Information Systems and Long-Term Urban Management
(end of the 18th- beginning of the 21st century)

International Colloquium
Organized by LATTS and ISCC
with the support of LabEx EHNE and Centre Alexandre-Koyré
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Call for papers

While both the historical and sociological literature already contains a significant body of research exploring the different forms of knowledge and the various practices dedicated to urban management, it has to be recognised that there has been far less work done on the information systems involved in the construction, development and uses of those forms of knowledge and practices.

Because of their original, or even spectacular, features, several recent technological developments, like GPS, digital mapping, real-time display panels or "Big Data", can make us forget that urban managers, whether technicians or politicians, have long employed information systems – i.e. socio-technical systems comprised of human beings, artefacts, and institutions that produce, process, and massively use informational data – of varying sophistication in their effort to control and manage the effects of the urban "revolution" that began in Europe around the 1800s, before spreading worldwide in the 20th century. There is a range of historical examples of such information systems. Haunted by the spectre of fire, the city of London was equipped in the early XVIIIth century with information systems introduced by the insurance firms of the time in a bid to deal with this scourge, while the end of the 1770s witnessed the development of systems designed to handle drowning emergencies in rivers such as the Thames. On the other side of the Channel, in the 1840s, engineers in the Paris city technical departments installed information systems, which allocated an individual record to every street and building in the capital describing their "hydraulic" status (equipment, subscription conditions…). In the early decades of the 20th century, several urban transport firms in the United States undertook large-scale surveys to collect data about the mobility of city dwellers, and processed this information with the "tabulation machines" of the era in order to optimise the design and performance of their transport networks. From the 1950s and 1960s onwards, air pollution in Paris has been subject to systematic measures, thanks to the implementation of a vast array of sensors throughout the city, while the setting up of Airparif in 1979 institutionalized the management of air pollution in the French capital. It is also worth noting that police departments didn't wait for the advent of video surveillance in order to be interested in traffic data. Telecommunications systems, such as the telephone system and, especially, the

various cable networks have been enlisted in various attempts to redesign the city through the creation of new forms of conviviality and sociability.

What if "past" and "present" could cast reciprocal light on each other? That is the idea behind this colloquium, which aims to be multidisciplinary, open to international comparison and the study of transnational movements, and to favour analyses over the *longue durée*. Historians, geographers, sociologists and practitioners are therefore invited to explore the long-term history of the information systems involved in urban management, particularly – but not exclusively – in light of the following questions:

1) **The characteristics and uses of information systems**: The aim here is to identify the big trends in these characteristics and uses (for example, the rise of real-time, with all the associated questions of computation and information presentation).

2) **The actors**: The objective here is to identify the significant changes in the systems of actors (producers and users) gravitating towards these information systems. To judge by the changes observed in a series of domains, such as transport, it would seem, for example, that we are witnessing a gradual withdrawal of public authorities as central players, both in production and uses, "offset" by the emergence of an ensemble of private actors who have succeeded in establishing close relations with the world of research (cf. Google and its products). This withdrawal of public authorities has also made it possible for civil society actors to develop their own information systems, in environment-related domains in particular.

3) **The consequences of the changes in these information systems for the design, development, operation, maintenance, and transformations of urban networks:** there is a need for analysis of the interaction decisional dialogue that is established, depending on the tools available, between these systems and the services provided by urban networks, about the impact of these systems on professional practices and jobs in urban and city networks, and about the question of the "supply and demand" equations, in terms of mobility for example.

4) **Information systems as "analysers":** Possessing particular material characteristics, backed by specific actors, the construction and uses of these systems can also bear witness to wider economic, social and cultural changes in urban societies. One example is the eloquently named "trip-desire charts" produced in the 1940s-1950s in order to find out what kind of urban travel American households were interested in, founded on the idea of the individual as free to travel at will, whose aspirations the engineer had to fulfil by providing the appropriate technical (infrastructural) resources, such as, in this case, urban expressways.

Lasting two days, the colloquium will be followed by a collective publication in the form of a special issue of the journal *Flux*.
Proposals of (twenty-minute) presentations are to be sent to the following address by the 30th of October 2015: sysinfogeslur2016@cnrs.fr

Each proposal (in English or French) should include a title and a text of around 400 words, accompanied by a short CV of the author

Replies to authors will be sent by November 30, 2015

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