



**Volgograd State University**  
with the support of  
**European University at Saint-Petersburg**

International conference

**Living Infrastructures**  
**Beyond Global North and Global South**  
April 27-28, 2017  
Volgograd, Russia

Call for papers

Abstract submission deadline: **March 7 2017**

The last ten years have seen significant growth in the social studies of (urban) infrastructures. Today, we can identify two waves of infrastructure research. The first wave (e.g. S.L. Star, G. Bowker, S. Graham, S. Marvin, P. Edwards) focused on methodological and epistemological problems, identifying key features and patterns of infrastructure development in the so-called Global North. Infrastructures evolve from large technological systems passing from malleability in the early stages to rigidity in the later ones. Mature and silently working infrastructures disappear in the background and therefore become invisible and stable – the “uninteresting” underpinnings of everyday life. In this context, “breakdowns” are considered to be crucial research entry points that reveal the sociotechnical complexities of infrastructures.

The second wave (e.g. A. Barry, P. Harvey, B. Larkin, C. McFarlane, S. Ureta) concentrated on the Global South to demonstrate the limits of the first wave. This strand shows that in many places of the world infrastructures are far from invisible, stable and silent in their workings. Practices of repairing, cleaning, maintenance and tinkering are coming to the fore. Moreover, with the concept of “infrastructural lives”, the second wave draws attention to the human dimensions and components of infrastructures.

However, these waves do not represent discrete categories with a clear transition

between them, but rather research trends that intermingled and interfered with one another. Further, we can observe the interactions of these waves to highlight the multiplicities not only of infrastructure research, but also of infrastructure itself.

To start, this refers to the patterns of development, governance, and maintenance of urban infrastructures (digitalization, sustainability, global transport chains, or securitization). Next, scholars have begun to focus on the regional differences and specificities of infrastructure development (for instance, water supply problems in Asia, maintaining critical infrastructure in the USA, the creation of natural infrastructures in Europe, or the debates about transport infrastructure in Russia). Further, accepting the diversity of regional developments includes accepting conceptual and methodological diversity as well. Science and Technology Studies (STS), mobilities research, critical urbanism, and non-representational theory have all contributed original approaches, concepts, and metaphors with which to understand the circulation of people, things, and ideas. These have generated a multitude of studies, from the global spread of neoliberal urbanism, to a relational view of people and the infrastructures of daily life, to the (de)territorialization of natural spaces in the city. This diversity underscores the fact that researchers from disparate disciplines and distant countries have begun to rethink the complexities of (urban) infrastructures.

We propose to continue this trend and conceptualize the politics of infrastructure research beyond the distinction between Global North and Global South. What if we start to think not only about the cultural and regional specificities of “infrastructural lives”, but also about the multiple ways in which infrastructures are another forms of life. “Living infrastructures” – the name of this conference – is a metaphor to remind us that infrastructures are dynamic and surprising, simultaneously resilient and fragile. They are ecologically mutually dependent with other life forms, they are not invulnerable and “eternal beings” as many social scientists thought of societies, they confront risks to their continued existence, and they are prone to thrive as well as to die. We invite researchers, practitioners, activists, and artists to unite their forces in conceptualizing the diversity of the infrastructural forms of life.

The conference proposes a number of themes, including but not limited to:

- Mobilities infrastructures
- Information technology and the digitalization of the city
- Infrastructures of the past, future, and utopias
- Human and more-than-human components of infrastructure
- The materiality of infrastructure
- The economics of infrastructure
- Infrastructural processes in transforming the city
- Accidents, catastrophes, and broken infrastructure

- The politics and administration of infrastructure
- The injustice and inequalities in accessing infrastructure
- Grassroots and informal infrastructure
- Affect and corporeal investigations of infrastructure
- Age and infrastructure
- Infrastructures of knowledge and knowing infrastructures

We also invite theoretical and empirical contributions on the diversity of historical, social, economic, cultural, and political aspects of infrastructures.

The conference languages are English and Russian.

### **Keynote Speakers**

TBA

### **Deadlines and Submissions**

Submit individual or collaborative abstracts (500 words) and a short bio (100 words) to the conference email: [living.infrastructures@gmail.com](mailto:living.infrastructures@gmail.com)

The deadline for submissions will be the **7th of March 2017**.

Presenters will be notified of acceptance within a week after the deadline.

For more information, updates and news visit our conference website

<https://livinginfrastructures.wordpress.com>

### **Program committee**

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