Urban Democracy, Social Movements and Post-Industrial Society

Veranstalter: Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome (KNIR); Christian Wicke (Utrecht); Tim Verlaan (Amsterdam)
Datum, Ort: 18.12.2019–20.12.2019, Rom
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Over the past two decades, many Western European urbanites have experienced an overall corrosion of their living conditions. Gentrification has led to displacement of long-term residents, while budget cuts and neoliberal policymaking have led to the privatization of public spaces and the decline of municipal infrastructures and services. Echoing the demands of the urban social movements of the long 1970s, citizens are yet again protesting against the increasing unaffordability and decreasing quality of urban living.

This new phase of discontent coincides with a growth of studies on urban social movements, and their strategies to promote or prevent urban change. Still, historians have remained relatively silent on the similarities between the urban movements of today and those of the recent past.

In order to gain insight into the ways in which individuals, grassroot organizations and policymakers have engaged with the urban environment during the postwar period, scholars discussed the contexts in which (predominantly) Western European social (urban) movements emerged mainly in the 1970s and examined possible continuities with the urban conflicts of today. In the opening statement, they were asked to pay more attention to the uneven structural as well as different ideological developments of that time, as place matters.

The first panel looked at how local movements attempted to resist the dominant model of Fordist urban planning across various European cities.

STEFAN COUPERUS (Groningen) examined the period of reconstruction in Europe after WW2, in which he sees forms of „contentious politics" rather than the development of urban social movements. If on the one hand scholars have constructed a master narrative of peace and stability, on the other hand little attention has been paid to groups that did not fit into this narrative. An interesting case in this regard is Rotterdam, where the reconstruction process revolved around neighborhood politics exclusively tailored to the needs of the nuclear family, therefore excluding numerous other groups of citizens. It remains to be understood if the forms of counter-resilience and collective struggle carried on by such groups are episodic or rather precursors of some of the urban struggles of the 1970s.

VALERIE WRIGTH (Glasgow) introduced the experiences of former tenants in the neighborhoods of Gorbals and Castle Milk, in Glasgow, between 1950 and 1980. Both neighborhoods were comprehensively redeveloped, but the resulting housing schemes turned out to be too expensive to maintain. In the Gorbals, despite the protests, many of the modernist high rises were eventually demolished in 1993. During the interviews Wright had with residents, people expressed nostalgia for the modernist project and the sense of community that it fostered, although many of them also acknowledged that it was not sustainable. The discussion raised questions about the connection between living and working conditions, which was central to many other social movements. The point was made that many social movements do not always want change and can thus be described as conservationist or even conservative.

ALISTAIR KEFFORD (Leicester) looked at the transnational phenomenon of mass affluence in several Western cities during the 1960s and 1970s. The Fordist model of consumption and urban planning which drove the construction of shopping malls across Europe, and especially in the UK, favored big retailers and aimed to reach a broad class of consumers, but proved only partially successful. The experience of remodelling the (postindustrial) city shows two opposite tendencies: one from above, with local governments financing the malls, and one from below, with citizens and small retailers protesting redevelopment and upscaling. Nevertheless, the latter movements were too diverse and failed to build a strong coalition. In the discussion, it was highlighted that attaching the term „postindustrial" or „post Fordist" to the UK is prob-

lematic, since malls from the 1960s and 1970s were still Fordist facilities.

Similarly, as demonstrated in the presentation of STEFANO MUSSO (Turin), the process of deindustrialization did not take place in Turin until the 1980s. Turin was the main industrial hub in post-war Italy and a site of internal migration from the South, following the massive expansion of car manufacturer FIAT. Together with ineffective infrastructures, the city's demographic growth during the 1950s and 1960s led to a dramatic housing crisis. Suffering from poor housing conditions and the strict Fordist discipline experienced in the factory, in the late 1960s workers began spontaneously protesting: thus, in this case, urban movements were an extension of class struggles inside the factory. The trade unions intercepted the demands of the workers and started negotiating with FIAT and Turin authorities, pursuing a reformist strategy. Alongside the trade unions, groups of the radical Left, such as Lotta Continua, began approaching workers at the factory's gates. Lotta Continua further extended industrial struggles to the urban environment by launching the slogan *Prendiamoci la città* (Let's take the city).

The post-Fordist framework is more suitable in the case of New York and Berlin, discussed by LISA VOLLMER (Weimar). Tenant protests in these two Western metropolises emerged during three specific periods: the late 19th century, the 1960s and 1970s, and the early 2000s. During the 1960s and 1970s, the crisis of the Fordist model became clear in both cities, and tenants suffering from both a severe housing crisis and difficult working conditions managed to bring these issues together into a collective struggle. Ultimately, both movements can be considered successful, as they had a real impact on local policy making. The model of self-governance promoted by such movements was transformed from an oppositional practice into state-organized forms of urban government. The two selected case studies are exemplary of the dialectic between local cases and ideological and conceptual frameworks such as liberalism and Fordism.

The second panel introduced three case studies featuring forms of local movements in the context of the exceptionally complex urban environments of the long 1970s.

PETER VAN DAM (Amsterdam) described the rise and urban characteristics of the Dutch fair-trade movement. Established around 1968 in the Netherlands in the wake of increasing globalization and the post-war decolonization process, the movement addressed the inequality of the global trade through connecting local and global modes of activism. It branched out in towns and cities through three different locations: the *Wereldwinkels* (World Shops), created as temporary workshops in the late 1960s but transformed into fixed spaces over the 1980s, supermarkets, targeted in the late 1990s to gain wider visibility, and town halls, with the rise of the first fair-trade towns in the early 2000s. Though quite inclusive, it remained mostly a middle-class movement.

BRUNO BONOMO (Rome) presented the case of Rome where, due to the exceptional growth of the service sector in the post-war period, the population increased by 70 percent between the early 1950s and the late 1960s, revealing the inadequacy of existing municipal infrastructures. Between 1960 and 1970, groups of citizens from both middle-class and working-class neighborhoods set up several *Comitati di quartieri* (Neighborhood Committees), grassroot mobilizations rooted in the principles of participation, reappropriation and self-management, and aimed at taking over municipal services in areas most affected by uncontrolled urban sprawl. One of the most significant cases was that of the *Comitato di quartiere delle Valli*, established in 1964 to protest the privatization of the *Pratone*, the neighborhood's only green area. The discussion highlighted that the framework of Fordism proves inadequate in this case as well, as Rome had never been an industrial powerhouse.

In the same period another Mediterranean metropolis, Istanbul, was facing very different forms of urban struggle. In 1961 a new Turkish constitution was introduced following the *coup d'état* against the Democrat Party. The fractured political situation led to violent clashes between socialist, fascist and islamist groups. In her presentation, CEYLIN IDEL (Amsterdam) mapped the main settle-

ments established by these groups claiming control over neighborhoods. The presentation and the discussion highlighted that the social movements' frame can be problematic when applied to forms of mobilization outside the Western European context.

The third panel focused on the role of heritage and ideology in the appropriation and transformation of buildings by grassroots organizations.

BART VAN DER STEEN (Leiden) examined three cases of squatting in Amsterdam and Nijmegen during the 1980s, showing how squatters had developed a transnational network through media, political gatherings and personal contacts. It is yet to be established to what extent this network was impactful at a transnational level, or if the occupations around the Netherlands during this period must be rather looked at as episodic. Van der Steen also emphasized the importance of resonance in the history of urban movements, as some have drawn much greater attention in the media and scholarship than others.

LOTTE HOUWINK TEN CATE (New York) focused on the establishment of shelters for women escaping domestic violence during the second feminist wave (c. 1960–1980). Following the establishment of a first shelter in London in 1974, a series of similar self-administered and spontaneous initiatives began spreading across Europe. In order to protect the victims, the shelters were often not advertised, but nevertheless succeeded in involving a wide and diverse community. In the context of this colloquium, it was useful to investigate such initiatives as urban movements.

In the same period, autonomous groups of citizens were also establishing cultural centers aimed at preserving local heritage. XENIA KOPF (Alberta) compared the cases of Arena in Vienna, squatted only very briefly in 1976, and *Avtonomna Tovarna Rog* in Ljubljana (2006). The two movements share a similar approach to cultural heritage of specific buildings and urban areas, understood as a set of traces from the past to be remembered and transformed rather than obliterated or preserved in the exact same shape. In such cases, the understanding of heritage, which was changing in the 1970s, appears to be proactive rather than conservative.

TIM VERLAAN (Amsterdam) introduced the case of the urban transformation and the conflict between residents and newcomers in Amsterdam between 1965 and 1990. The initiatives of the *Provos* presented Amsterdam as the „magic center", and thus succeeded in making the city center more livable and culturally active, but also in an ironic way triggered the gentrification of some neighborhoods.

Drawing on the theories of Edgar Salin and Manuel Castells, in his fascinating keynote lecture ALEXANDER SEDLMAIER (Bangor) discussed the political dimensions of urbanity, which cannot be conceived without considering the active participation of citizens as correctives in urban history. As all the presentations demonstrated, urban movements conceive the city simultaneously as the arena, the stake and the medium of their protests. In addition, they all share several key features such as the use of instrumental strategies, the co-existence of class-based and non-class-based constituencies, and one or several defining political and/or cultural orientations. They offer an alternative urban future aimed at revising and correcting ordinary politics and institutional planning projects.

The last panel was devoted to the migration processes in urban areas between the immediate post-WW2 period and the early 1980s.

DAVID TEMPLIN (Osnabrück) examined the housing crisis faced by migrants in Hamburg since the 1950s. It is problematic to define the conflicts that arose in the migrants' neighborhoods of arrival as „urban movements", since they were mostly isolated episodes rather than organized protests. Moreover, the groups of migrants involved (mostly Italian, Turkish and Spanish) had different social and political backgrounds, which resulted in a rather scattered movement.

LOUISE MISKELL (Swansea) discussed the phenomenon of internal migration of steel workers in the cities of Port Talbot and Llanwernin. After the decline of coal industry in South-Wales during the interwar period, the steel industry started to expand again after 1945, resulting in the establishment of new industrial sites and by extent satellite towns for the workers. The rapidly growing demand for

housing led to the haphazard development of neighborhoods lacking proper infrastructures and collective spaces. Thus, the residents autonomously formed social clubs and local organizations. In this case, the relationship between migrants, the companies they worked for and local government was not conflictual, for people believed that the steel industry was the future of the country and were willing to adjust to the difficult life in the new satellite towns. It would be interesting to investigate further how the self-administration of spaces by the steelworkers reshaped the relationships between local government, the companies, and their employees.

In his closing remarks, CHRISTIAN WICKE (Utrecht) referred to his own research and stressed the importance of the 1970s as a time of major transformation for the urban movements, but also as a time of reinvention of history as a discipline, with the spread of social history, the history of everyday life and history from below. This went hand in hand with changes in the discourse over urban heritage. Urban movements, urban conflicts and urban transformations of the long 1970s display a variety of features: some of them were deeply concerned with heritage (i.e. in Sydney and in the Ruhr) and offered a platform for cross-class and cross-movement alliances. This was however not the case in other cities (i.e. Turin and Rotterdam), where the heritage discourse was almost absent.

Following up on Wicke's observations, Verlaan introduced some additional suggestions for further research and discussion. He stated that, while the workshop's main themes – urban democracy, social movements and postindustrial society – had all been covered by the speakers, they will have to be further connected to each other in future research. In addition, historians of urban movements need to focus more on market forces as most urban movements discussed during the colloquium operated in the mixed economies of the Western European welfare state. Another stream of research should focus more on the action repertoires of urban movements, which very much overlap with the action repertoires of other social movements.

In the final discussion, participants also highlighted the diversity of the backgrounds of the activists, ranging from traditional working-class alliances to the new urban middle classes of the 1970s, and the different degrees of ideological awareness expressed by the various movements. Moreover, echoing Wicke's preliminary remarks, the case studies demonstrate that the structural shift from industrial to postindustrial societies is not always adequate to frame the emergence of urban (social) movements, as they arose in deindustrialized, industrialized and not-industrial cities alike and resulted from uneven social, political and economic transformations. In conclusion, whilst displaying interurban and transnational networks of people and ideas over time, urban movements are localized and place-dependent phenomena.

Conference overview:

Asker Pelgrom (Rome): Introduction

Tim Verlaan (Amsterdam) / Christian Wicke (Utrecht): Opening remarks

First session – Urban Movements During Fordism and its Crisis

Chair: Martin Baumeister (Rome)

Stefan Couperus (Groningen): The Contentious Politics of Post-War Reconstruction in Blitzed Cities

Valerie Wright (Glasgow): „It wis sold as utopia". Post-War Reconstruction, Comprehensive Redevelopment and Community Activism in Glasgow 1950–1980

Alistair Kefford (Leicester): The Consumer City and the Citizen Consumer. The Impact of Mass Affluence on the Urban Economic and Political Landscape

Stefano Musso (Turin): Labour Unions' Urban Politics in Italy. The Case of Turin

Lisa Vollmer (Weimar): Tenant Movements in the Crisis of the Fordist City in Berlin and New York

Second Session – Metropolitan Movements of the Long 1970s

Chair: Moritz Föllmer (Amsterdam)

Peter van Dam (Amsterdam): Infiltrating the City. Embedding Fair Trade Locally,

1969–2001

Bruno Bonomo (Rome): Urban Struggles in a Post-War Middle-Class District, Rome 1970s–2000s

Ceylin Idel (Amsterdam): Incubating Insurgency. A Political Geography of Istanbul, 1960–1980

Third Session – Social Movements, Public Space, and Grassroots Urban Politics

Chair: Freia Anders (Mainz)

Bart van der Steen (Leiden): Travelling Barricades. A Case Study of Squatter Transnationalism in Europe, 1980–1990

Lotte Houwink ten Cate (New York): The Architectural Fix. Second Wave Feminist Claims to Public Space

Xenia Kopf (Salzburg): To Care for a Place. Autonomous Cultural Centers as Grassroots Heritage Protection

Tim Verlaan (Amsterdam): The Magic Center. Urban Social Movements, Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity (1965–1990)

Alexander Sedlmaier (Bangor): Keynote lecture: Provocations at the Ends of Urbanity: Historical Perspectives on Urban Movements of the Cold War

Fourth Session – Urban Movements, Migration and the Working Classes in (De)Industrial Cities

Chair: Stefan Berger (Bochum)

David Templin (Osnabrück): Contested Neighborhoods of Arrival: Immigration and Conflicts over Urban Space in West-German Cities in the 1970s and 1980

Louise Miskell (Swansea): Steel and the Coalfield: Expansion and Decline in Industrial South Wales, c.1945–1975

Christian Wicke (Utrecht): History and Heritage as Urban Movement in the 1970s. Some Reflections and Examples

Tagungsbericht *Urban Democracy, Social Movements and Post-Industrial Society*. 18.12.2019–20.12.2019, Rom, in: H-Soz-Kult 12.06.2020.