

Call for proposals

International conference: « The Right to the City in the South, everyday urban experience and rationalities of government »

University Paris Diderot, CESSMA, 15-16-17 November 2017

The concept of the Right to the City has recently resurfaced in academic and activist circles, adopting a number of different meanings in the process (Kuymulu 2013). Research in Urban Studies addressing the issue of the Right to the City has expanded significantly since the 2000s. This renewed interest was kickstarted by radical Anglophone researchers based in the Northern hemisphere, who mobilized Henri Lefebvre's writings (Lefebvre 1968) to theorize an agenda of resistance against neoliberal socio-economic and political transformations (Purcell 2002; Harvey 2003; Mitchell 2003; Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer 2009). In parallel, in a more reformist perspective, the institutionalization and codification of *bona fide* Rights explicitly modeled after the Right to the City took place, thoroughly transforming the latter in the process. As a result, the Right to the City is now also mobilized in a regulatory, legal, technical and applied frame aiming at the promotion of both plural and quantifiable social rights agendas, prefiguring the advent of a Second Generation of Human Rights. Critiques have been prompt to warn against the watering down of the critical and political dimensions of the notion brought by such an extension (Belda-Miquel, Peris Blanes, and Frediani 2016; Purcell 2013; Mayer 2009).

The tension between revolutionary agenda and reformist programme, as well as the potential watering down of the critical dimension of the notion, seem particularly visible in cities of the South. Indeed, developmental interpretations of the Right to the City recommending an institutionalization of Rights have become very popular (Parnell and Pieterse 2010; Brown 2010; Zérah 2011; Aubriot and Moretto 2013). Research on cities of the South have overwhelmingly adopted this perspective. As a direct result, the Right to the City has made its way in the agendas of international institutions such as the U.N. (Jouve 2009; Costes 2010) or in national legislations, in particular in Brazil (Lopez de Souza, 2009). At the same time, the notion of the Right to the City has been taken over by Neomarxist researchers, or more broadly researchers with a political and critical perspective, from the South. The notion in this case is mobilized to think the rise of democratic participation and forms of political resistance in a context of growing intra-urban inequalities caused by neoliberalism (Samara, He, and Chen 2013; Carrión and Erazo 2016).

These various scientific productions and theoretical angles do not easily talk to or inform each other. Furthermore, the issue of the status of the Right to the City remains open: it is at times mobilized by researchers as a slogan and a political programme, at times as an analytical category, and sometimes both at the same time. Confronted to this difficulty, we propose a decentering of the critical capacity of the notion of the Right to the City, aiming at focusing on the interplay between urban policies and ordinary, everyday urban experience. Inspired by the works of W. Nicholls & F. Vermeulen (2012) and of J.-A. Boudreau, N. Boucher & M. Liguori (2009), who all take into consideration the role of ordinary city experience in the conscientization and political mobilization of city-dwellers, we want to take the Right to the City as a useful analytical concept in order to understand the relations between the daily practices of city-dwellers and rationalities of government. In this sense, we want to introduce the notion of a "*De facto* Right to the City".

This "*De facto* Right to the City" characterizes the process of spatial and social ordering played at the intersection between public action (the designing of public policies, the practices of agents of the

state...) and urban daily practices, insofar as this interplay produces recognizable routines (Morange & Spire, *forthcoming*, and Morange, Spire & Planel, *forthcoming*). The notion of a "De facto Right to the City" aims at identifying the way city-dwellers participate in the construction of a social and spatial order in the city by means of, *inter alia*, the daily repetition of gestures, the consolidation of social connections, the practical compliance to collective rules, the means of occupying and appropriating space... We claim that the actual conditions of city life influence the means of existing and projecting oneself in the city. The "De facto Right to the City" forces us to identify what in urban experiences leads to the formation of a normative conception of one's place in the city, of what can and must be the urban, spatial, political and social order. *In fine*, it also questions the temporalities of these processes and the way they institutionalize in the long term.

The proposed conference aims at gathering researchers working on the political dimension of the daily practices of urban dwellers. Such urban practices have been on the agenda of Urban Studies scholars working in cities of the South for a long time: they have produced research on urban anchoring and integration to the city, or on the construction of *cidadinité* ("cityness"). The conference wishes to expand these works and to question the political dimension of ordinary urban practices in the South. The issue of the dimension and of the political potential of ordinary urban practices has been explored via the emergence of a Right to Informality (Huchzermeyer 2011), via the exploration of the insurgent dimension of urban citizenship (Holston 2008), or via the analysis of the "quiet encroachment" capacities of city dwellers which establishes them as political subjects (Bayat 2010). Mobilizations and processes of political conscientization have also been explored in their relationship to the plurality of urban experience and condition (Uitermark *et al.* 2012). These debates remind us that it is through their practices of urban space that city dwellers experience processes of social exclusion, of relegation, of marginalization, but also of political and social integration, of assertion of forms of partly local citizenship whose exact nature is difficult to pinpoint. Simply put, the idea of a "De facto Right to the City" forces us to take into consideration urban practices in their dual dimensions of conformity and subversion.

The construction of a "De facto Right to the City" can be observed through the analysis of classic topics for research in cities of the South, such as housing, service delivery, public space, informal trading, and the places of migration. These topics can help us apprehend the various forms of interaction between city-dwellers and agents of the state taken in a broad sense. These interactions are constitutive of city lives in the long term and can be observed in daily routines. They are particularly visible on the occasion of public interventions: regularization processes, the implementation of migration policy and the accompanying invisibilization/visibilization of migrants, or the restructuring/rehabilitation of informal settlements. These particular transitional times appear as privileged and fruitful to analyze the "De facto Right to the City" understood not as an end to open political conflict mobilization, urban struggles, etc., but as a process of constant readjustments in the production of norms, between urban experiences and rationalities of government.

Proposals can consist in empirical case studies addressing the different debates around the Right to the City. They can also consist in theoretical approaches questioning for instance the issue of the mobilization of the Right to the City in Social Sciences, as well as its normative dimension. They can also consist in epistemological contributions addressing how research based on cities of the South can, and under what conditions, mobilize a notion forged and developed for cities of the North. The conference is also open to contributions from cities of the North, insofar as they specifically encompass a comparative dimension with cities of the South.

The conference will be held in French and English. Proposals originally written in Spanish and Portuguese will be selected insofar as a visual presentation (slides) in English or French is provided by the author. For technical and financial reasons, simultaneous translation will not be available during the conference but the organizers will facilitate exchanges in all four languages during the collective discussions.

Organization of the conference

This conference is part of a research project on the Right to the City hosted since 2013 by CESSMA (Centre d'Etudes en Sciences Sociales sur les Mondes Africains, Américains et Asiatiques) by research collective Dalvaa (<https://dalvaa.hypotheses.org/>). The project is funded by Ville de Paris as part of their « Emergences » initiatives.

Partial funding will be available for researchers who wish to give a presentation but cannot benefit from funding from their home institution. Priority will be given to researchers holding precarious positions.

Proposals for the conference must be sent to the following address:

colloquedalv2017@gmail.com for 04 May 2017 at the latest.

They should consist in a title, an abstract no longer than 500 words, a short presentation of the author(s) (name, home institution and position, email address) as well as a short bibliography.

Organizing committee:

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