



Universiteit Leiden

PRO-SPECT – The Spectacle of Prostitution and the making of a modern city, Amsterdam, ca. 1880-1950.

Applicants

Eligible proposals must have at least two applicants from Humanities, preferably with an interdisciplinary approach.

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Marion Pluskota	History
Fresco Sam-Sin	LIAS

Project description

Provide a brief description of the project (max. 300 words)

The project ‘The Spectacle of Prostitution’ is based on the assumption that prostitution, as in the exchange of money, goods, or services for sexual relations, is visible in the urban landscape. It argues that prostitution is visible not only through the display of women and men’s body but also through its influence on various aspects of the development of modern cities: on their economy, sanitary evolution, social composition, consumer and leisure identity, policing, spatial use of the urban environment (both outside on the streets and inside private houses), and even on the sounds and lighting of certain areas. This project resonates with current issues in the Netherlands and especially in Amsterdam, with respect to the space and the visibility allowed for prostitution. The current views held by the Amsterdam municipality on sex work suggest that prostitution has had a visible and quantifiable impact on the urban environment only since recent years. This project goes against this idea and aims to show that prostitution, and the people involved in it, have actively participated in the shaping of contemporary Amsterdam.

The innovative character of this research lies in its framework and the wide range of primary sources being analyzed. Instead of looking at Amsterdam prostitution and prostitutes as being shaped by municipal and national regulations, they are studied as individuals shaping the city, especially, but not only, the districts where they plied their trade. The researchers will combine the methods of social history with these of material culture studies. This project is thus bringing to light a more comprehensive view of prostitution in the period studied. Contrary to other studies on Amsterdam prostitution, the project will show continuity between the end of the nineteenth century and the interbellum period in the practice of prostitution, in its visibility and in its impact on the urban landscape.

Research Trainee Profile

Each proposal requests two Research Trainees. Describe the general tasks of the research trainees, how these tasks are academically challenging to the research trainees, whether they need any preliminary

knowledge (regarding the topic and/or research methods) and which skills the research trainees should have. Also specify which type of students are eligible to apply (3rd year Ba, Ma, ResMa).

The two research trainees will be asked to carry out extensive research and will learn how to analyse different types of primary sources (judicial archives, newspapers, but also paintings, photographs, songs, blueprints...). A general overview of useful sources has already been drawn, based on themes that will be developed in more depth in an article and, later, in a monograph. Some sources are online, but others require regular trips to Amsterdam:

1. Themes and sources:

Performativity in urban environment	Photos of prostitutes, brothels, Madam Drawings-paintings Literary representations Judicial archives (testimonies) Commissioned investigations on prostitution Kinsie´s papers (League of Nations´ envoy) Fashion items (clothes, jewellery...)
Privatization of urban space	Photos Police records Newspapers Street songs Kinsie´s papers
Privatization of interpersonal relations	Drawings/Paintings Literary representations Blueprints-Floor plans Judicial archives Advertisements for prostitutes
Urban planning	Municipal debates on districts known for prostitution Newspapers articles on the state of the streets Blueprints of newly built districts where prostitutes worked Municipal records on street lighting
Urban health market	Medical publications Patient records Hospital Archives (opening of a new syphilitic ward) Advertisements in newspapers for medicines against syphilis.
Policing the urban space	Municipal and national debates Municipal regulations (inc. ban on brothels) Police and Tribunal archives
Urban consumer and leisure society	Newspapers and literary publications on the development of nightlife Fashion items Licensing data

	Art market (upsurge in paintings representing prostitutes)
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The trainees should be interested in social history, urban studies or material culture studies and have a broad knowledge of 19th-20th century history of the Netherlands. The research trainees will also be involved with a team of student-ambassadors from the TTT collaborative (see below), who are working on other topics. The trainees must be able to travel to Amsterdam on a regular basis (according to RIVM advice). Being able to read Dutch is a plus. Trainees can be BA3 students, MA or ResMa students.

Collaboration

If applicable: Describe how your research improves collaboration and cross-pollination between the disciplines involved (max. 300 words)

This project came to light after various discussions with Fresco Sam-Sin (LIAS) who specializes in the relation between text and material culture. It is in this capacity that he developed and manages the online platform <https://thingsthattalk.net/>. This academic year, students from over 30 courses in our faculty are using this platform for object-centred visual storytelling (see [this article on the university website](#)). Before the end of this year Things That Talk - TTT will have developed dedicated zones where research teams can be conducted (in a collaborative backend) and showcased in the TTT frontend.

Apart from offering an innovative and evolving set of storytelling tools, the platform is groundbreaking in helping researchers organize their data in a Linked Open Data structure. This allows us to get a better understanding of the relations between data, in- and outside of Things That Talk. Fresco’s expertise in the methods of material culture studies and his knowledge in digital humanities tools, combine with my own expertise in urban and social history will allow us to build a joint online platform showcasing the role of prostitution in shaping modern Amsterdam.

Such a collaboration will enhance the links between LIAS and the Institute for History, especially in terms of valorisation. The online platform will add to the social and historical study of prostitution in Amsterdam an in-depth analysis of the material culture surrounding prostitutes at the time. It will also respond to the current debates on the role and place of sex workers and prostitution in the future of modern cities.

Deliverables

Enumerate intended project results: papers, research proposals or otherwise. (max 200 words)

The research trainees will be directly involved in two deliverables: 1. The making of an online platform 2. The writing of one academic article to be submitted to Journal of Women’s History, who has already expressed interest in this topic. The making of the online platform will consist of choosing which sources will be featured on the website, writing an excerpt for each source, and learning the basics of website building thanks to the team of TTT. The article, written in collaboration with the two supervisors, will focus on the historiographical debates on prostitution and will offer strategies to rethink its role in the development of modern cities.

A public lecture will be organized to showcase the results of the research and launch the website, although this will most likely be held after the end of the trainees’ contract, they are welcome to participate.

I hope to be able to reuse the methodology develop in this project to study other cities. Eventually, a monograph on the materiality of prostitution and its role in shaping modern cities is planned, however I will need to do more research before being in a state to write it.

Planning

Provide a breakdown of the project into phases with tentative timing (max 150 words)

Both research trainees will follow the same timetable as they work their way through Amsterdam archives. The first stage of the project is dedicated to collecting and organizing the primary sources in a database, followed by an analysis of the findings. The last step focuses on the valorisation of the project.

Week 1 (February): Division of the tasks between the research trainees: one student will be tasked to visit the Amsterdam city archives while the other one will focus on collecting and indexing sources from online repositories. A detailed planning and keys to online research will be provided to the students during this meeting.

Week 2 - 13 (end of April): * Students: building up of the database, contacts with archivists and curators to discuss their collections, online research.

* Supervisors: regular checks to control the validity of the database.

Week 12 - 30: * Supervisors + students: start of the second part of the project: analyse of the sources and creation of the online platform.

* Writing of the first draft of the historiographical article.

Week 32 (begin September 2021): Public lecture on Prostitution in Amsterdam, 19th -20th centuries and launch of the online platform, either in the city archives or in the Amsterdam city museum (or online if public gatherings are still not allowed).

Student Application

Provide information on how to apply e.g. required documents for application (resume, motivation letter etc.) and an email address where student applications should be sent to.

Applications should be sent to: m.pluskota@hum.leidenuniv.nl and should include a cv and a motivation letter (max. 800 words) reflecting on their interests in working on prostitution, urban history and material culture. The trainees must be able to travel to Amsterdam on a regular basis (except if the RIVM forbids it).