

The Public Use of Urban History

Location: Belgium

Call for Papers Deadline: 2009-12-01

Abstracts are invited for a main session (M28) of the 10th International Conference in Urban History, organized by the European Association of Urban Historians in Ghent, Belgium (1–4 September 2010)

THE PUBLIC USE OF URBAN HISTORY (19th-20th centuries)

The public use of urban history is possibly as old as urban history itself. Urban historians have traditionally pursued a public role in many ways: by writing institutional histories commissioned by public actors or, on the contrary, by explicitly countering existing public discourses on the city. They have considered history as a way to diffuse shared representations of the urban past or as a way to reveal hidden, unsettling perspectives. They have looked for ways to exert an influence over urban powers or have tried to give voice to voiceless people and communities.

Some urban historians have explicitly recognized the public dimension of their work; others have kept a distance from any social or political implication of their research and have imagined urban history as a purely scientific practice. Nevertheless, the public impact of their work has sometimes proven extremely effective.

The expression public use of history was introduced by Jürgen Habermas in the context of the German *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s and has since marked several debates on the links between historical research and the memory of European societies. In North America, the expression public history has been used since the 1970s to refer to a specific form of historical practice, especially targeted at non-academic audiences. Such an approach has bred a few important works in the field of urban history, such as Dolores Hayden's *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (1995), or Martin Melosi and Philip Scarpino's *Public History and the Environment* (2004).. However, reflections on the role played by urban history in fostering identities and elaborating shared or conflictual representations of an urban society are still too sparse.

The session welcomes papers dealing with any relevant aspect of the proposed subject. Urban history has played a crucial part in a vast range of urban policies, be it campaigns for urban preservation, planning schemes, administrative reforms, or other attempts to forge a link between historical knowledge and a wider sense of citizenship. In recent years, historical discourse seems at the foreground of the city marketing techniques that are a by-product of the increased competition between cities.

Up to 8 papers will be selected for the session. We especially encourage the presentation of papers focused on a specific case study of urban historical research, showing the cultural and political strategies behind it and assessing its impact on a wider public sphere.

If you are interested in contributing to this session, please contact the organizers: Filippo De Pieri, Politecnico di Torino, Italy , and Denis Bocquet, TU Dresden, Germany

Abstracts must be submitted through the conference website:

<http://www.eauh2010.ugent.be/paperproposals>

Submission deadline: 1 December 2009.

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