

Transit Cities: Migrant Experiences in the late 19th and early 20th century (session at the EAUH conference, Antwerp, 2-5 September 2020)

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M-MIG-3 Transit Cities: Migrant Experiences in the late 19th and early 20th century

Cities in Motion, 15th International Conference on Urban History, Antwerp, 2-5 September 2020.

Session organisers: Markian Prokopovych and Tobias Brinkmann

The session will examine the role of transit cities in migrants' individual experiences in the late 19th and early 20th century and look at specific urban spaces that they encountered, temporarily appropriated and where they interacted with more permanent urban groups in an aim to establish the role of municipal authorities, urban communities and transmigrants' individual agency.

Session content

In the decades after 1850 the rise of the steamship, expanding railroad systems and information networks connected a rapidly growing number of people in different parts of the world to globalizing markets for goods, services, information and labor. Detailed research since the 1960s has shown that most European city migrants during the 19th century hailed from the wider vicinity of the respective city. The focus on immigration and urbanization has overshadowed the impact of mass transit migration on cities. The rise of modern transportation networks turned cities into major passage points for millions of transmigrants. Major urban centers such as Berlin, Paris, London or New York became transportation hubs and thus had to accommodate a high and constantly growing number of transmigrants before 1914.

Transmigration benefitted hostel owners, steamship lines and other businesses providing services to migrants. However, it also put a significant burden on the existing urban infrastructure struggling to cope with a growing number of commuters. State officials and society frequently perceived mass transit migration as a threat. Officials were concerned about the spread of contagious diseases and social disorder, and about transmigrants becoming illegal sojourners. The implementation of restrictions and regulations by major destination countries such as the United States in the 1890s

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forced transit countries such as Germany and Britain to control transmigrants even more closely.

The session will examine migrants' individual experiences and look at specific urban spaces that they encountered, temporarily appropriated and where they interacted with more permanent urban groups. To what extent was their travel controlled by the municipal authorities? Did they exercise agency in avoiding or subverting the regulations? Did the 'locals' help and assist migrants or, conversely, act on the authorities' behalf? What can be concluded from this about the nature of specific urban communities?

Drawing on the outcomes of several previous EAUH sessions, we invite proposals of comparative nature as well as case studies that help elucidate on one of these aspects of migrants' transient experiences.

Proposals should be submitted directly to the EAUH website (<https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/conferences/eauh2020/papers/call-for-papers/>) to the **M-MIG-3** session by **4 October 2019**.

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