



## Resistance is in the Air

### International interdisciplinary symposium

#### CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

*Brussels, 25-26 April 2019*

#### Theme

Resistance is in the air. All over the world, awareness of air pollution as a serious matter of concern is growing. This is prominent in the rise of citizen groups claiming their right to clean air, the increasing number of newspaper articles on the subject, and the growing mobilisation across broad ranges of society. At the same time, air pollution is also academically taken up more widely and consistently: an increasing amount of scholarship is looking into the issue from a wide variety of disciplines. Air quality policies are also at a turning point. The growing number of citizen science projects, living labs, crowd-sensing and other similar initiatives contributes to blurring the boundaries between “citizens” and “experts”. This shows the potential of dialogue and collaboration among different actors, but also represents a step towards transcending these categories and making place for promising new ways of thinking about research, action and citizenship. Overall, there is a sense of urgency, rooted in state-of-the-art knowledge about the risks of exposure, the apparent inadequacy of the current legal framework, policy and infrastructural solutions, and the - sometimes distorted- way information on air pollution is collected and disseminated.

It is in this context that the first international symposium on ‘Resistance in the Air’ is being organised, with a specific focus, for this first edition, on the theme ‘resistance’, in its diverse possible meanings. The socio-demographic characteristics of people can make them more or less *resistant* to the impacts of air pollution on their health and wellbeing, while their economic situation is likely to exacerbate or help addressing their vulnerability. Historical path dependencies in the urban form and infrastructure, as well as established power relations among groups and stakeholders can make socio-technical systems *resist* change and innovation. Citizens concerned with the health and environmental threats of air pollution may engage in active *resistance* against actual status quo by physically changing their living environment, by exerting political pressure in the streets and in courts, or by taking steps towards alternative metabolisms of air and its pollution. In doing this, they may take resource to existing atmospheric science or contest the state of the art and engage in the co-production of alternative forms of knowledge. However, citizens do not only *resist* air pollution. Citizens also happen to *resist* against prioritising air pollution as a matter of concern and protest against measures to tackle it: referring to social justice, individual freedom or discourses about economic viability and growth, significant groups of citizens claim the ‘need’ or ‘right’ to drive the car or to engage in other polluting practices. Not seldom, it comes to a conflict between citizen groups and other actors with different interests in the air.

In this context, we invite contributions which help enlarge our current state of understanding of air pollution, from a broad range of disciplinary perspectives, and more specifically, investigate these forms of ‘atmospheric resistance’ in all its manifestation.

## **Aim of the Symposium**

The objective of the symposium is to provide a platform for scholarly dialogue and interdisciplinary exchange, among scholars but also with citizens and activists. Bridging the disciplinary gaps, as well as engaging with the larger societal debate, this symposium has the ambition to urge political agenda-setting by pushing reflection on strategies and pathways to more ambitious and broadly supported air quality regulations.

In this regard, the international symposium will be part of a larger event, which includes a citizen's day as a forum for societal dialogue and a hackathon for cleaner air through open data mining and manipulation (held on April 27<sup>th</sup>). Scholars who participate in the academic conference are most welcome to also participate in the other activities of the event. Similarly, we will invite the broader public to participate in selected sessions during the academic conference.

The event as a whole will provide a forum for critical debate across a range of perspectives on air pollution, will raise awareness about its impact on health and on the environment, learn and exchange about socio-ecological future alternatives and strategies towards change, and will help bridging the gap between science, lived experience, policy and practice.

## **Who should apply?**

The conference aims to gather air pollution scholars from a broad range of disciplines: health and environmental science, law, geography, urban planning, transport, sociology, political science, philosophy, communication, psychology, European studies, etc. ...

## **Content of contributions**

The following questions and topics provide possible starting points, but other perspectives relating to a different understanding of (1) air pollution in general and (2) resistance to air pollution or air pollution measures are very welcome too. The sessions will be organised in such a way as to bring together contributions on similar questions from different disciplinary perspectives.

- How does air pollution become an object of social and political contention and debate?
- How to act in the face of complexity? How to move beyond contesting air pollution to promoting particular solutions?
- What policies prove to be successful in terms of reducing emissions, exposure and vulnerability? Do they have side-effects? E.g. how to deal with pollution displacement and the levelling out of pollution?
- Why do air quality cases matter and how do they transform the law? What do we learn from diesel gate?
- How do policymakers, politicians or citizen groups relate to European legislation in how they advocate their case?
- What are opportunities and restrictions of personal monitoring devices and crowd-sourced air quality monitoring endeavours? Is citizen science complementary or competing with public information on emissions?
- What are possibilities for coalition building among scientists and citizens?
- How can we understand and interpret differences in exposure, vulnerability, and responsibility? How is air pollution related to social and environmental justice?
- What are the health impacts of pollution on the most vulnerable groups and how should differences in exposure be approached by citizen groups and policymakers?
- How to measure the health impacts of policy interventions for reducing air pollution exposure?
- ...

## **Practicalities**

### **Format**

The programme includes:

- Parallel sessions: Sessions of 15-minute presentations about planned, ongoing or recent research, followed by Q&A by the attendees
- Round tables: Short pitches by authors from different disciplines invited to reflect on given question, followed by the intervention of a discussant who will help connecting the intervention with the Brussels context and a debate with the audience
- World cafés: Structured conversations between researchers and practitioners, to foster the exchange of questions, perspectives, approaches on matters of shared interest.
- Posters for non-expert audience: In addition to their contribution to the symposium, participants are warmly invited to present their research as a poster (or other creative formats) during the Citizens Day that follows the symposium.
- Mobile workshops We are currently working with partners of the civil society to organise mobile workshops during the citizen's day. These will consist of guided tours through places of contestation in and surrounding the city centre.

### **Submit abstract**

- Deadline for abstract submission is the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2018
- By email to [Hilde.Everaerts@vub.be](mailto:Hilde.Everaerts@vub.be)
- Abstract of maximum **750** words shall be submitted together with a short bio which includes current affiliation(s) and an overview of the most relevant research and/or publications.
- Authors will be informed about the final decision on their proposal by 15<sup>th</sup> January.

The scientific symposium will be held **in English**.

Please specify if you are planning to present your contribution also as a poster during the citizens day, and the language(s) you feel comfortable with to present during the citizen day (English, French, Dutch).

### **Location and Organisation**

The symposium is hosted in Brussels, Belgium, at *Les Ateliers des Tanneurs*

The registration fee is **120 EUR**, covering the venue, lunches and refreshments on both days (Reductions for participants from civil society and master students: 30 EUR per day). Travel costs and accommodation in Brussels are not included.

### **Scientific committee**

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