



Centrality and the City

This module builds on sustained reading of Henri Lefebvre's landmark contribution to urban studies, *The Production of Space*, which we read throughout the term so as to develop our grasp of its key concept of urban centrality in a steady way and to consider how Lefebvre's work has informed subsequent urban history and theory, including the work of David Harvey, Andy Merrifield, Mike Smith, as well as Lefebvre's closer contemporaries, such as Michel de Certeau. The course work is organized around three clusters through which we explore and transform the concept of centrality. Proposed focus areas are as follows, but will be discussed with the student group in advance of the course material being defined:

- the market-driven centrality of Les Halles, approached first through its 19th-century forms and representations, then considered in relation to the contemporary Les Halles, the central transport, leisure and commercial hub of Paris;
- intellectual centralities, through a comparison of the 19th-century National Library with its Salle Labrouste and the contemporary site of the Bibliothèque nationale in the 13th arrondissement;
- postcolonial centralities, focusing on the insurgent shapes of "Parisian" centralities on both sides of the périphérique, with particular focus on Northern Paris in relation to major infrastructural developments (Campus Condorcet, La Chapelle International, the 2024 Olympic Games).

Module aims

- To explore different mutations of the centre in Paris, working in an interdisciplinary manner across geographical and administrative definitions (drawing on maps and plans), literary and artistic representations of Paris, and urban and cultural policies
- To reflect theoretically on key notions for negotiating the contemporary city
- To consider the way in which the priorities of movement, exchange and management of the population confront the locations where historical significance seems to cluster
- To reflect upon the interplay between history and the socio-economic development of the city

Module structure

The weekly two-hour sessions will be organised around fictional and theoretical reading as well as site visits. Students are assessed through two oral presentations, one that focuses in a way chosen by the student on Les Halles and one on a subject/site of their choice. The presentations can be scripted academic papers or film/sound work, or a combination of both.