WHAT’S IN A NAME? HOW WE LABEL PERIPHERAL PLACES.

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Worldwide, over the past century urbanization has entailed massive growth at the urban edge. Fringe growth has taken varied forms, attracting widespread interest and concern. Appropriately, scholars and planners in different countries have used various labels to refer to such developments. Everywhere, these have acquired negative connotations. This is especially the case for areas settled by rural migrants, ethnic minorities, or the poor. Such areas are peripheral in both social and geographical terms. Examples include the banlieues of France, favelas of Brazil, gecekondu of Turkey, or hutment slums of India. There are indications that such labels have been resisted by local residents but, especially among anglophones, researchers have paid little attention to the fact. This session asks the question: does it matter how we label the socio-geographical periphery? This question raises a number of issues pertaining to the nature, origins, extent, and significance of local resistance to the nomenclature used by experts, planners, and the like. Particular interest attaches to the historical process by which such areas acquire generic labels; by which media and experts give those labels wider currency; and by which they are contested and perhaps changed. The proposed session will bring together historians and those social scientists who are alert to the dynamics of such processes.

Collectively, the papers will speak to three urban-historical themes.

• the extent to which generic versus specific names have been used to make sense of the urban environment
• the processes by which names are bestowed and contested, including the varied role of media and experts in the developed and the developing world
• the relationship between the urban past and the categories with which we attempt to make sense of it.

The session addresses a neglected issue and is exploratory. As such, it is intended to bring together, and foster comparisons between, cities that differ widely in their urban fringe experiences and also in the languages/labels that have been used to describe those experiences. For that reason, an attempt will be made to include papers that present national or regional surveys as well as urban case studies. If the response is strong, the best papers may be collected as a book. Tentative interest has been expressed by Routledge.