COLLOQUIA HUMANISTICA

Maciej Falski

University of Warsaw, Poland
mfalski@uw.edu.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5610-5608

Linda Kovářová

Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague
linda.kovarova@ff.cuni.cz
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8990-4262

Heritage and the Post-Socialist City: Social and Cultural Perspectives

Abstract

The paper is a presentation of the latest volume of *Colloquia Humanistica*. The leading subject of heritage in the post-socialist city is largely commented on with reference to three major questions: the interplay of city planning and identity issues; symbolic practices and semiotic shifts in urban space; social practices and the functioning of local social networks. Concluding remarks draw attention to the intersection of memory studies and politics, as well as the issue of (dis)continuity, which is crucial for the stability and security of societies on the one hand, and for efficient change on the other.

Keywords: post-socialist city, heritage, urban studies.

The notion of cultural heritage has gained importance since the early 1980s in Europe. The year 1980 was declared the Year of Heritage in France, an initiative which met with success and enormous interest of the population. Not only hundreds of museums and other sites were opened to the public, but also many private collections usually not accessible to visitors. The idea was launched by the French president at the time, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and can be seen as his attempt to leave a trace in history, typical of the French style of presidency, by intervening in the field of culture (cf. Garcia, 2006), but it gained popularity and gave an example for the whole European community. The Council of Europe initiated an event called European Heritage Days in 1991, which today includes various activities throughout the European Union and neighboring countries. These brief remarks reveal not only a certain "obsession with heritage", but also an important political impact of that notion. Political usage of the past in the nation-building process has been widely discussed, as has been the European policy of strengthening the European symbolic coherence and identity using heritage and other notions and practices from the field of symbolic and historical production (cf. Lähdesmäki et al., 2021).

In the present volume of *Colloquia Humanistica* we ask what has been the fate of heritage of "the other Europe", or that part of the world which was under the influence of state socialism behind the Iron Curtain, or somewhere in-between the two blocks, as the case of Yugoslavia can be classified. There is no satisfying definition of what the notion of post-socialist heritage can mean, nor what this heritage itself can be seen like. We understand heritage as anything from the past which is classified as valuable for a certain community and generates values proposed for the future (Szacki, 2011). This definition, operational rather than exhaustive, shows two important aspects of the notion. Firstly, heritage is not given as an unconditioned good: it is defined and determined by certain actors in a specific socio-cultural and political context. Secondly, heritage is closely related to the vision of the future, or, in other words, it plays an important role in the determination of group identity, strengthening some principles and undermining others. It seems interesting to see in this light how present-day societies of the post-socialist area treat the legacy from the socialist era. It appears obvious that no linear trajectory of post-socialist urban transformation can be traced and literature covers it mostly as a major discontinuity. There was no such phenomenon as a unique way of transformation from the socialist to any supposed "capitalist" or "universal" city. Nonetheless, we propose the category of "post-socialist" as a notion covering the space – and populations living there – of the common experience of living under the socialist regime.

The question arises how various urban communities from that area deal with the socialist past and its material or social expressions.

The authors represented in the present volume investigate the process of transformation of urban communities in post-socialist realities through different case studies – one group of contributions focuses on the interplay of city planning and identity issues; another one on symbolic practices and semiotic shifts in urban space; other case studies are devoted to social practices and the functioning of local social networks. There is also one paper that offers a general evaluation of how the post-socialist space has been theorized in research over the last thirty years.

City Planning and Identity Issues

Two contributions focus on the analysis of space transformation after the collapse of the former regimes. A case study of the Istrian city of Pula by Tanja Petrović gives us an example of a former "military city" and a recent "post-military city", a liminal and equivocal type of place. The author introduces us to the ways in which the soldiers of the former Yugoslav army and the citizens of Pula interacted and shaped the space of the city and each other over time – both during the period of Yugoslav socialism and the following post-socialist times. Petrović remarks that the city suffers from the "appendix syndrome", meaning that the collective perception of Pula by its citizens is one of a low-profile city, outside main roads and important events. Nevertheless, the author argues it can also function as a source of affective attachment and engagement. Regarding the collected narratives of the inhabitants of the city, the author sees them in terms of "neither-nor", characterizing them by fluidity and intertwinement. This case study makes an up-to-date addition to the research field debating (de)militarization and its aftereffects, moreover, set in the context of post-socialist urban settings and depicting the social perspectives. Petrović relates such settings to the perspective of "unwanted heritage", in which the status of certain places is often unresolved and they still wait for their new functions and owners. Moreover, negative values and connotations attached to physical objects from the past periods in the city make it difficult to identify with them. On the other hand, the post-socialist heritage is seen as an important factor of place identity and is reclaimed by part of the local community. We can notice in the conclusion that different actors take part in the process of negotiating the meaning of the area and its future fate. These aspects are a frequent phenomenon which the European post-socialist societies must deal with.

Naum Trajanovski discusses another aspect of space transformation – the city planning process. Skopje is one of the most interesting cities from the point of view of urban planning, as it was subject to two global transformations: the first one, after the disastrous earthquake in 1963, and another, politically motivated, in the 2010s. The Macedonian capital was largely destroyed in 1963, and the international community got engaged in the rebuilding process, which exceeded the potential of the country. The author presents the involvement of Polish sociologists, who engaged in the preparation of the reconstruction plan. It was a pioneering concept, aiming to identify people's needs and the major social problems of the city in order to support the planning process with a "view from below". Apart from the famous set of brutalist monumental buildings in the center, a long-term development plan was prepared. A survey of Skopje population, conducted by a joint Polish-Macedonian team, revealed some key points of the city's social development; among them the interethnic relations and a lack of integration of different ethnic and religious communities were mentioned. However, the development plan, called "Open City", was abandoned: partially in the 1980s, and totally after the independence of Macedonia in 1991. Trajanovski discusses the problem of continuity and discontinuity of urban planning when a socially motivated program is replaced by the politically motivated concept of the capital city as a stage for the nationalist idea of Macedonian identity.

The above-mentioned authors show us that heritage can neither be viewed as a set of built environments, nor as a set of symbolic places with a special historical value. The city itself should be seen as a specific structure which supposedly generates emotions and memories. As such, the city influences the mental map of city dwellers. According to Paul Connerton, any intervention in the socially organized structure, of which urban areas are an example, can affect collective memory as well as social safety and stability (Connerton, 2014). An intervention, as both cases show, can meet a vigorous protest, as it was in the case of Pula, or create a deep feeling of uncertainty. The socialist heritage, or places and structures associated with the socialist regime, can fall victim to rivalry between various actors, and local dwellers claim their right to the city as well (Harvey, 2019).

Symbolic Practices and Semiotic Shifts in Urban Space

As we claim at the beginning of this article, the post-socialist city can be defined by the need of response to the complicated process of transformation, affecting every aspect of urban life. The accessibility of the city and disruption

in the planning process is one aspect, another one can be defined through symbolic practices and the semiotic transformation of urban space. Two cases from the post-Soviet area show a drive to rearrange the symbolic sphere in order to establish a new set of values. In their paper, Bato Dodukov, Oyuna Dorzhigushaeva and Galina Dondukova explore how global and local Buddhist organizations are represented in the urban landscape of Ulan-Ude, the capital of the post-Soviet Republic of Buryatia, and analyze opinions of local Buddhist leaders on urbanism and its influence on reality. The authors depict the clash between the global Buddhist organizations and their leaders settled locally in Ulan-Ude, defining them as "urbanized", and the traditional, revived local Buddhist organizations and leaders promoting rural lifestyle, considering them "anti-urban". The paper focuses on exploring especially the traditional Buddhism in Buryatia and its anti-urbanism. This stream is considered to be of purely religious and ethnic nature: it proclaims village life and practicing agriculture as a suitable lifestyle for Buryat Buddhist believers (and not all people). On the other hand, anti-urbanism as a system of theoretical considerations and practical actions commonly associating urban space with negative attributes – such as pollution (air, noise, light), (un)sustainability, unaffordability (housing prices, gentrification, tourism), lesser social cohesion and perhaps even immorality recognizable in European countries – is of rather social and economic nature.

Another case from the post-Soviet area reveals the need to break with the past. The question of symbolic practices turns out to be a political issue, or, in other words, symbolic practices were supposed to correspond with the change not only of the regime, but of the patterns of culture, which is clearly shown in the article by Yevhen Rachkov. Apart from providing the context of heritage uses in post-socialist Ukrainian cities, this paper is a contribution to the field of urban festivity, as it offers an analysis of both tangible and intangible components. Rachkov examines urban festive culture in today's Ukraine, which he defines as eclectic, consisting of several elements he identifies and refers to as traditional, new/Western style and Soviet. Drawing on Pierre Nora's concept of places of memory, he considers the ongoing process of creating a new festive canon in big cities of eastern and southern Ukraine to be part of "decolonization of historical memory". The revival of pre-Soviet traditions, taking over from the West, or reinterpretation and modification of former traditions are the basic principles that are part of this process. These strategies are typically present also in other post-socialist countries and they have been described in numerous case studies, especially with regard to heritage uses and identity-making. At a certain point, heritage and the attendant

festivity serve decommunization processes in post-socialist urban reality. In conclusion, Rachkov points out that modern urban festivity (ritual practices) in Ukraine is fragmented, decentralized and diversified.

Social Practices and the Functioning of Local Social Networks

The transformation ongoing since the early 1990s has been affecting urban social practices as well. Destruction of local social networks was characteristic of the post-Yugoslav space, which was deeply influenced by the devastating impact of military and political conflicts. A specific model of cohabitation, *komšiluk*, can be interpreted as a mechanism permitting to maintain relationships between various neighboring groups of different ethnic and/or religious identities. It can be treated as a kind of intangible heritage, inscribed in the sphere of social practices. Denis Ermolin analyzes a wide range of narratives about the common past of originally ethnically mixed neighborhoods in Kosovo's capital city of Pristina in the context of its socio-cultural transformations. His discourse-centered approach to collective memory displays several co-existing contradictory voices – a multivocality. The author's goal is to understand social relations in situ, especially under the circumstances of ethnic tensions. Ermolin identifies the cultural type of boundary dividing the city's residents into two diverse categories: old citizens as "people with culture" (those who knew how to live in the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional and multi-cultural city of Pristina and whose identity was based on locality rather than ethnicity) and newcomers. Therefore, the author claims that despite the growth of interethnic tensions in the 1990s Kosovo, the relations between Serbian and Albanian neighbors in Pristina open the possibility for a new interpretation of the Kosovo conflict as one having a social-class dimension rather than being an ethnic conflict between Serbs and Albanians.

Tereza Hodúlová presents another aspect of social transformation after the collapse of the socialist order in Central Europe. This paper is based on a long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2019–2020, including participant observation and in-depth interviews with the residents of Solidarita housing estate in Prague, focusing on their practices of involvement in community life and their perceptions of and attachment to the place they live in. Hodúlová employs the theoretical concept of the social production of space and the notion of place attachment in order to explore the context of the social production of post-socialist space. Her case study of the Solidarita housing estate demonstrates how place attachment affects

the understanding and experience of the place; it also shows the impact of socio-spatial changes. The Solidarita housing estate is a remarkable example of socialist urban planning, architecture and housing policies and of the changes that followed during the post-socialist times. Interestingly, contrary to common conclusions (cf. Simmel, 2010) that large cities as crowds of lonely individuals are less capable of coherent collective action than small towns, Hodúlová's findings show the opposite, as residents of the Solidarita housing estate in Prague have engaged in several collective actions.

Maja Babić examines the study of the post-socialist city in Western Balkans in the general context of research on the post-socialist urban space. She explores different academic trends, disciplines engaged and methodologies applied in the study of the post-socialist urban space in former Yugoslavia. In her paper, she offers a thorough overview of how the Yugoslav post-socialist urban space has been examined and theorized in the last thirty years. What she identifies as dominant research tendencies are those focusing on heritage, transformation, introduction of market economy, sustainability and the links between the national and the urban. The war destruction of heritage during the 1990s in former Yugoslavia – for which scholars have adopted the term "urbicide" – and subsequent reconstruction have been greatly connected with the post-Yugoslav identity construction processes. Regarding the transformation, the existing research has looked into the political and economic transition from communism to democracy and from centrally planned economy to capitalism. Babić provides an overview of major works and case studies from the field in focus. She also outlines several possible trajectories of future research on the post-socialist city in former Yugoslavia: (1) the examination of the "post-Yugoslav" as juxtaposed to "post-socialist" city; (2) further explorations of heritage preservation; (3) the expanding study of Yugoslav monuments; (4) the rising problematics of housing; (5) the growing focus on sustainability; and (6) the issues of foreign investment urban renewal projects. As a conclusion of her examination of studies on the topic, Babić calls for a transdisciplinary approach in comprehensive examination of diverse elements in the production of urban and socio-cultural space.

<center>*</center>

All the papers attempt to go beyond a stereotypical image of societies which try to regain the time lost under the socialist regime by implementation of a quasi-universal order of market-driven capitalism. The notion of heritage reveals itself as a useful tool for the investigation of the social and cultural change, as it is deeply related to the attitudes towards the socialist

past, which can be observed in the societies in question. It is significant that the authors contributing to the present volume turn their attention to practices, the ways of doing, or relations in the social field in the city. *Komšiluk* in Pristina, integrated neighborhood in the Solidarita housing estate, or practices of festivity, are described as relatively coherent patterns of culture, revealing values important for a given urban community. As the authors suggest, answers to the questions of social transformation are not unambiguous. In Ermolin's and Hodúlová's research, it can be seen that people try to resist negative phenomena accompanying the change, like nationalization or commercialization. Meanwhile, patterns of festivity in the public sphere can be seen as a sign of struggle against the Soviet past in Ukraine. The ways of doing, as Connerton claims, are transmitters of collective memory (Connerton, 2014). For Victor Turner, practices are crucial for the periodical "staging" of the community: this is the reason why we can relate them to the notion of heritage and why they are so important for a diagnosis of the socio-cultural change (cf. Turner, 1974).

Urban space becomes an arena of the struggle for meanings and for political and economic capital. Here again heritage plays an important role as a site of memory with great semiotic potential. Nora argues that sites of memory have substituted the previous collective memory of communities which lived in continuity with their past, something that has been wiped out in the context of modernization (Nora, 1989, cited in Ira & Janáč, 2017). Some sites created during the socialist era are labeled as "unwanted" with the intention of destroying them and replacing them with something new. Meanwhile, the study by Tanja Petrović shows that for a large part of urban population such sites can be associated with positive values: in the case of Pula, they could be seen as symbols of an open society with a strong workers' identity, developed in the times of socialist Yugoslavia and systematically dismantled since the early 1990s. Petrović's paper once again confirms the importance of the "bottom-up" anthropological perspective. Conflict over the interpretation of the heritage from the socialist times turns out to be a rivalry of different concepts of community, centered on different values. In the times of a traumatic socio-cultural change (cf. Sztompka, 2004), heritage can give certain stability, relating the uncertain and conflictual present with the past, or with the positive aspect of the past which is sometimes visible from the local perspective but remains unnoticed from above.

In mapping and researching the reality of post-Soviet urban space, small towns tend to be less reflected on than large urban centers, and this is also the case of the contributions in this volume: all of them are devoted to large or capital cities. In scholarly discourse small towns maintain tradition, while large cities tend to focus on the future: societies in small towns are

characterized as societies of memory, in contrast to societies of change in large cities (Klusáková, 2017). Comparison of proclaimed attributes of small towns and large cities and their processes in the perspective of post-socialist urban realities could constitute the next possible and valuable avenue for further research on the post-socialist city.

Beyond the Thematic Section

Apart from the thematic section, the present volume of *Colloquia Humanistica* contains a set of other important contributions. The article by Ewelina Drzewiecka is an interesting commentary on modern spirituality. Her analysis of Teodora Dimova's novel provides an insight into reinterpretation of the biblical tradition in the new contemporary context, which can be seen as a comment on the post-socialist change in the symbolic sphere in Bulgaria.

An exceptional contribution is the first translation into Polish of *Skanderbeg*, a poem by Grigor Prličev, a Macedonian-Bulgarian writer and activist from the nineteenth century. The poem has been beautifully translated by Małgorzata Borowska. The case of Prličev illustrates a specificity of multifaceted identity in the Balkans, and multiligualism typical of the Balkan societies under the Ottoman rule (Sujecka, 2012). The origin of the poem is brought closer by Małgorzata Borowska, who presents and comments on documents related to the University of Athens poetry competition organized in 1862, in which Prličev took part with his *Skanderbeg*.

With his review of Marcel Thomas's new book *Local Lives, Parallel Histories: Villagers and Everyday Life in the Divided Germany* (Thomas, 2020), Jaroslav Ira draws our attention to the issue of small towns in the transformation processes. Researchers have discussed the shape of large-scale processes on the local level of small towns and rural realities since the 1990s. Thomas makes a contribution to these discussions about relations between global and micro history. His comparative study of two German villages (small towns) in the relative periphery on both sides of the Iron Curtain presents how the broader social change played out and what local meanings the villagers ascribed to the processes of transformation. Based on his findings, the author deconstructs the stereotype of completely different experiences in the two Cold War blocks.

Tomáš Masař's review introduces one of the latest works coming from the circle of researchers associated with the General and Comparative History Seminar at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague, followers of Czech historian Miroslav Hroch, a founder of this department

and one of the leading figures in comparative research on nationalism. Milan Scholz, a second-generation student of his, investigates the processes of constructing Czech and Polish national identities in a study entitled *České a polské hledání identity: Myšlení Tomáše Garrigua Masaryka a Romana Dmowského v komparativní perspektivě* [Czech and Polish Search for Identity: The Thought of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and Roman Dmowski in a Comparative Perspective] (Scholz, 2020). This extensive work is based on vast secondary literature and own published writings of the two key thinkers of the Czech and Polish national movements and provides a compendious introduction to their biographies and their views.

References

Connerton, P. (2014). *How societies remember*. Cambridge University Press.

Garcia, P. (2006). Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, la modernité et l'histoire. In C. Andrieu, M. Lavabre, & D. Tartakowsky (Eds.), *Politiques du passé: Usages politiques du passé dans la France contemporaine*. Presses universitaires de Provence. https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pup.5894

Harvey, D. (2019). *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. Verso.

Ira, J., & Janáč, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Materializing identities in socialist and post-socialist cities*. Charles University, Karolinum Press.

Klusáková, L. (Ed.). (2017). *Small towns in Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries: Heritage and development strategies*. Charles University, Karolinum Press.

Lähdesmäki, T., Mäkinen, K., Čeginskas, V. L. A., & Kaasik-Krogerus, S. (2021). Europe from below: Notions of Europe and the European among participants in EU cultural initiatives. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004449800

Scholz, M. (2020). *České a polské hledání identity: Myšlení Tomáše Garrigua Masaryka a Romana Dmowského v komparativní perspektivě*. Ústav T. G. Masaryka.

Simmel, G. (2010). The metropolis and mental life. In G. Bridge & S. Watson (Eds.), *The Blackwell city reader* (2nd ed., pp. 103–110). Wiley-Blackwell.

Sujecka, J. (2012). Profile of Grigor Prličev (Grigorios Stawridis). *Colloquia Humanistica*, *2012*(1), 239–241. https://doi.org/10.11649/ch.2012.014

Szacki, J. (2011). *Tradycja* (2nd ed.). Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.

Thomas, M. (2020). *Local lives, parallel histories: Villagers and everyday life in the divided Germany*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198856146.001.0001

Turner, V. (1974). *Dramas, fields and metaphors: Symbolic action in human society*. Cornell University Press.

Dědictví a postsocialistické město: sociologická a kulturní perspektiva

Příspěvek je prezentací nejnovějšího čísla Colloquia Humanistica. Jeho hlavní téma dědictví v postsocialistických městech je z velké části komentováno s odkazem na tři hlavní otázky týkající se podoby: vztahu mezi městským plánováním a otázkami identity; symbolických praktik a sémiotických posunů v městském prostoru; a sociálních praktik a fungování místních sociálních sítí. Závěrečné poznámky poukazují na průnik studia paměti a politiky, stejně jako na otázku (dis)kontinuity, klíčové na jedné straně pro stabilitu a bezpečnost společnosti, a na straně druhé pro její efektivní změnu.

Klíčová slova: postsocialistické město, dědictví, urbánní studia.

Dziedzictwo i miasto postsocjalistyczne w perspektywie socjologicznej i kulturowej

Artykuł jest prezentacją najnowszego numeru „Colloquia Humanistica". Główny temat dziedzictwa w miastach postsocjalistycznych został przedstawiony w odniesieniu do trzech zasadniczych pól tematycznych: relacji między planowaniem miejskim a kwestiami tożsamościowymi, praktyk symbolicznych i zachowań semiotycznych w przestrzeni miejskiej oraz praktyk w kontekście tworzenia się lokalnych sieci społecznych. Wnioski wskazują na wpływ pamięci oraz polityki, jak też kwestii (nie) ciągłości, na stabilność i bezpieczeństwo wspólnot miejskich z jednej strony, jak też na ich skuteczne przemiany z drugiej.

Note

Maciej Falski, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
mfalski@uw.edu.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5610-5608

Linda Kovářová, Charles University, Prague, Czechia
linda.kovarova@ff.cuni.cz
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8990-4262
No competing interests have been declared. MF is the Deputy Editor of the journal.

Support of the work:

Authors' contribution:

Maciej Falski prepared a general outline of the article, and developed its structure and verification, while Linda Kovářová contributed with the summaries of the papers and the general conclusion. Both authors contributed to the general concept of the article and drafting the manuscript in equal parts.

Publication History