

THE LURE OF THE CITY 1400-1900

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Period: All

From the late medieval period onwards European towns and cities attracted people for various economic, social and juridical reasons. Urban communities offered labor opportunities for both men and women through trading networks, labor markets, public works, guilds, and financial institutions. Judicial protection was offered through laws and legislation, and urban populations could use various civil and criminal courts to settle conflicts or to deal with violence, maltreatment or insults. In addition, cities provided social care through various urban agencies, such as town governments, guilds, neighborhood associations, and ecclesiastical organizations. In the course of the early modern period rapid urbanization and population growth advanced both the scope and scale of various public services that were offered by towns and cities. At the same time, such processes resulted in proletarianization and urban polarization which caused certain groups to run higher economic, social and juridical risks as they could to a lesser degree fall back on the protection and support of the traditional community or their families. A lot of valuable work has been done on a wide range of subjects regarding the socio-economic opportunities for people moving from the countryside to the city, most investigations focussing on patterns of migration and the policies of town governments. There is much less known about the motives, experiences, chances, and risks in relation to various social and economic groups coming to the towns.

This session aims to explore a theme that has recently been raised by historians Lucassen and Willems in their volume *Why people want to live in the city? What made cities attractive to various social and economic groups between the late medieval period and modern period?* This session aims to explore broader issues in relation to the pulling power of the city, broad both in time and 'European' space.

We are interested in questions such as:

In what ways did cities offer opportunities regarding labour, social care, socio-economic networks, and judicial protection?

Can we distinguish patterns in various types of urban communities (such as seafaring towns, proto-industrial centres, industrial centres or centres of administration) and the services and facilities that people were attracted to?

Can we distinguish patterns in the ways in which men and women or different social-economic groups were attracted to particular opportunities or services, or in the extent to which they had access?

This session encourages a wide range of contributions, bringing together scholars from various fields and disciplines, such as social and economic history, criminology and legal studies.