

Call for Abstracts

The Institute for European Urban Studies invites abstracts for its annual conference taking place on 09-11 November 2023 at Bauhaus-Universität Weimar on

Authoritarian Urbanism: Global Manifestations, Knowledge Exchange and Contestation

Cities are generally understood as ‘cradles of democracy’, as central sites for political action, pro-democracy and emancipatory movements, and as battlefields where authoritarian and illiberal tendencies are resisted and contested. Accordingly, research has produced ample knowledge on the interplay of cities and democracy. The complex relationship between cities and authoritarianism, in turn, has received far less attention. Yet, cities are focal points for authoritarian interventions, they are breeding grounds for authoritarian movements, and they play a crucial role in maintaining and stabilizing authoritarian regimes.

The recent surge of authoritarian tendencies around the globe has led to a renewed interest in these processes. In the last couple of years studies have documented contemporary manifestations of authoritarian urbanism and highlighted the role of urbanism in authoritarian state-building; research on post-politics and post-democracy has illuminated how the current neoliberal order undermines democratic practices in and through urban development; and works have shed light on the interplay of authoritarianism, illiberalism and right-wing populism and their socio-spatial dynamics in cities.

This conference sets out to further this debate. It brings together scholars from different disciplinary background within the field of urban studies to shed light on contemporary forms, mechanisms and dynamics of authoritarian urbanism in a global perspective. In particular it aims to advance our understanding of how urbanism is linked to, and instrumental for rising processes of authoritarianism. Gaining a better understanding of this complex interrelationship is crucial for countering authoritarian tendencies and for devising strategies to reverse them. Against this background we particularly invite contributions on the following topics:

Unlearning authoritarian urbanism: It is common to associate authoritarian urbanism with repressive interventions, arbitrary and opaque decision-making and spectacular, symbolically charged megaprojects in authoritarian regimes. However, recent years have seen a surge of new and perhaps unexpected policies in many authoritarian contexts, such as participatory planning, the emergence of public spaces following human-scale city-making or the rise of sustainable urban policies. What is more, while authoritarian urbanism for long referred solely to developments within authoritarian regimes, recent research has begun to conceptualize it as a spatially unbound phenomenon, shaping democratic and authoritarian contexts alike. By shedding light on its manifold contemporary manifestations around the globe, we want to unsettle and unlearn common perceptions and understandings of authoritarian urbanism. We are interested how authoritarian urbanism in the 21st century “looks like”, that is which forms it takes and how it operates; how new trends affect it (digitalization, progressive urbanist policies, etc.); and in how state-society relations are shaped through urbanism, that is how support and acceptance for authoritarian leaders is created and how democratic practices are undermined in and through urbanism.

Learning authoritarian urbanism: In order to grapple with the challenges that the complexity of urban life in an increasingly globalized world brings about, contemporary authoritarian, populist and illiberal leaders actively engage in authoritarian learning. Knowledge exchange takes place on how to carry out public participation in planning without undermining the existing power balances, on how to apply instruments such as *lex specialis* and development agencies in order to circumvent legally defined procedures, on how to make use of crises and states of exception to push through profound interventions, on how to effectively silence oppositional actors through urbanism or on how to appease the grumbling middle and upper classes through urban redevelopments. But while research on learning and knowledge exchange thrives with regard to pro-democracy policies, the practices and patterns involved in learning authoritarian urbanism have so far hardly received attention. Accordingly, we are interested in gaining a better understanding on who is involved in learning authoritarian urbanism; on how and through which networks knowledge exchange takes place; on the involved actor-networks spanning across authoritarian and non-authoritarian contexts; on which policies, ideas and role models circulate and are learned from; and on how authoritarian regimes learn from democratic contexts and vice versa.

Contesting authoritarian urbanism: Just as the workings and manifestations of authoritarian urbanism vary widely in different contexts, so do the means, strategies and possibilities to counter them. Outspoken and loud forms of protest exist along more subtle and quiet forms of resistance. What is more, as the operating modes of authoritarian urbanism evolve and change, for example by expanding its repertoire or by drawing on new technologies (e. g. covid-apps to prevent or disperse demonstrations), actors must constantly seek to adopt their tactics in order to counter them. Accordingly, we are interested in different actors, platforms and forms of resisting authoritarian urbanism and their effectiveness; in how local contestations are shaped by their respective contexts and in the possibilities and constraining factors that exist; on how actors adopt to new forms of authoritarian urbanism; and on processes of co-optation and how they in turn affect the forms and workings of authoritarian urbanism.

We welcome both conceptual-theoretical and empirical contributions on the above topics. In order to participate please send an abstract (appr. 300 words) and a brief bio-note to IfEU.Jahrestagung@uni-weimar.de. The call for abstracts will close on **31 January 2023**. Acceptance letters will be sent by March 2023. There will be a conference fee (approximately 30 Euros).