

Attending to Early Modern women: Remapping Routes and Spaces

Workshop: Gender in the European Town: women's impact on their urban communities

Elaine Chalus, Anne Montenach and Deborah Simonton

Summary:

The international research network, Gender in the European Town, funded by the Danish Research council, has brought together new and established scholars from twelve countries to explore the place of gender in three interrelated areas that shaped the development of the early-modern town: the economy, politics and civic identity, and real and imagined space. This workshop will draw upon the extensive conversations the project has engendered, not only about the changing dynamics of gender and towns over time, but also about the challenges posed in writing a comparative European history that extends beyond the Anglo-Franco-German axis to incorporate explicitly the Nordic region, thus raising questions both about the complexities of pan-European gendered ideals (and how and where these were intersected and/or modified by local or national norms), and about the nature of the European town itself.

Organisers:

Deborah Simonton, Associate Professor of British History, University of Southern Denmark. Her research focuses on women, gender and the economy in eighteenth-century Europe, while her interest in urban history relates to the workplace and use of urban space. Having taught politics, sociology and history, she brings an interdisciplinary approach to her research.

Anne Montenach, Lecturer in Early Modern History, University of Aix-Marseille, France. Following research on the early modern urban economy with a special emphasis on informal circulations and exchange, she has turned to working on the history of smuggling in the South-Alpine communities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and is identifying how women were pivotal to urban economies, both illicit and legitimate.

Elaine Chalus, Senior Lecturer in History, Bath Spa University, England. As an expert in gender and political culture, Dr Chalus has helped to reconfigure the way that historians understand women's place in, and contribution to, political life in Britain in the long eighteenth century. Her current research considers women's contribution to the creation of the vibrant eighteenth-century extra-parliamentary nation through their use of clothing, colour and adornment to politicize space.

Workshop Description:

The period from about 1600 is fundamental to how our cities have developed and shapes our contemporary understanding of towns and the way they work in cultural, spatial and gendered ways. The idea of the city is central to contemporary practices, which draw on ideas and imagined spaces of the past. As places which fostered and disseminated key social, economic, political and cultural developments, towns were central to the creation of gendered identities and the transmission of ideas across local, national and transnational boundaries. The research network Gender in the European Town is interjecting gender into European urban historiography and therefore altering perspectives on urban identity and development. The marriage of concepts 'gender', 'urban' and 'Europe' is innovative and lends itself to many approaches and interpretations. Recent research on women, gender, towns and the emergence of polite and commercial society concentrates largely on British, and especially English, historiography. It only tangentially engages with Europe, and frequently ignores significant research on Danish and other Nordic towns. Consequently, while European scholars are working on European towns, no current integrated research in Europe attempts to grapple with the umbrella of questions we are considering. In this respect, the presenters of this workshop represent the breadth and diversity of the group as feminist scholars based in three different countries and European regions, and able to reflect on research in Britain, Southern Europe and Scandinavia. Importantly, we wish to address the lacunae created by ignorance of the Nordic dimension. Asking new questions and exploring and comparing experience in a range of towns across Europe, the

network intends to contribute to a wider understanding of the spaces, places and dynamics that shaped the urban European world.

Our network focuses around three themes: Space and Place; Economy; Political Culture. This research explores relationships of gender, space, workplace, commerce, trade and sociability and will promote a wider understanding of the issues of gender and urban experience. These three central themes project speak directly to newer ideas of exploring the dynamics of culture – both as definition and as practice. Importantly, ‘political culture’ does not mean politics as it is usually defined, but refers to power and influence. Thus, how power was legitimated and understood was important in creating a space for women and for gendered political culture, which was not always contest and tension, but often collaboration and collusion. Similarly, urban economic culture is embedded in the meanings attributed to expertise, skill and ‘brotherhood’. However, commercial and capitalist culture increasing broke down some of the corporate protection that men had felt, while individual identity, class and status were often as important. In this context, masculinity and femininity became areas for dispute and renegotiation. Ultimately ‘space and place’ are central to understanding the cultural dynamics of towns. The kinds of spaces that developed, the places that people could and did use, and the people who constructed them are all significant. Physical spaces operate as landmarks, as memory sites, and places of congregation and social intercourse. There is no doubt that the cultural investment of public spaces, particularly of urban spaces, is a complex process of appropriation and adaptation.

The workshop will concentrate on women’s participation in their urban communities based on the three themes of economy, civic identity and use of space and place in early modern European towns, and will aim to develop a conversation about key issues and themes. The workshop will begin with very brief presentations in order to bring out the comparative nature of our research and to pose the kinds of research questions and issues, which we would like to explore further with workshop participants in conversation.

Some Research Questions

What is the contribution of gender to the culture of towns over time?

In what ways did men and women articulate their relationship to the urban economy?

In what ways is urban space, gendered, appropriated and adapted?

What part does gender play in the construction of civic identity?

How did the pragmatism of everyday urban life reflect changing notions of gender?

How does myth and ritual shape and/or reflect the gendered dynamics of the European town?

What part did gender play in the construction of local, national, international networks?

Our approach has enabled us to ask questions that urban history has tended not to ask, since in many respects the gendered character of towns has not been central to traditional urban history. We intend to broaden our idea about the development and legacy of towns in this period and contribute to a wider understanding of women’s role in the spaces, places and dynamics that shaped the early modern world.

Eighteenth-century towns

Adapted from Deborah Simonton, ‘Gendering work in eighteenth-century towns’, in Margaret Walsh, ed., *Working out Gender, Perspectives from Labour History* (London: Ashgate, 1999), pp. 29-47 and *Women in European Culture and Society, Gender Skill and Identity from 1700*, Routledge, 2010.

Many towns and cities of eighteenth-century Europe experienced significant, often rapid, growth. For example Aberdeen expanded from just over 10 000 in 1755 to over 16 000 by the 1790s, Berlin grew

from 8000 in 1648 to 170 000 in 1790; the population of Copenhagen quadrupled between 1660 and 1760 while London increased by a third in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹ At the same time towns were at the centre of commercial developments which meant that more goods and services were available to support the urban community. The middle-classes were developing an identity and an awareness of their position, and the processes of industrial and commercial change meant that there was greater tension between the 'employers' and the 'workers.' Significantly workplace relations were undergoing important transformations which were neither uniform in effect nor which took the same route in towns across Europe. ...

There was a steadily rising female to male sex-ratio in the growing cities of Europe with an expanding range of jobs open to women. In 1720 the population was 55 per cent female in Geneva and 61 per cent in Aberdeen.² Yet, as Pam Sharpe has written, 'urban history has so far made little of the fact that towns were often areas with populations in which women predominated.'³ *The Statistical Account for Scotland* stressed the importance of accommodation, employment opportunities and rural emigration, points echoed in Sharpe's work on Colchester:

Besides the temptations of cheap commodious houses, of easy access to fuel, and to all the necessaries and comforts of life from our vicinity to the port and the market of Aberdeen and of the high probability of finding employment from some of the many manufactories carried on in our neighbourhood, induce many old women, and many of the widows and daughters of farmers and tradesmen, to leave the country and reside in this parish while their sons have either settled as farmers in their native place, or gone abroad or entered into the army or the navy.⁴

Though the urban world could be a minefield with the risk of destitution leading to prostitution amongst other dangers, it also represented opportunity for married and unmarried women. Although precarious, furnished rooms, lodging houses, and networks of women, not to mention shops and taverns with prepared food meant that women could live alone and survive. ...

Status, position and gender

Permeating eighteenth-century society was a belief in the right order of things. Status and one's social position in the rank order of society were paramount in many people's minds. Reminiscent of Pope's 'vast chain of being,' Clara Reeve stressed 'in a well regulated state, a right and true subordination is beautiful, where every order is kept in its proper state.'⁵ Public identity was defined by birth, property, occupation and, collectively, by rank in the social order. However 'most women were defined by the honour of their presiding male.'⁶ People did not perceive monolithic or homogenized classes, but groupings of a number of echelons, each represented by a variety of characteristics. Contemporary writers referred to the lower orders or middling orders for just such a reason. King's and Colquhoun's ordering of society based on income lend weight to this assertion as does Defoe's ranking according to consumption. Similarly examples from the Continent divided the three (and sometimes four) estates into several subdivisions. Within each level, there were a number of minute gradations which were important in creating status differentiation and defining one's place in society. The political economist Antoine de Montchrestien argued that the third estate was composed of three sorts of men, labourers, artisans and merchants.⁷ Defoe was at great pains to distinguish tradesmen from manufacturers and artisans on the one hand and peddlers on the other, and 'As there are several degrees of people employed in trade below [tradesmen] ..., such as *workmen, labourers*, and servants; so there is a degree of traders above them, which we call *merchants*.'⁸

Along with the sense of industrial and scientific improvement and a feeling of growing prosperity, social aspirations governed the actions of wide sections of society across Europe. As Dorothy Marshall explained, 'class distinctions were important and gave form and order to everyday living, but created no insurmountable barrier to either economic or individual progress.'⁹ Thus the belief in improvement often translated into the desire for social advancement, for upward social mobility. Industrial and economic change brought structural changes in occupational relationships which affected social position. Old distinctions between labourer and artisan were blurred by increasing employment of waged labour under skilled foremen instead of journeymen qualified by apprenticeship. Increasing

affluence, particularly for sectors of the middling orders, put them in a better position to assume the trappings of those above them in the social hierarchy. Better incomes led to a more pretentious social life for many Essex farmers and the smaller professional groups. The falling demand for Essex baize undermined clothiers, while successful artisans began to rise in prominence.¹⁰ In Paris, tension between masters and men, and concern to keep men tied to their work and place was a recurrent theme, which resulted in *lettres patentes* in 1749 with the clear purpose of controlling workers' movements.¹¹ Similar mobility operated for those in the lower orders, both male and female, who were able to 'better themselves' through apprenticeship or movement through the servant hierarchy.¹² The anxiety about social mobility was illustrated by a German writing in 1722, 'it would be better if everyone kept his station.'¹³

At the same time, ideological and social change resulted in a reworking of gender so that women's roles became central to defining social status. New scientific thought and the Enlightenment reshaped the Judeo-Christian tradition that depicted women as evil and dangerous and added new and extremely durable theoretical justifications for legal, economic, social and educational disabilities. The bourgeoisie was significant in creating gender roles defined in terms of public and private spheres and emphasising domesticity for females. Although the new middle classes shared Enlightenment criticisms of absolutism, 'they adhered to tradition when it came to the role and rights of woman.'¹⁴ ...

Politeness, sociability and civic identity

The urban context also meant changes in the ideas of towns, with many developing a self-image that fostered a drive for status, sociability and civility. Eighteenth-century urban history has been concerned with the emergence of polite culture, the increasing sociability of towns and a sense of urban identity.¹⁵ Display and the image of the town created new meanings associated with commerce and polite society, while many towns witnessed a drive for status, sociability and civility. Growth of civic pride and self-confidence was a key element in the variety and vitality of provincial culture. Roey Sweet has argued that enhanced awareness of other towns, as well as of wider society, 'encouraged a more positive formulation of civic consciousness amongst those who participated in such activities.'¹⁶ Local pride and an active sense of civic identity mark out urban attitudes in the late eighteenth-century and in many towns we see programmes of rebuilding and new civic architecture. The building of Edinburgh's New Town is a prime example. Many towns of all sizes increasingly projected an identity derived from a newer bustling commercial culture situated in part in *laissez faire* ideas that overlay and mingled with older ideas of status and standing that were personal and linked to corporate identity through artisanal traditions and honour. Shopping and luxury consumption could take place anywhere, and many elite ordered their goods from afar. But most shopping took place in towns and the recipients of those orders usually were urban.

Notably much of the new ideas about towns and the implementation of urban renewal relied on the resources and intervention of the middle classes. These were precisely the people who shaped the gendered structures of towns through their new interpretation of status and reputation. Along with a sense of industrial improvement and growing prosperity, there was a 'dizzy sense of opportunity' with the growth of trade and new prospects for men, with spinoffs for others like officials, lawyers and doctors who serviced the trading community.¹⁷ Urban political culture and spaces were largely perceived as male, entrenched by male control of civic processes, from running local councils to their memberships of social clubs.

This vibrant urban context is important since it provided the backdrop to the luxury trades and provided consumers who gobbled them up. Certainly many villages had shops and producers who would make up goods for people, but this was small scale and usually local. The growth of changes in material culture built on the growth in demand, largely from middling and elite consumers. Letters and account books make it obvious that these purchasers sought out fashion and to them fashion simply did not exist in the parochial rural world—it was urban and cosmopolitan, not rural and parochial. In this polite urban culture, historians have increasingly positioned women as arbiters of sociability and as consumers. And as historians of political culture have argued women were also centrally involved in the developing political culture of towns using visiting, entertaining, patronage and networks in the

development of political capital. As Elaine Chalus has argued:

As family representatives, or in conjunction with political men, most women took part in activities between elections which carried subliminal or blatantly political messages. Some, such as assemblies, balls, breakfasts, dinners and race meets, were unquestionably public; others, including Public Days at local great houses, special dinners for the local Corporations, or entertainments that catered for freeholders and their wives, all took place in the private setting of the home and are less easily classifiable. Even mundane or intimate socializing, such as teas, cards and visits, often had political implications.¹⁸

Thus the sociable and polite world of the eighteenth-century town took on a new face with important implications for how women related to the metaphorical and physical spaces and places of towns.

Corporatism and its challenges

Towns tended to be built on a foundation of corporatism and *ancien régime* societies' self-perception stressed corporate identity and organisation. In this context the 'profundity of the divide between skill and lack of skill offers a key to understanding the insistent concern of those without skill, or whose skills were at risk, to create or consolidate their own associative structures.'¹⁹ Woolf thus explains the tendency for endogamous marriage of widows within trades in order to retain an *effective* if not *legal* membership in the corporation, which is reflective of a widespread need to achieve corporate identity. Corporate identity had a number of important implications for control of community and maintenance of custom, and particularly helped protect small masters from the implications of free enterprise. Corporate regulation helped protect trades, maintain quality and regulate the workplace and through it the community. ...

Custom and control in the workshop, divisions of labour and the political and economic life of many towns inhibited women's access to certain trades and occupations. The extent of such restrictions depended on the ability of male power structures to limit women's work, which in turn depended on the corporate structure of the town. Thus those towns which were not governed by guilds and corporate regulations might have provided women more opportunities than those which were. Despite regional and national differences, the working experiences of urban women throughout Europe were strikingly alike. Changes in institutional structures, methods of production, ideologies and conditions of labour supply influenced them in similar ways and shaped the character of their work. Most European city economies were dominated by guilds and the corporate structures and controls which came with them. The effect was to link economic, social and political roles in explicit and implicit ways which had important ramifications for rank and status, but which also had particular meaning for women's role in urban society. Although there were female guilds, notably in Cologne, Paris and Rouen, and women gained admission to some male guilds, they were essentially masculine organizations which paralleled the male life cycle, reflecting in their structure and rules aspects of male rites of passage. Guild regulation of the workplace, and of access to it through apprenticeship and mastership rules, helped imbed masculinity into artisanal work and to define as male work which was perceived as skilled. These regulations were about control and exclusion. Whilst they existed to maintain standards of production, they were equally intended to hold up prices and prevent unskilled labour from undermining their position. ...

During the century, workplace tensions were exacerbated by a fundamental split over protection of the workplace and retention of property of skill on one hand and pressures for unregulated free enterprise on the other. At the same time, the occupational controls of guilds and apprenticeship seemed to loosen, because many workers lay outside that structure. Additionally, the hierarchy of trades underwent disorientation in the fluid economic situation where time-honoured occupations declined, and new ones rose to take their place. This situation created uncertainty about status and heightened a concern for maintaining social distinctions. It was often a very fine job for craft guilds and civil authorities to establish and maintain right between masters and men and between small and large masters, especially in the fluid market of the eighteenth century. Each expected their position to be protected, and their rights not to be abused. As Arlette Farge explained, there were three opposing

concepts at work: the desire of the authorities to see that the power of the masters was not undone, thus guaranteeing the policing of the realm; economists on the look-out for opportunities to suppress corporations which held back industrialisation, and wage earners using an alliance with masters to gain the right to set up on their own, whilst also undermining the system by breaking contracts to take on more advantageous ones.²⁰

Economic opinion which favoured removal of trade restrictions was aggressively opposed to apprenticeship. Adam Smith's classical statement of this position gave theoretical force to views which were already widely held across Europe. ... The thrust of his attack was precisely that few trades required extensive skills to practice them. ... Smith saw apprenticeship as a deliberate attempt by craftsmen to restrain competition, and protect their own position and earnings. In the climate of free ebullient competition, with the abolition of apprenticeship 'the publick [sic] would be a gainer, the work of all artificers coming in this way much cheaper to market.'²¹ The same approach lay behind Turgot's short-lived edict of 1776 banning guilds and masterships, making the exercise of all trades free.²² In opposition to the forces of free trade stood skilled workers who wished to protect their position within a trade and the trade's position within the economic and social structure. Smith argued that apprenticeship regulations offended against the property each worker had in his own labour. In contrast, skilled workers maintained that apprenticeship conferred a particular property right to the exclusive exercise of their trade. ... As pressures grew on guilds from competition by merchants putting work out to unincorporated areas, from new unregulated trades, from governments which reflected *laissez faire* attitudes, and from shifts in the economic structure of Europe which undermined many older trades, guild members became ever more assiduous in asserting their right to control labour and production. The challenge to guild structures and long-standing working practices meant that men had to fight to retain their place in the labour market.

The Urban Economy

The Economy grouping of researchers has concentrated on two key areas: 'female agency in the eighteenth-century urban economy' and 'gender and luxury in the urban economy'. We have a book contract for the first of these and are developing a second focusing on luxury. The 'Agency' book will be our first publication drawing on our pan-European network of established and postgraduate historians from twelve countries whose interests lie in examining the ways that the European urban experience was gendered over time and across borders.

Situated in eighteenth-century urban culture, it explores the activities and agency of women in these commercial communities. Towns were often the motivators for economic change, controlling trade and capital formation, and the disseminators of culture. Guild traditions with their primacy on skill and brotherhood formed the foundation of most European towns, which was increasingly challenged by *laissez faire* ideas and the rapid growth of commercial and much more open market forces. Women as well as men had to learn to navigate these shifting economic spaces. Thus our research addresses a number of questions, which speak to how women specifically negotiated and articulated their relationship to the gendered urban economy.

Even though women appear to be everywhere in the preindustrial urban economy, many historians have failed to see them, while relatively few urban historians have noted and articulated their presence. Urban histories have not only tended to slide over women, but they have positively constructed the economy as a man's world. Economic growth and the urban economy 'are represented as the product of largely masculine agency.'²³ This unfortunate tendency has obscured some of the important research, which has been published on women and the eighteenth-century economy, and relegated it to 'women history', as though it had no real relevance for urban research. In a landmark article some years ago, Maxine Berg asked, 'What Difference did women's work make?', in this case to the industrial revolution.²⁴ We would ask what difference did women and gender make to urban development and the shape of the town and specifically to the urban economy.

The members of the group are mainly working on local studies. In the context of the project summarised above, these studies will provide detailed snapshots of specific localities while addressing

transnational European questions relating to the diversity of law, legal constraints and capacities, as well as of social status and of lifecycle, such as, maids, married women, spinsters, widows. Thus, we recognise difference, but within that look for linkages in women's experiences.

Many members of the network are specialists on the eighteenth century, so it was natural to draw on this expertise and interests. At the same time, the eighteenth century is traditionally seen as marked by the emergence of the modern world and the growth of the European nation-state, and especially in the shaping of North-western European culture. The long eighteenth century was also a significant moment in reshaping urban economies. As suggested above, corporate structures of many towns were under stress, often from free male labour challenging the guild systems, while a growing commercial marketplace provided opportunities for men with money and acumen to establish themselves in commercial ventures. In some towns, the corporate structure became more flexible as these commercial men instead of craftsmen began to gain the upperhand politically and economically. In Britain, for example, the 'polite and commercial people' were seen to be the model of the true Englishman. This was the period of the Enlightenment whose basic tenets challenged established ties and restrictions, while the French Revolution specifically abolished the guilds, at least temporarily. This allowed spaces within which women could perform their economic activities and establish identities. Gender was also undergoing important shifts at the same time and much of the research on the new 'polite' town couches women as consumers, not workers, and men as 'business men' as business became more overtly inscribed as a male world. The redefinition of male and female into the models usually identified with the nineteenth century and bourgeois femininity and masculinity clearly has its roots in eighteenth-century ideology and practice.

Our research will show how the urban economy represented opportunities for women, by taking women as social actors in context and re-interrogating the notion of 'agency'. We already know that women dominated certain areas of urban activity, such as the clothing and food trades, innkeeping, midwifery and service. However, we are looking at the variety and range of ways women negotiated commercial towns, looking at the strategies they employed to operate in these worlds. Among these strategies, we pay particular attention to work as a major social resource, to mobility, to a combination of licit and illicit activities and to the role of sociability and social networking – from kinship and family connections to female business partnerships.

The essays collected in the book will show how the urban economy represented opportunities for women, by taking women as social actors in context and re-interrogating the notion of 'agency'. Agency is a concept frequently used in social sciences but seldom addressed and defined in the literature of the early modern urban society and economy. Our aim is to address the concept of female agency from a historical perspective and to illustrate the circumstances under which women could access a 'capacity to act' in the European urban economy during the long eighteenth century and to illuminate the factors – age, marital and social status, political or economic climate – that determined their ability to manage their own lives.

Agency is a labile concept which is related, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to the *facultas agendi* of individuals, in other words to 'the faculty of an agent or of acting'. Such a definition, within its apparent simplicity, only gives a partial account of the discussions and debates that the term has aroused from several decades. Indeed, the agency-structure debate is a basic problem of the social sciences, symbolized by the conflict between two schools, the methodological individualists, who focus their attention primarily on the individual, and the holists, who consider human beings as constrained and directed by structural and institutional forces.²⁵ Feminist scholars have radically revised and enriched this classic approach, by interjecting gender into the traditional debate about determinism versus freedom. In their attempts to analyze the mechanisms of patriarchal society and to highlight the roles of women as historical agents, feminist historians have shown an intense interest in the concept of women's agency. Nevertheless, and despite their essential contributions to the field, their approach suffers from two main weaknesses. First, while the conditions in which agency can be produced or achieved are a main issue in feminist theory, the definition of agency itself is rarely addressed as the central subject of analysis²⁶. Second, agency appears to be largely conceived – more often than explicitly defined – in terms of resistance to social norms and oppressive power relationships (namely

male dominance). The same ‘teleology of emancipation’²⁷ underwrites many accounts of agency developed by the subaltern studies, which also frequently link the concept of agency with those of capabilities and empowerment.

In this context, poststructuralist conceptualization of power and subject formation, as developed by Foucault and feminist theorist Judith Butler, has offered a way to move beyond the dichotomy of male dominance and female subordination and to capture the complexities of agency. According to Butler, ‘the paradox of subjectivation (*assujétissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power’.²⁸ This approach invites us to pose the question of agency in ways other than in terms of ‘free will as exercised by completely autonomous individuals’²⁹, and, at the same time, to avoid considering human beings as ‘over-active’ and ‘over-creative’ actors – which would contribute to reinforcing the dichotomy between structure and agency.³⁰ If agency clearly refers to a capacity for action in the world and is therefore closely linked to the notion of choice, it is also embedded, as Giddens and Bourdieu have argued, in a set of deeply internalised dispositions (*habitus*) or in institutional and structural constraints (structuration theory). These constraints – or opportunities – are precisely generative of agency, an agency that is always embodied in power relations and has to be contextualized within them.

Despite its heuristic and even paradigmatic qualities, the concept of agency has seldom been explicitly used and discussed by early modern historians.³¹ The aim of this group is to deal with female agency as a dynamic and relational concept by exploring it from a historical perspective. The research illustrates the circumstances under which women could rise above their restrictive situations, and illuminate the factors – age, marital and social status, political or economic climate – that determined their ability to manage their own lives. In order to address agency not as an invariant in space and time, but as a process and a mosaic of changing opportunities, we take into account, in different local and national contexts, the constraints and obstacles with which women had to fight or cope – such as laws, guilds or hierarchical relationships – in the private and public spheres. Agency here is not conceptualized strictly in terms of resistance to male authority or patriarchal patterns, but arose from the variety of everyday interactions in which women accommodated, negotiated or manipulated social rules and gender roles.³² In relation to the web of social practices in which they were enmeshed and to the resources available in their given milieu, women could, in certain circumstances, access authority and liberty, and their agency could foster changes within gender relations as well.

The contrast mentioned above between women’s ubiquity and agency in the European urban economy and their so-called invisibility is a key issue. In fact, this invisibility does not result from a lack of archives, but from a lack of questions. In order to restore the diversity of women’s experiences – often marginalized – and the great variety of opportunities and obstacles they could encounter, we pick up their trail as social actors and as significant economic agents in their own context. Using a range of methods of inquiry and employing new ways of looking at known sources, our work sheds light on a much wider range of places and activity for women than has been previously supposed, leading us to a better understanding of early modern urban societies. Since official documents show only the tip of the iceberg, we use other kinds of material in order to put together scraps of information. By crossing well-known sources (parish and town council records, tax records, censuses, guilds records) with ‘new’ sources that indirectly provide information on women (judiciary records, sale permits, lists of poor, family papers, newspapers, extant business and personal records), we find places in which women were not expected to be. We are, therefore, developing a nuanced account that physically and metaphorically maps men and women into the urban economic landscape and into the commercial worlds.

Some of us are using an approach based on small groups of individuals or families. Indeed, in the case of informal practices for example, it is only at the micro level that one can hope to reconstruct the mechanisms of female agency. Others working on quantitative materials concentrate on larger groups of women like single women, independent saleswomen, female migrants or godmothers. But in every case, we specifically look at the individuals, their actions, their choices – even if they may not have

been systematically conscious choices – and their decisions. By doing that, we try to go beyond the anonymity of the social historian's groups and to make women the subject of the discussion, not the object. In this sense, addressing female agency is also a way of changing the focus of the narrative. By examining specific women, and groups of women, we can see how they took decisions and took action much more clearly than if we are projecting a female overview – which often perpetuates the notion that women lacked real agency. Far from concentrating only on poor women, where their use of survival strategies are already well known, or business women, who are the focus of a growing number of research projects and publications, we are dealing with women of various social positions, in order to provide additional insights into female agency in and outside the household and the domestic sphere, and according to age, class, professional occupation, and so on.³³ Depending on given situations and contexts, agency therefore appears to be collective as well as individual.

Our evidence shows that women's stereotyped roles as housewives did not inhibit them from taking a major part in the early modern urban economy, albeit unofficially or illegally. Despite gender barriers and legal constraints, which we carefully discuss and compare, female activities were far from minimal or marginal. By exploring the strategies adopted by individual women to work into the system, the motivation behind their actions and the male response to female agency, these articles lead to more concrete conclusions about constraints but also about opportunities available in the urban environment. Moreover, female roles and attempts to overcome and manipulate their specific situations reveal that women were vital participants in urban culture and contributed to changes during the long 18th century. Agency eventually appears as a very dynamic concept that we address in several forms, including not only the capacity for action (or *capabilities*) and the notion of choice (e.g. in creating the market by being a consumer), but also experiences, emotions and self-identities.

The research has begun to stretch the traditional economic approach, by showing how women were involved in other elements than the market, or in different types of 'markets' in a wide sense, for example land markets and medical markets, etc. It also explores the gendered negotiations of women and how they built their relationships within the economic nexus. Some of the themes we are discussing include:

- The gender ideology of trade, commerce and guilds;
- How individuals appropriated and adapted urban places and spaces;
- Use of language and concepts regarding gender, skill and status;
- Women's roles in the burgher economy, godparenting and merchant networks;
- Midwives, servants and the construction of female networks in an urban service economy;
- Gendered travel in European towns: the importance of networks and social contacts

The second sub-theme of the Economy Group has been 'Gender and Luxury in the Modern Urban Economy'. The themes of consumer culture and of luxury are now well-worked, but most of the studies on these topics concentrate on England – as a laboratory of new practices and as the cradle of the consumer society – and to a certain extent on France (luxury debates). The gender aspect is generally developed only in the margins. Also, there is often little link between the eighteenth-century debates and the rise of the consumer economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

We have organized a panel for the Urban History conference in Prague later this year, which addresses some of these issues. The interests in Prague conference stretch beyond those of the Attending to Early Modern Women session, but to put our thinking in context we would like to share some of our thinking beyond the early modern era. We have adopted an urban, gendered and comparative perspective on the European scale with the aim to interrogate the relationship between gender, consumption and luxury in different kinds of urban societies from all parts of Europe, from the French or Spanish 'société d'ordres' and the Absolutist Danish-Norwegian Kingdom to the 'bourgeois' society

of Holland for instance. Furthermore we hope to analyse, compare and put in perspective female and male consumer identities and practices and link these to urban circumstances such as political and economic structures etc. We perceive the town as a crucial place for material and cultural circulations and for competition and emulation.

The 18th century is obviously at the heart of the luxury debates but it seems important to include the second half of the 17th century when the luxury trades and guilds developed during the age of mercantilism, and when the first criticisms of luxury emerged. Similarly, the importance of developments in the 19th and early twentieth century when consumption moved onto a larger scale with the development of department stores needs to be drawn into this story. Clearly urban development did not follow a single commercial path, and we call for papers on a full range of patterns in examining these debates and developments.

As this is the newer area of research for this group, we have suggested some possible directions:

1. Making and marketing luxury: guilds and other circuits; conflicts, concurrence and cooperation.

2. Consumption:

- Men and women as (new) consumers.
- The changing status of material goods, from ostentation to conveniences, from representation to well-being; it could be a way to (re-)interrogate the changing definition of luxury itself.
- Marketing practices and gender of both merchandisers and consumers

3. Control and transgression

- Economic and political control (for instance mercantilism) and its consequences, like smuggling (e.g. many women wore printed calico – *indiennes* – in France in the 18th century even if it was forbidden).
- Efforts of the state (or other authorities) to define men's or women's consumer identity, to control the appearance (sumptuary laws) and how people accept or bypass these prescriptions.
- The prescriptive role of fashion and how it can be turned. Here again, merchandising practices play an important role.

Space, Place & Environment

Towns are experienced as much as constructed. They reflect the cultural and intellectual currents of the day, the prevailing economic climates and the unresolved tensions in the lives of their inhabitants. The gritty physical reality of towns as places exists in perpetual dialogue with the more elusive abstraction of towns as social and spatial constructs, conceived, constructed and contested in a multiplicity of ways. As a fundamental constituent of personal, social and political power relations, gender plays an important part in shaping towns. It is both embedded into the built environment and reflected in the way that the built environment is experienced and used. Working in conjunction with such other key factors as class and time, it can be found in patterns of residence and movement, in the provision and consumption of services and consumer goods, in the nature of street culture and the diversity of the social arena, and in the shifting boundaries between the public and the private, the social and the political, the licit and illicit, the respectable and the dishonourable.

Given what we, as historians, already know about the gender division of early-modern town populations and our growing awareness of the multiplicity of ways that women participated in the urban workforce, it is, in many ways, surprising to realise how patchy our knowledge still is of the ways in which urban places and spaces were gendered — especially over time and across national

borders. Space was, as Amanda Flather has argued for early-modern England, both ‘an arena of social action’ and ‘the basis for the formation of gender identities, which were constantly contested and reconstructed’.³⁴ Studying the relationships between gender and space in the context of urbanizing, modernizing Europe (c.1500–1914), with its cultural diversity and differing rates of development, therefore provides us with a particularly rich opportunity to explore specific local or national experiences, while also considering the place of the urban in the development of emergent pan-European notions of modernity.

The Space, Place & Environment strand of the Gender in the European Town project is currently preparing a volume of essays which will bring together in English for the first time the research of a group of new and established scholars from Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, France, Russia, Britain and the United States, who are concerned with the complex interplay of gender, place and space in the history of urbanizing Europe from a variety of geographical and contextual vantage points. The volume will include work on cultural capitals such as Copenhagen, Stockholm, Helsinki, Moscow and London, port cities such as Aberdeen, commercial centres such as Lyons, and health and leisure towns such as Nice and Monte Carlo.

Our research builds upon the sort of work that has recently been done on the pre-modern city, best exemplified by the recent special issue of *Gender & History* edited by Lin Foxall and Gabriele Neher, *Gender and the City before Modernity*, 23:3 (Nov. 2011). By focusing on the period c.1500–1914, which saw the transition from early-modern to modern society, we are aiming to provide a series of case studies — snapshots in time and place — which will allow us to explore a crucial period of historical change: one which was marked personally by the emergence of individualism; socially by the shift from a society of ranks and orders to a society stratified by class; economically by mechanization, industrialization and consumerism; politically by the emergence of the nation state and an uneven, jerky engagement with notions of citizenship and democracy; and, developmentally, by the rise of the town and the growing hegemony of urban life, albeit to varying degrees and at different points in time across Europe. While not being directly comparative in approach, the essays will highlight shared themes and subtle, as well as significant, differences.

We are particularly interested in exploring a number of key questions:

- In what ways did gender, place and space operate to shape, reflect or facilitate the actual or imaginary experience of the town for individuals, households, or groups? What does this add to our knowledge of the operation of gender over time? To our knowledge of the history of towns?
- To what extent were these experiences intersected and modified by other factors such as class, age, marital status, religion, notions of identity and citizenship, etc.?
- What does the study of gender, place and space in an urban setting tell us about the opportunities and constraints that towns offered to their inhabitants over time? What light does it throw on the changing nature and meaning of physical or psychological boundaries and conceptual spheres (public/private, male/female, licit/illicit, etc.)?
- What can we learn about gendered behaviours and the use of space from the interplay between place, form and function in towns? How, in particular, were towns with specific functions (resort towns, market or port towns, regional or national capitals, etc.) architecturally and materially gendered and spaced? Similarly, how were discrete communities within towns incorporated (e.g. tradesmen and artisans, military or naval bases, refugees and immigrants)?

The colloquia, at which we have shared our research to date, have reminded us of the importance of geographical and cultural contexts, and of the impact of broader intellectual/ideological notions of *habitus* when considering questions of gender, place and space in an urban context. They have in particular underlined the vital role played by social and vocational hierarchies — and the peculiarities of developing notions of class — as well as the parallel development of an elite pan-European cosmopolitanism. They have also encouraged us to remain alert to the differential rates of European development, both within and between nations, and among a diversity of towns. Finally, our research has emphasized the need to remain aware of the personal while studying the urban. European towns,

across time, offered women spaces of convenience, community, culture and contribution, though how these spaces were construed and operated varied according to gendered understandings of mutable concepts such as public and private, social and political, licit and illicit. As importantly, perhaps, women's experiences of the urban were also shaped by such individual factors as age, health, marital/social status and personal preference — and by the urban centre's ability to cater to their diversity.

Civic Identity in early modern European towns

This group traces how a gendered concept of citizenship emerged in a number of locations in Northern European towns during the early modern and modern period. For this group the political aspect is central, as we explore how meaning and content are ascribed to citizenship through political actions. Dependent on who is performing, political actions can have different forms and occur in different places. From a gender perspective we examine how modern citizenship was defined and came into shape. Taking our point of departure in different northern European towns, we examine how citizenship was negotiated and used in the urban space, how people's need of care and support became political and how political citizenship was established and institutionalized.

Our overall theme is that of different sites of political activities, including print culture, courts, institutions, streets and care, and how these different activities performed by different actors in different places became political. The members of the group consider aspects of how different actions by men and women were ascribed gendered meanings. They examine both how the notion of gender had consequences for transformations of urban political practice as well as how the modernization of towns and the development of citizenship influenced the relations between gender and its meaning. Their research will provide a corpus of new local studies from different towns in northern Europe in which common issues, theoretical and methodological questions are addressed. The comparative and transnational perspectives provided by combining such work contributes to establishing new knowledge about the relationship between gender, citizenship and the development of the modern town in northern Europe.

Three themes have provided the focus of research:

- Poor relief as an issue where the active citizen was acting to define his or her social and political role and at the same time played an active role in the development of the town
- The active use of the urban space for negotiations about the content and limitations of citizenship
- The way in which political and legal conflicts contributes to establishing inclusion in the political field and citizenship

We are addressing towns and urban environments in a north-west European context with case-studies from Ireland, Wales, England, Scotland, Denmark, Northern Germany and Sweden. Although there are political, economic and social differences between the individual countries, there are also aspects of the urban environments that are inspired and developed transnationally, in particular those regarding an urban culture in which civic identity and citizenship are central in both action and understanding. The north-west European area is at the same time special because in each of these the church was connected to the state through the reformation. During the period from 1770 to 1870 towns in this study were modernised in different ways, so we examine how this modernisation influenced action and the meaning of action.

There is a long tradition of using the concept of citizenship within gender research. T. H. Marshall (1893-1981) has been criticised for being blind on gender. His chronology for citizenship, identifying civil citizenship in the 18th century, political citizenship in the 19th century and social citizenship in the 20th century, can be, and has been discussed. Meanwhile, he points out how important it is to regard citizenship from different aspects and emphasises the unstable character of citizenship, with fluid

boundaries and under constant renegotiation. Our research will both build on and challenge Marshall, by gendering different kind of citizenship in different historical settings.

We address different aspects of gendered citizenship and examine how they interacted in the making of the political citizen and the modern town. Marshall's concept of citizenship as a model is used in the different contributions as a methodological point of departure together with the introduction and use of the concept of active citizenship. The contributions focus on citizenship as an active involvement while problematising the relation between action and the way in which it is described and understood in its own age. By doing this the members also discuss the implications and understanding of political activities.

Civic identity is a theoretical concept complementary to citizenship. While it has not been used much in gender research, it is an established concept within research in urban history. This perspective connects to the way in which Benedict Anderson (1936-) thought about nationalism when he introduced the concept of 'imagined communities', understanding identity as a construction. Civic identity can be described as a locally rooted imagined community with identification towards common norms and morals, which took over from the pattern of identification known from the rank society. Several of our network members investigate the establishing of imagined communities made up by different kinds of civic identity and shaped by gender. Besides taking a gendered perspective on the concepts of citizenship and civic identity, the contributions all deal with the relation between different social groups and classes and how the dynamic in these relations interacts with the transformation of the concepts.

National citizenship has been studied widely from the perspective of democratization and politicization, with a focus on how citizenship has been defined and what factors contributed towards creating citizenship as an idea. To a lesser extent, attention has been directed towards civic identity as a local form of citizenship both pre-existing and co-existing with national citizenship. So we also look at how civic identity was shaped before and along side national citizenship. What kind of identification did people have with their hometown in early modern Europe? What were the important factors in civic identity: What role did religion, social and political factors play? How was civic identity gendered? Did men and women have different kinds of civic identity? How did they 'take on' their civic identity, and how was it practiced? Was a special kind of civic identity special prone to developing into a national and political citizenship?

Suggestions for Further Reading

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- ²E. William Monter, 'Women in Calvinist Geneva (1550-1800)', *Signs*, **6**, 2 (1980), p. 189; OSA, **xiv**, p. 285.
- ³Pamela Sharpe, 'De-industrialization and re-industrialization: women's employment and the changing character of Colchester 1700-1850,' *Urban History*, 21, 1 (April 1994), p. 78.
- ⁴OSA, **xiv**, pp. 293-94.
- ⁵Clara Reeve, *Plans of Education; with Remarks on the Systems of Other Writers* (London: 1792), p. 70.
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- ⁷George, *England in Transition*, pp. 150-155; Porter, *English Society*, pp. 63-112, 386-89; Peter Earle, *The World of Defoe*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), p. 164; Peter Burke, 'The Language of Orders in Early Modern Europe,' M. L. Bush, ed. *Social Order and Social Classes in Europe since 1500*, (London: Longman, 1992), p. 6.
- ⁸Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman in Familiar Letters*, (1727, reprint ed. New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969), **I**, p. 2.
- ⁹Dorothy Marshall, *Eighteenth-Century England*, (New York: David Mackay Company Inc., 1962), p. 39.
- ¹⁰A. F. J. Brown, *Essex at Work, 1700-1815*, (Chelmsford: Essex Record Office, 1969), pp. 138, 158-59, 163.
- ¹¹Arlette Farge, *Fragile Lives, Violence, Power and Solidarity in eighteenth-century Paris*, (London: Polity Press, 1993), p. 126.
- ¹²See J-Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant in Eighteenth-century England*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), pp. 35-70.
- ¹³Quoted in Geoffrey Treasure, *The Making of Modern Europe, 1648-1780*, (London and New York: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1985), p. 18.
- ¹⁴Ute Frevert, *Women in German History, from Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, (Oxford: Berg Publishers Limited, 1988), p. 12.
- ¹⁵The concept urban renewal or urban renaissance is most closely argued in Peter Borsay's book, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989). Note the criticism of this concept voiced by Angus McInnes, 'The emergence of a leisure town: Shrewsbury 1660-1760', *Past and Present*, 120 (1988), 53-87. The concept has entered English urban historiography.
- ¹⁶Rosemary Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-century England* (Oxford, 1997), p. 274. The concept urban renewal or urban renaissance is most closely argued in Peter Borsay's book, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town, 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989). Note the criticism of this concept voiced by Angus McInnes, 'The emergence of a leisure town: Shrewsbury 1660-1760', *Past and Present*, 120 (1988), 53-87.
- ¹⁷Smout, *A History of the Scottish People*, pp. 339-40.
- ¹⁸Elaine Chalus, 'that epidemical madness': Women, Social Politics and the Electoral Process in Eighteenth-Century England',
- ¹⁹Stuart Woolf, 'Order, Class and the Urban Poor,' Bush, ed. *Social Order and Social Classes*, p. 189, see also p. 190.
- ²⁰Farge, *Fragile Lives*, p. 126.
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- ²³Sweet, 1
- ²⁴Berg, What Difference---
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- ²⁷Saba Mahmood, 'Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival', *Cultural Anthropology*, 16 (2001), 202-236, 210.
- ²⁸Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge), 1993, 15.

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³⁰ Henrietta L. Moore, 'Ethics and Ontology. Why Agents and Agency Matter', in Marcia-Anne Dobres and John E. Robb (eds.), *Agency in Archaeology* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 259-263.

³¹ See for instance S. Annette Finley-Crosswhite, 'Engendering the Wars of Religion: Female Agency during the Catholic League in Dijon' *French Historical Studies*, 20 (1997), 127-154 ; Jutta Sperling, 'Dowry or Inheritance? Kinship, Property and Women's Agency in Lisbon, Venice, and Florence (1572)', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 11 (2007), 197-238. For an incentive analysis of the agency-structure debate and its impact on gender history, see Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2007), 3-8.

³² Michael J. Braddick and John Walter (eds.), *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³³ Hannah Barker, *The Business of Women. Female Enterprise and Urban Development in Northern England 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Nicola Phillips, *Women in Business, 1700-1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006) ; Danielle van den Heuvel, *Women & Entrepreneurship. Female Traders in the Northern Netherlands, c. 1580-1815* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007); Laurence Fontaine and Jürgen Schlumbohm (eds.), *Household Strategies for Survival 1600-2000: Fission, Faction and Cooperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁴ Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 2, 1.