

## INTRODUCTION

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**With this volume**, the European Association of Urban Historians (EAUH) introduces itself for the first time to American readers and includes some of the results of its Fifth International Conference, which took place in August/September 2000 in Berlin. The EAUH was founded in 1989 by English, Dutch, Belgian, and French historians. The focus of its activities is the International Conference on Urban History. It takes place every two years in a significant European city. After Amsterdam 1992, Strasbourg, Budapest, Venice, and Berlin each hosted the conference consecutively. It has become one of the biggest and most important forums for international academic exchange in the field of historic urban research. In Berlin 2000, more than 460 academics took part from Europe—not least Eastern Europe—and throughout the world, above all Canada, Japan, and the United States.

Against the international approach of the EAUH, interdisciplinary work plays a central role within the organization of the association. No academic discipline alone can successfully investigate and interpret the city in all its complexity without correspondence with related fields. Within this research area, representatives of various disciplines work together: historians, ethnologists, town planners, urban sociologists, and so forth. The dangers as well as the chances presented by such cooperation are obvious: For the foreseeable future, there will not be an agreed, qualified definition of the city. The short- and medium-term goals will therefore involve the discovery of important fields of research and to open up their methodological approaches. But this demand for transparency and unity stands—beyond the sheer endless variety of urban phenomena—opposed to the dual trend of diversification. The differences in developing an understanding for the nature of the city and the process of urbanization in Europe alone have become immense. The growing number of disciplines, each of which involves the intense absorption of urban historical research questions, has also contributed to the further pluralization of such questions, goals, and methodical approaches.

In this situation, the EAUH takes on an important mediating and clarifying function. The association's international conferences bring academics, who have researched the history of European cities from different angles, together for a continuous exchange of knowledge and intensive discussion. These meetings offer researchers the possibility to inform each other of the condition and the current spectrum of research in urban history. They help formulate the right questions, identify the most productive field inquiry, and critically review new methods. In short, they contribute to the reduction of diversity, and the confusion it often carries with it, by conceptualizing the use of a common, international, and dynamic field, called "urban studies." The EAUH uses the richness and diverse perspectives of the participating disciplines for the advancement of the transdisciplinary urban studies. At the same time, each individual discipline profits, not least history, from this exchange of new dynamics and innovative power.

The lack of space here prevents a resumé of the work that has been carried out by the EAUH up until now. However, a number of findings, trends, and suggestions may be put forward here. Not surprisingly, we have witnessed a sudden expansion of research into the various dimensions of urban life, which up until now have received little attention. It is clear that a number of reasons have caused this trend. Such reasons include the extraordinary diversity of European cities and urban research in Europe, the international and interdisciplinary approach of the EAUH conferences, the agreed view of a city's development as part of a comprehensive process of urbanization, and, finally, the heavy involvement of specialists with an immediate relationship to the practice of contemporary urban development. Also significant is the fact that the city appears suited in particular to the application and experimentation of newer themes and methodical trends within the discipline of history.

EAUH activities have always set out to include a balanced mix of approved, established, and new forms of research. The dominant, heavily quantified social and economic approach (which was popular in the earlier EAUH conferences) has, like the interest in local politics, partly lost out. Themes involving the history of urban administration, urban planning, construction, and architecture were discussed in detail at Berlin 2000. New working fields such as environmental, consumer, media, and gender history attracted growing interest. Finally, the approach that has become popular since the "cultural turn" involves the interpretation of the city as a highly differentiated, spatially aggregated condition of society. It views the city as having been shaped through built and human masses; the density of communal life and communication; great social disparities; the diversity of ethnicity and milieus; the mix of political, social, and cultural practices; accelerated change; and, not least, an extraordinarily productive historical culture of interpretation. In this context, it is worth mentioning the experience-orientated interest in the rhythm of urban life but also the new research into environmental cognition within cities, as well as the production of identities, self-portrayals, and images of the city.

The most desirable approaches, however, remain the reflection on theoretical bases, analytical concepts, and appropriate methods within modern urban history. The systematic comparison of structures and development models within cities also remains of prime significance. The complexity of the urban condition and the diversity of committed disciplines in this field of research demand to some degree adequate theoretical and methodical development.

With the title "European Cities. Networks and Crossroads," Berlin 2000 attempted to shed light on advancements made in the comparative analysis of the city's nature. The simple comparison (i.e., the working out of similarities and differences in defined sections of urban structure and development) profited from the range of such developments presented. The reconstruction of exchange relationships between cities and city networks, be it the exchange of people, goods, or ideas, frequently came to the fore. However, elaborated theoretically driven comparison did not arise in any section.

Nevertheless, the achievements cannot be underestimated. The sectoral division of urban research into brackets of varying disciplines has taken a step back. Town planners, architectural historians, and other specialists have in the meantime positioned the results of their research in the context of a comprehensive politically, socially, and economically unified domain. The opportunities for communication are greater, the subject boundaries more permeable, and the types of themes and methods more productive. A large number of results have in the meantime been published in important volumes.<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of foreign research results and methodical approaches in individual works is taken for granted. Without the continuous exchanges between neighboring disciplines and national research traditions, the diversity of queries and topics of research, which are dealt with at the EAUH, would fail to emerge. The search for informative research perspectives, suitable concepts, successful methods, and new source material goes further in reflective eclecticism, which will remain the model of orientation in the field of urban studies for a great deal longer.

The collection of articles presented here can only elaborate on some of the most important contemporary research interests. Examples include capital cities and their buildings and spaces as the media of symbolic politics (Blockmans, Sanger), as an expression of work-related national identity interests (Shevirev), and as carriers of long-term growing national and European traditions (Ribhegge); the formation of the early modern city through functional networks, crossing regions and nations, occupying temporary or permanent urban subspaces and built forms, and, finally, transgressing further into or between cities, again terminating (Lanaro); and the city and its apartment blocks as a developing connection for new civilized spatial requirements, for orientation and behavioral patterns, which have won overall economic significance (Forsell). The final example presented focuses on the reevaluation of one of the most important theoretical interpretations of the modern metropolis through urban theoretical discourse (Jazbinsek).

Berlin 2000 primarily aimed to highlight the achievements of cities in Europe since the Middle Ages. At the same time, it highlighted the progress made by our field of research—one that can now exhibit an expansive array of interdisciplinary as well as international contacts, counting itself as one of the most dynamic fields of inquiry in the European academic scene, even if only part of the hopes and visions of the EAUH founders have been realized.

#### NOTE

1. Some of the publications (monographs and collections only) that grew out of Berlin 2000 are: Denis Boquet and Samuel Fettah, eds., *Réseaux techniques et conflits de pouvoir dans les villes européennes XVIII-XX siècles* (Rome, forthcoming); Slawomir Gzell and Lu'a Klusáková, eds., "Peripheries or Crossroads of Cultures? Towns of East-Central and South-Eastern Europe," *Urbanistyka. Miedzyczelniane zeszyty naukowe* 5 (2000), special issue; Helen Hills, ed., *Architecture and the Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe* (London, forthcoming); Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud, Harold Platt, and Dieter Schott, eds., *Cities and Catastrophes. Villes et catastrophe* (Frankfurt, 2002); Marie-Noelle Polino and Ralf Roth, eds., *The Railway and the City in Europe* (London, 2002); Heinz Reif, ed., "Deindustrialisierung und Stadtentwicklung," *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 42 (2001), special issue; Clemens Zimmermann, ed., "Kino und Stadt," *Die Alte Stadt* 28 (2001), special issue. Other publications are in preparation or in print.

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