

CONTESTED URBAN POLICY

breeding concrete utopias

Technische Universität Berlin

30 September – 2 October 2025

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What is the potential for urban policy conflicts to bring about change? In its fourth international conference, the AESOP Planning/Conflict TG pursues further its inquiry into the meaning and role of contention and conflict in democratic urban politics and planning. The focus of the conference is on emergent issues of contention and conflict in the transformation of cities, and on the generative potential for change that may emerge from alternative practices of contestation and mobilization.

This perspective invites exploring contention and conflict as possible drivers and opportunity structures for generating alternatives. While this requires adopting a non-deterministic ontology of emergence, it also requires pushing our understanding of conflict beyond received schemes. Against reducing the radicality of contention and conflict to a matter of negotiated debate and manageable resolution – of ‘taming antagonism’ – as well as against reducing attention to reactive moments of protest and resistance, the conference invites to explore conflict dynamics as constitutive of capacities for actively bringing about alternatives.

While radical democratic theory and critique of the ‘post-political city’ emphasize the need to recover the political as agonistic affirmation of difference, articulations of the debate also point at the variety of social sites and practices wherein this affirmation is possible.

Here the idea of concrete utopia as a form of prefigurative action comes into play. As actualizations of possibilities not-yet-there intimately related to conditions and perceptions of the here-and-now, concrete utopias embody, at the same time, a critique of the present, an affirmation of its contingency, and a concretization of alternative aspirations and intentions. Their prefigurative nature resides in realizing a convergence of motivations and resources for local collective action that merges envisioning and enacting, i.e. capacity of pre-figuration and of pre-formation, of imaging as well as making.

As an expression of insurgent practices, concrete utopias represent political moments in that they establish a link between the critical delegitimization of the present and the praxeological legitimation of alternatives. Just as conflict is a political moment marked by affirmation of the existence of an absence, of a gap, concrete utopias are political moments turning this affirmation into a capacity of envisioning and enacting alternatives.

The conference invites to adopt the idea of concrete utopia as a heuristic, exploratory hypothesis for critical research on urban policy conflicts. By discussing how prefigurative actions and concrete utopias are being experimented in contemporary cities, the conference aims at contributing to exploring how the contestation of urban policies may produce seeds for political transformation.

Call for papers:

Contributions are welcome that address contexts, conditions, and challenges for introducing change in a variety of urban domains of contestation – including, but not limited to work, care, housing, social autonomy and commoning, sustainability transitions, solidarity, and citizenship – both empirically and theoretically.

Submission of paper proposals:

Please submit your paper proposal including

- an abstract of 300-500 words, outlining its relation to the conference theme, conceptual framework and methodology
- three to five keywords
- a short bio-note of up to 100 words, including current affiliation, position and address

before 30 June 2025 to:

planningconflict2025@planningtheory.tu-berlin.de

Preliminary program (t.b.c.):

- two keynote speeches:
Miguel A. Martinez, Uppsala Universitet and
Nanke Verloo, Universiteit van Amsterdam
- thematic paper sessions
- field-trips to related sites in Berlin

Conference fee:

100 Euros / 50 Euros (students) to cover meals and refreshments, due to current budget cuts.

Payment requested together with registration before 15 August 2025.

Receipt of payment is provided.

Scientific committee:

Francesco Campagnari, EHESS Paris
Enrico Gualini, Technische Universität Berlin
Verena Lenna, Vrije Universiteit Brussels
Alessandra Manganelli, Universitat de Barcelona
Miguel A. Martinez, Uppsala Universitet
Stijn Oosterlynk, Universiteit Antwerpen
Carolina Pacchi, Politecnico di Milano
Nanke Verloo, Universiteit van Amsterdam

Concept and organization:

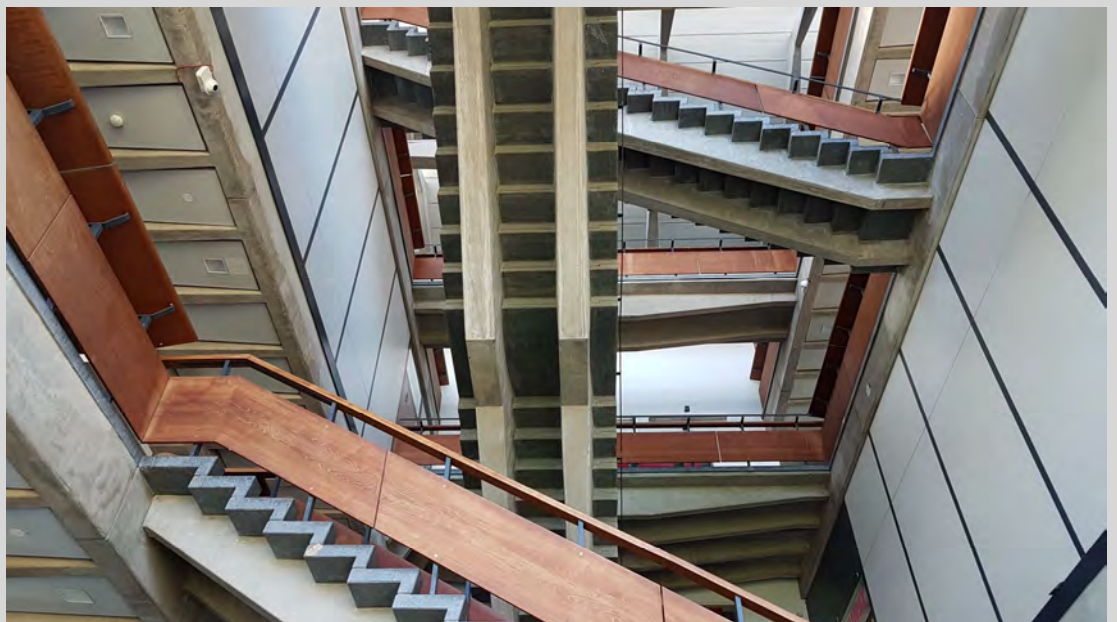
Chair of Planning Theory and
Urban-Regional Policy Analysis
Technische Universität Berlin

Key dates:

- abstract submission: 30 June 2025
- decision on paper proposals: 15 July 2025
- registration deadline: 15 August 2025
- final program: 1 September 2025

Venue:

Technische Universität Berlin, Building A
Straße des 17. Juni 153, 10623 Berlin



Conference link and contact:
<http://www.planningtheory.tu-berlin.de>
planningconflict2025@planningtheory.tu-berlin.de

AESOP Planning/Conflict thematic group link:
<https://aesop-planning.eu/thematic-groups/planning-conflict>

AESOP Planning/Conflict thematic group conference



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