



# **‘Making visible the invisibles’**

## **Research on inequalities and injustices in cities and urban environments**

### **Conference**

### **CIVIS Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP)**

27-29 September 2023, Brussels, Belgium

## **Call for papers**

This conference aims to bring together contributions from researchers who have sought, in different ways and in different thematic areas (nature and environment, politics and governance, society and public services, technologies and change, architecture and urban planning etc.), to make the invisible visible, to make the implicit explicit. The format is deliberately interdisciplinary, aimed at encouraging the sharing of concepts and theories, empirical examples and case studies rooted in various urban contexts, territories, institutional contexts. Possible strategies and actions might be based on different methodological approaches. Therefore, the conference is open to researchers from the social sciences (e.g. politics, sociology), humanities (e.g. human geography, history) and the natural sciences, built environment and technology fields (e.g. architecture, planning, civil engineering), as long as their subject of study has a connection with urban spaces.

What does it mean to be invisible in the city? Who and what might we think of as being invisible? And how can we tackle the forces/structures at play in the distribution of (in)visibility in cities and the injustices and inequalities bound-up with them? This international conference looks at how certain groups, issues and species are marginalised in urban life and larger territories, and considers the role researchers can play in creating and tackling these invisibilities.

Urban spaces are characterized not only by their great divides and contests but also by the dominance of certain groups, and functional areas (or ideas) over others. Often, this dominance takes obvious forms in terms of highly visible unequal divisions of wealth, opportunity and power. But frequently such dominance/division can take less visible forms.

In the same way, certain phenomena are not very visible, either because they are difficult to apprehend by our senses, because they seek more or less deliberately to hide themselves, because their frequency or schedule of appearance is atypical or irregular, or simply because nobody pays attention to them. Things can be seen without being looked at, voices heard without being listened to.

The academic world is obviously not immune to these invisibilisation logics in the urban environment and in regional areas. Research funding and timeframes, data collection, disciplinary fragmentation, and epistemological choices are all elements that tend to focus the attention of researchers and therefore to make certain urban inhabitants or certain phenomena which take place in the space invisibly. Working in this direction also means considering urban and landscape regeneration actions as a response to the rights of citizens and residents, specifically the weakest and most vulnerable groups, as well as the growing need for social cohesion and an acceptable quality of life.

The conference is structured around the following research questions, to which contributors are invited to link their interventions:

- What are the blindspots in current urban and territorial research and how can they be identified? What (and where) are the unheard voices, the unresearched phenomena and challenges? What are the implications of these invisibilities?
- Which empirical methodologies or conceptual approaches can be used to explore hidden or discrete phenomena in urban and territorial areas?
- What is the potential of participatory research to build bridges between research and activism and explore under-investigated fields and unheard voices?
- How can the results of research on the invisible (communication and ethical issues) be best visualised, mapped, and disseminated?

## **Main topics suggested**

We suggest a few indicative topics hereafter. We welcome submissions that go beyond the following suggestions but contribute to answering the previous questions. The different panels of the conference will be established depending on the submissions.

### ***Topic 1 - Discover hidden urban nature***

Urban nature may include remnants of primeval landscapes, agricultural land, designed green spaces, and novel wild urban ecosystems (restored ecosystems). Different urban nature invisibility is expected to be analysed depending on location, structure, functionalities, users, investments, management, or interactions. Invisible components of urban nature (e.g. brownfields, wilderness, hidden species, presence of marginalized social groups) are expected to be considered at the same level of priority as invisible dimensions of the most visible components of urban nature (e.g. green areas, urban waters, dominant stakeholders).

### ***Topic 2 - Unveil partial visions in research***

Research can be biased when the researcher places themselves at the center of the investigation. This can result in certain parts of cities and territories becoming invisible, as certain dimensions of space are not considered as data, or some elements are deemed unworthy of attention. This limited perspective can lead to partial visions and incomplete collections, missing key elements that could enrich our understanding of the subject. Moreover, some researchers do not engage with local authors or travel to the places they research, resulting in incomplete or inaccurate portrayals of territories and cultures. We encourage researchers to critically reflect on their own biases and the limitations of their methodologies and explore alternative research methods, such as participatory and community-based research, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

### ***Topic 3 - Make visible and tangible equity in spaces***

The diverse cultural factors affecting the access and living conditions of refugee and immigrant populations in European cities must be considered when building new spaces. Lower socioeconomic backgrounds also suffer from increased health challenges, compounded by the adjustments that come with migration or refugee status. Interdisciplinary design thinking can help to evaluate and consolidate these factors, taking into account input from various experts, including doctors, psychologists, sociologists, politicians, community leaders, and institutional leadership. This approach requires a broader vision of aesthetics and an experiential, cultural, and multi-sensory perspective, helping to reconnect fragile communities with nature and urban spaces.

### ***Topic 4 - Uncovering social invisibility and marginalization***

Social invisibility and marginalization in urban spaces pose significant challenges for individuals, communities, and institutions. This is particularly the case for e.g., homeless people, beggars, elderly people living in isolation, children and youth, and groups affected by segregation and fragmentation of cities. These social groups face difficulties in accessing public spaces, healthcare services, education, and employment opportunities, among others. They also have fewer resources and opportunities to assert their own interests, particularly at the political level.

### ***Topic 5 - Governance, innovations, and digital transformations***

Governance, innovations, and digital transformations in cities and territories can play a significant role in making the invisible less invisible. The emergence of smart city technologies and digital platforms can facilitate access to information and resources for marginalized groups, and enable their participation in decision-making processes. Furthermore, governance models that prioritize equity and social inclusion can help ensure that the needs and interests of all members of a community are taken into account. Innovations in urban planning, such as mixed-use developments and community-led initiatives, can also create more inclusive and sustainable urban spaces. By embracing these approaches, cities and territories can move beyond the traditional paradigm of making the visible more visible, and instead work towards creating more just and equitable societies for all.

# Expected Contributions

We welcome in-presence inter, trans and pluridisciplinary contributions from junior and senior academics, public administration, private companies, and other stakeholders interested in challenges in urban environments.

## Formats

Contributions can take one of the following three formats:

- Classical presentation (15 min) with visual support (e.g. slides)
- A1 poster with a pitching session
- short stand-up pitch: 3 minutes (possibly illustrated by a visual) to present a topic, summarize a result, ask a question to the audience, etc.

## Submission

Abstract submissions must be written in English according to the following criteria:

- An abstract of a maximum of 300 to 500 words.
- Methodological and/or theoretical approaches, main objectives, and preliminary results must be highlighted.
- **Proposals must be submitted by 15 May 2023** via [this form](https://forms.gle/Z4TG3tN32vX2mQqR6).  
(<https://forms.gle/Z4TG3tN32vX2mQqR6>)

## Timeline

- 15 May: abstract submission
- 30 June: abstract acceptance communication
- 15 July: preliminary programme
- 15 September: final programme
- 27-29 September: on-site conference in Brussels

# Organizing Committee

This conference is organized by the CIVIS Hub4 *Cities, Territories, and Mobility*.

## Scientific Committee

ALONSO ALMEIDA Maria del Mar, UAM

BATTISTI Alessandra, SAUR

BEVERIDGE Ross, UofG

GOUSCOS Dimitris, NKUA

HIDALGO Carmen, UAM

IOJA Christian, UB

LANG Stefan, PLUS

LE MAIRE Judith, ULB

LEBRUN Robin, ULB

SBARAGLIA Fanny, ULB

WAYENS Benjamin, ULB

## Practical Information

The conference will take place in Brussels from the 27 September (afternoon) to the 29 September (noon) 2023.

Further practical information will be communicated as soon as possible.

## Contact

E-mail: [makingvisibletheinvisible@gmail.com](mailto:makingvisibletheinvisible@gmail.com)

To submit an abstract, please use the following form <https://forms.gle/Z4TG3tN32vX2mQqR6> or scan the QR code.

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