

LIVING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND PUBLIC ACTION

CALL FOR PAPERS



JANUARY 26TH AND 27TH 2023

Campus Condorcet · Aubervilliers · France



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While small and medium-sized cities remained on the side lines of urban research for a long time (Bell and Jayne, 2009; Demazière, 2017; Édouard, 2012; Wagner and Grove, 2021), they have recently experienced renewed interest (Grossmann and Mallach, 2021). Mainly studied in the field of urban shrinkage – which concerns them more frequently than growing cities (Chouraqui 2021; Wolff and Wiechmann 2018) – it is argued here that they cannot be studied solely through this perspective. Despite their common structural features, namely, their position between metropolitan and rural areas, the geography of productive activities or the territorial deployment of the State (Chouraqui, 2020; Santamaria, 2012), small and medium-sized cities constitute a set of heterogeneous places (Servillo et al., 2014).

If small and medium-sized cities are relevant categories in the field of urban studies, what social, political, geographical or economic facts do they allow us to grasp? How do certain national or even transnational processes (contemporary transformations of capitalism and public action, reinforcement of austerity policies, accentuation of social and economic inequalities, mistrust of the State, increase in international migration, etc.) materialise in these cities (Béal and Pinson 2014; Peck 2012)? What are the resources and practices of inhabitants and institutional actors in the face of these transformations? What are the specificities of the urban policies carried out in these cities and how do they renew the existing works, essentially focused on metropolitan areas? How the distance with metropolitan areas can foster or constrain the development of small and medium-sized cities?

This conference seeks to open new paths of reflection on housing and ways of living, by considering the geographical, economic and sociological characteristics that define shape small and medium-sized cities as singular objects heterogeneous places with multiple functions: settings and contexts, but also actors in their own right (Bozon 1984; Weber 1989; Guérait 2017; Pribetich 2017; Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2011). The topic of housing will be analysed in its threefold dimension spanning from the social, the urban to the economic (Driant, 2015), and more precisely, be explored through the analysis of residential pathways in small and medium-sized cities, lifestyles and modes of cohabitation, and public policies. Are the modes of cohabitation of local populations and social relations the same as in rural areas or in large urban agglomerations? What can we learn from the variations between the different representations (academic, media or political) of these territories and their inhabitants? Finally, are there any specificities of small and medium-sized cities with regard to housing issues and ways of living, or should we rather understand them as a 'particular but not singular' research framework (Maget, 1989, p. 79) to which similar questions apply to other spatial contexts?

The aim of this conference is to open up a space for interdisciplinary (geography, sociology, urban planning, demography, history, political science, etc.) and international dialogue on these subjects. We invite empirical studies on these cities, in order to better know and understand the phenomena that take place there. These empirical analyses could contribute to theoretical reflections on the meaning and relevance of the categories of small and medium-sized cities.

To address the questions and topics mentioned, three main axes are proposed: a first axis on residential pathways to better understand the mobilities and immobilities in small and medium cities; a second axis on lifestyles and modes of cohabitation; and a third axis on housing and public policies in small and medium cities.

1. Residential mobility and place attachment

A first axis of reflection concerns the interrelationship between residential (im)mobility and territorial transformations in small and medium-sized cities.

While many studies have focused on describing the demographic situation in small and medium-sized cities, there are fewer studies that explicitly address residential mobility in relation to social mobility as well as the development of socio-economic and cultural capital in these areas (Rudolph, 2017; Steinführer and Grossmann, 2021). The aim is to examine more broadly the forms and scales of residential mobility from, to or within small and medium-sized cities. The spatial and territorial extent of these mobilities can also be investigated, from the most local residential movements to international mobilities (Fonseca, 2008; Gardesse, 2020). The aim is to furthermore analyse the socio-spatial filtering that these (im)mobilities produce and their role in transformations of the social composition and morphology of these spaces (Coulton, Theodos and Turner, 2012). How do residential mobility practices vary according to the socio-demographic characteristics of individuals (age, social position, gender, migratory origin, etc.)? To what extent does residential mobility vary from one city to another – depending on regional, economic or social contexts in particular – but also within small and medium-sized cities, in particular between the centres of these cities and their peripheries? Are we witnessing, as many essayists and journalists have prophesied, a 'revenge' of medium-sized cities? Has the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to transforming the symbolic hierarchy of territories and the residential practices of social groups? Beyond the often caricatured and speculative media discourses, empirically and scientifically supported proposals will be particularly appreciated.

On a more microscopic scale, this axis also invites us to grasp what the residential stages in small or medium-sized cities represent for individuals and social groups. In a life-course approach (Elder, Kirkpatrick Johnson and Crosnoe, 2003), it is a question of resituating these stages in residential and social trajectories in order to relate them to the other dimensions of the trajectories – in particular professional and family trajectories (Bailey, 2009). At what stage in the life cycle does the move to – or departure from – a small or medium-sized city take place? Research on the French context has shown that for a long part of the 20th century residential mobility to a small or medium-sized town was primarily a response to short-distance movement motivated by professional opportunities (Commerçon, 1984). At the same time, other studies have shown that, particularly in the context of decentralisation, medium-sized towns have been the location of residential stages linked to long-distance geographical mobility in connection with upwardly mobile professional careers, particularly in the civil service (Guérault, 2018). Moving to a small or medium-sized city is also a stage for vulnerable populations, such as the elderly or refugees (Bose, 2021; Gardesse and Lelévrier, 2020). What is the temporality of these different stages? For whom do small and medium-sized cities constitute spaces of residential attachment, even

to the point of constituting the last stage of residential pathways (Steinführer and Grossmann, 2021)? How can residential immobility in these contexts be characterised socially and spatially (Coulter, van Ham and Findlay, 2016)?

2. Lifestyles, cohabitation patterns and social relations

The second axis of the call for papers focuses on the analysis of lifestyles and social relations in small and medium-sized cities, including generational, gender, class and race relations. It is based on the observation that the structure of social space varies according to the territory: the social groups present and the relative value of their capital differ according to spatial configurations (Laferté, 2014; Çağlar and Glick-Schiller 2011). Rural areas and small and medium-sized cities thus have unique socio-demographic characteristics compared with large cities: for example, in France, there is an over-representation of working-class groups (Bruneau et al., 2018) and of women with qualifications, who are more likely to 'skilled return' after their higher education (Guérait, Jedlicki and Noûs, 2021); at the same time, the proportion of immigrants is lower in many national contexts (see for example Fromentin and Pistre, 2021 for France, or Pottie-Sherman and Graham, 2021 for Canada). This line of enquiry invites us to extend these reflections: to what extent do small and medium-sized cities have specific features in their social structure, which can be explained by their history, their location or their particular demographic weight? Does the study of these cities allow us to renew the analyses of social segregation, which are very focused on metropolises? Do the dynamics of affinity aggregation of the upper classes and the eviction of the working classes observed there (Easton et al., 2020; Guibard, 2021), against a background of financialization of their property markets (Sassen, 2014) and gentrification (Tissot, 2015; Van Criekingen, 2008), concern only the large cities? How do these places – often considered outside the markets – become the setting for processes of financialization and forms of entrepreneurial experimentation? (Berglund 2020) Can the socio-demographic transformations of the centres of small and medium-sized cities be reduced to phenomena of urban decline and impoverishment?

At a more local level, this axis is also interested in the alliances and power relations between social groups in small and medium-sized cities. For example, what are the effects of urban sprawl and the decline of certain cities on the power struggles taking place in their centres (Guérait and Warnant, 2020)? What are the logics of appropriation of space that are manifested, conversely, in the more gentrified territories? The axis also invites us to question the expression of lifestyles and their regulation. Does the distinctive value of cultural practices and lifestyles (Bourdieu, 1979) evolve according to the territory? Which groups 'set the tone' (Chamboredon and Lemaire, 1970; Elias and Scotson, 1994) in small and medium-sized cities? How does the legitimate expression of social distances manifest itself, between a working-class demand for equality in small industrial towns (Gans, 1967; Weber, 1989, chap. 10) and a more relaxed imperative for 'simplicity' in more heterogeneous territories (Schnapper, 2021, chap.8; Sherman, 2017)? In the end, does the coupling of social groups in local sociability attenuate or exacerbate their differences? In terms of gender, do we observe variations in the expression of masculinity and femininity according to the territories? Finally, the axis proposes to question the relationships in small and medium-sized cities.

Far from being a natural property of small urban units, acquaintanceship is the variable and historically situated product of the intersection of social milieus. How does it manifest itself (or not) according to the size and morphology of cities? What forms of social control and gossip does it correspond to? How do we live together in these small and medium-sized cities?

3. Housing, population and public policy in small and medium-sized cities

This last axis of reflection deals with public policy in the field of housing and settlement. It aims to combine work on housing stock – production, maintenance, transformation and management methods – with research on the social division of space and housing policies.

A detailed analysis of the characteristics of the housing stock in small and medium-sized cities, as well as their evolution over time, is an important first step towards a better understanding of these urban contexts and their diversity. What are the characteristics of the housing stock in small and medium-sized towns, and how do these vary within urban agglomerations? How do the social, economic and demographic transformations of small and medium-sized cities – suburbanisation, de-industrialisation or the ageing of the population – affect housing stock? The modalities of production, maintenance, transformation or demolition of the housing stock are particularly relevant to question in these types of spaces. Public actors and operators may be confronted with particular challenges, such as the vacancy of housing, the absence of private developers or the low property prices, which transform the objectives, approaches and modes of action, in contexts where the financial, human and technical means are less important than in metropolitan areas.

How can private housing stock be produced or maintained when the property market is slack and private operators are virtually absent? The specificities of housing policies and of the actors involved in housing production could usefully be examined, as these urban contexts differ so much from the large cities, where these elements have been more thoroughly investigated. More specifically, the growing importance entrepreneurial policy-making has been underlined in larger metropolitan areas (Harvey 1989; Jessop 1997), where policies aimed at local economic growth are developed and rely on public-private partnership, in a context of rationalisation of public expenditures and the reinforcement of the "urbanisation of capital" (Harvey 1975, 1989; Peck 2012). Do these findings apply beyond larger cities? What are the consequences of the adoption or reproduction of such policy model in smaller cities? What are the strategies of the public housing providers and how do they differ among or even within these cities (Béal et al. 2019; Fertner et al. 2015; Meier 2018; Mondain 2021)? How do national actors deal with housing issues and what programmes do they set up for small and medium-sized cities? In what way do they constitute resources on which they can rely to act on their housing stock? How are classic housing policy issues such as heritage protection (Sportich du Réau de La Gaignonnière, 2021), energy renovation or the control of urban sprawl (Persyn, 2017) are adapted (or not) in these specific areas? How do these housing issues manifest themselves in other European or international contexts?

LIVING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND PUBLIC ACTION

CALL FOR PAPERS

Finally, how do public actors consider (or not) population regulation and social composition in those cities (Desage, Morel Journel, and Sala Pala 2014) and how are these questions integrated in public policy? Two different scales are identified here: firstly, the intra-urban scale, regarding urban revitalization policies (Gaudin, 2013; Dupuy Le Bourdellès 2018; Berroir et al. 2019) and their effects on the social division of space (Davidson and Lees 2005; Smith 1996); and secondly, the regional and national scales, through residential attractiveness strategies (Kwiatek-Soltys et al., 2014). In this context, the variety of public policies deployed in the realm of territorial marketing (Hospers, 2020; Pinoncely and Schemschat, 2021) – as well as their consequences – can be studied. Equally, the transformation and production of the residential offer, for example to capture the flows supposedly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, could be examined. In parallel, national relocation strategies aimed at the mobility of vulnerable populations from metropolitan areas to small- and medium-sized cities or rural areas could be studied in the same way as settlement programmes from non-governmental organisations or public housing providers.

Abstract submission

We invite abstracts of 500 words (excluding references) to be submitted on the following platform : habiter-vpm.sciencesconf.org. Abstracts in both French and English are welcomed. Application deadline: **1st of July 2022**.

The authors will be informed of the result of their proposal at the beginning of September 2022. With a view to a publication project, a text of around 15,000 characters will be requested from those selected in December 2022.

LIVING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND PUBLIC ACTION

CALL FOR PAPERS

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LIVING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND PUBLIC ACTION

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LIVING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND PUBLIC ACTION

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LIVING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND PUBLIC ACTION

CALL FOR PAPERS

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LIVING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND PUBLIC ACTION

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LIVING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND PUBLIC ACTION

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LIVING IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CITIES

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RESIDENTIAL TRAJECTORIES AND PUBLIC ACTION

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