

CATference 2022

Budapest, 27 June – 1 July 2022

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Urbanism, politics and post-socialist space

Session organisers:

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Ideas on human-centred, high-quality urban spaces, on pedestrian and cycling-oriented infrastructures, or on participatory planning are on the rise across the post-socialist space. Efforts towards “humanizing” cities and making them more liveable have been documented in cities such as Sofia, Belgrade or Moscow. A variety of actors is involved in circulating these ideas: urbanist laboratories, policy makers and consultancies spread these policies; planners and architects adopt and implement them in different localities; blogger-urbanists and educational platforms raise awareness for these ideas beyond the expert communities; and citizen groups fighting against destructive practices of space-production refer to these concepts to legitimate alternative visions for urban development. By doing so, these and other actors contribute to the establishment of urbanism (“urbanistyka”, “urbanizm”, etc.) as a particular field of practice in many post-socialist contexts.

But while initially drawing on a similar set of ideas, their popularisation and politicization resulted in highly differentiated and context-specific ways of how the field of urbanism has been assembled across the post-socialist space. In some contexts, these policies go beyond the fostering of human-centred, high-quality designs, and signify the hope towards creating more just cities, the fight against corruption and increasing authoritarian tendencies. In others, critical urbanist initiatives have been co-opted by the authorities, who turned urbanism into a top-down, state-led project and instrumentalize it to strengthen an authoritarian regime. The post-socialist space also provides ample examples in which urbanist ideas and initiatives have been incorporated into neoliberal projects of city-making, thus primarily serving the further commercialization of space.

We invite scholars to present empirical studies and/or conceptual approaches to study the different trajectories of how the field of urbanism has been assembled across the post-socialist space. By thinking post-socialist cities through the phenomenon of urbanism we hope to shed light on the highly variegated politico-economic drivers and power arrangements that shape contemporary space production. Questions to be discussed involve, but are not limited to:

- How can we conceptualize, define and analyze urbanism as a distinctive phenomenon?
- Who are the main actors and power arrangements involved in producing, popularizing and politicizing context-specific assemblages of urbanism? Which role do international actors play in this process?
- How did the ideas of urbanism change over time? Which factors facilitated this change?
- Which forms and mechanisms of political and economic co-optation and/or empowerment can be observed? And how can we explain these different trajectories (institutional characteristics, power arrangements, pre-existing legacies etc.)?

If you are interested in joining, please send an abstract to Daniela Zupan (daniela.zupan@uni-weimar.de) and Daria Volkova (daria.volkova@uni-weimar.de) by May 15th 2022. Please also upload your abstract to the CAT-ference website, indicating that you intend to present in this session. Abstracts shall include name, affiliation and email-address of authors.