Call for Papers

What is Economic Planning?
Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Workshop at Science Po Paris
10 & 11 December 2026

Organised and funded by:

The Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Evaluation of Public Policies (LIEPP)
The Centre for European Studies and Comparative Politics (CEE) &
Transforming Interdisciplinary Education and Research for Evolving Democracies (TIERED)

Economic planning is back. The shutdown of the global economy during the COVID-19 crisis showed that, when necessary, states can effectively intervene in markets without disastrous results. Even before then, the European Central Bank had shown during the Eurozone crisis how consequential a centralized public institution could be in stabilizing the economy. At the same time, it has become painfully clear that the transition toward sustainable energy cannot be delivered by the market alone, and that state coordination is required. The growth of the Chinese economy, meanwhile, as drawn renewed attention to what can be achieved when market mechanisms are combined with strategic state direction. Against this backdrop, economic planning has returned to the political and intellectual agenda and is once again being seriously discussed in think tanks, policymaking circles, and public debate.

Yet there is much discussion about what economic planning should look like. Is it the replacement of market mechanisms by centralised algorithms? Can it be the coordination of financial markets by central banks? Is it the implementation of strategic investment agendas? And if the latter is the case, how would it differ from industrial policy? In answering these questions, history is vital. Current proposals for economic planning can draw inspiration from history—for instance, from Neurath's economy in kind or the Lucas Plan—but can also learn from it, whether from the failures of Soviet planning or the success of Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry.

What can be drawn from history for current planning proposals is, however, hampered by the lack of an interdisciplinary dialogue. The history of planning is studied in many different subdisciplines, from political economy to intellectual history and political theory, but there is little interaction between them. This lack of dialogue is no doubt exacerbated by the absence of a clearly defined concept of economic planning. For some, planning is synonymous with industrial policy, while others see it as an alternative to free markets.

This work received government funding administered by the National Research Agency (ANR) under the TIERED program (France 2030 and the European Union's NextGenerationEU (ANR-22-EXES-0014)) and under the LIEPP program (IdEx Université Paris Cité (ANR-18-IDEX-0001)). At LIEPP, it is supported by the "Environmental Policies" axis, and at the CEE by the "Transformation of Capitalism" axis.

As a consequence of these disciplinary boundaries and the lack of a shared definition, scholars who theorise ambitious proposals for planning in the present day interact too little with scholars who study the concrete institutionalised practices of planning in the past. This leaves some of the biggest issues surrounding planning unaddressed: how does planning move from utopian ideal to institutionalised practice? And how can the disappointments that arise when ambitious visions of planning encounter bureaucratic inertia, institutional constraints, and interest-group politics be better understood—and perhaps mitigated? It is here that the history of economic planning can be vital to the future of planning.

This workshop aims to overcome these disciplinary boundaries by bringing together scholars from many fields to discuss what planning is, the politics of planning, and what happens when planning moves from idea to practice.

We are looking for contributions on the following topics:

Axis 1: What is planning?

Planning is a polysemic notion, appearing in many different contexts and periods and invoked by a wide range of actors, from engineers to artists, from fascists to neoliberals. Does it make sense to treat all these enunciations of the word "planning" as part of one overarching history of planning? Can we speak of a diverse tradition, of multiple schools or of varieties? Or is "planning" merely a political slogan, an empty signifier that expresses the desire for a way out of economic crises but lacks meaningful content of its own? On the first axis, we wish to raise the more fundamental methodological questions:

- Would it make sense to treat the various histories of planning as part of a (yet to be established) subfield of "the history of economic planning"?
- How should planning be studied? Does the historiography of planning require a clearly defined research object? What might a preliminary definition of planning look like?
- Does it make sense to include other forms of planning—such as urban or environmental planning—within a history of economic planning?

Axis 2: The Politics of Planning

Ideas of economic planning often take the form of a utopian ideal. As such, they generate images and symbols that political actors can mobilize. At the same time, economic planning is also a highly concrete practice embedded in administrations, government agencies, and central banks. Here, planning is more than a political program; it becomes an "infrastructure" through which data are collected, processed, and disseminated, and through which policy decisions are made—bringing together diverse forms of data, theory, expertise, and organizations. But what kind of politics unfolds between these two sides of planning? Along a second axis, we invite contributions that analyse the different political dimensions of planning and the relations between them: planning as political imaginaries and utopias, as bureaucratic infrastructure, as sites of political conflict, and so on. We are particularly interested in case studies and comparative research on:

- How specific state, banking and business practices have historically inspired planning ideals;
- How planning moves from a utopian ideal to an infrastructure;
- How and why did past planning practices, such as those seen in post-war Europe, come to an end?
- Economic planning as a site of political conflict: struggles over expertise, resources, models, priorities, and futures within and around public institutions such as planning agencies, ministries of economic affairs, and central banks;
- How planning becomes politicized and depoliticized.

Axis 3: The Relevance of the History of Economic Planning

The final axis poses an unapologetically presentist question: What is the relevance of the history of economic planning for today's planning proposals and concrete planning practices? In doing so, we aim to map the wide variety of current planning theories and practices and to investigate how they relate to the longer history of planning. Are there continuous traditions or schools of planning? What can be learned from past successes and failures? What does it mean, for planning, to succeed or fail? What drives recurring waves of enthusiasm for planning? We welcome contributions that:

- Provide overviews or map the diversity of either past or contemporary economic planning theories and practices;
- To provide a comparison between planning discourse and practices in Europe, China, and other parts of the world;
- Explore future perspectives and possible trajectories, including regarding central banking;
- Offer theoretical reflections on how the past is relevant for the present in relation to economic planning;
- Reflect on how to learn from past successes and failures, from the rise and fall of planning programs, and from cycles of enthusiasm and neglect surrounding planning alternatives.

Applicants should submit an abstract of no more than 500 words outlining their proposal, and a short CV by **12 October** 2026 to zoe.evrard@uclouvain.be and thomas.kayzel@sciencespo.fr. Applicants will be informed of the outcome by **20 October** and will be requested to submit their papers by **1st of December** by the latest.

Please note that should your institution be unable to do so, limited conference funds are available to support accommodation and travel expenses.