Session at AISU (Genoa, 7-10 Sep 27)

13th AISU Congress, Genoa, Sep 7–10, 2027
Deadline: Oct 18, 2026

Giulia Zanon

Session 3.7: Sharing and Contending Space: Devotional Confraternities in Early Modern Cities.
Convenors: Giulia Zanon (Università di Verona); Francesca Ferrando (Università degli Studi di Genova).

Devotional confraternities have played a significant role in shaping and defining European urban settings. Their presence was evident in their management of spaces within religious buildings, such as chapels and altars, as well as in the construction of new buildings. Confraternal spaces were places of devotion, ritual, and social interaction, but also contexts in which collective identities, social hierarchies, and power relations were defined and negotiated. The material and visual culture of the confraternities – from architecture to devotional objects, from works of art to processional paraphernalia – further helped shape the urban experience and provided tools through which groups and communities represented themselves and asserted their presence in public space. Confraternities provide a privileged vantage point for investigating the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that characterised early modern societies. While some associations restricted access based on gender, social group, profession, or economic means, others offered opportunities for participation and representation to often marginalised groups, such as women, people with disabilities, migrants, or religious minorities. In this sense, the spaces of the confraternities could serve as both instruments of social control and places for the expression of identity. Coexistence within the same urban contexts required forms of negotiation, but it could also give rise to conflicts over the management of spaces, devotional practices, and access to resources. On other occasions, however, the presence of close collaborations attests to the existence of networks built around shared interests. This session invites contributions that explore confraternities as spaces of interaction, representation, conflict, and negotiation. Studies focusing on the social uses of space, the construction of collective identities, expressions of female agency, material and visual culture, ritual and processional practices, as well as the relationships between confraternities, religious institutions, and civic authorities are particularly welcome. Through these perspectives, the session aims to foster reflection on the role of confraternities in community-building and in defining the social, cultural, religious and gendered spaces in early modern Europe.

Please submit your paper proposal using the dedicated congress webpage: https://aisuinternational.org/en/genova-2027-sessioni-macrosessione-3-proposta-paper/

A number of participation grants will be awarded to early-career scholars under the age of 35 (as of 31 August 2027), for more details see: https://aisuinternational.org/en/genova-2027-borse-di-partecipazione/

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us: giulia.zanon@univr.it; francescaferrando88@hotmail.it.

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