods in Provincial Shops in Eighteenth-Century England', *Cultural and Social History*, 2 (2005) 165-188. For recent critiques on the 'modern' character of retail and advertising (including additional references): Blondé Bruno and Ilja Van Damme, 'Retail Growth and Consumer Changes in a Declining Urban Economy: Antwerp (1650-1750)', *Economic History Review*, 63:3 (2010) 638-663; Dries Lyna and Ilja Van Damme, 'A Strategy of Seduction? The Role of Commercial Advertisements in the Eighteenth-Century Retailing Business of Antwerp', *Business History*, 51:1 (2009) 100-121.

<sup>57</sup> Bert De Munck, 'The Agency of Branding and the Location of Value. Hallmarks and Monograms in Early Modern Tableware Industries', *Business History* (2011) forthcoming.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' in W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon* (London, 2001).

<sup>59</sup> Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel of course had much to say about urban characteristics such as *ennui* but see also Simon Gunn, *The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class* (Manchester, 2000), esp. ch. 3. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London, 1976) was among the first to chart sociologically new forms of urban interiority in London and Paris.

<sup>60</sup> Chris Otter, 'Making Liberalism Durable: Vision and Civility in the late Victorian City', *Social History*, 27:1 (January 2002), p. 4. Leif Jerram has made a trenchant restatement of the idea that space matters in urban history in his recent book *Streetlife: The Untold History of Europe's Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2011), esp. Introduction.

The central paradox in the nineteenth century is that the ideologies of a small state came along with an ever swelling apparatus of rules, bureaucracies, technologies and experts required to produce a content population and an orderly society. Rather than constant surveillance and a disciplining police, governance required a wide range of privatized and semi-privatized micro-power structures, including an ever increasing range of experts for the production of knowledge and an ever reshaped and re-invented civil society. Not only Haussmanisation but virtually all instantiations of modernity – such as the separation of home and work place, a capitalist economy, social segregation, technological advance, cultural and racial exclusion etc, – can all be seen as utterly material, technical and knowledge-related phenomena. Significantly, in the political and scientific imagination, the distinction between the city and the countryside did not fade at all, rather on the contrary. While religious and other conservatives idealized the ‘rural’, a distinction was made between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.<sup>61</sup> The urban context was associated with *Gesellschaft*, and hence with modernity – notwithstanding clear signs of continuity, especially in the realm of political philosophy. In the end, while this heralded the implicit association between an urban way of life and both the current economic ideas related to the ‘creative class’ and political ideas based on the liberal individual, the urban origins of western social, political and economic theory have been largely ignored in these disciplines’ self-reflection.<sup>62</sup>

Of course, modernity also produced ambivalence. It generated strong feelings of fear about racial degeneration and social fragmentation, which resulted in the idea that urban dwellers required new types of expertise in order to embody the modern liberal individual. In a sense, city walls, gates and urban citizenship were replaced by town planners and public architects who created public spaces in which modern individuals could meet to form a civic community. In the process, people and things started to interact differently. Urban elites created new technologies of rule, in which the material had a different type of agency than it had had in the past. While sewers were to create a healthy and hygienic city, large boulevards and parks ensured the free movement of people. Museums and public libraries in the meantime were to create a civic culture.<sup>63</sup> So while the city continued to be the ideal form of society, as an imagined reality, it had changed significantly. In a way, the city’s very agency had changed.

### **Writing the New Urban History**

Our project thus invites participants to focus on the material and technological aspects of urbanization and urban life – not in order to exclude social, economic, cultural and political elements but with the aim of understanding better how they worked. Chronologically our focus is on the advent of modernity in the broadest sense, i.e. the period in which the material form of the city and the way of thinking about material and matter changed most

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<sup>61</sup> Louis Wirth, ‘Urbanism as a Way of Life’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 44 (July 1938) 1-24.

<sup>62</sup> See e.g., Mike Savage, Alan Warde and Kevin Ward, *Urban Sociology, Capitalism and Modernity* (Basingstoke, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2003) esp. ch. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom*; Otter, *The Victorian Eye*; Simon Gunn, ‘The Origins of the Urban Cultural Economy in England, 1835-1990’, *Informationen zur Stadtgeschichte*, special issue, ‘Städtische Kulturförderung’, 2 (2008) 46-63.

fundamentally. In order to explicitly tackle the concept of urban agency, our privileged focus will be on policy and governance, i.e. the forms of agency of urban actors and actor groups. Through the concept of governmentality and a more 'realist' attitude towards the technicalities and materialities of governance, we hope to yield a better understanding of both the power relations in which urban actors and actor groups are involved and the impact the urban had as a spatial, technical and material reality.

Taking up this historiographical challenge for the urban history of Europe, we envisage a four-volume history under the general editorship of Bert de Munck at Antwerp and Simon Gunn at Leicester. Each volume will be organized around a major theme as follows:

**Volume 1: Urban economy and the idea of the city**

**Volume 2: Migration and the technologies of territory and identification**

**Volume 3: The City as Environment**

**Volume 4: Governing through Community**

*[Note that these titles are of course preliminary]*



# Towards a New Urban History of Europe

## Themes for the Volumes

### Volume 1: Urban economy and the idea of the city

Problems in current research on economy, innovation and cultural industries

- Link between innovation (and modernity) and the urban context is taken for granted in much research
- Field of tension between the idea of the creative entrepreneur (in modern cities) and the importance of political regulation (in pre-modern cities)
- Both conventional economic perspectives and critical (Marxist) approaches fail to address the question of urban agency (while the former address proximity and economies of agglomeration, the latter focus on new articulations of class with the city as a background).

Our approach

- Examining the historical relationship between city, economy and innovation in Europe. How did creative industries come to be seen as something urban in the first place?
- Analyzing the interrelation between innovation, cultural industries, economic regulation and cultural policies beyond economies of scale, the regulation of the market and the articulation of class. How did the urban continue to be related to innovation and creativity?
- Linking product quality and creativity to 1) the city as a cultural and political reality and idea and 2) changing forms of subjectivity and urban citizenship.

Some possible research questions

- How were cultural industries related to the city as an imagined and material/spatial reality?
  - o How did the relationship of cultural products and the 'public sphere' or 'the political' change in the long run? Was there a shift from the city as a political stage to the city as an arena of consumption and cultural display?
  - o How to understand transformations related to the visibility of products and producers? Was there a shift from the visibility of (urban) producers and skills to the display of products and consumption mediated by (urban) experts?
  - o What role did the city as a material and spatial reality play in economy and innovation in different parts of Europe?
- What type of entrepreneur buttresses (urban) economic innovation and creativity and how is s/he implicated in or created through urban governance?
  - o Was there a shift from governing through regulation (and communities) to governing through the creativity of entrepreneurs and artists?
  - o How to understand the shift from artisans/artists (and their relation with merchants and the urban) to artists/designers (in the context of firms and cultural policies)
  - o In what sense did the role and content of 'expertise' change over time?

## Volume 2: Migration and the technologies of territory and identification

### Problems in current research on migration and integration

- The analysis of socio-economic motives (of migrants) and the protection of communal resources and social order is insufficient to understand the complex and multilayered reality of both the agency of migrants (and migrant networks) and regulatory practices of the city, state, etc.
- The shift from the urban to the national with regard to policy and governance cannot be explained adequately without taking governmental rationalities and technologies of rule into account. How did these alter across time and space?
- Understanding the shift of identity formation from the urban to the national (and beyond) requires taking into account changing subject-object relations (since the materiality of what is identified *with* changes fundamentally).

### Our approach

- Linking migration history to urban history through a focus on governance, governmentality and subjectivity
- Understanding the articulation of solidarity and the entitlement to communal resources as part of a rationality of government
- Focusing on the technologies, materialities and spatialities of inclusion/exclusion and identification/subjectivation

### Some possible research questions

- Who is defined an immigrant and how is that related to ethico-political (and scientific) ideas and definitions of territory (and space)
  - o How did the relationship of identity and belonging with place and territory change in the long run, taking into account different levels of governance?
  - o How did different conceptions of territory and boundaries, community and individuality, etc. impact upon the regulation of migration through forms of membership (e.g. of guilds, associations etc.), (urban and national) citizenship, settlement laws, entitlement to communal resources, etc?
  - o How to understand the shift from the early modern field of tension between kinship and territory to the nineteenth-century focus on freedom and flows on the one hand and cultural and racial exclusion on the other?
- How do we understand the shift from early modern urban practices of inclusion and exclusion to the nineteenth-century national system, taking into account material and technical contexts and instruments?
  - o How were the regulations of immigration on the one hand and different forms of subjectivity and community on the other related, and how did that change in the long run across different parts of Europe?
  - o How were such mechanisms as surveys, population registers, statistics, passports etc. related to political philosophy, definitions of territory and citizenship, and sensitivities related to space, place and belonging?
  - o How was immigration translated into a social and/or technical 'problem' and how did that change in the long run?

## Volume 3: The City as Environment

### Problems in current research in urban environmental history

- Urban environmental history is haunted by an opposition between culture and nature, and between the history of technology and the history of policy and mentalities
- There is an almost exclusive focus on modern cities and a related difficulty of taking (long term) path dependencies and historical contingencies into account
- An implicit opposition can be detected between sustainable and productive cities and city-hinterland relationships in the late middle ages and the early modern period and the 'colonization of nature' in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries
- There is a need for a closer integration of perspectives of urban ecology and metabolism on the one hand and, on the other, the effect of political discourses and ideas, technologies and infrastructure, and scientific paradigms.

### Our approach

- Going beyond the idea of the city as an urban metabolism, including ecology/environment as an object of government
- Linking environmental issues and policies to 1) scientific and epistemological evolutions (miasma, bacteria etc.), 2) political ideas (hygiene, degeneration etc.) and 3) the rationalities of government
- Giving weight to the agency of the non-human, such as ecological disasters (exogenous shocks) and the city as a built environment and infrastructure, including issues of path dependency and collateral problems induced by technologies

### Some possible research questions

- When and how did 'nature' become an object of government, and in what sense?
  - o What was seen as polluting/harmful, and how did that change in the long run?
  - o How was this linked to scientific paradigms, to technological possibilities and practices, and to the rise of expertise and experts?
- To what extent did cities or citizens shape the (modern) human/non-human dichotomy?
  - o How was the opposition between the urban (culture) and its environment (nature) articulated and shaped across time and place in Europe?
  - o To what extent and how did cities or urban actors create 'nature', 'wilderness' and environmental concerns?
- How did the relationship between city and hinterland change in the long run, and how was this related to ideas of justice, modernity, sustainability, urban metabolism etc.
  - o How were city and hinterland defined mutually and reciprocally in different historical contexts?
  - o How should we understand the advent of environmental concerns and its possible relationship with urbanization and urbanity?
  - o Was there a shift from ecologism as a critique of modernity towards a science with increasing technical capacities?

## Volume 4: Governing through Community

Problems in current research on civil society and urban culture

- Civil society is seen as a sphere independent of the state (and the private sphere of the family)
- Research addresses civil society as either part of hegemony (Marx, Gramsci) or opposed to hegemony, i.e. part of Enlightenment (Habermas) or of political modernity (in the late medieval and early modern city, see Putnam)
- Relationship between civil society, governance and forms of subjectivity remains unclear

Our approach

- Qualifying the shift from traditional hierarchical forms of state control to freedom and horizontal relationships
- Focusing on governing at a distance, through community, infrastructure, technology
- Linking civil society to (different) rationalities of rule on the one hand and (different) forms of subjectivity on the other
- Paying attention to practices, micro-technologies of power and materiality/spatiality

Some possible research questions

- How to understand governance beyond the state and the governance-civil society articulation
  - o How to understand the relationship of civil society with Republicanism, liberalism and other political philosophies
  - o How to comprehend the relationship of discourses related to participation and civil society and the city as a material, spatial and technical reality
  - o Can civil society be seen as an arena for state intervention and/or an assemblage of actors (human and non-humans) engaging with the state?
- How to understand the shift from guilds and brotherhoods to a 'modern' civil society (free associations, subscriber democracy, pecuniary mechanisms etc.) other than through the traditional civil society debate?
  - o To what extent and how was the modern creation of civil society related to political philosophy (cf. ideas on republicanism and guild ethos, civil society versus natural society, civil society versus the state...) and liberal discursive practices such as 'governing at a distance'?
  - o How was civil society in its various historical forms related to the city as a material and technical reality, and to the city as an imagined reality?
- How was participation related to modes of individuality and subjectivity and how did that change in the long run?
  - o How did governance empower certain collective actors and disempower others?
  - o How did it impact upon notions of freedom and individuality?
  - o Was there a shift from 'political citizenship' to a 'stakeholder'-based polity?