

MLA 2023 (January 5th - 8th, San Francisco, CA)
Association for Literary Urban Studies

Literary Urban Studies and City Planning

This session gathers papers that consider how work in literary urban studies draws from and contributes to scholarship in city planning, architecture, and other design fields. Our session is motivated by the intersection of a recent “narrative turn” in the design professions and “spatial turn” in literary and cultural studies. In this session, we are interested in bringing together papers by scholars working in literary urban studies to identify approaches to meaningful collaborations in scholarship, teaching, and public engagement between literary studies scholars and scholars in design fields. This session is organized together with the Association for Literary Urban Studies (ALUS; <https://blogs.helsinki.fi/hlc-n/>).

Scholarship on the spatial turn generally engages with how literary texts can address the complex layers of memory, affect, and kinship that co-constitute experiences of built and non-built environments. As literary studies scholar Pamela K. Gilbert argues in her discussion of the “spatial turn” in literary studies, “human experience of space is always mediated by human relations with the world, material and discursive.” Gilbert goes on to suggest that literary texts are particularly useful for describing these processes of mediation.

Scholarship on the “narrative turn” in city planning considers what planning scholar Leonie Sandercock similarly describes as the process of storytelling implicit in describing urban spaces. Sandercock argues that, “in order to imagine the ultimately unrepresentable spaces, lives, and languages of the city, to make them legible, we translate them into narratives.” Thinking between conversations that extend from the “narrative turn” in planning and the “spatial turn” in literary and cultural studies, we welcome contributions that consider how the strategies of literary studies and design fields can most productively inform one another.

Our conversation builds upon the intersection of these overlapping strategies in literary studies and planning, as well as work like literary urban studies scholar Lieven Ameel’s invitation for planners and humanists alike to read literary texts and planning documents together, as well as recent work in city planning, architecture, and other design fields that uses humanistic methods to address questions of infrastructure, power, and justice.

We hope that the papers in this session will contribute to a conversation that reads the entanglement of literary urban studies and scholarship in city planning and other design fields to identify practical modes of collaborative research, teaching, and outreach related to urban and spatial justice. In this session, we aim to situate literary urban studies as an important interlocutor for contemporary conversations about urban futures. These conversations draw on city planning, architecture, and other design fields, and also on shared engagements in the environmental humanities, Indigenous studies, postcolonial critique, critical race theory, and feminist and queer studies. Please send an abstract of 250-300 words and a short bio to wlanigan@govst.edu, eprieto@ucsb.edu, and dknittle@sas.upenn.edu by March 18th, 2022.