

CONFERENCE REPORT

Dreamed/planned cities and experienced cities

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Last July, the French Centre Max Weber (CNRS, University Lumière Lyon 2, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon and University of Saint-Etienne) and the University of Saint-Etienne organized the annual conference of the IUAES (International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences) *Commission on Urban Anthropology*. More than fifty scholars participated in the conference, coming from all over the world: Albania, Brazil, Bulgaria, Columbia, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hong-Kong, Hungary, India, Italy, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, U.K. and U.S.A. Nearly a third of participants were PhD students.

The aim of this conference was to investigate both the dreamed/planned cities and the experienced cities, following a well-established Lefebvrian sociological tradition that distinguishes between the government of the city and the city dwellers' representations and practices of the city. The Urban Anthropology Series¹ and the works published in the journal *Urbanities* are good examples of this growing trend among anthropologists, which is consistent with the major transformations of cities around the world: gentrification, competition between cities, urban sprawl, mobility, heritagization and so on. Urbanity is paradoxically claimed as one of the main attributes of Modernity at a time when cities are diluting and disseminating. Instead of opposing urban governments and urban planners to dwellers and local committed groups, the general convenors of this conference proposed to highlight the ways people take for dealing with the relationships between those who think the city and those who inhabit and practice it. The shared assumption was that everyone is entitled to have personal thoughts about the place where one lives.

There are particularly relevant reasons for working on those questions in Saint-Etienne. Saint Etienne is an average town which developed during the first industrial revolution thanks to a particular triptych: coal-mining, steel industry and textile industry. For a long period, St Etienne has been the capital of the French arms and weapons industry. In the mid nineteenth century the city was at the top of the French industrial development. Until the 1960s, the region remained one of the main French industrial settings. Some famous French companies were born here, such as the supermarket company Casino, Manufrance which invented the mail order catalogue at the beginning of the twentieth century, Creusot-Loire which is now included in the group Arcelor-Mital. Today, Saint-Etienne is among the world's leaders in medical textiles.

¹ Published by Ashgate until 2013. In 2014, the Series 'Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology' was established.

Saint-Etienne has a large industrial heritage. For example the place where the conference was held, built in 1864, used to be the *Manufacture Nationale d'Armes* (the National Arms Manufactory); over 11,000 people worked there 60 years ago. The *Cité du Design*, the Superior School of Arts and Design, which is part of the University, is now housed in most of those buildings. This industrial history has deeply impacted the urban landscape. It is one of the main issues of the local urban regeneration program. It has also impacted the social practices, demographics and local identity. Many features of this industrial labour past are still alive: the social habit to meet in cafés; the supporters' songs during the football matches, which evoke the coal-mining; the procession of Santa Barbara — Santa Barbara was the holy protector of the miners — is still very popular; the local artists and musicians who more than elsewhere use the features of the industrial heritage in their production and performances.

However, over the last few decades Saint-Etienne has lost 20 percent of its population. It has become one of the poorest towns in France. Probably close to 40 percent of the inhabitants have one grandparent who was born in North Africa, and a many people have a second home in the surroundings countryside. St Etienne's principal problems are the white collar flight and the impoverishment of the city centre. It is becoming a city of old people, migrants and children. Yet, it is not a large brownfield, a slum or a kind of large retirement home. St Etienne has one of the most important museums of contemporary art in the country, it is the home to one of the most important design events in Europe, and it is a place very pleasant to live in. Saint-Etienne was a good place to think about the future of European midsized cities.

St Etienne offers the kind of city life that ethnographers are fond of describing, but also the dreams, projects, aspirations that they have often forgotten. Everywhere, people need to dream their lives in order to deal with the everyday reality. Italo Calvino's *Invisible cities* shows that no place exists that we do not have in our mind. Cities exist when we experience them. How do city life and city dream join or disjoin? Our intention was to put on display the dialectic between city dwellers' dreams and urban planners' projects in order to understand better the white-collar flight and the gentrification process, the urban mobility and the spatial discrimination, the increase of heritage and the paradoxes of locality in the global world.

Five, well attended panels were held. *Emerging Practices in the City* was convened by Fernando Monge and Francisco Cruces (both at the National University of Distance Education, Spain). *Urban Changes and Attachments* was convened by Bianca Botea (Université Lumière Lyon 2) and Sarah Rojon (Université Jean Monnet Saint-Etienne). Fotini Tsibididou (University of Macedonia-Greece) and Eleftheria Deltsou (University of Thessaly-Greece) convened the panel on *From Civil Society to New Social Movements and Beyond: Urban Lives and Experiences at the Time of Neoliberal Governmentality*. Dolores Koenig (American University, Washington D.C.) convened the panel on *Planning for Renewal and Resettlement: Contested Visions*. The panel on *The Dreams and Nightmares of City Development: Urban Planning, Ideologies and Social Movements in Contemporary Cities* was convened by Nebi Bardhoshi and Olsi Lelaj (Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Studies, Tirana).

Emmanuelle Lallement of University of Paris-Sorbonne gave a very stimulating keynote lecture on *Ethnologists and the City: A View from France* that allowed each participant to be aware of the importance and singularity of the French urban anthropology.

The working method that we proposed was a little bit unusual for the CUA conferences. The call for presentations was launched in two steps. First, a call for panels was made and the proposals were submitted to a scientific committee. Second, the selected panel convenors issued a call for papers. They were asked to select between 6 and 8 papers which were then subject to the approval of the two general convenors. Speakers were asked to send their presentation to the appropriate panel convenor a few days before the conference, and then give short presentations at the conference. The convenors led the discussion. A main aim of the conference was to allow ample time for debate.

This format was much appreciated and we shared very exciting intellectual exchanges. The debate among speakers and with the floor was particularly rich and stimulating ethnographically, epistemologically and theoretically. Two points among many should be emphasized: the renewal of problematic issues through well-conducted ethnography and an intellectual attitude wide open to other scientific disciplines.

As a mark of the intellectual quality of this conference and of the interest it has raised, it was decided that the convenors would bring together revised versions of the best papers presented in their panel and then submit Special Issues for publication in *Urbanities*.

Last but not least, special thanks go to the doctoral students of the Centre Max Weber, who gave their time to help make this event successful.