

Working group – Focus 3: Diagnostics and urban history

Applying or claiming the usefulness of history in urban projects naturally leads on to a debate about the diversity of practices and circumstances in which history is put to use. The objective disparity between teaching and research methods practised for example in a school of architecture, a school of urbanism, a university history department, a cataloging department or even a Board of architecture, town planning and the environment (*CAUE*), does not preclude the circulation of research in the scientific domain (publications, reviews, conferences) or the socio-professional sphere (i.e., media, public institutions, Grand Paris building project, etc.). The necessity of comparing and contrasting field experiences, methodological approaches and research findings undoubtedly paves the way for a redefinition of the place of history in a debate over the future of cities. This involves comparing and contrasting the use of key urban history terms (prospective, project, heritage, etc.) and methods (monographies, inventory morphology, macro/micro history, etc.) for the purpose of fostering epistemological reflection without which history cannot really be any more than a cheerleader for city planning. The key word “diagnostic” that is repeatedly used in the field of urbanism, architecture and heritage is the focus of numerous challenges and controversy. It is important to offer scientific criticism at the juncture of academia and operational research (research offices, local and regional heritage departments) that harnesses history for the purpose of analysing the historical value of a given urban fabric.

This research into uses and practices gave rise to exchanges between the Group and *Service régional de l'Inventaire Ile de France* (Paris Regional Inventory/Archives department) in 2014-2015. It also culminated in the organisation of an international conference on “History, Diagnostics and Urban Futures” together with the University of Valladolid (coordination Maria Castrillo, Laurent Coudroy de Lille and Loïc Vadelorge) in 2016. Three sessions were organised (10-11 March 2016, Valladolid and Avila; 29-30 November 2016, Marne La Vallée and La Défense-Suresnes; 20-21 April 2017, Valladolid), each around a specific field study (Avila, Suresnes, industrial wasteland around Valladolid, etc.), and exchanges in the form of “open study days” on the ways in which researchers tackle current planning issues by leveraging history in professional contexts (e.g., historicising waterfronts).

This epistemological reflection will continue over the coming months. As part of Labex Week in September 2017, the Group organised a study day entitled *Digital humanity and the history of the Grand Paris building project* (coordinated collectively by IGP) together with a round table session to trace the links between historical research and current and future stakeholder issues in the *Grand Paris* project, e.g., the issue of the way in which history is being used for the Grand Paris walking trail project (coordination André Lortie, Emmanuel Bellanger, Frédéric Bertrand). The TG plans joint initiatives with “The city and professions” Transversal Group, coordinated by Reinhard Gressel and the Professional heritage unit of the City of Paris (directed by Miriam Simon) around the memory of those who used to work on the city’s roads, cemeteries and sewers.