

Conférence Altervilles



URBAN NARRATIVES **(Re)building cities through narratives**

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Jean Monnet Network

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Introduction

Ordering city through discourses - Philippe Zittoun

In order to create a frame of analysis for the rest of the seminar, Philippe Zittoun talked to us about the importance of discursive practice. Placing its work in the linguistic turn in social sciences made in the 70s around Habermas, Austin and Foucault, he presented to us the 7 main characteristics about language:

- Discourse as an indispensable filter of reality : we cannot separate thinking from discourse
 - And as a transgressive filter : not neutral and transparent
- Discourse as a game of language to build meaning (Wittgenstein)
- Discourse is a singular and material practice (Foucault)
- Discourse is action (Austin) since it can be performative
- Discourse is acknowledgement of the subject
- Discourses are used to create argument or dispute (Boltanski)
- Power of discourse and discourse of power which are incompatible for Arendt (who does a separation between power and persuasion), but not for Habermas, Foucault or Bourdieu.

The second part of its presentation was about discursive practices

- The collective definition of a tragic statement on a public problem : creating a tragedy, labeling it as a political problem, defining victims, designing causes is all about discourses.
- The same strategy can be applied not for a problem but for a solution
- In front of unsolvable problems, the goal is to redefine the problem. For instance, when unemployment is the problem, government makes work regulation the problem.

Finally, he explained to us the trajectories of a statement to the population. There are different forms such as the public/mediatic one or the hermetic policy territory one (discrete scene with few people).

Urban discourse is a way to re-order a problem to control the city.

Rebuilding cities through narratives - Christelle Morel Journel and Aisling Healy

First of all, we have to ask ourselves if these narratives are something new. In fact, cities have always produced stories with mythological roots. But, there was a “booming” in urban narrative recently, with for instance “ville nouvelle” in France, around which was conceived a technocratic narrative of a connected and efficient city.

Urban planning narrative is a technical activity, producing discourses on the city. The urban projects were the primary media of stories in the late 20th century in order to make the population accept the transformation of the city. The mid 90s saw a global neoliberalization of the cities, and the story telling played a more and more important role.

With “cities being back in town”, municipalities began to play one of the most important roles again. But, at the same time, the rise in city competition around attractiveness made them develop new narratives to put forward some key sectors. We live in a time of an intensification of urban narratives, with conditions of production (with a lot of new actors playing a role in that) around new forms of urban planning, new settings of urban debate and new communication tools.

Session 1 - Tales of Urban Renaissance

Reinventing the urban narratives of Lyon : Can the city museum be an actor - Xavier de la Salle

Xavier de la Salle, director of the Musée Gadagne in Lyon talked to us about the role of the museum in the narrative of Lyon. Nowadays, the museum plays a social function allowing citizen to understand the story of their city. In order to do that, they developed an artistic method around the “ANPU” which stands humoristically for “Agence Nationale de Psychanalyse Urbaine”, a method designed to avoid being boring about urbanism and to introduce poetry and emotion in the exhibition with people being able to participate into the project. The question he tried to answer to is the possibility of a museum being a real actors in the construction of the city and its narrative.

Narrating Pittsburgh’s transition from steel to silicon, scalpels and sustainability - Michael Glass

Michael Glass is an urban geographer whose work focuses on boundaries. He insisted on the power of discourse to shift the perspective of particular places, and to create boundaries. To demonstrate that, he put on perspective the traditional and the new narrative of the city of Pittsburgh. In the beginning of the 1900s, journalists built the narrative of the city, depicting it as a industrial polluted city with a lot of problems. This narrative changed with the public-private partnership at the head of the city, creating a Renaissance narrative. But this discourse could not hold with the crises of the Rust belt in the 1980, the narrative focused on the university precinct and on downtown with the areas around being erased. The amazon opportunity (which the city missed) helped creating a new narrative, focused on remaking former industrial cities on the riversides with the idea of attractivity at the center. This narrative is limited since it did not take account of he past

Newcastle city future project - Louise Kempton

Louise Kempton work focused on the role of universities as anchor for institutions in innovation growth. Newcastle history narrative is closed to the Pittsburgh one : a cradle of the industrial revolution which declined steadily from the 30s to the 80s with nowadays emerging sectors in data innovation with universities as key assets of that. The question she asked is how can place generates place-leadership and think more ambitiously about positive change, in a authority-ridden risk-adverse environment? In this governance context with a powerful central government applying austerity programs, one actor cannot face all of the problems by himself. The Newcastle Future project focusing on a 50 years long frame contributes to the narrative of Newcastle as a innovative city, but the NFC has no power which creates a problem of legitimacy. The question of the viability of NCF is raised.

Most liveable Pittsburgh - Sabina Deitrick

One of the resource used by Pittsburgh to develop its current narrative is its ranking as the 2nd most liveable city of the USA... but also as the 8th most polluted city. The pollution problem is in fact what made Pittsburgh more liveable since, after the 50s, programs of cleaning were developed with a slow growth strategy to keep the prices affordable. The question is to know for whom Pittsburgh is

liveable. Indeed, quality of life surveys show that black residents have a lower quality of life than white ones. There is significant differences by demographic variables (especially age and race). Pittsburgh success narrative does not show this differences and some neighborhood does not reflect this story.

When Detroit hires a chief storyteller - Aaron Foley

Aaron Foley, chief storyteller of detroit worked in the context of the burden of Detroit narrative as a violent city with everybody owning guns and as the motor city full of blight. At the same time, new narrative of a city full of “happy” white millennials, as a artist paradise with the QLine (a trolley line) being a major asset of it. The problem of this new narrative is that it focuses on white people, and forget about the black community or LGBTQ+. Aaron Foley as a journalist background, and works with photographs and other journalists to tell stories about Detroit and detroiters that are not represented enough in this new narrative. The aim of his work is to fill the holes in the story telling of Detroit for people who does not have a platform. He then presented to us some stories he had covered.

Session 2 - We are all metropolises ! Narratives on good scales of cooperation and governance

The Metropole of Lyon through the lenses of the Metropole of Minneapolis Saint Paul : What do their narratives have in common ? - C. Ghorra Gobin

As cities are ranked in terms of resources, population, financial and political power, it is easy to divide them in categories. Concerning Lyon and Minneapolis, they are considered as “second cities”, even if they are a part of the globalized world.

In the case of Lyon and Minneapolis, are their different narratives on the metropolitan transition depending on the situation of the city, for instance, a centralised state in France versus a federal system in the United States ? Does it signify a rescaling of the State as Brenner states it, or a form of new localism according to Katz and Nowak ?

The two cities of Lyon and Minneapolis actually share the same local willingness to become a metropolitan institution, but the narrative is quite different depending on structural aspects. On the one hand, Lyon has developed an economic narrative as well as a touristic one with the Unesco, and his soon expected to vote for the metropolitan president.

On the other hand, Minneapolis is mostly famous for its Mall of America and its métropolis is perceived as a progressive institution, facing the public choice theory deeply rooted in the cultural institutions of the United States of America. The centrality of Lyon also differs with Minneapolis, as well as the economic development. Nonetheless, they both share the same local willingness to become a metropolitan institution, Lyon for the competitive aspect, while Minneapolis tries to equalize cities in its metropolis.

The role of the state is different though, as the inhabitants of Lyon are going to vote for the first time in 2020 for the metropolis, while the Minneapolis metropole doesn't have a federal legislation.

While they remain different in terms of development of the metropole, but both demonstrate a local willingness to become a metropolitan institution.

When private actors discuss Marseille's metropolisation - Christophe Parnet

How did the debate about the metropolitan government lead to the integration of a business elite within metropolitan authorities ? The structuration of a small business group of interest, known as Clut Top 20 started to emerge back in 2005, as a lobby for its interests, while the local power of Marseille strongly rejected its influence and views on how to aim for a better corporation at a larger scale. The central government though, was willing to implement incentives for flexible cooperation between cities and make Marseille bigger than it was in early 2005's, especially with the transcendental label of "Marseille, capitale de la culture".

Parallaly, the state was a privileged partner, a technical one in terms of co-construction of the Metropolis of Marseille. This interventionism led to the legitimation of this small business elite, as the bond between the French state and this lobby is more about economic strategy than a shared ideology.

Braddock : Building a narrative on a Mayor's charisma - Aisling Healy and Christelle Morel Journel

The mayor of Braddock is extremely visible, on the contrary of the south-east political leaders in the Pittsburgh. This little municipality is located on the periphery of Pittsburgh could be compared to the size of Saint-Etienne for instance, but what strikes the most is the importance of the local mayor : John Fetterman. His visibility is not only carried throughout newspapers, movies or documentaries, but also embodied by the massive amount of tattoos he is wearing.

The following question is : how to manage an almost ruined territorial identity as discourses are materials, and non neutral. The mayor have been pioneering key actor in framing the sacrificed community of Braddock, trying to overcome hard times, a topic that has been covered by John Fetterman in various medias and even TED seminars. Therefore, the mayor has extremely active on which policies to implement in order to change the "blight" image that Braddock has, thanks to the development of urban farming, attract artists and fighting gun violence.

To sum up, the mayor is an extreme incarnation of new urban narrative, starting with the mayor who literally embodies that change as newspapers deeply cover his physical appearance first. We can see here that one can build a political career on decline and turn a ruined image into an asset for politics, which is precisely a built narrative, at the expense maybe, of the original community leaders.

The Northern Powerhouse as a spatial narrative - Danny MacKinnon

Established in 2014 by George Osborne as latest initiative for rebalancing the UK economy, and to boost economic growth in the North of England. From the core cities such Manchester, Leeds or Newcastle, the aim is to bring northern cities together in terms of transports, connections, universities and with this union, become as strong as a global city. As the former narrative was tied to the idea of agglomeration between cities, the one promoted by the Northern Powerhouse is all about the new economic geography, as a soft space of collaboration and promotion.

Thus, the expansion of urban entrepreneurialism is expanded to a “competitive multi-city regionalism” according to David Wachsmuth. This initiative intends to focus the economic activities on the region on digital and health innovation, as well as reducing the unemployment flaw of the region, and reinforce the devolution of power thanks to this new model of city government. Finally, this new narrative has been adopted by regional interest in order to lobby on state government, and promote the north as an economic space for investment.

Session 3 - When international organizations support cities as welcoming actors

When international organizations support cities as welcoming actors - Younes Ahouga

Younes Ahouga is a Ph.D. student in political science and a research assistant at the Global Studies Institute of the University of Geneva. His presentation focused on the International Organization for Migration, specifically on the speech made by its director general, Swing, during the Conference on Migrants and Cities in 2008. Bimal Gosh first defined the “migration management paradigm” in 1997 as a coherent system of policy frameworks, practices and institutions to enact “related openness to migration”. It implies a mix of incentive and control measures to “discipline” migration. However, it used to comprehend migration as a global phenomenon, not thinking about the local aspect. Ahouga presents this conference as a « local turn » in migration policies, and Swing’s speech as an aim at constructing a strategic alliance to « disaggregate government ». Indeed, in his speech Swing reduces the complexity of the migrants-cities nexus by reducing it to opportunity and silence the disadvantages : this nexus is merely a win-win process. In his vision, migration is an inevitable process that happens to sustain urbanization, and he encourages mayors to act in a pragmatic way by building local partnerships to deal with this issue. The speech is normative, because it urges mayors and local actors at the conference to act a certain way, and discursive because it offers no material governmental technology, except when Swing announces the launch of the World Migration Report “Migrants and cities: new partnerships to manage mobility”.

Questioning sanctuary in securitized states : welcoming narratives from San Francisco, Sheffield and Toronto - Rachel Humphris

Rachel Humphris is a lecturer in the School of Social Policy at the University of Birmingham. Her presentation focused on the place of three Sanctuary Cities : San Francisco (USA), Toronto (Canada) and Sheffield (UK). In this presentation, cities do not act only as local actors, they act as global actors on migration by their welcoming and openness for diversity. In an age of mobility, cities are the scale in which circulation is mostly seen but not the only one. Humphris cites James Scott, who says sanctuary cities act like states by creating urban policies on migration in inclusion. Sanctuary cities are presented as a unified governmental apparatus or “field of policy”, which obscures political battles and the patchwork of implementation at different levels and in different local government departments. There are various urban policy models a city can adopt to welcome and integrate migrants : non-policy, guest worker policy, assimilationist policy, pluralist policy, intercultural policy. All sanctuary cities are not just cities : some of them adopt affirmative strategies that don’t disturb the underlying social structure (Sheffield) like most cities, but some of them try to change the social framework that gives rise to injustice (San

Francisco) or set in motion a trajectory of change in which more radical reforms become practicable over time while operating in existing social frameworks (Toronto).

Welcoming America : complexities and contradictions in Dayton, Ohio - Stacy Harwood

Stacy Harwood is a city planning professor at the University of Utah and talks about the the contradictions of the welcome culture in Dayton, Ohio. In 2009, there has been a huge surge of the movement against migrants in the US, to which a welcoming movement has responded : Welcoming America, which has since then spread across the US. It is a non-profit that aims at creating a networks across the country, and that has started labelling some cities “welcoming cities”, including unexpected cities like shrinking and rust-belt cities like Dayton in Ohio. The welcoming movement, whose strategy is to counter anti immigrant narratives with stories of “good migrants”. But the welcoming narrative reproduces spatial segregation with most of migrants living in afro-american neighborhoods, and is silent about Dayton’s gentrification. In the transformation of the city, there has been missing voices : both immigrants and the struggling white working class have not been taken into account. Despite the controversies surrounding the movement, including among other activists, the welcoming narrative leaves no room for debate.

When businessmen create a welcome culture in German cities - Christiane Heimann

Finally, Christiane Heimann, an associate member at the Otto-Friedrich-Universität of Bamberg, presented her work on Spanish labour migration to Germany. She explained that German businessmen have become actors of European migrations and are creating a Welcome Culture in Germany because of labour shortages. Labour integration is new in Germany, and is due to the economic boom and the demographic crisis, and German integration culture is mainly providing informations and language courses. Spain is a big target of German employment policies, because it has a lot of youth unemployment and it is part of the EU. The harmonization of policies for the EU labour market, the bilateral memorandum for recruitment of Spanish workers, and the agreements of cooperation on local and regional level have created favorable conditions for businessmen looking for workers. Through three case studies of specific fieldworks, she studies the migration of Spanish workers from three cities in Spain (Valencia, Zaragoza and Barcelona) towards three cities in Germany (Würzburg, Munich and Stuttgart respectively), and shows that employers do lobbying for migration policies in their cities. She explains that universities create trust between Spanish immigrants and German businesses by advertising offers, and that framings transported by local actors are more trusted than those transported by the government, showing that local actors are embedded in strong networks.

Session 4 - Alternative Metropolitan narratives

How devolution split North East England - Peter Morris

Peter Morris is a professor of economic geography from the Newcastle university. He’s involved in the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies. His conference “How devolution split North East England” begins with a devolution chronology. In 2010, under the labour government, there is a switch from regionalism to localism. United Kingdom has nine region and the north east region is the smallest. Each region has a development region agency. In North East England a coalition was created

between 38 local enterprise partnerships and a patchwork of combined authorities to build devolution deals

In 2015, with the provisional devolution deal the North East Combined Authority has many devolved powers: Investment, planning, business support, employment, transport, housing. Tees Valley which is a city region in the North East of England accepted the election of a “metro mayor” but NECA rejected the deal in 2016. Why ? One of the main questions of Morris’ study is: Why did the local authorities in Tees Valley accepted and in the North-East rejected UK government offers ? The devolution deal defeated by informal institutions which are: a strong sense of identity, historical rivalries between North-East and the central power, political traditions and practices (North East people use to vote for Labour party) and a resentment of Newcastle leadposition. To conclude, to create a local government and a local development agency, according to Peter Morris we have to get the politics right and build from the bottom up.

An alternative urban tale : le guide indigène de détourisme de Nantes et Saint-Nazaire - Frédéric Barbe

Frédéric Barbe is a lecturer at the Ecole nationale supérieure d'architecture de Nantes, and had a PhD in geography and planning. His work make references to situationism, social sciences and non-colonist literature. He’s a member of the association “A la Criée” which is a “laboratory of social invention”. The book *Le guide de détourisme de Nantes et Saint-Nazaire* is a reaction against the new narrative about Nantes built by the municipality.

In 1989, the urban rebirth of Nantes started accompagné by an official narrative of Nantes renaissance. In this context municipality did a lot of cultural events. Barbe observed a “touristification in a major policy in the local metropolization process. For example: *Le Guide du Routard* was paid 30 000 euros by the city of Nantes to make a special book about Nantes metropole. But in front of this narrative, “indigenous” people create alternatives: in 2009, at the fringe of the internal biennale of spectacle, they did a conference and had the idea about a real alternative urban narrative guide. They wanted to show things that were under the strong official narrative.

#Villes : a drama protocol to collect and stage inhabitants Narratives in Saint-Etienne and Lyon - Jérôme Cochet

Jérôme Cochet is an actor, and artistic director. He works within the “Collectif X”. The Collectif X, created in 2013, is a troupe from Saint-Etienne which has developed a project about city articulated around this question: How to use both theater and scientific methods to portray the city through a participative performance ? To do that, they did different activities during one month in partnership with a social structure of Saint-Etienne. The first activity was an urban walk: people had to narrate their journey in the street. The second consisted in doing an interview with someone and repeated in front of other people what the person said. Then the Collectif X organized a public choral of 100 definitions of the city. The fourth activity named “Controverse” was to participate to a fictive debate about an imaginary city. Finally, the people who participated made a performance which is a restitution of the fourth steps. It was a festive moment.

Alternative Pittsburgh - Dan Holland- Communities of Resistance: Building social Capital in Pittsburgh and Lyon.

Dan holland, is a researcher from the University of Pittsburgh. His researches are focused on studying transatlantic wealth-building strategies in low- and moderate-income and minority communities in post-industrial cities in the United States and France. He made comparisons between Pittsburgh and Lyon about people capacity to build social capital. In 1958, Louis Pradel, Mayor of Lyon, broke ground for HLM in the neighborhood of La Duchere. He had a urban renewal project for Lyon and wanted to build a new city. He followed the Le Corbusier ideology. At the same, the mayor of Pittsburgh demolished some buildings too. But in front of this demolitions, people asked to be more integrated into urban renewal. They attempted to resist against modernization in their communities. Riots of Les Minguettes in 1981 and La Duchère in 1997 are symptomatics of this will.

Commentary

Urban narratives are not just empty statements about cities, but also have real repercussions on the urban fabric and our representations. Narrating the city is not a new phenomenon and can be traced many years back since every city - especially European ones - use mythical references to tell a story about themselves. During this seminar, we studied recent and older city narratives trying to understand their contents, their production and their effects on cities. This short work based on the different sessions of this seminar is dedicated to ask ourselves if narratives are changing the city. In order to do that, we will begin by studying narratives as an object for public policy, we will then point out the limits of these narratives in city-shaping. Finally, we will look at “alternative narratives” that stand out from the traditional metropolis’ narratives.

1/ Narratives as a (new) field of action

In a constant moving economy between its inner sectors and the consensus on the competition between cities, more and more urban narratives seem to emerge in order to compete with each other in order to impact their attractiveness. Those new narratives are met with the creation of symbolic goods, such as cultural manifestations in the city which have been seen in Saint-Etienne, borrowing a City Of Design narrative for instance.

While some researchers compare this type of policy as putting “lipstick on a gorilla” according to William J. V. Neill for example, the performativity of the urban narrative and discourses need to be analyzed. These discursive strategies, seen as solutions to obliterate another narrative such as the industrialised city or coal city, to walk towards a new image.

Those policies are rising with the coalition-building form, as we demonstrated it in the case of Marseille, in which the once rejected business sector is now fully part of a large-scale implementation of *city of culture*, needing the cooperation of various actors from private to public so civil society.

The main idea is to draw out a niche, that one city could fill and then attract people in this specific sector, whether is it *welcoming cities* in Toronto or *innovative cities* in Detroit or Pittsburgh. Therefore, a city in need of rebranding itself thanks to a new urban narrative will focus on specific aspects, thus, affecting directly the city in its organization as well as the structure of local administration, being nowadays, governance and metropolisation.

2/ Limits of narratives

By definition, urban narratives are meant to make cities more attractive for people and capital in a globalized competition context, thus tending to silence the negative aspects of their city’s development, especially the ones the narrative itself is responsible for. The presentations of the conference offered a critical view of the urban narratives they studied. Pittsburgh’s narrative for example underlines that a former industrial city has become the second most liveable in the USA, while silencing the disparities between white and black people that the Renaissance programs have worsened (i.e. Sabina Deitrick). In Detroit, the adopted narrative is aimed at the newcomers and focuses on the millennials having big projects downtown, forgetting about black people (i.e. Aaron Foley).

The case of local migration policies also reflect the “emptiness” of some urban narratives. As Fleury-Steiner and Longazer say, immigrants are seen as “useful invaders” by welcoming cities because of the economic benefits they bring to the city, while at the same time experiencing exclusion in that same city¹. Like urban narratives exist in a neoliberal framework without questioning it, welcoming narratives often do not take into account the fears of the local population towards immigration (i.e. Stacy Harwood), and some cities that label themselves Welcoming Cities or Sanctuary Cities do not aim at disturbing the social and political framework they operate in (i.e. Rachel Humphris). And in those cases, refusing to act on the existing social and political framework can have negative consequences on migrants, who still suffer local anti-immigrant movements and national anti-immigrant policies.

3/ Alternative narratives ? (Sarah)

Being conscious of the limites and inequalities that official narratives hide, others actors all over the world by different means try to create others narratives. This “alternative” narrative seeks to make hear voices, opinions and histories of people that are invisible in the traditional mediatic space.

Thus, in a institutional way, Aaron Foley, chief storyteller of Detroit, tries to make the voice of LGBTQ or black people be heard. In the traditional new Detroit narrative, the focus is on white millenials and their success. He uses internet to show examples of success by people who belong to sexual, gender or racial minorities. But this “alternative” narrative inserts into the official renewal narrative of Detroit. In fact, the narrative of minorities doesn’t intend to remain alternative but want to transform the official narrative in a more inclusive one.

The Frédéric Barbe’s approach is opposed to such a narrative. The book *Le guide de détourisme de Nantes et Saint-Nazaire* is a direct reaction against the official renewal narrative built by metropoles. It doesn’t aim to be appropriated by the municipality but rather to propose another way to see or discover the city, far from the institutional visions which promote tourism. For example the map of the ZAD of Notre Dames des Landes, is a production that does not want to (and cannot?) be appropriated by the municipality of Nantes. The association “A la criée” seems to propose an “alternative” narrative which contests directly the official one without the ambition to be part of it.

Finally, the project lead by the Collectif X in Saint-Etienne wants to empower people by the collective creation of a narrative about the city. It aims to make people, who belong to low-income social categories, to think about their own city thanks to a sharing of individual and collective experiences. The voice of many people are at the center of the project without the ambition to become official or alternative.

¹ Fleury-Steiner, B. & Longazel, J. (2010). Neoliberalism, Community Development, and Anti-Immigrant Backlash in Hazelton, Pennsylvania. In M. W. Varsanyi (Ed.), *Taking Local Control: Immigration Policy Activism in U.S. Cities and States* (pp. 157-172). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.