

# Urban Agency?

## Towards a New Urban History of Europe Since 1500

### **Migration policies and the materiality of identification in European cities, 1500-2000**

**Call for papers** for an international conference hosted by

Hilde Greefs (University of Antwerp – Centre of Urban History)

Anne Winter (Vrije Universiteit Brussel – Historical Research Into Urban Transformation Processes)

Place: Antwerp - Date: 28-29 May 2015

Urban history is to a large degree a history of migration and of dealing with migration. In late medieval and early modern cities migration flows and settlement were often regulated by local institutions such as citizenship, guild membership and settlement laws. During the transition from early modern to contemporary society, these local institutions were profoundly transformed as cities became part of modern nation states, where citizenship and membership primarily related to the nation and involved new mechanisms of identification and incorporation.

Economic and social historians have linked this transition to proletarianization and industrialization, focusing on the impact of economic transformations on push and pull factors of migration, and relating the exclusion and disciplining of immigrants to class struggle. Political historians have in contrast placed the nation state and national identity at the centre of their analysis, often reducing the causes for changes in migration regulation to a monitoring problem. Cultural historians and historians of political thought in turn refer to still other causes, such as enlightenment thinking with its emphasis on natural rights, individualism and popular sovereignty. The actual dynamics and practices of migration regulation in cities have however been very little studied in a long-term perspective, as most early modern research focuses on the local level and most analysis for the contemporary period looks at the level of the nation state. This conference aims to move beyond the stalemate of modernity narratives by focusing on the micro-policies of identification and the rules, practices and material devices with which migration flows were channelled and immigrants were identified and assigned a place in the urban fabric in a long-term perspective.

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Studying these micro-policies and the materiality of identification in local contexts is considered a privileged inroad to studying how underlying power relationships influence and solidify in different types of institutions and transpire through society on a daily basis via discourses and practices. It also allows for incorporating approaches that consider the importance of capital, ideology and human choice in connection with non-human elements – ranging from city walls and the physical layout of cities to passports and registers of newcomers – and look for the networks or assemblages in which all these elements are interconnected.

Our conference will address long-term transformations in micro-policies of identification and incorporation of newcomers as a next step in developing a new approach to the history of migration policies as an integral part of the social and political fabric of cities. Our book will take into account multiple institutional levels and different types of agency so as to develop new perspectives on long-term transitions from the pre-modern to the modern city. We consciously strive for a comparative perspective on European cities in the past five centuries that allows to take into account the role of regional diversity, temporal changes and differences between distinct types of cities (politically, economically and demographically).

We aim to collect papers on the following items:

1/ What were the changing and shifting principles to distinguish migrants and to evaluate their roles and places within the urban community in its different dimensions, including work, residence, poor relief, education, urban rituals etc.? How did urban authorities deal with the growing ambitions of the (supra)national state to control and monitor geographical mobility and how did the relative autonomy of cities towards immigrants evolve in relation to shifting conceptions of territory and boundaries through time and space?

2/ Which material and technical instruments were used to identify migrants? Which kinds of identity documents (domestic and international passports, birth and marriage certificates, residence and work permits, relief certificates, certificates of racial origins, etcetera) did migrants carry with them when moving to cities? How protective or repressive was the effect and use of these identification documents for the migrants involved? How did these uses of papers evolve through time? And how did this relate to different regimes and conceptions of membership of urban communities?



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Researchers interested in participating in the conference are invited to send their abstracts (c. 500 words) before 1 September 2014 to the organizers ([Hilde.Greefs@uantwerpen.be](mailto:Hilde.Greefs@uantwerpen.be) and [Anne.Winter@vub.ac.be](mailto:Anne.Winter@vub.ac.be)). Candidates will be informed about the selection by 15 September 2014. Selected participants are expected to send their full papers to the organizers by 15 April 2015 to be circulated in advance among the participants at the conference. After review, the papers presented at the conference will be taken into consideration as chapters for a collective book series on 'urban agency', that is to appear in 2016. Travel costs and accommodation will be provided.

**Background:** This book is part of a series devoted to the subject of 'urban agency', the aim of which is to produce a new, multi-authored history of modern Europe in four volumes, reflecting the current state of research in the field. Organised by two major centres of Urban History, Antwerp and Leicester, the series will represent current cutting-edge research on Europe's urban inheritance, and it will help to define the parameters of debate for the next generation of research. To this end, the general editors, Bert de Munck and Simon Gunn, have written a paper setting out the rationale for the project, as well as the principal ideas behind it. This platform text can be obtained from Bert De Munck ([bert.demunck@ua.ac.be](mailto:bert.demunck@ua.ac.be)). In practical terms, the project has emerged from the international research community 'Urban Agency: Setting the Research Agenda of Urban History', funded by the Research Foundation, Flanders (FWO-Vlaanderen) and initiated by the Centre for Urban History in Antwerp.



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