

The City as a Laboratory (Essen, 30 Sep–2 Oct 26)

Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen (KWI), Germany, Sep 30–Oct 2, 2026

Registration deadline: Sep 15, 2026

Christine Beese, KHI FU Berlin

International Conference: The City as a Laboratory – Building, Urban Infrastructures and Knowledge-Making in the Early Modern Period.

Organisers: Christine Beese, Junior Professor at the Department of Art History at Ruhr University Bochum (Germany) and Merlijn Hurx, Professor at the Department of Architecture at KU Leuven (Belgium).

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Main Supporter: Fritz Thyssen Foundation

Today, cities and metropolitan areas have emerged as leading hubs of innovation across the globe, driven by favourable ecosystems that combine high concentrations of tech enterprises, universities, and capital. This dominance has deep historical roots, reaching back to the late medieval and early modern periods, when cities began to function as experimental laboratories. Urban centres served as so-called trading zones where actors from diverse backgrounds actively engaged in creating, implementing, and disseminating knowledge to shape and advance urban conditions. From scientists to craftspeople, from the church to the courts, people with different institutional, social, and cultural backgrounds contributed to the formation of an urban body that was constituted by and continually reshaped through their knowledge-making.

This conference aims to shed light on the city as a contact zone and as both a subject and an object of knowledge-making. We situate architecture and civil engineering within a broader field of knowledge production in order to explore the paths and conditions of technological and cultural change.

Programme:

30.09.2026 Wednesday

09:30–10:15 Christine Beese (Bochum, Germany) and Merlijn Hurx (Leuven, Belgium): Welcome and Introduction

10:15–11:00 Nicole Falconi (Bochum, Germany): Constructing Anatomical Theatres in Ibero-American Hospitals: Surgeons, Architects and Craftsmen as Collaborators in the 18th and 19th Centuries

11:15–12:00 Giedrė Jarulaitienė (Drammen, Norway): Johan Daniel Berlin: Architect of the Enlightenment City

12:00–12:45 Sebastian Fitzner (Bochum, Germany): Scaling the City – Architectural Models as Knowledge Repositories in the Early Modern Period

13:45–14:30 Marc Nötges (Kaiserslautern, Germany): Imagined Cities, Model Worlds: Architectural Capricci as Pictorial Models

14:30–15:15 Pedro Gonçalves (Paris, France): Pierre Patte's Organic Vision of the City

15:30–16:15 Caroline Fußbach and Maurice Parussel (Bochum, Germany): The City Book 'Civitates Orbis Terrarum' Between Geography and Chorography

16:15–17:00 Marie Krüger (Bochum, Germany): Shaping the City of Knowledge: The Leiden University Print Series

17:15–18:45 Bert De Munck (Antwerp, Belgium): Crafting the Urban Body Politic: The Epistemological Foundations of the Early Modern City (Keynote)

01.10.2026 Thursday

09:30–10:15 Davide Martino (Brussels, Belgium): Terraqueous Cities: The Early Modern Art of Governing Water

10:15–11:00 Fatma Sarıkaya-Işık (Ankara, Turkey): Measured Waters: Water Infrastructure and Urban Knowledge in Early Modern Istanbul

11:15–12:00 Ludovica Galeazzo (Padua, Italy): Building and Governing a Watery Periphery: The Venetian Lagoon Archipelago in the Early Modern Period

12:00–12:45 Emma Bekaert (Leuven, Belgium): From Galley to Ground: The Venetian Arsenal and the Development of Early Modern Foundation Expertise

13:45–14:30 Vincent Vanhamme (Leuven, Belgium): Searching for Knowledge: Governing the Construction of the Sixteenth-Century Sasseevaart

14:30–15:15 Nicoletta Marconi (Rome, Italy): Building in Rome Between the 17th and 19th Centuries: A Crossroads of Practices, Technical Experimentation, and Dissemination of Knowledge

15:30–16:15 Elisabeth Deans (Cambridge, England): Architectural Intelligence: Building as a Matter of the State

16:15–17:00 Anna-Luna Post (Leiden, The Netherlands): Cities, Essay Prizes, and Academies in the Eighteenth-Century Dutch Republic

02.10.2026 Friday

09:30–10:15 Cristiano Guarneri and Ines Ivić (Venice, Italy): Circulation of Architectural Knowledge in Ragusa (Dubrovnik) After the Great Earthquake of 1667

10:15–11:00 Charles van den Heuvel (Amsterdam, The Netherlands): Mechanics Mosaics: Interwoven Knowledge of Engineering in the Low Countries (ca. 1570–1670)

10:00–11:45 Karel Davids (Amsterdam, The Netherlands): The Limits of Innovations: Urban Infrastructures in Early Modern Amsterdam Compared with Other European Cities

11:45–12:30 Final Discussion

14:00–16:00 Guided Tour to the Top of the Bell Tower of Salvator Church in Duisburg and Visit to the Duisburg City Museum

Further information can be found here:
https://kgi.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/portfolio-item/conference_city_as_laboratory_2026/.

Reference:

CONF: The City as a Laboratory (Essen, 30 Sep-2 Oct 26). In: ArtHist.net, Jul 14, 2026 (accessed Jul 14, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/53467>>.