

Call for Papers

AAG Annual Meeting, April 6-10, 2020, Denver, CO, USA

Governing Urban Drug Cultures

Session organizer:

Stefan Höhne (Institut für Kulturwissenschaften (KWI), Essen Germany)

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»Every city is a narcotic city«

Practices of drug use are deeply woven into urban spaces, everyday lives and the contested governance of cities. Since the 1960s, the consumption of both legal and illicit narcotics has become a widespread phenomenon and debated issue around the world, affecting all social classes and milieus in different ways. Within media and political discourse, however, it is predominantly the visibility of drug cultures in urban space that is considered most problematic. Its practices are often linked to specific urban areas, such as 'ghettos', immigrant neighborhoods or other 'spaces of fear'. Drug use and sales are usually associated with marginalized groups, such as homeless, foreign and impoverished populations. Imaginaries of drug users evoke stereotypical and often highly gendered and racialized conceptions of what we call 'narcotic subjects', such as 'junkies', migrants, sex workers or dealers.

Furthermore, these urban geographies of drug use often function as catalysts that trigger public discussions regarding what forms of encounters, practices and exchanges are desired and acceptable in public space. By raising contentious issues like morality and fear – as well as othering and stigmatization – these imaginaries stimulate debates on larger social issues such as exclusion, deviance and integration. However, drugs in urban space can also hold positive connotations when connected to pleasure, relaxation and sociability. In many contexts, drug use has become more normalized and a vital aspect of urban tourism and festivalization.

In this session, we want to explore how practices, discourses and conflicts around public drug use have impacted the fabric of cities. We ask: What imaginary geographies of urban narcotic cultures have emerged? How have cities regulated contested sites of drug use? How do the dynamics of governing the narcotic city shape the modalities of inclusion and exclusion of public space? Which actors and social movements have questioned politics of stigmatization and suggested alternative visions? We are particularly interested in comparative work, trans-local micro geographies as well as in studies that go beyond the punitive dimensions of the 'War on Drugs'.

If you are interested in participating in this session, please send a title and a 250-word abstract to Stefan Höhne (stefan.hoehne@kwi-nrw.de) and Boris Michel (boris.michel@fau.de) until October 15th, 2019. All accepted contributors need to register for the conference and provide their PIN to the organizer by 10 November 2019 in order to be included in the session.

For more on the Governing the Narcotic City Research project visit www.narcotic.city