

KFG UrbRel (2779) | Internal Workshop | Concept Note

Typologising Cities: A Critical Reflection

17 May 2022, Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies

Instead of referring to the general term 'city' – notoriously difficult to define – historians often speak of certain types of cities, highlighting either a key functional aspect or a visible feature of these more or less dense settlements: 'agrotown', 'merchant city', 'port city', 'court city', 'working-class city', 'mining city', 'consumer/producer city', to name but a few. To emphasise certain religious functions, the terms 'bishop town', 'cathedral town', 'monastic town', or, in the Indian context, 'sacred city' or 'temple town' have been introduced to the literature. Historians and historical enquiries, of course, are not the only source of typologies of cities. Over the last century, city planners, geographers, bureaucrats, and social scientists have contributed to the expansion and differentiation of city taxonomies. Some of the most popular categories also used outside academia – like 'smart city' or 'garden city' – are not historical coinages.

This workshop aims at reconstructing where typologisation in urban history came from and what it was intended to achieve, either in a historiographical manner or in terms of the history of scholarship. One starting point is certainly Max Weber's 1921 essay on the city and his (sociological) method of forming ideal types. In European urban historiography, Weber's approach (including a first attempt at urban typification) was widely received and further developed, especially in the *Institut für vergleichende Städtegeschichte* in Münster and in the European project of historic town atlases (HTA).

In the workshop, we want to trace these stages (as well as others, should they have existed) and to follow the question what we gain and what we lose when we assign certain cities to a category based on a supposed main characteristic or function. Are city types applicable only in their respective regional context? After all, what would be the European equivalent of an Indian 'temple town'? Which alternative terms can we use for engaging comparatively with cities? To this aim, papers with comparative ambitions and/or proposing rectifications of received categories are more welcome than mere case studies or historiographical overviews.

The results of this workshop will be published on the open access database Religion and Urbanity online (<https://doi.org/10.1515/urbrel>). For this, we aim to foster projects of co-authorship evolving from the workshop. Participants are expected to pre-circulate their contribution (max. 3 pages, draft versions are accepted) by May 1st.

Recommended Reading

Mumford, Lewis, *The City in History*, New York 1961.

Wilfried Nippel/Hinnerk Bruhns (Hrsg.), *Max Weber und die Stadt im Kulturvergleich*, Göttingen 2011. [darin insbes. Michael Mann]

Ray, Aniruddha. *Towns and Cities of Medieval India: A Brief Survey*. Abingdon 2016.

Sjoberg, Gideon. *Pre-industrial city. Past and present*. New York 1960

Sharma, Yogesh and Pius Malekandathil. *Cities in Medieval India*. Delhi 2014.

Weber, Max: *Die Stadt*, hg. v. Wilfried Nippel (Studienausgabe der Max Weber-Gesamtausgabe I/22-5), Tübingen 2000 [first published in: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 47/3 (1921), p. 621-772].

Werner Freitag, *Stadttypen*. URL: <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Staedtegeschichte/portal/einfuehrung/stadttypen/index.html>, accessed 09.03.2022