

Call for Papers

Authenticity in European Cities. Creating, Visualizing, and Contesting Urban and Built Heritage

16 – 17 March, 2023

Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam

Convenor: Achim Saupe, Anja Tack, Christoph Bernhardt, Daniel Hadwiger

The conference "Authenticity in European Cities. Creating, Visualizing and Contesting Urban and Built Heritage" will focus on how buildings, urban neighborhoods, urban spaces and actors were and are perceived as "authentic". Debates on how a city should look like and who decides which objects are worth representing it are a major opportunity to analyze "regimes of historicity" (François Hartog) as well as past and present urban societies. We will focus on the field of built heritage with its various forms of reconstruction, renovation or demolition. Another focus will be laid on the question of urbanity. What makes a city "unique", "characteristic", and "urban" and how have these images of urbanity changed in the past and present?

Debates on the image, identity and memory of cities have become particularly intense since the 1970s with important transformations in the economic, political, socio-cultural and ecological sphere. The 1970s in Europe are regarded as a turning point in urban development with the end of the car-oriented city, the European Architectural Heritage Year 1975 and the increasing preservation of old dwellings and towns. The political changes in Germany and Eastern Europe in 1989/90 also strongly influenced the view on a city's character. The case of Potsdam, where the conference will take place, is itself the object of several controversies about how and where the baroque or socialist epoch should be represented, and how urbanity and historicity can create a lively and attractive city.

Authenticity is like a living dead in postmodern and contemporary history culture. As the purportedly "original", "pure", "true" and "unique" character of persons, objects or practices, "historical" and "urban authenticity" have powerfully promoted urban heritage debates. Meanwhile, the concept has been heavily criticized and deconstructed.

Scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds dispute the ways in which claims of authenticity – and authorization – indicate cultural re-orientation, backwardness or cultural change in modern societies. While there is a broad consensus among constructivist approaches that historical authenticity is always socially and culturally produced and that there is no such thing as "the pure" or "the original", the case of the materiality of the built heritage seems to challenge this approach. More recent concepts argue that authenticity is an effect that arises from the interaction of individuals or groups with artefacts and things within places and environments that are relevant for their own historical self-understanding (Siân Jones/Thomas Yarrow).

From the perspective of the conference's underlying research project, urban and historical authenticity are understood as a multi-layered level of meaning that is produced and communicated by various social actors dealing with the material and urban heritage and its visual representations. According to Francesca Piazzoni, the attribution of (historical) authenticity and the discourse about urban authenticities is therefore part of the production of urban space and its conceived, perceived, and lived dimensions. Objects, practices and urban spaces from different periods of time can therefore represent a city's multiple pasts, creating multiple identities and possibilities to belong.

The contributions to the conference could address topics like:

- Authentication and authorization processes in urban environments and heritage
- "Politics of authenticity" in European cities
- Perception of the demolition, re-development, reconstruction or preservation of urban spaces and buildings

- The role of civil society and citizen groups in preserving or creating “authentic” places and spaces
- The role of migrant groups and dynamics of otherness with regard to “authentic” or “diverse” urban spaces
- The role of cultural practices, urban (street) art, social interactions and local traditions
- The role of natural environments and urban green spaces with regard to the image of a city
- Urban temporalities and “regimes of historicities”
- Interferences between tourism, gentrification and authentication processes
- The role of images (media, photos, pictures, maps)

The conference is part of the research project "Urban Authenticity. Creating, contesting, and visualizing the built heritage in European cities since the 1970s", which is funded by the Leibniz Association. It is a collaboration of the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, the Institute for Contemporary History Munich-Berlin, the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History Potsdam, and the Association of Museums in Brandenburg.

We invite contributions presenting case studies on European cities as well as comparative approaches. Papers from the fields of contemporary history, urban history, heritage conservation, (critical) heritage studies, cultural studies, sociology, art or architectural history are of special interest. Travel and accommodation costs are covered.

Please send us your proposals (max. 300 words) and a brief biographical note (max. 150 words) to Daniel Hadwiger (daniel.hadwiger@leibniz.irs.de) by December 9th, 2022. Applicants will be notified of acceptance by December 16, 2022.

