

**Transformative Knowledge for an era of Planetary Urbanization?  
Questioning the role of social sciences and humanities from an interdisciplinary  
perspective**

*Pre-Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) one-day seminar  
Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade de Lisboa (ICS-ULisboa)  
An INTREPID Action workshop*

11.00am-5.30pm, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2017 (followed by drinks/ pre-arranged dinner)

***Submission of motivation letters by 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017***

**Keynote speaker:**

- Heather Campbell (University of Sheffield)

**Organisation:**

- INTREPID COST action ([web](#));
- ICS-ULisboa, research group Environment, Territory, Society ([web](#));
- AESOP Young Academics Network ([web](#)).

*The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in so many ways.  
The point, however, is to change it  
(Karl Marx, Theses On Feuerbach, XI)*

*[T]he scientific study of and training in creative conceptual and practical thinking on the relation between society and environment at various territorial levels and in the search, development and advancement of opportunities for purposeful intervention in that relation to ensure sustainable development  
(AESOP, 1995)*

A few decades ago, Henri Lefebvre (1970) prophesied that human society, under capitalist organisation, would inevitably become entirely urbanised. If, as many argue, that moment has arrived and we live an age of ‘planetary urbanisation’ (Brenner, 2013; Buckley and Strauss, 2016), the problem(s) of the urban – the ‘urban question’ (Castells, 1972; Merrifield, 2012) – are amongst the central challenges facing the world. From a different perspective, the concept of the ‘Anthropocene’, has popularised the idea that mankind has become a planetary force (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000). Given its dominant urban form, the Anthropocene’s sustainability becomes increasingly a matter of urban sustainability, and that is a major 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge. The New Urban Agenda by UN-Habitat (2016) summarises the main obstacles to sustainable urban development as: ‘the persistence of multiple forms of poverty, growing inequalities, and environmental degradation [...], with social and economic exclusion and spatial segregation often an irrefutable reality in cities and human settlements’.

If awareness of ongoing climatic change has generated growing public concern, there nonetheless seems to be widespread uncertainty that environmental (and hence social and economic) disasters can be avoided. Prevailing commitment to increasingly far-reaching ‘techno-fixes’ seem to either confirm such, potentially dystopian, pessimism (see Klein, 2014), or appeal to a utopian ideal under the notions of smart and intelligent cities (de Jong et al., 2015).

This one-day seminar starts from the idea that the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) are crucial to produce and disseminate the knowledge necessary to envision and collaboratively shape ‘sustainable’ futures, avoiding the traps of dystopian and anti-utopian developments. However, at

present, mainstream research and education approaches seem ill-equipped to address the major economic, environmental and societal challenges generated by contemporary urbanisation. The social sciences, for example, are dominated by an ‘entrenched empiricism’ (Brenner and Schmid, 2013) that prevents the production of novel, and theoretically/critically informed, paradigms. Disciplinary barriers meanwhile stymie the creation of real inter- and trans-disciplinary knowledge (Harkavy, 2006; Petts et al, 2008; Davoudi, 2010). All in all, SSH have been too focused on studying the past and present (Appadurai, 2013; Adam, 2009) and risk missing the opportunity to shape a ‘sustainable’ future (Bina et al, 2016a).

This certainly seems to be true of urban studies, an inherently interdisciplinary field (AESOP, 2009), but one in which standard practices fall short of the holistic approaches necessary to equip the next generation with the methodological and conceptual capacities to shape sustainable futures (Bina et al, 2016b). Urban disciplines and mainstream SSH therefore urgently need to develop new approaches if they are to contribute positively to the creation of just and sustainable urban futures (Dimitrova, 2014; UN-Habitat, 2009).

This seminar aims to bring together a group of particularly early and mid-career scholars to discuss the kinds of transformative knowledge, pedagogy and practice required to achieve sustainable development in an era of planetary urbanization. We invite scholars from (and beyond) all areas of urban studies and SSH linked to urban issues, including, but not limited to, planning, architecture, urban design, urban geography; and economics, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, comparative literature, cultural studies, to participate.

The session will critically consider the strengths and weaknesses of SSH approaches, and how they might be reconfigured. Key issues to be considered will include at least two of the following themes:

- challenges and potentials of shaping new interdisciplinary agendas in research and education (especially from the perspective of early career researchers);
- role of theory in the production of the urban, and the value of critical approaches (cf. Brenner, 2009; Marcuse, 2010);
- search for new epistemological and methodological approaches – ‘mondialisation’ (Lévy, 2008), beyond divides such as local/global (Healey, 2012), West/South (Santos, 2010) and human/nature (Moore, 2015), and the potential of comparative studies for the production of new knowledges (Robinson, 2016);
- role of SSH in envisioning and shaping futures – including co-production (Watson, 2014; Palmer and Walasek, 2016; Campbell and Vanderhoven, 2016), and foresight methods for exploring urban futures (Güell and Lopez 2016; Hopkins and Zapata, 2007; Freestone, 2012; Phdungsilp 2011).

#### *Format and useful information*

The seminar will be participatory in format, with two keynote addresses and a core discussion in the form of world café. It is intended that discussion will feed directly into a linked roundtable discussion proposed as part of the main Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP) conference that will run from the 11-14 of July in Lisbon. Building on a brief Position Paper by the organising team to be circulated in advance to participants, it is anticipated the session will also generate collective written outputs in a suitable international journal.

The seminar is free of costs to the participants. To be considered for the seminar, please submit by 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017 a letter of motivation (max 2 pages A4) to [simone.tulumello@ics.ulisboa.pt](mailto:simone.tulumello@ics.ulisboa.pt) AND [andy.inch@ics.ulisboa.pt](mailto:andy.inch@ics.ulisboa.pt), stating what your background and researcher/education interests are, as well as what perspective and topics you want to bring to the discussion. 20 participants

will be selected, with priority given to early- and mid-career, scholars – at least 5 seats will be reserved to YA members. Notice will be given by early April.

#### *Travel bursaries*

We will be able to fund up to six bursaries aimed at contributing towards travel expenses (approximately the cost of travel and one-night accommodation), with priority given to early-career scholars from universities in low- and middle-income countries – with a proportion reserved for YA members. If you want to apply for the scholarship, please submit a letter stating why you think it should be awarded to you.

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