

7<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Social Sciences  
**The Public Sphere  
and the Politics of Space**  
Al Akhawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco, 29-31 May 2020

**Conference rationale**

With the gradual rise of socio-economic and political challenges facing the Middle East and North African (MENA) and the Sub-Saharan regions, the “public space” and the “public sphere” have come to the forefront of scholarly debates and research by scholars in various fields of studies. The concept of the “public sphere” was conceived as part of the interplay of first a physical locale that imply constant social relationships in a concrete public domain (public space) and second the constellations of socio-economic factors contributing to the rise of political debates (public sphere).

The aim of this conference is to probe social, economic, political problems via the theoretical lenses of the public sphere, the different aspects of spatial configurations, the politics of space, as well as the counter-public or parallel discursive arenas as conceived by Nancy Fraser. “Popular spaces” in the language of Andrea Cornwall were part of “subaltern politics”, informal networks and the arenas in which individuals come together for collective action, self-support initiatives or through the enactment of different forms of sociability.

This conference seeks papers or panels that draw on research on the public sphere in relation to such themes as, collective deliberation, social movements, political press, public opinion and their interrelated relationships with questions of democracy and civil society. From this angle, we would like to attract researchers in such fields as, political science, history, sociology, and communication studies that focus on the deliberative dimension of the public sphere. Meanwhile, we welcome themes related to the public space as a maker of social bonds, street art and culture, literary streets or cafes, and urban forms and architecture.

Scholars in fields as, cultural studies, art, geography, and urban and environmental studies that focus on different public places are welcome to propose papers from their respective disciplinary perspectives. The theoretical distinction that we make here between “public sphere” and “public space” is however not mutually exclusive in the sense that we encourage participants to challenge this dichotomy and present case studies where there is no clear-cut delineation.

**Conference themes**

The seventh annual social science conference organized by Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, scheduled for 29-31 May 2020, aims to expand on concerns of the Social Sciences in Morocco and elsewhere regarding the place of the public sphere and public space as a theoretical framework for examining some of the main social, political, urban and cultural challenges facing the MENA region.

Suggested topics for the conference include but are not limited to:

- How can the public sphere help foster the process of democratization in the MENA region?
- How does the public sphere manifest itself given the nature of rule?
- What is the legal framework that enhances or limits the public sphere?

- What kinds of space do people create for themselves?
- How do people through a particular space (physical or cyber) challenge existing power structures, demand new legislations, or ask for social transformations and reforms?
- What are the different forms of public engagement?
- What forms of representation are articulated in the public space?
- What voices are included or excluded from debates in the public sphere?
- How efficient is the engagement of citizens?
- To what extent does the MENA region have a “public sphere” and what are the limits?
- Can we speak of a “rational discussion” contributing to the common good and resulting to the achievement of a “consensus”?
- How are public opinions formed?
- What kind of public discussions, if they do exist, are taking place?
- What are the ways in which the Internet became an essential means by which people contribute to sustaining a public sphere, or conversely create counter-public sphere?
- What are the ways in which digital media influence perceptions and practices about the politics of space?

### **Terms of submission:**

Conference presentations can be delivered in Arabic, French or English, and we encourage scholars to submit either panels or papers. Panels should tackle the same issue from different disciplinary perspectives, whereas papers will be placed in multi-disciplinary panels. Doctoral and other graduate students are strongly encouraged to submit proposals.

Abstracts should indicate the topic, the research question, the hypothesis and the methodology the paper plans to engage in and should not be more than 350 words long. As conference space and time are limited, papers may not have more than one author; co-authored papers should be presented by one person.

Abstracts should be sent to the scientific Committee for review by 16 February 2020. Acceptance notices will be sent by 15 March 2020. The all-inclusive (meals and shared room for two nights) registration fee for the conference is: 500 MAD per person, 300 MAD for students.

To submit an abstract or register for the graduate workshops, please access our website at <http://conferences.aui.mndsn.com> and fill out the online form.

### **Conference Scientific Committee**

Karim Achibat, Jack Kalpakian, Driss Maghraoui, Abdelkrim Marzouk, Biliانا Popova, Eric Ross, Aure Veyssière

### **Conference Organizing Committee**

Karim Achibat, Rachid Daoudi, Driss Maghraoui, Abdelkrim Marzouk, Eric Ross