



Call for Papers

**Between Families and Institutions:
Towards a Comparative History of Urban Communities, 1350-1600**

International Workshop, European University Institute, Florence, 27 April 2012

The social organisation of medieval and early modern urban communities has long been debated, particularly the significance of norms, networks and institutions for advancing social integration and cohesion. Pre-modern urban life is sometimes thought to have rested on a lost form of association rooted in kinship, friendship and neighbourhood. Others argue that these relations were particular and primordial: genuine trust and solidarity based on reciprocity are then regarded as properties of modern society. More recently, the emergence of corporation-based institutions (guilds, fraternities, neighbourhoods, etc.) in medieval cities and towns has drawn much attention. These voluntary associations, by generating social capital, gave rise to political stability, fostered economic growth and strengthened societal cohesiveness; and, as such, they shaped urban civil society.

The last conclusion has met with general acceptance, even though we still do not know how voluntary associations contributed to the well-being of both townsmen and urban society as a whole. This workshop, therefore, addresses the question as to how membership of trade and craft guilds and religious fraternities benefited individuals and how these organisations strengthened the cohesiveness of medieval and early modern European urban communities. It aims to scrutinise the social texture of these corporations and how their various roles in urban society developed over time, thereby challenging participants to re-examine existing data and re-evaluate current theories. The comparative perspective of the workshop should also be instructive in determining the factors that explain variations in the role of voluntary associations as integrative forces in urban society, particularly between southern and north-western Europe.

The call for papers, therefore, aims to attract contributions on the following themes:

- 1) *Structure and membership*: Under what conditions did guilds and fraternities emerge as the collective consequence of cooperation between individuals? How did the growth and institutionalisation of these voluntary associations affect their internal organisation and members' participation? Which segments of urban society had access to guilds and fraternities, i.e. how did mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion operate? And, to what extent were these multi-layered voluntary associations shaped by kinship ties or ingrained in neighbourhoods?
- 2) *Functions and beneficiaries*: How did the secondary political, social or cultural functions of guilds and fraternities relate to their core economic or religious purposes? Were secondary functions – for example social assistance – important motives for joining voluntary associations? Did benefits of



membership also extend to the families of members? And, to what extent and how did these organisations produce public goods that benefited the urban community as a whole?

- 3) *Institutional contexts*: What kind of linkages and interactions (particularly through overlapping social networks) existed between guilds and fraternities and urban religious and secular institutions? To what degree was their organisation and functioning determined by variations in the wider urban institutional framework? And, to what extent did differences in family structures and household formation patterns affect the social role of guilds and fraternities in urban society?
- 4) *Ideology and culture*: Did ideological, religious and cultural norms and beliefs emerge that strengthened cooperation within guilds and fraternities? Were the religious and cultural activities of voluntary associations interwoven with urban festivities, and to what extent did they fit into an overarching urban ideology? And, did these activities contribute to or harm the social cohesiveness of urban communities?

Early career researchers and researchers working on southern Europe are particularly encouraged to participate.

Please send abstracts of around 250 words for 20-minute papers to the organiser, Dr Arie van Steensel (arie.vansteensel@eui.eu).

Deadline for abstracts is 15 December 2011.

The workshop will take place on Friday, 27 April 2012, at the European University Institute (EUI), Department of History and Civilization, Florence, Italy.

Selected paper participants will receive reimbursement for accommodation expenses.

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