



## **Taking images seriously: Ethnography, photography and investigations of urbanity**

Workshop  
9am-6pm, 16 May 2024

French-German Cultural Institute  
Tübingen, Germany

Bringing together scholars who use photographs in their urban investigations, this workshop offers a practical, critical yet non-judgmental space in which to explore epistemological, methodological and ethical questions raised when working with photos to research changing urban lives around the world.

Links between ethnography and photography have existed since the invention of photography. The birth of photography as a technology, art-form and social practice is generally associated with urbanisation and industrialisation of the 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Urban-scapes and urban lives continue to provide the backdrop or focus for photographers and social scientists alike. As diverse photographic genres (portraits, street, documentary, 'found' images) and methods now join the assimilation of other visual materials and methods within qualitative social research, the inclusion of photos within urban research can take various forms (Rose 2016 ; Roberts 2011; Becker 1974). This can take the form of quick shots of street life taken with mobile phones – backing up field notes scribbled down on the move. It can include the analysis of official images produced by city marketing agencies, pinpointing prevalent narratives about urban repositioning strategies. Methods such as photo-elicitation with family albums can help layer up thick descriptions about time, memory, changing social ties within urban neighbourhoods. Despite this diversity, surprising little attention has been given to the question of how making and/or working with photographs may offer particular insights into ethnographic explorations of urban transformations.

Over the years, the frontiers delimiting photography as a 'discipline' or 'practice' and social science research have become increasingly fuzzy, as visual ethnography and sociology has developed as sub-genres and as photographers become sociologists and anthropologists (and vice versa) and draw on scientific literature for inspiration in their image making. While a thriving literature exists on how photos may be interpreted, how relations between photographs and the field can be differently conceived, and the potential 'agency' of photos within social lives, the relations between the social sciences, art and photography remain under-unexplored (Cuny et al. 2020). Further, in much social science research, images continue to be relegated to a purely illustrative role and their analytical potential overlooked.

Taking the images we work with seriously, this day-long workshop will be the opportunity for researchers who differently engage with photographs to reflect upon the above and to think more deeply and critically about: (how) can photography help us better understand the urban?

**Format:**

- Held at the French-German Cultural Institute in Tübingen on the occasion of the presentation of the sociological and photographic project, *Marseille: Au-delà des clichés* (Abed Abid, Claire Bullen, Amel Zerourou), the day-long workshop will be open to a maximum of 12 participants.
- The workshop will be held in English.
- Each participant will introduce one or two photographs taken from their field-sites. These will serve as the basis for discussions of ethical, methodological or epistemological implications (consent, power-relations, representation, material conditions of image production, aesthetic choices, materials, etc., insights into urban social relations, urban changing forms, the urban ethnographic endeavor...)
- The day will be divided into three two hour blocks, during which a maximum of four people will present their images. No formal presentation is expected. The idea is to facilitate discussion and debate. This will be followed by a wrap up session, to collect together insights.
- During the day, there will an opportunity to visit the exposition: *Marseille: Au-delà des clichés*.
- Following the workshop, participants will be invited to contribute a 1000-word discussion piece, accompanied by images from their research, for an on-line academic journal.

If you are interested in taking part, please send an email Claire Bullen ([claire.bullen@uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:claire.bullen@uni-tuebingen.de)) and Amandine Turri Hoelken ([amandine.hoelken@gmail.com](mailto:amandine.hoelken@gmail.com)) by the 31 March, setting out your motivations and suggestions of the photos that you would like to discuss.

Some financial support is available for those without funds to cover travel and accommodation. Please mention in your mail if this is your case.