

CATference 2022

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CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Memory politics in cities after transition

Session organiser:

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In the cities after transition, the discussions on memory politics are mostly centred around the experiences of decommunisation and creating new national narratives. In this event, the processes of rethinking and symbolic reappropriation of urban spaces are inextricably linked with creating new urban identities. The section aims to refresh the discussion on the memory politics in cities that experienced socialism and review the long-term effects of decommunisation, renaming urban spaces, and deconstruction of socialist heritage (physical and symbolic).

According to Farrar, urban planning practices (and here we can include the toponymy/memory politics) help to cultivate or diminish our understanding of the past and our place in it (Farrar, 2010). In particular, assigning the name of a precise historical figure to a specific space is a way of constructing memory politics. At the same time, it works as a way to legitimise the historical figure for the members of the society (Halbwachs and Coser, 2008). As Stiperski et al. point out, during the past two centuries, the urban toponyms (especially the street names) reflected the collective identities and became a means for the ruling elites to shape such identities (Stiperski et al., 2011). In particular, the communist regimes across different countries widely used the mechanism of renaming places to "displace the memories" of the pre-socialist times and spread the new socialist agenda. However, similar processes were (and are) on the go in the times of transition, accompanying a search for a new identity for the societies and urban communities. Still, some practices of establishing new identities through commemorating, forgetting and displacing memories were critically assessed by some scholars (Light and Young, 2014, Lazarenko, 2021, Ginelli, 2022), especially concerning what, who and how is about to be decommunised. As Ginelli shows in the examples of Budapest, sometimes decommunisation leads to the displacement of memories of the anti-colonial fight and experiences of certain communities. So, as Capdepón, Siep and Strauss point out, "... when places hold multiple and often opposing memories, the question of whose histories are remembered and publicly shared, or marginalised and excluded, becomes crucial for understanding social dynamics and political change." (Capdepón, Siep and Strauss, 2020) The representations of memory politics in the urban context are multiple. They include – but are not limited to – the renaming of urban spaces (in a context of diminishing ones and establishing other ones), destruction (of places bearing condemned connotations, e.g. demolition of monuments), and construction (especially of the new sites of memory).

Discussed issues may include:

- How do cities remember, commemorate, and change the urban through the naming policies?
- How are commemoration practices linked to urban identities?
- Memory and ideology: prospects of de-ideologisation of space instead of re-ideologisation;
- Decommunisation as decolonisation in post-socialist societies;
- Toponymy and routine practices, including co-existence of different toponymic levels within the urban tissue;
- How do political forces and civil society activists shape public debates about the representation of the past in urban space?



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This session aims to bring together these various interests in memory politics, mainly in post-socialist and transforming cities (with no definite geographical boundary). Both empirical and conceptual contributions are welcome. A more detailed yet complex understanding of interdependences between memory politics, urban identities and transition processes, viewed from a postcolonial perspective, might be a desired outcome of the session.

If you are interested, please send your abstract to Valeria Lazarenko (Valeria.Lazarenko@leibniz-irs.de; valerie.lazarenko@gmail.com) by the **15th May 2022**. Please also upload your abstract to the CAT-ference website, indicating that you intend to present it in this session.

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