

Urban History Group Annual Conference

St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford, UK
29–30 March 2012

Call for sessions and papers

The Living and Liveable City: Health, Lifestyle and Environment in History

The city has long stood as a model for the organisation and reform of human life. People have historically been attracted (and, for large periods, repulsed) by the opportunities offered by urban living because cities act as the conduits through which money, ideas, goods and technologies are created, circulated and incorporated into everyday life. In order to be an attractive and liveable place, the city requires a healthy metabolism through which society can be organised and regulated effectively. As cities develop they require improvements to public health, environmental justice and access to housing, recreation, culture and employment. These opportunities need to be freely circulated in order to satisfy the insatiable appetite of both the living city and its citizens. However, it is important to keep in mind that such circulation has often not been the case in the past, and even the most well-intended planning reforms sometimes favoured the privileged districts and layers of urban society.

This conference thus focuses on the notion of the living and liveable city in a historical perspective. There are no chronological or geographical limits to this theme. The city has been long depicted as a living organism created from the interaction of natural resources with technologies, ideas and entrepreneurial flare. The idea of the living city is both an imagined and a real response to the threats posed to urban life from disease, squalor and other forms of social and racial injustice. Meanwhile, historians are beginning to view towns and cities as the products of flows of 'socio-natural' inputs and outputs. The infrastructural, technical and technological development of the living city thus impacts on the ways that citizens live in the city. To turn a living city into a liveable city has always required more than sewers, clean water and drains. It has also necessitated the provision of, and access to, housing, culture, recreation, open spaces and employment opportunities. Notions of environmental improvement, sustainability and the "urban renaissance" increasingly concern urban historians, and, whilst they have nuanced meanings to contemporary policy-makers and planners, they are rooted in the long history of cities and the ways in which they were made liveable. This conference seeks to explore the extent to which various social groups and agencies have created living and liveable cities throughout history.

Some issues that the conference seeks to consider include:

- The changing notion of the living and liveable city and its multi-faceted evolution over time.
- The concepts of 'improvement', 'renaissance', 'environment', 'health' and 'sustainability' and how our understanding of them has changed over time.
- The sectorial construct of the environmental city: as the whole or as separate areas of contamination, escape or distinction.

- The circulation and flow of “natural” resources within cities and between cities and their natural hinterlands.
- The changing perception of cities as healthy, liveable and attractive places as well as the realities of social and environmental injustice during different historical periods.
- How and why urban elites and residents have made certain parts of cities healthier and more liveable places, whilst neglecting other parts inhabited by marginal social and ethnic groups.
- The historical relationship between urbanisation, public health and social policy either in improving urban life or furthering social or racial segregation.
- The role of institutions, including the market, in creating the liveable city.
- The construction and diffusion of socio-technological innovations, ideologies and other practices designed to make towns and cities attractive places to live.

The conference committee invites proposals for individual papers as well as for individual sessions of up to three papers. Sessions that seek to draw comparisons across one or more countries or historical periods are particularly encouraged. Abstracts of up to 400 words, along with a title, name, affiliation and contact details should be submitted to the conference organisers and should indicate clearly how the content of the paper addresses the conference theme outlined above. Those wishing to propose sessions should provide a brief statement that identifies the ways in which the session will address the conference theme, a list of speakers and paper abstracts. The deadline for expressions of interest for sessions and papers is **30 September 2010**.

In addition, the conference will also host a new researchers’ forum. This is aimed primarily at those who are at an early stage in a research project and who wish primarily to discuss ideas rather than present findings. New and current postgraduates working on topics unrelated to the main theme, as well as those just embarking on new research, are particularly encouraged to submit short papers (usually fifteen minutes) for this forum. When you submit a proposal please stipulate whether you would like to be considered for the new researchers’ forum.

Graduate students can obtain a bursary to offset some of the expenses associated with attending the conference. Please send an e-mail application to Professor Richard Rodger at Richard.Rodger@ed.ac.uk and ask your PhD supervisor to also send a message confirming your status as a registered PhD student. The Urban History Group would like to acknowledge the Economic History Society for its support for these bursaries.

For further details please contact Conference Organisers:

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