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Keynote Speech: Soft infrastructures in change and development: a modified institutional logics approach for post-socialist urban studies

by Örjan Sjöberg, sponsored by **Eurasian Geography and Economics/Taylor & Francis**

Abstract:

Post-socialism, scholars at earlier CATferences have argued, “brings the hybridization of different infrastructural regimes to the fore” (Tuvikene *et al.* 2019: 3). This is true both with respect to the physical structures and networks that we typically associate with the word infrastructure and the governance of said societal backbones. Indeed, the latter can be thought of as a form of soft infrastructure, the qualities of which are equally critical to the effective running of society as are good quality roads, electricity grids, utilities, communication networks etc. However, governance, and more generally the institutions that underpin any form or system of governance, is not a unitary phenomenon. Instead, we may speak of logics which result from but also in turn influence the existence, nature and impact of institutions, governance as a way of conducting a particular business being intertwined with (not to say ensnared by) the institutional environment within which it finds itself. To account for the multiple shapes, or indeed hybridity, of governance, the notion of institutional logics is often employed. The argument here is that a systematic exploration of such logics may prove useful to post-socialist urban studies, not least if we are to account for change over time or the conflicts that are often observed to arise within a given national or urban setting. To leverage that capacity, however, would require a more stringent use of the notion of institutions.

Special Session: Workshop ,*Wither Post-Socialism*‘

Organised by Mattias Bernt

Subsequent years have seen ongoing debates about the meaning and the usefulness of the concept of post-socialism for urban studies (see Sýkora and Bouzarovski, 2012; Chelcea and Druță, 2016; Ferenčuhová and Gentile, 2016; Golubchikov *et al.*, 2014, Golubchikov, 2016; Tuvikene, 2016; Trubina *et al.*, 2020; Müller, 2020; Salukvadze and van Assche, 2022; Kinossian, 2022; Chelcea, 2023). These debates echo earlier conceptualizations to some degree but also go beyond established positions. Thus, while some scholars keep conceptualizing postsocialism as a yet unfinished process of “multiple transformations” towards capitalism (Sýkora and Bouzarovski, 2012), others emphasize the hybridity of the socio-spatial formations found on the Eastern side of the former Iron Curtain and highlight the open-ended character of the transitions experienced. These contributions also highlight the mutual embeddedness of capitalist economies and socialist legacies (Golubchikov *et al.*, 2014). Again other scholars proclaim “Goodbye, (to) Postsocialism!” (Müller, 2019) and declares post-socialism as a vanishing spatial-temporal container (Tuvikene, 2016; Gentile, 2018; Galuszka, 2022). Inspired by post-colonial critiques, this strand of arguments calls for a more ‘de-territorialized’ perspective. Fourthly, we can also find positions which look at postsocialism as an “anti-communist” project and emphasize its connections to global neoliberalizations (Chelcea and Druță 2016, Chelcea 2023). Summing up, it seems that the concept of “post-socialism” is used in increasingly different ways and different authors have developed rather variegated ideas about whether or not the term is still useful and if and how it should be modified, abandoned, or applied.

As a consequence, the debate about postsocialism has become very difficult to oversee. Different ideas are, moreover, not often put into conversation, so that differences and similarities are a matter of interpretation. This has arguably, led to some fragmentation of the debate.

This intellectual development, however, resonates with real-life changes: differences among postsocialist cities have grown and it has become more complicated than in the past to tell what, say, Timisoara,

Shanghai and East-Berlin have in common. Uneven economic development, new forms of authoritarianism and geopolitical rivalry add to the complexity.

Against this background, the proposed research colloquium aims at re-examining the concept of postsocialism from different perspectives. For this, we will bring together key positions of the debate and ask major proponents to discuss their understanding of post-socialism in a very concise way. With this, we hope to make the debate more accessible, counteract intellectual fragmentation and stimulate exchange.

Panelists:

Luděk Sýkora | Charles University, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development

Erika Nagy | Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Békéscsaba

Tauri Tuvikene | Tallinn University, School of Humanities

Maria Gunko | University of Oxford; Yerevan State University

Special Session: Getting published in academic journals - Meet the Editors of Eurasian Geography and Economics

Organiser: Craig Young (Editor-in-Chief - Eurasian Geography and Economics)

Keywords: Academic publishing, academic journals, Eurasian Geography and Economics

Abstract: This session will focus on publishing in academic journals by introducing the journal Eurasian Geography and Economics (EGE - <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rege20>) and also more broadly by discussing key issues in publishing in refereed journals. EGE publishes research on the “post-socialist”/“Eurasian region” (we acknowledge and encourage debate about the potentially problematic nature of these terms). Publishing eight issues per year, EGE is a Quartile 1 journal (Scimago JCR rankings, Geography, Planning, and Development 2024). EGE has a long-term association with the CAT-ference, with several Editors being keen CATs, and we have published many CAT-authored papers, book reviews, and thematically focused Guest Edited Special Issues. We will provide an overview of publishing opportunities with the journal, including the key topics and various article formats we seek to publish, and also opportunities for Guest Editing Special Issues and reviewing books. The session will then discuss more broadly key strategies to enhance the success of submissions (and key reasons why submissions may be rejected) which will also be more generally applicable to any researcher wishing to learn more about the broader publishing environment and processes, and thus may be of use more broadly for PhD students and early-career researchers who are developing a publication strategy. You are welcome to come along for an informal discussion and share questions about getting published.

Session 1: The Left-Behind Syndrome: Shrinkage, social and economic marginalization, and anti-elite politics

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Keywords: Shrinking cities, marginalization, populism

Abstract: While the existence of left-behind places is not a new phenomenon, marginalization and socio-economic, spatial and political polarization have accelerated over the past decades in the former communist nations as an outgrowth of neoliberal globalization, layered in eastern Germany by the process of German unification. Economic marginalization, widely seen by those marginalized as driven by national and transnational elites, has led to the growth of anti-elite or populist perspectives, reinforced by the financial crisis and subsequent austerity of 2007-2009, and further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic 2020-2023. We see the pandemic as societal or cultural trauma as well as a catalyst for driving a more overt political expression of those perspectives, reflected in the growth of populist and nativist political movements. For this session, we invite case studies that illuminate the relationship between population decline, socio-economic marginalization and anti-elite or populist politics in post-communist cities and suggest how recent developments can enrich the debate on shrinkage and decline and discuss the implications of this history for the future of political stability and public policy. After the presentations, we seek to have a general exchange on the topic together with the presenters and audience in the second part of the session.

1 Who can bring change to left-behind places? Exploring residents' attributions of political agency in shrinking small towns

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Susann Bischof | Johann Heinrich von Thünen Institute

Keywords: Political agency, municipalism, small towns

Abstract: Embedded in a mixed-method study on the geography of discontent in CEE, this paper explores subjective perceptions of being "left behind" and how they intersect with political orientations among residents of two small peripheralized towns in Czechia and eastern Germany. Both are shrinking, exhibit high levels of support for populist parties, and have a high share of non-voters. Drawing from group discussions, we examine how residents narratively engage with political agents positioned on various levels. We find that while there is significant resignation and distrust towards national political institutions, residents have more ambivalent evaluations and higher expectations towards local institutions of representative democracy, such as mayors and city councils. Our results indicate that feelings of being left behind channel expectations, hopes, and ascriptions of political agency towards the municipal level. We explore how these perceptions intertwine with residents' narrative constructions of their own political agency and their relationship with local governance. We discuss how these insights can inform resilience-building and support progressive change in shrinking towns. The paper advances debates on the role of municipal institutions in political struggles and societal transformation.

2 Beyond mere shrinkage: Left behind places, the COVID pandemic, and anti-elite politics

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Keywords: Left-behind places, marginalization, anti-elite politics

Abstract: While the existence of marginalized or left-behind places is not a new phenomenon, both marginalization and socioeconomic, spatial and political polarization have accelerated over the past

decades as a central effect of neoliberal globalization, and in the case of eastern Germany, the process of German unification. Economic marginalization, widely seen by those marginalized as driven by national and transnational elites, has led to the growth of anti-elite or populist perspectives, reinforced by the financial crisis and subsequent austerity of 2007-2009. For many reasons, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which we see as a societal or cultural trauma, became a catalyst for spreading those perspectives and driving a more overt political expression of them. That can be seen not only in the growth of populist and nativist political movements, but also in the growth of conspiracy theories such as vaccine opposition and the so-called “great replacement” theory. In this paper, we will trace the conjoined history of economic marginalization, left behind places, the effects of the pandemic and the growth of anti-elite populist movements, focusing on examples from eastern Germany and the United States.

3 Emotional Geographies of loss and neglect – (how) do they feed the success of right-wing parties?

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Keywords: Emotional geography, peripheralization, far-right

Abstract: Emotions and affect represent pivotal drivers of human behaviour, exerting a profound influence on how we perceive, shape, and claim spaces. Furthermore, place constitutes a pivotal element in the formation of personal identities. In contexts that are peripheralised, loss is an omnipresent experience. The prevailing sentiment in the community is one of diminishing resources and options, characterized by an exodus of residents, a decline in infrastructure, a loss of local industry and economic vitality, and a deterioration of the physical environment. These developments can be attributed to a series of interconnected factors, including reliance on external governance structures, scarcity of local resources, and integration into global economic and financial systems. The emotional conditions that have been identified as a result of the situation under discussion include sadness, shame, insecurity, and occasionally anger. It has been argued that these conditions create fertile ground for right-wing actors, who exploit regional grievances by framing small, marginalized localities as victims of neglect by distant, out-of-touch governments, as discussed under the label "geographies of discontent". The paper aims to shed light on the emotional details of this phenomenon, building on perspectives of theories of emotions from psychology, sociology, or geography.

4 From Expansion to Erosion: The Shrinking Peri-Urban Landscape of Shkoder and Albania

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Keywords: Peri-urban shrinkage, post-socialist urbanism, Shkoder

Abstract: This paper examines the spatial and socio-demographic transformation of peri-urban areas in Albania, with a focus on the outskirts of Shkoder city as a microcosm of broader national dynamics. Between 2011 and 2023, Shkoder's peri-urban zone experienced a sharp population decline of over 30%, reversing a prior decade of unregulated expansion and informal urban growth. This shift marks a critical juncture in Albania's post-socialist urban trajectory, where early aspirations of decentralized development have given way to fragmentation, infrastructural neglect, and deepening socioeconomic disparities. Through a comparative analysis of Shkoder and other Albanian urban peripheries, the study explores the dual phases of peri-urban development—growth through informalization, followed by demographic and functional shrinkage. The research draws on empirical field data and secondary statistics to argue that Albania's peri-urban zones are emblematic of “left-behind geographies” shaped by selective policy attention, economic dislocation, and rural-urban-outmigration. This paper contributes to the discourse on urban shrinkage in post-socialist states and calls for renewed attention to the governance of transitional peripheries that continue to be spatially present but politically absent.

5 Strategies to create a cohesive community and generate a robust and resilient economy that can attract new people, with an inversion of the migration flow

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Keywords: Shrinking cities, urban planning, distributism

Abstract: All over the world, in both developed and underdeveloped countries, the phenomenon of shrinking cities is becoming increasingly frequent. Many communities are disappearing because of intense urbanism combined with a demographic shift. This is a very common phenomenon in Albania, too. After a review of some post-socialist cases, guidelines have been evaluated to support the implementation of a two-way strategy, aiming to both create a cohesive community and generate a robust and resilient economy that can attract new people, with an inversion of the migration flow. An approach to develop urban planning strategies to ease the application of a socio-economic doctrine to restart local communities and fuel their growth is then analysed. So, the paper investigates, starting from similar post-socialist experiences, how it is possible to build cohesive, sustainable, efficient, and resilient communities through proper urban planning and defines a general framework for its application. The results are a decision-making tool to select applicable sites and a development framework to reverse the shrinking process and create new solid, sustainable, resilient communities. Although the development framework has been designed for optimal cases, it could be useful to define different implementation roadmaps for non-optimal cases.

6 Between Darkness and the Dawn: A Photographic Understanding of Memory and Society in Eastern Latvia and the Baltic States

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Keywords: Latvia, historical memory, marginalization, resilience

Abstract: In the small nation of Latvia, the city of Daugavpils has been left behind. Three hours from Riga, Vilnius and Minsk, it was historically the trade node between Russia and Western Europe, once giving it a fascinating ethnographic makeup as well as an important regional position. It remains the largest majority Russian-speaking city in the EU and NATO, but suffers from its geographical and economic isolation on top of a declining and aging population. Daugavpils's people—now economically and socially malnourished—ardently feel abandoned in modern-day Latvia, with each setback feeding their disillusionment in national and supranational European institutions.

This project utilizes Daugavpils to explore how long-term marginalization in post-communist cities can fuel populism and a crisis of belonging. In a city where questions of identity, language, and citizenship remain unresolved, tensions have been intensified by Latvia's increasingly nativist political climate and ex-migration. Economic exclusion facilitates cultural erasure and a sense of non-belonging and statelessness. Through documentary photography, this project traces ways that communities come to terms with loss, persistence, and defiance in the face of sociopolitical abandonment. In doing so, it gives powerful insight to conversations surrounding urban shrinkage, political instability, and the irreconcilable legacy of communist tyranny.

7 Economic, Social and Political Marginalization in Daugavpils, a Latvian Left-Behind City

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Keywords: Marginalization, demographic change, ethnic identity

Abstract: Daugavpils is a paradigmatic marginalized or left-behind community. The city is steadily losing population, and its population is aging as its young people are leaving for greater opportunities elsewhere in Latvia and the EU. It has become increasingly economically marginalized in a highly centralized country where economic growth and vitality are concentrated in and around Riga, the capital city, and is stigmatized by virtue of its predominantly Russian ethnic character in a country in which ethnic identity is not only a major cultural driving force, but is strongly embedded in national politics

and policy. I will explore the relationship between Daugavpils' geographic marginality, its demographic and economic decline, and the role that ethnic division plays in how the city is perceived from the outside officially and informally, and how it animates the city's political culture and behavior. I will conclude with observations on Daugavpils' likely future course, and whether there is a realistic path to a different future for the city.

8 Understanding the geography of discontent in Latvia: the rise of anti-system views, economic grievances and socio demographic change

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Keywords: Discontent, political trust, populism, Latvia

Abstract: Support for anti-system parties has risen rapidly, and a wave of discontent has taken over in North America and Europe. It has transitioned from being a formidable force to becoming one of the primary challenges facing society. However, the underlying causes of this emergence remain the subject of intense debate. Demographic and socioeconomic change over the past 25 years has rendered many individuals and territories vulnerable, leading to a backlash of the periphery – ‘the revenge of the places that don’t matter’, ‘forgotten’ and ‘left-behind places’. These divides reflect electoral trends driven by shifting allegiances of residents from areas who feel marginalized, neglected and disrespected by government and political elites. This research maps the geography of discontent across territorial units (electoral districts) in Latvia and assesses which demographic and socioeconomic factors push anti-system voting. The study examines the outcomes of the 2018 and 2022 Latvian parliamentary elections, alongside the associated demographic and economic statistics for those years. The results show that the anti-system vote is mainly a consequence of local demographic, economic and industrial decline in combination with lower employment and a less educated workforce.

Session 2: Uneven Development and Everyday Life: New Ideas and Challenges for CAT Research

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Keywords: Uneven development, everyday life, CEE

Abstract: To date, relatively limited scholarly attention has been paid to the Central and Eastern European & Southern European applicability of the concept of uneven development (originally developed to understand the spatiality of capitalism, e.g. Smith 1990), as well as to the potential of enriching the original theory through empirical experiences from these regions (e.g. Golubchikov et al. 2014). Moreover, this panel not only seeks to add CAT-related research (as case studies) to these discourses but also proposes a novel approach that combines the concepts of uneven development and everyday life. The session is an invitation to discuss the experiences gained from applying these two approaches. We therefore expect presentations that are based on theoretical and/or empirical, quantitative and/or qualitative research that might contribute to a debate on the following questions:

How does the combination of uneven development and the concepts of the individual- and group-specific space-experience and everyday life contribute (theoretically and empirically) to geographical knowledge? More specifically, how do the structural conditions of uneven development affect space-attached individual and/or group-perceptions and practices?

And vice versa, what impact can all those individual/household-level decisions and/or civil society strategies and actions (that shape daily practices) have on uneven geographical development?

We especially encourage research contributions examining the changing relations and reactions of people marginalised / left behind in various ways (living in places/regions that are currently in the position of underdevelopment/disinvestment) to the spatial disadvantage(s) they experience.

1 Uneven development and everyday life – gentrification as experienced by marginalised residents in a CEE city

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Keywords: Uneven development, gentrification, space experience

Abstract: This presentation highlights the benefits of integrating the concepts of uneven development and everyday life. We argue that by viewing marginalised residents of urban areas as active participants rather than passive victims of gentrification, we can achieve a more accurate understanding of their lived spaces and better comprehend gentrification in general and its characteristics in Central and Eastern Europe in particular. The location of the empirical research, funded by the National Research, Development, and Innovation Fund in Hungary (No. 138713), focuses on the Zsolnay Quarter, a district in Pécs, Hungary. This area transitioned from a working-class neighbourhood to a decaying slum and eventually became a target area of modest gentrification through the European Capital of Culture programs in 2010. Our approach connects the spatial experiences and daily practices of certain marginalised groups, revealed through narrative interviews, with macro-processes explored in the historical analysis of state- and capital-driven homogenisation and differentiation, alongside changes in investment and disinvestment patterns. Individual and group experiences from the state socialist period illuminate previously overlooked differences in the production of space across various eras, shedding light on current opportunities for former "occupier developers" and the unique features of recent spontaneous gentrification.

2 From Postsocialist Anxieties to Neoliberal Desires: Housing Advertisements and Urban Imaginaries in Vilnius

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Keywords: Housing advertisements, representations of space

Abstract: This presentation analyses housing advertisements in Vilnius, Lithuania, as cultural texts that reflect and shape shifting urban imaginaries in a postsocialist context. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's triad of spatial production, it examines how housing is constructed not only as a physical space but also as a site of ideology, aspiration, and social ordering. The study is based on a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2022) of advertisements of 420 housing projects from two periods (2000–2013 and 2014–2022). The findings trace a shift from what I term transitional neoliberalism – characterised by privatisation, securitisation, and anxieties rooted in postsocialist uncertainty, where early ads idealise homogeneity, enclosure, and control – toward an aspirational or experiential neoliberalism. In this later phase, housing, while still organised around the "collective organisation of privacy" (Musterd 2006), is framed as a conduit for post-material values such as authenticity, slowness, eco-luxury, and personal fulfilment. The urban imaginaries thus move from anxiety to selective, curated desire, layering aspirational promises over residual insecurities. These findings suggest that postsocialist neoliberalism in Vilnius is not simply an imported model but a layered and evolving formation.

3 Guiding urban policies through the ordinary city: The 'London Opportunity Areas' as a model for Tirana's uneven growth

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Keywords: opportunity areas, uneven growth

Abstract: Tirana presents itself as an experimental urban laboratory, where events unfold in a context marked by a widespread perception of disorder. "Nënë Tereza" Square, the urban terminus of the

Dëshmorët e Kombit Boulevard and once a splendid metaphysical space framed by the former stadium, today retains only a portion of its original configuration—and of its symbolic and spatial value. The new stadium, significantly larger in scale, functionally more complex, disrupts the spatial harmony envisioned by Gherardo Bosio.

Despite the existence of a regulatory plan (Tirana 2030 by Stefano Boeri) and two masterplans for the city's central area (by Grimshaw and Architecture Studio), a series of high-rise buildings are emerging in locations that appear contextually incoherent. By contrast, urban development in London is not governed by a traditional masterplan, but rather shaped through urban projects with a strong formal and spatial identity. Specific "Opportunity Areas" are identified based on strategic interests and needs, and the responsibility for regeneration is delegated to private initiatives, in exchange for the provision of public spaces and services. A paradigmatic example of this approach is "VNEB"; similarly, in Tirana, the "Riverside Albania" development reflects this model. Might this represent the future trajectory of urban development in Tirana?

4 Deindustrialization, uneven development, and everyday life – A case study of the Chinese community in Budapest's 8th district

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Keywords: Uneven development, everyday life, Budapest

Abstract: This presentation explores the relationship between uneven development (UD) and everyday life (EL) through the case of a transforming brownfield area in Budapest, Hungary. It seeks to bridge macro-level (UD) and micro-level (EL) research perspectives by examining how large-scale economic processes intersect with the daily experiences of local communities. The so-called Ganz-MÁVAG site in Budapest's 8th district, once a major industrial complex, underwent deindustrialization and functional transformation in the post-socialist period. Today, it is primarily characterized by retail and wholesale activities operated by a predominantly Asian (mainly Chinese) labor force (and thus, is frequently referred to as Budapest's 'Chinatown'). Based on our interviews and participant observation, the research investigates how the seesaw of investment and disinvestment (i.e., uneven development) has shaped the everyday lives of Chinese transnational migrants in the area.

This study is part of the research project entitled 'Marginalised Space Experience in the Context of Uneven Geographical Development' (Grant No. K 138713), funded by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office of Hungary (NKFIH).

5 Is the Green Deal a fair deal? – Environmental justice implications of a peri-urban renewable energy development from the perspective of local farmers

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Keywords: Green grabbing, peripheral (re)industrialisation, agriculture

Abstract: In our presentation, we examine the effects of and local resistance towards a peri-urban solar energy project from the perspectives of uneven development, food security, and environmental justice. Our case study is Inárcs, a formerly agricultural, rapidly transforming settlement bordering the Budapest agglomeration (Hungary) from the South. Our research methods include regional and local expert interviews, oral history interviews with small-scale farmers and agricultural workers, and analysis of secondary sources. We present the conflictual process of capitalist production of space (nature), including the selective and declining profitability of agricultural activities, urban sprawl and related market processes, and the installation of new industrial facilities, using a novel approach of combining the concept of uneven development and the everyday experiences of local farmers.

This work is based on the results of the 'Marginalised Space Experience in the Context of Uneven Geographical Development' research project (project no. 138713), funded by the Ministry of Innovation and Technology of Hungary, National Research, Development, and Innovation Fund, under the K_21 funding scheme.

6 Faith-based governance and rural marginality: Social services in Hungary's emerging settlements

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Keywords: Faith-based organisations, rural marginality, spatial inequality

Abstract: This paper examines how uneven development is reproduced and governed in rural Hungary by delegating social services to faith-based organisations (FBOs). Based on fieldwork conducted within the state-led Emerging Settlements programme, targeting 300 of the country's most disadvantaged villages, the study explores how spatial marginality is managed through selective care, moral narratives and professional mediation. The paper argues that the programme does not seek to address structural inequalities, but rather spatialises poverty through project-based interventions that blur public responsibility and reframe poverty as a behavioural issue. The analysis highlights three key areas: (1) the spatial logic of FBO-led service delivery, (2) the political reframing of Roma inclusion and poverty, and (3) the dilemmas that social workers face when navigating between professional ethics, state expectations and community needs. By offering a grounded perspective on how rural development and social service delivery are shaped by everyday practices, institutional roles, and broader political shifts, the paper contributes to critical debates on uneven development in Central and Eastern Europe.

7 Reframing Centrality: Exploring Time-Space Imaginations in Czech Border Microregions

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Keywords: Centrality, time-space, experience, Czech microregions

Abstract: This paper explores centrality by contrasting the dominant polycentric planning discourse with the perception of lived space. Urban system theories perceive the centre as a tangible feature of both the physical and social urban landscape, grounded in aggregated data analysis and embedded in the technical planning discourse. This continues to be reflected in European spatial policy that normatively prescribes a desired model of territorial development. Yet, such analytical representations often fail to reflect everyday lived experience and ignore the temporality of action space. Based on nearly 2,000 face-to-face questionnaires using a non-probability quota sample, the study investigates potential discrepancies between analytically derived spatial representations and individually perceived time-space experience. The case study focuses on peripheral and border regions of the Czech Republic—post-socialist, formerly industrialised areas affected by transformation, depopulation, and service decline. Preliminary findings show that many people anchor their activities within a single spatio-temporal context and perceive time and space in a predominantly monocentric manner. However, mapping individual action time-spaces reveals notable heterogeneity in imagined centralities across socio-demographic groups. This contrast between analytical and experience-based centrality may offer valuable insights for planning and regional policy.

8 Crip Time and the Politics of Accessibility in Post-Socialist Public Transport

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Keywords: Public transport, accessibility, temporalities

Abstract: This paper explores how temporalities shape the governance and lived experience of public transport accessibility in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), particularly in Brno, Czech Republic. Inspired by crip theory as a lens for exploring post-socialist transformation (Kolářová & Koobak, 2020), specifically by the concept of crip time (Kafer, 2013), the paper investigates how

temporalities influence institutional priorities and the legitimacy of accessibility-related agendas. Despite formal commitments to inclusion and accessibility, public transport institutions are shaped by neoliberal governance, where technocratic models and the authority of the free market limit both institutional capacity and understandings of accessibility. Nonetheless, within these constraints, initiatives to improve public transport accessibility are emerging. These efforts suggest that public transportation in cities often positioned as peripheral can act as sites of practical innovation and accessibility. Engaging with discussions on post-socialist heterochronies and decolonial approaches to urban transport geographies (Chelcea, 2022; Wood, Kębłowski & Tuvikene, 2020), this contribution highlights the epistemic relevance of CEE contexts in global debates on mobility and accessibility. Crip time offers a powerful framework for reimagining urban public transport governance and accessibility beyond Western-centric paradigms.

Session 3: Making and remaking authoritarianism? Encountering infrastructures, practices, and atmospheres of closure and control in the city

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Keywords: Authoritarianism, infrastructures, atmospheres, digital, urban

Abstract: In the context of the current (geo)political rightward shift, there is a growing interest in retheorizing authoritarian cities and practices around the world (Bathla 2025; Can and Fanton Ribeiro da Silva 2024; Zupan 2023). Eschewing narrow container thinking, this follows a line of research that focuses on authoritarian practices (Glasius 2018; 2023), with a focus on the urban as both place and process where these transitions are taking place. There is a need to examine the everyday manifestations of authoritarianism in the city, unpacking the ways in which ordinary encounters contribute to the creation and recreation of an overall politics of closure and control (Geva 2021; Laketa 2025; Mascaro 2024).

This session investigates these textures of closure and control that shape authoritarianism in urban spaces. To avoid reproducing either transition narratives or reductive and binary understandings of authoritarianism, this session invites contributions that explore the position of the various “Easts” in contributing to global thinking on authoritarian practices and places. Are “post-socialist” cities in the vanguard position in relation to cities elsewhere (Chelcea 2023; Krivy 2022)? What can cities in the North, West, and South learn from the East?

We welcome empirically rich submissions that explore everyday infrastructures, practices, atmospheres, and spaces where the authoritarian can be encountered and experienced. These might include museums, stadiums, squares and monuments, public transport, housing developments, cultural events, and media – whether physical or digital.

1 Illiberal politics, post-socialist neopatrimonialism and manifestations of authoritarian urbanism in Budapest

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Keywords: Illiberalism, authoritarianism, neopatrimonialism, neoliberalism

Abstract: More than thirty years after the declaration of liberal democracy in former socialist countries of Eastern-Europe, we see a U-turn towards authoritarianism and illiberalism in Russia, Hungary and Serbia as prime examples, however the spectre of illiberal politics is there in other countries. Earlier descriptions were prematurely convinced about the new hegemony of neoliberalism appearing also in urban development. However, the deviations from the agenda of markets and private capital became visible for example in contextually peculiar patterns of gentrification and state led urban regeneration. As a compromise, conceptualisations such as post-socialist or authoritarian neoliberalism came up. However, these suggestions veil the institutional peculiarities of ownership, urban planning and urban democracy, also determined by the consequences of the post-socialist transformation: the

neopatrimonial power relations in politics and economy. I use examples from Budapest in the illiberal context of Hungary to present how these quasi-feudal relations influence dynamics of land rent and state-led urban investments resulting in typically authoritarian spectacle projects, such as the movement of government functions to the castle of Buda or building large and underused stadia. Instead of neoliberal capital accumulation the interventions are rather tools for the maintenance of the uncontested domination by the state party.

2 Cities as “Enclaves of Democracy”: Paradoxes of Local Politics in (Quasi-)Feudal Putin’s Russia

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Keywords: City, Russia, enclaves of democracy

Abstract: The paper examines the paradox of local politics in Russia despite intensified authoritarianism following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Despite the construction of a “vertical of power” (Petrov, Lipman & Hale, 2014), and widespread assumptions of societal depoliticization (Matveeva, 2018; Laruelle, 2020) followed by the unprecedented repressions since 2022, our fieldwork in six Russian regions (2023–2025) reveals continued political engagement at the municipal level. In particular, city council elections remain contested spaces. We argue that the institutional weakening of formal urban governance has led to partial neglect by federal authorities (Prakh, 2024), allowing informal systems, described by local actors as “quasi-feudal”, to emerge. These systems, dominated by local business elites and clientelist networks, create opportunities for opposition actors to navigate into institutions through elite rivalry and strategic openings. We conceptualize cities as “enclaves of democracy” (Gilley, 2010; Öktem, 2023; Szymański, 2024): pockets of political pluralism within an authoritarian regime. This challenges dominant narratives of uniform repression and invites reconsideration of federalism, informal authority, and local democratic resilience in hybrid regimes like Russia’s.

3 Motorist Populism: Right-Wing Urban Movements ‘Defending Drivers’ Rights’ in CEE/FSU

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Keywords: Backlash, populism, automobility, far right

Abstract: Transport conflicts rank among the most explosive fields of contemporary urban policy. Social inequalities exacerbated by the housing crisis push less-affluent residents out of inner-city areas toward increasingly distant suburbs, where lower-quality public transport encourages (sub)urban dwellers to rely on private automobility. Meanwhile, climate-oriented policies are introducing ever more restrictive measures that trigger “carbon gentrification,” further marginalizing everyone outside the most privileged urban strata. Together, these forces fuel a spiral of dissent that manifests as (sub)urban right-wing populism, endorses illiberal urbanism, or, in its extreme form, promotes conspiracy theories about 15-minute cities and other mainstream urban policy concepts. This presentation presents findings from a study of the narratives driving such urban backlash movements, based on interviews with their representatives in four CEE/FSU cities: Tallinn (Estonia), Warsaw (Poland), Lviv, and Kyiv (Ukraine).

4 General Rule of Political Conduct or why transport governance is inherently authoritarian.

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Keywords: Transportation, governance, authoritarianism

Abstract: Transport has always been an authoritarian practice for bureaucrats and scientists, who share an epistemological approach based on assumptions, specific data and statistical methods. A specific set of procedures plays a crucial role in producing knowledge, delivering services and designing the market. Such an approach to transport limits our ability to understand, explain and define the phenomena of movement because it serves the bureaucratic purpose of redistributing money. Following Robert Michels’ “iron law of oligarchy,” David Graeber proposed the iron law of liberalism. I would like to

make a very modest contribution to this line, with the introduction of the General Rule of Political Conduct, meaning that practical implementation of a specific agenda almost always suggests exclusively bureaucratic means. Drawing on empirical examples from Moscow and Bishkek, as well as historical examples from the Soviet past, this contribution illustrates that there has never been an authoritarian turn; it has always been this way, at least in transportation.

5 From abandonment to theft: Property and occupation in Russian territorial governance

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Keywords: Occupation, land, property regimes, Russia

Abstract: This talk examines how property regimes operate in authoritarian settings, focusing on Russia's approach to land governance as a tool not just of control, but of occupation. I explore how recent changes in Russia's legal framework around land inform and are informed by extralegal land grabbing in Ukraine's occupied territories during the full-scale invasion. Tracing the official discourse on land, the talk will reflect on the contradictory workings of infrastructures of land cadaster, management, and valuation, which were among the first to be set up in occupied zones laying the groundwork for new territorial claims. On the one hand, these mundane systems of land management have struggled to deal with widespread land abandonment at home. On the other, these same systems have been instrumental in producing land abandonment in occupied territories, paving the way for seizure. Making sense of these two contradictory practices – land abandonment and land theft – interchangeably, could help to lay out the specific infrastructures of occupation through property. This contribution sheds light on the murky networks of extralegal land relations in armed conflict zones, where infringements on property rights often solidify repressive regimes, strengthening or dismantling the territorial sovereignty in question.

6 Infrastructures of Solidarity: Contesting Authoritarian Control in 2020 Minsk

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Keywords: Minsk, protest, mass housing

Abstract: This paper examines everyday forms of resistance to authoritarian control during the 2020 protests in Minsk. Focusing on the micro-spaces of daily life—such as private apartments, children's playgrounds, and personal mobile phones—it explores how digital and physical infrastructures intertwined to transform an ordinary mass housing district into an epicenter of mass protest. This paper highlights how often-criticized features of post-Soviet residential space—anonymity, uniformity, and high population density—become resources for collective resistance and solidarity. At the same time, it shows how these very resources became vulnerable to subversion through digital surveillance technologies. By tracing the evolving dynamics of protest and state repression, the paper shows how previously overlooked intimate spaces of everyday life were gradually drawn into the sphere of authoritarian control. I argue that the practices of resistance and repression that emerged in Minsk in 2020 offer important lessons for contemporary protest movements across “Easts” and “Wests”—from Turkey and Serbia to the United States.

7 (Dis)assembling authoritarianism in quotidian digitally mediated interactions

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Keywords: Authoritarianism, neighborhood, digital mediation

Abstract: Classic scholarship on authoritarianism highlights how institutional structures sustain a political balance enabling regime survival (Gerschewski 2013). Digital mediation complicates this balance by facilitating both surveillance and resistance (Weidmann & Rød 2019). This presentation explores how authoritarianism and digital mediation intersect in everyday life and examines how authoritarianism is assembled through digitally mediated negotiations within neighbor communities.

Focusing on neighboring as a spatially proximate and socially significant form of bonding (Bulmer 1986), we highlight how authoritarianism is assembled, resisted, or eroded through routine digital interactions such as online talks, discussions, and actions. This lens broadens understandings of authoritarianism beyond overt repression to include its reproduction or dissolution through quotidian, often unnoticed acts. Our approach aligns with perspectives on the local diversity of global models such as neoliberalism (Brenner & Theodore 2002; Matveev & Novkunskaya 2020) and authoritarianism (Olt et al. 2024), interpreting them as local assemblages. Drawing on the data collected in Moscow and St. Petersburg (2018–2025), we show how everyday mediation of neighbor communication may (not) contribute to authoritarian assemblages, and how authoritarianism manifests in “diffused and diverse” forms (Koch 2022) in daily life under Russia’s authoritarian regime (McFaul 2021).

8 Methodological reflections on exploring the authoritarian: Potemkin democracy and the polycrisis

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Keywords: Authoritarianism, theory-building, methodology, everyday life

Abstract: The contemporary moment has been described as a polycrisis of overlapping existential threats (Homer-Dixon et al. 2022). One of the features of the polycrisis is its prolonged nature, continuing for years on end to threaten life, liberty, and happiness across a variety of contexts. These problems persist despite collective public pressure, to say nothing of common decency or even basic self-preservation.

This paper posits that the polycrisis is both created and sustained by a profound lack of authentic democratic practices in cities around the globe. Building on Marlies Glasius (2018; 2023), it centers authoritarian practices (rather than states) and hinges on questions of accountability, control, and access to information. Further, in light of increasing risks, the paper asks how scholars can continue to do research on and in spaces of repression and political closure. Continuing a commitment to the value of investigating micro moments and everyday urban life (Wolfe 2023; 2024), the paper sets out an array of practical and ethical problems on conducting research in an era of authoritarian practices before suggesting some potential ways forward. Ultimately, the paper argues for the necessity of continuing research – specifically because of the global spread of authoritarian practices and politics.

Session 4: Beyond the binary of absence vs dominance. Exploring state practices in postsocialist urban development

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Keywords: State practices, urban planning, policymaking

Abstract: In urban development, the state is generally discussed in terms of provisioning, security and authority. Scholarships often frame it as either neglectful (e.g., left-behind places) or overly interventionist (e.g., social engineering, violence). However, reality is more nuanced. Using Stef Jansen’s (2015) distinction between practices of statehood (power over people/territory) and statecraft (“care” for people/territory) this session explores complexities of state involvement in postsocialist cities.

Under state socialism, both statehood and statecraft actively shaped urban development. Postsocialist cities witnessed weakening of welfare-oriented statecraft, but unlike in post-Keynesian states, these changes were radical and disorderly (Gorbach, 2024; Collier, 2011). Welfare systems collapsed amid unclear property rights, incoherent regulations, and ambiguous responsibility allocation. Simultaneously, statehood was reinforced through national identity-building.

Recently, the entanglements of statehood and statecraft have grown increasingly complex. For example, neoliberal governance persists but is markedly interwoven with renewed welfare promises; state-neglect contributing to social injustice and fueling the rise of the (far) right runs parallel with (re-)new(ed) attempts of social engineering; finally, increasingly authoritarian and violent practices of statehood are taking place particularly in cities within strategic areas such as resource-rich territories and border zones. We invite contributions mapping (re)configurations of statehood and statecraft in postsocialist urban development. Moving beyond simplistic narratives of state absence or dominance, this session aspires to view the state as an effect of mundane processes within the urban realm by analyzing state practices, promises of thereof, and manipulations therein in their simultaneity.

1 Fragmented Statehood, Residual Statecraft: The Possibilities and Constraints of Local Governance in the Authoritarian Hungarian Polity

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Keywords: Authoritarian shift, street-level bureaucrats, local governments

Abstract: In the wake of the authoritarian shift in Hungary, territorial governance structures have undergone significant centralisation: local governments have lost key administrative functions, faced drastic budget cuts, and seen their autonomy in service provision severely curtailed. These shifts have subordinated municipalities to the bureaucratic and political logic of the central state. Furthermore, as part of a social policy paradigm based on reverse redistribution, the state has withdrawn financial and social support from the most marginalised. The central question of the presentation is whether local governments have the capacity to find ways to manoeuvre within this repressive policy environment, enabling street-level bureaucrats — the implementers of local policy — to bring about transformative change through their discretionary practices in service delivery. Drawing on a case study of a poverty-stricken, resource-poor small town often described as ‘left-behind’, I explore how local governments and street-level bureaucrats negotiate, bend, and at times subvert national policies in their efforts to sustain liveable conditions for residents. This case illustrates how authoritarian centralisation does not entirely eliminate local agency. Instead, the interplay between coercive statehood and fractured statecraft reveals the complex, everyday practices through which state power is both enacted and contested in the locality.

2 Planning by proxy: consultocracy and the fragmentation of state practices in urban regeneration in Poland

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Keywords: State practices, urban regeneration, consultocracy

Abstract: The paper explores the rise of consultocracy—a governance mode in which urban regeneration is steered by private consultants operating between the state and local communities—in post-socialist Poland. Moving beyond the binary of state absence versus dominance, I argue that consultocracy reflects a shifting configuration of state practices, blending weakened welfare statecraft with persistent claims to territorial authority (statehood), as framed by Jansen (2015). Based on in-depth interviews in Wielkopolska Region, I show how public authorities formally retain power, while actual planning and implementation are delegated to consultancy firms. These firms introduce managerial logics, depoliticize conflict, and frame regeneration through technical expertise rather than public debate.

In the context of neoliberal transition and EU cohesion policies, consultocracy becomes a tool for performing state capacity while obscuring institutional fragility. Urban regeneration strategies are thus shaped by contradictory forces: promises of inclusion and care coexist with exclusionary practices and elite capture. The paper contributes to the debate on postsocialist state transformation by analyzing how planning practices produce the effect of the state—neither absent nor dominant, but diffused, technocratic, and contested.

3 Retrogressive Urbanisation: The Shift Toward Top-Down Planning Following Armenia's "Velvet Revolution"

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Keywords: Democratisation of urban planning, Yerevan, Armenia

Abstract: The distinct characteristics of Armenia's urban policies during the period of the so-called "Velvet Revolution" are most evident in the suburban areas of Yerevan and the broader metropolitan region of the capital. Initial public expectations regarding the democratization of urban planning, the empowerment of local governance, and the enhancement of participatory decision-making processes gradually diminished following the consolidation of the power by the new government—particularly after the second war with Azerbaijan over Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). When examined within the broader context of Armenia's after independence era, urbanisation trends reveal that ideological transformations and shifts in the economic system have had limited influence on urban development. In some instances, these changes have had even more pronounced effects, driven primarily by economic stimuli resulting from geopolitical fluxes in the region.

Session 5: Rethinking Regeneration: Enhancing Quality of Life in Shrinking Cities

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Keywords: Shrinkage, quality of life, planning

Abstract: Shrinking cities often seek to reverse decline through physical pro-growth strategies such as attracting new industries, investing in culture and tourism, or implementing flagship development projects (Hospers, 2013). At the same time other declining cities seek to attract creative class members. While these approaches may stimulate economic activity, they frequently overlook the everyday needs of existing residents. When such strategies fail, they can further deepen social and spatial inequalities (Sousa & Pinho, 2015). In this session we explore an alternative path: regeneration rooted in improving the quality of life for existing populations. Despite outmigration and economic stagnation, many shrinking cities possess strong potential for transformation into more liveable, resilient places. Yet, local policies often fail to prioritize basic urban functions such as accessible and safe public space and urban greenery, housing quality, walkability, or community wellbeing. As van den Berg (1999) stated, quality of the urban environment is a key factor in attracting and retaining people and knowledge-intensive activities - precisely what shrinking cities need most. We invite contributions that investigate how enhancing urban quality of life can become a strategic tool for the regeneration of shrinking cities. Topics may include, but are not limited to: population retention strategies, child-friendly cities, walkability and sustainable mobility, (re)use of public space, and participatory planning in shrinking contexts. As Tirana, the host city of CAT 2025, has recently reclaimed streets for children and pedestrians, we particularly welcome case studies or conceptual papers connecting everyday urban life with regeneration strategies beyond the common growth paradigm.

1 In search of the right mix: the subtleties of quality of life-strategies

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Keywords: Quality of life, policies

Abstract: How can policymakers in shrinking cities contribute to a better Quality of Life for their residents? In this paper we use insights from the academic literature and examples of some shrinking cities in Europe to argue that quality of life enhancing-strategies require an integral perspective that

focuses on the long term. After all, quality of life is a concept that is more than the sum of its economic, social and spatial dimensions - it is precisely about the right mix between them. Sensing a balance in policies between prosperity, spatial upgrading and social justice, for example, can prevent 'green gentrification', i.e. the process where green investments in a neighbourhood unintentionally lead to rising property values and living costs. At the same time, enhancing quality of life cannot be influenced by policy strategies overnight, and certainly not in shrinking cities. Therefore, we need no regret-policies: interventions that are forward-looking and can count on strong public support. To increase the likelihood of such strategies, we argue that innovative participation methods, such as walking interviews and Future Design-tools, can help.

2 Rethinking neglected infill urban open spaces: people's needs and planning conflicts in Opole, Poland

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Keywords: Urban open spaces

Abstract: Urban open spaces are vital to city life, supporting access to nature, recreation, social interaction, health, and inclusion. Yet many small, underused spaces are increasingly neglected or subject to development pressures. This study focuses on neglected infill urban open spaces (iNUOS) in the historic centre of Opole, Poland. We examine how the physical characteristics of iNUOS align with residents' needs, how these vary across socio-demographic groups, and how they compare to existing urban planning policies. Results show that while 41% of respondents support construction, a greater proportion favour preserving these sites as green areas. Additionally, 69.6% advocate for introducing small-scale infrastructure such as benches, lighting, or other urban furniture. These findings reveal a clear mismatch between residents' preferences and local land use plans, which predominantly designate such areas for development. We frame this conflict as a "green–grey trade-off": a tension between creating inclusive, human-scaled public spaces and preserving ecological value through minimal intervention. We argue for participatory, small-scale planning approaches grounded in Design Thinking to better integrate community needs and ecological opportunities. This socio-ecological lens offers a pathway to more adaptive, inclusive, and context-sensitive urban development.

3 Push, Pull, or Stay Put? Families' Views on Life in Shrinking Ostrava

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Keywords: Shrinking cities, QoL, families, child-friendly

Abstract: How do families live in the shrinking post-industrial city of the former Eastern Bloc? The paper presents the results of two questionnaire surveys conducted in 2020 (n=1800) and 2025 (n=1600) among families living in Ostrava. These datasets allow us to track the changing perceptions of various aspects of families' Quality of Life, including push and pull factors of out-migration in the context of a shrinking city. As families are the most frequent out-migrating group, the needs of this target group should not be neglected. On the contrary, families should be the most frequently mentioned group in the planning process. To what extent are they considering the possibility of moving out of Ostrava and what are the key push and pull factors that shape their decision? The data show that the problems typically associated with shrinking cities, such as the lack of adequate job opportunities, no longer play a major role in families' decision to leave Ostrava. Comparing the two time points (2020 and 2025) provides valuable insights into whether and how the city has changed in the eyes of Ostrava families. The paper contributes to the broader debate on the viability of shrinking cities in the CEE region and the role of families in them.

4 Walkability in Shrinking Cities: A Tool to Improve Everyday Urban Quality of Life

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Keywords: Walkability, urban design, shrinking cities

Abstract: Shrinking post-socialist cities face complex urban challenges, including degraded public spaces, aging infrastructure, and declining population. While regeneration efforts often focus on economic revitalization, everyday urban qualities and sometimes sustainable mobility issues - such as the walkability of the city - remain underexplored. In order to evaluate the walking friendliness of the environment better UWET+ was introduced, i.e. a user-friendly walkability evaluation tool designed to assess street-level conditions in inner urban areas, including both historical cores and large housing estates. Drawing on case studies from two Czech shrinking cities (Ostrava and Most), the paper reveals spatial inequalities in walkability and identifies key urban design qualities - such as safety, tidiness, and human scale - that strongly correlate with perceived quality of life. The findings demonstrate that improving walkability can serve as a low-cost and inclusive strategy for urban regeneration, especially in contexts of demographic decline. Rather than pursuing growth-oriented redevelopment, we argue for regeneration approaches rooted in enhancing everyday urban life. Integrating walkability into local planning can help shrinking cities become healthier, more resilient, and more socially inclusive places to live - particularly for families, seniors, and vulnerable groups.

5 From Decline to Adaptation: Medium-Sized Lithuanian Cities in an Era of Polycrisis

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Keywords: Medium-sized cities, post-industrial cities, Lithuania

Abstract: Over the past three decades, Lithuania has faced a series of significant crises that have profoundly influenced the development trajectories of its cities. Most urban areas - particularly post-industrial, medium-sized cities serving as regional hubs - have experienced not only substantial population decline, but also economic, social, and infrastructural deterioration. Nonetheless, recent trends indicate a modest demographic stabilization, largely attributed to immigration and re-emigration. This paper examines the dynamics of urban shrinkage and resilience in Lithuania, with a focus on several regional centers. It begins by outlining national population changes since the early 1990s, followed by an analysis of key demographic, social, and economic indicators. The study further explores the cumulative impacts of recent overlapping crises - including the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, geopolitical tensions at the Belarus border, the war in Ukraine, and economic recession - on urban development. Particular attention is given to the perceptions and responses of local authorities in addressing both shrinkage and crisis management. Ultimately, the research seeks to illuminate how medium-sized Lithuanian cities are adapting to a context of "polycrisis", offering insights into the challenges and potential pathways toward revitalization.

6 Cultural regeneration from an evolutionary perspective: case of Baumwollspinnerei and Lower Vítkovice

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Keywords: Cultural, regeneration, industrial, heritage

Abstract: This paper examines the processes of cultural regeneration from an evolutionary perspective, focusing on the cases of Baumwollspinnerei in Leipzig and Lower Vítkovice in Ostrava. The study concentrates on the dynamics of adaptation and transformation of industrial heritage within the context of socio-economic and urban development. By applying evolutionary theory, we compared the key phases of regeneration in these sites and identified fundamental mechanisms that enabled these industrial areas to make a transition from industrial complexes to cultural and creative hubs. The results reveal different approaches within specific phases of cultural regeneration, particularly in relation to investments, interdisciplinary cooperation, and the preservation of industrial heritage values. The study

contributes to a better understanding of evolutionary principles in sustainable cultural heritage development and offers practical insights for planning similar reurbanization projects on an international scale.

7 From Left Behind Regions to Left Behind Neighbourhoods: microgeography of discontent

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Keywords: Left behind neighbourhoods, geography of discontent, shrinking cities, Ostrava

Abstract: This paper examines the concept of left-behindness at the sub-regional scale, with a special focus on the relative emerging category of so-called 'left-behind neighbourhoods' within the broader discourse on spatial polarisation. We argue that socio-political discontent is inherently multiscalar and multidimensional, and that fine-grained spatial analysis can uncover dynamics that remain hidden at the regional level. Drawing on demographic data, poverty indicators, and a spatialised Social Deprivation Index, we propose a preliminary operationalisation of left-behind neighbourhoods in Ostrava - a strongly fragmented shrinking city. To introduce a political dimension, we analyse electoral data from recent presidential and parliamentary elections, exploring spatial overlaps between socio-economic deprivation, participation and non-participation, and support for populist or anti-establishment parties. Our objective is to identify how patterns of vulnerability intersect with political discontent at the neighbourhood scale. The Ostrava case offers a critical context for testing spatial relationships and understanding how urban shrinkage produces both material and political exclusion. By focusing on micro-geographies of discontent in Central and Eastern Europe, this paper contributes to filling a significant gap in the literature and outlines a methodological framework for future comparative research.

8 Social resilience of large housing estates from the socialist era - assets and challenges as reflected in a unique long-term study

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Keywords: social resilience, LHE, long-term study

Abstract: After more than 30 years of social transformation, the undifferentiated portrayal of large housing estates (LHE) from the socialist era as a symbol of state socialism has become obsolete. We need to recognize the assets of housing estate, but also their challenges in accommodating a large proportion of diverse urban dwellers. Affordable rents and adequate social infrastructure facilities in a very green environment offer acceptable living conditions. Based on research results from a unique long-term observation over 40 years of the LHE Leipzig-Grünau in Saxony/Germany, we can provide significant insights into the dynamics of this estate with currently around 45,000 inhabitants. After a period of severe shrinkage from the 1990s to the 2010s (population decline of 50%, vacant housing, demolition of apartment blocks), the estate experienced a turnaround caused by the economic and cultural upswing of the city of Leipzig, which attracted many people. Social resilience in the form of integrative neighbourhood relationships, trust and a willingness to welcome newcomers guaranteed a high level of residential satisfaction and place attachment. Nowadays, however, social resilience has come under pressure due to the growing number of migrants from abroad. The reasons for this and possible solutions will be discussed.

9 Governance Models and Everyday Resilience: Reassessing Post-Soviet Housing in Narva and Daugavpils

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Keywords: Housing, resilience, Baltic states, shrinking cities

Abstract: This paper compares housing management systems in Narva (Estonia) and Daugavpils (Latvia), two shrinking cities where Soviet-era housing dominates the urban landscape. Despite similar demographic trends formed by depopulation, aging, decreasing family size, and youth outmigration, the cities have developed distinct governance models in housing management. Daugavpils retains a centralized system dominated by a large municipal housing company, while Narva has a decentralized structure composed of small homeowners' associations and private managers. Based on recent fieldwork, we analyse how these systems affect building maintenance, local agency, and resilience. Residents in both cities express strong attachment to their neighbourhoods, citing affordability, greenery, infrastructure, and social ties as key assets, challenging dominant narratives of Soviet housing as dissonant or obsolete. Elderly residents, often viewed as a challenge due to limited financial capacity, also emerge as key actors in renovation efforts. The paper highlights how historical legacies, national regulations, and institutional design shape local capacity to adapt under conditions of shrinkage. While no model proves universally superior, the comparison offers insight into how everyday practices, governance frameworks, and residents' values interact to sustain resilience in marginalized urban settings. The findings call for a more nuanced understanding of post-socialist housing beyond crisis and decline.

Session 6: Tirana transformed: Vertical urbanism, planning Conundrums, and imaginaries of sustainability

Daniel Göler | Dhimitër Doka

Keywords: Vertical urbanism, sustainable development, territorial governance

1 Busting the Scales: On Tirana's Vertikal Urbanism

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Keywords: Vertikal urbanism, large-scale urban developments

Abstract: Tirana started its urban transition process after the fall of communism in a small-scale and often informal manner. Today, urban development in the metropolis with its tripled population has generally formalised. The built fabric experienced a metamorphosis into a globalised urban structure. Recently a certain number of megaprojects (in Albanian terms) arose in the city, such as mixed-use skyscrapers, high-rise apartment buildings and big shopping malls. In this context, the contribution will critically address relevant topics, such as the overwhelming scalar dimension of the projects as well as the randomness of function and design. Tirana's skyline shows elements of globalised structures, but from an organisational point of view there is no corresponding functional internationalisation. Some of the large urban developments are organised as public-private partnerships. In such cases, the public sector provides the property, applies for approval and then transfers the responsibility to private developers. This model fosters urban development and renewal, but at the same time, the profits will be privatised. All in all, we note in Tirana an urbanism of exception that can only be partially explained with common theoretical approaches but rather requires an appropriate consideration of the evolutionary background, thus a relational perspective.

2 Evaluating the Dynamics of Urban Imbalances in post-socialist Albania: An Empirical Comparative Approach

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Keywords: Regional disparities, empirical approach, sustainable

Abstract: Albania has navigated a protracted and complex post-socialist transition, marked by multifaceted challenges that encompass issues intrinsic to urbanization processes and the urban phenomenon per se. Notwithstanding the paramount importance of sustainable development as a global

paradigm, Albania's progress toward attaining sustainable development goals, particularly in urban contexts, has been hindered by the country's confronting challenges. Mitigating regional disparities in urban development emerges as a salient aspect, underscoring the imperative of fostering sustainable development broadly and urban sustainability specifically. This study employs an empirical comparative approach based mainly on descriptive statistics to evaluate the dynamics of urban imbalances in Albania focused on distribution of urban population and cities in Albania, highlighting regional disparities and dynamics. Using a dynamic comparative approach, we analyze the spatial patterns of urbanization, population concentration, and city growth across regions during post-socialist transition period. This empirical comparative approach aims to enable the identification of evidence-based insights into urban development highlighting the need for balanced and sustainable urban growth.

3 Territorial Reasoning Beyond Coordination: Identifying Archipunctural Potentials through Data-Driven Urban Analysis in Post-Transition Tirana

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Keywords: Post-transition urbanism, territorial-governance, ML clustering

Abstract: Urban planning in Tirana, as shaped through the procedural machinery of the National Territorial Council (KKT) and strategic directives from the Albanian Territorial Development Agency (AZHT), appears to function-but not always as a system. While approvals are issued, often rapidly, their cumulative effect rarely aligns with the lived, infrastructural logics of the city. It is not failure, necessarily, but a form of partial coordination. Congestion, fragmented mobility, and spatial inconsistencies persist. This study does not claim to fix these inconsistencies. Rather, it observes them as symptomatic of a deeper epistemological shift: one in which form-making has become the proxy for territorial thinking. Drawing on recent case readings and interpretive mappings, the paper proposes a reframing-not technological, but cognitive-of how urban intelligence might evolve. Yet to support this reframing, a supplemental computational layer is introduced: a ML clustering method that identifies ideal administrative units to anchor archipunctures across the city's sub-units. This customization of the model refers to its target outcomes, adapting to varying KPIs, such as mobility strain, access inequality and regulatory density. Differentiated decision-making insights are valuable for different stakeholders, grounded in real conditions-framing Tirana not as an anomaly of post-transition urbanism, but a prototype of its contradictions.

4 Biophilic design and urban wellbeing in post – communist Tirana: A visual and social reconnection with nature

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Keywords: Biophilic design, urban wellbeing, post-communist architecture, Tirana, environmental awareness, sustainable urbanism

Abstract: The integration of biophilic design into urban environments has gained increasing attention for its potential to improve residents' quality of life and foster stronger connections between humans and nature. This study investigates the role of biophilic design, through both inner and outer spatial elements, in enhancing the wellbeing of residents in the municipality of Tirana, Albania. Special emphasis is placed on the aesthetic and psychological revitalization of post-communist residential buildings, which dominate much of Tirana's urban area. The research explores whether the integration of natural elements in architecture and public spaces contributes to improved mental health, increased social cohesion, and a stronger ecological awareness among city dwellers. Drawing on field research based on random sampling methods, the study investigates differences in self-reported emotional wellbeing, perception of space, and environmental awareness between those living in buildings or areas with biophilic features and those in more traditional, non-renovated environments. Particular attention is given to post-communist residential buildings, where visual revitalization through biophilic design may also contribute to the psychological renewal of urban identity. The findings suggest that residents exposed to biophilic design report higher levels of satisfaction with their living environment, reduced stress, and greater appreciation for urban nature. Conversely, those in less green surroundings tend to

express lower emotional and spatial engagement with their neighbourhoods. Despite growing interest in sustainable architecture, institutional support for biophilic renovations remains limited. The study underscores the importance of integrating nature-centered design strategies into urban planning, especially in post-socialist cities undergoing rapid transformation.

Session 7: Megaproject Mirages: Understanding the Socio-political Lives of Unbuilt, Incomplete, and Over-Promised Urban Development

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Keywords: Megaprojects, unbuilt, spectacular, failure

Abstract: Spectacular megaprojects have long supported nation building, urban renewal, and real estate speculation. Amid the intensified global mobility of capital, policies and imaginaries, countries embrace these projects to signify prosperity and modernization, with proposals becoming ever-more ostentatious and technologically sophisticated. Some have broken ground while others remain entirely on paper as ‘megaproject mirages’—far too ostentatious and costly to build yet still participating politico-economically and doing much as symbolic capital.

Existing scholarship underscores the high-risk nature of megaprojects. Still, there are advantages to proposals that are more spectacular than feasible. Unrealized schemes avoid construction costs while offering real financial gains. They reinforce an image of the host state as more prosperous and functional than it may be. At the same time, these mirages concretely impact cities by shaping local economic patterns, cultural trajectories, and political discourse.

Highlighting this trend toward ‘megaproject mirages’ and arguing that scholars should re-conceive of project failure in light of alternative aims, this session probes the lives of unbuilt, incomplete, and over-promised development, also analyzing the tolls on communities:

- What is the utility of over-promised and under-delivered megaprojects?
- What roles do extra-national actors play in their proliferation and development?
- How do they shift discussions on the goals of urban development?
- How can researchers better develop methodologies for assessing such works?

While a globally relevant phenomenon, we are particularly interested in the ‘Global East’ (broadly conceived) as a liminal space where projects often intersect with informal governance, global capital, and local symbolic aspirations.

1 Megaprojects as Ruins-in-Waiting: A Postmodern Reading of Incompletion in Tirana

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Keywords: Incompletion, postmodern urbanism, architectural spectacle

Abstract: In Tirana, the unfinished has become an architectural condition in its own right. This paper investigates the socio-political and aesthetic logic of incomplete, over-promised, and speculative megaprojects, framing them as “ruins-in-waiting” that reflect the deeper ideological structures of postmodern urbanism. Engaging with Jean-François Lyotard’s critique of grand narratives and Fredric Jameson’s analysis of late capitalist spatial production, the paper argues that incompletion functions not as a flaw in the system, but as its defining expression. These projects, such as Downtown One, the Orbital Forest, and the now-demolished National Theatre, become visual and material manifestations of a city governed by deferred futures and aestheticized promises. To further contextualize this phenomenon, the paper draws a conceptual parallel with the surreal etchings of Giovanni Battista Piranesi. His visionary ruins, particularly the Carceri series, are employed as a critical lens through which Tirana’s contemporary architectural landscape can be read: monumental yet suspended, intricate yet devoid of use. By analyzing both the visual language and political economy of these megaprojects,

the paper proposes that Tirana offers a paradigmatic case of post-socialist urbanism in which the ruin is no longer a remnant of the past, but a permanent placeholder for futures that never arrive.

2 Albania's Unbuilt Stadium Schemes: Promised Sports Infrastructure as a Guise for Profitable High-Rise Construction

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Keywords: Infrastructure, media, unbuilt projects, Balkans

Abstract: Over the past two years, Albania has seen a staggering four international competitions for new stadium development, with €1.2 million already spent to create detailed plans. Despite years of pre-planning, all remain solely on paper, with three of the four without any concrete investment. These schemes function more as media events and share a featuring of adjacent high-rise towers that bear no relation to sports infrastructure. At the same time, each has led to significant legal manipulations and planning amendments, while draining state resources. This research provides an overview of Albania's unbuilt stadiums and examines their real-world implications. Drawing attention to the discursive impact of promised sports infrastructure and the role of large international design competitions in feeding conceptions of modernity, we offer insights into the hidden power of these proposals. Existing literature highlights the adverse effects of sports infrastructure development. Less attention has been paid to how these initiatives may not be focused on stadium provision at all but instead serve as catalysts for privatizing public space and facilitating speculative real-estate development. Considering the findings, we argue that scholars should consider not only these projects' material outcomes but also their legislative changes and closed-door procedures as unbuilt schemes.

3 From Boulevard to Speculation: The Anatomy of an Unfinished Urban Megaproject in Tirana

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Keywords: Megaproject transformations, speculative urbanism

Abstract: In post-socialist European metropolises, megaprojects—exemplified by Tirana's New Boulevard—are increasingly seen not only as systems for the physical organization of cities, but also as instruments of political symbolism, real estate speculation, and legitimization within hybrid governance. Launched 15 years ago, it was initially seen as a “connector” integrating the planned city with the informal settlement along the Tirana River, and it has since evolved into a flexible “connector” of political aspirations, speculative interests, and unfinished urban development. Conflicting definitions of public interest and urban need—understood through wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) and clumsy solutions (Douglas, 1999; Hartmann, 2012)—have prompted repeated revisions of the project's scope, scale, and objectives. Divergent rationalities—hierarchical authority, neoliberal enterprise, and resident fatalism—converge in a political initiative characterized as performative megaproject illusion (Harris-Brandts & Gogishvili, 2025). This study combines analysis of policy documents, interviews, and ethnographic observation to critically assess how incomplete megaprojects in Tirana have influenced urban inequality, political symbolism, and hybrid governance in a high-society context. The New Boulevard demonstrates the use of ambiguity as a mechanism and of urban planning as an alibi for donation and territorial control, rather than signaling policy failure or superficial modernization.

Session 8: Postsocialist Cities: Transcending the Divide, Establishing Connections

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Keywords: Postsocialism, othering, East–West divide

Abstract: The collapse of the Eastern Bloc has sparked significant scholarly interest in postsocialism. Yet, much of this scholarship remains geographically confined to formerly socialist states or framed

within a specific temporality – a “time after socialism.” This perspective overlooks the dynamic and reciprocal Cold War relations, where Eastern and Western blocs defined themselves through mutual opposition, creating interconnections through processes of othering. Three decades later, postsocialism serves as a generative, albeit highly criticized (Müller 2019), concept in urban studies. This panel proposes to reflect on its current relevance, while emphasizing its relationality – postsocialism is always produced through relation to its counterpart(s) and emphasized connection to them. This means postsocialism is constantly being revised and reproduced as its counterparts change. The end of the Cold War triggered interdependencies, including economic and migration ones, that diminished previously stark East-West divides, while new forms of othering emerged, fueled by political cleavages.

Drawing on Boyer and Howe’s (2016) ‘lateral theorization,’ this session aims to establish new analytical connections across scale, space and temporalities and thus critically reflect on the border that runs through the world of cities due to dualistic imaginaries. In this vein, we suggest reflecting upon three strands: a) how has the collapse of the socialist other transformed ‘Western’ urban spatiality, including military-based cities, industrial centers, and logistics hubs, among others? b) what socialist legacies transcend conventional postsocialist geographies? c) how can empirical research be organized to challenge, rather than replicate, the East–West duality?

1 Post-Socialist Urban Infrastructures: Learning from Systems of Less

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Keywords: Frugality, systems of less, transport

Abstract: Central and Eastern Europe has witnessed a historically unique transition from state-sponsored large technological systems to fragmented and ailing neoliberal provision – a process unrivaled anywhere in the world in terms of its scale and speed. We argue that CEE infrastructural practices and experiences are relevant to studies of future transitions to frugality, sustainability and resilience. Infrastructural practices of adaptation in our region of interest reflect different “systems of less” that we frame as (1) “system of resource scarcity”, (2) “system of state failure”, as well as (3) “system of no awareness” which were characteristic of socialist and post-socialist era infrastructuring. As neither the state nor the society at-large in CEE countries have shown significant consciousness of sustainability goals, sustainable practices might rather be instances of accidental infrastructural practices of sustainability, yet they share some parallels with sustainable infrastructure planning

2 Thinking Laterally About Urban Decay: Postsocialist Cities and Beyond

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Keywords: Decay, ruination, nothing, post-Soviet

Abstract: This research examines urban decay as a multiterm phenomenon and contested theoretical framework within contemporary urban studies. The investigation centers on how “decaying places” are conceptualized, experienced, and analyzed across diverse postsocialist contexts, with broader implications for understanding urban transformation across multiple geographies. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork conducted in several post-Soviet countries, this study interrogates the paradoxical relationship between material familiarity and sociocultural diversity of post-Soviet cityscapes. The analytical framework draws upon Wittgenstein’s conception of “language-games” alongside Peircean semiotics to engage with the “qualsigns” of decay—encompassing abandoned structures, deteriorating infrastructure systems, degraded public spaces, and processes of wildering. This synthesis provides a nuanced lens through which to examine the multifaceted nature of urban decay, meaning-making, and produced knowledge. The research seeks to transcend externally imposed theoretical frameworks by exploring the differential interpretive mechanisms employed by academic researchers and local residents in their understanding of urban decay. Through a methodological approach that moves beyond etic theorization toward emic conceptualizations and lateral comparisons, this work challenges conventional East-West and North-South rifts in urban theory-making and

interrogates the rigid epistemological politics that often govern interpretations within comparative urban studies.

3 Transcending the East-West Divide: Scientific Towns as Sites of Relational Postsocialism

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Keywords: Scientific settlements, transnational networks

Abstract: This paper challenges conventional East-West binaries by examining the post-socialist transformations of scientific settlements (Akademgorodoks) as relationally produced processes that transcended national boundaries. Through comparative archival analysis of post-1989/91 transformations in Soviet sites like Pushchino and East German centers such as Dresden-Rossendorf, this research—representing the first step of a broader investigation—explores how these specialized urban formations navigated similar challenges of institutional restructuring, economic transition, and identity reconfiguration despite different national contexts. Drawing on archival research in German repositories and digitized Soviet and post-Soviet collections, the study reveals how post-socialist transformations in scientific towns were shaped by their legacies of transnational collaboration, which happened despite the Cold war restrictions, and shared institutional models. The comparative analysis demonstrates that while these settlements underwent different trajectories—some becoming integrated into Western scientific networks, others facing decline or repurposing—their transformations were interconnected through common challenges of adapting socialist scientific institutions to market economies and changing political priorities. By examining institutional documents and transformation strategies, this analysis contributes to understanding how socialist legacies in knowledge production exceed conventional postsocialist geographies and continue to shape contemporary scientific landscapes.

4 Urban Commoning in Poland: Between Global Trends and Post-Socialist Legacies

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Keywords: Urban commons, crisis, spatial development

Abstract: The presentation is based on a study of informal urban commons in Poland existing for at least three months within the period 2008 to 2017. Fifteen in-depth case studies are selected to reflect typological diversity, regional distribution, operational status (active or closed), and the experiences of participating actors. These initiatives are situated within post-socialist contexts, with attention to the social and economic systems that influence their development. The analysis focuses on organisational and spatial forms, revealing how these influence development trajectories and actor dynamics. Paradoxes are identified—such as exhaustion, closure, and the emergence of implicit norms and power structures—that contribute to internal tensions. The study draws on theoretical frameworks to uncover mechanisms such as commodification, gentrification, institutional isomorphism, and capitalist transformation. These forces are shown to either sustain the commons—though often with significant compromises—or lead to their decline. By exploring the urban commons in a post-socialist context, the study challenges simplified East–West dichotomies and reveals entangled trajectories of civic urban practices shaped by both local legacies and transnational influences. Despite these dynamics, the study highlights promising institutional models from both Poland and abroad, offering potential pathways for more resilient forms of urban commoning in Central and Eastern Europe.

5 Socialist proximities: a case of Sointula - a utopian socialist settlement

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Keywords: Post-socialism(s), utopian socialism, knowledge production

Abstract: Sointula is a small settlement established in Canada in December 1901 on Malcolm Island on the Indigenous Kwakw̱ala land. It was built by Finnish coal miners inspired by the utopian socialist principles of the 19th century. Everyone had an equal salary and emphasized women's rights and the

creation of communal infrastructure for social reproduction. After 5 years, financial difficulties and mismanagement led to bankruptcy, and key leaders left Sointula with a significant group of followers. Still, the rest of the community remained, upholding some of the utopian principles, including self-government, strong social ties, care, and cooperative everyday practices. By examining the complexities and contradictions of social-utopian liberatory legacies intertwined with a settler-colonial project, I approach this space beyond conventional post-socialist geographies and place-based politics of utopian logic. Acknowledging, “there has been a different proximity to socialism” (J.) I challenge the assumption of such projects as “temporal and spatial detachment from the present reality” (Leinonen, 2022, p. 110). Following locals, I pay attention to how Sointula was globally networked and how early Finnish residents spent money. Among various social causes, they supported labor movements in other countries, Russian political prisoners, and the IRA (Irish Republican Army).

Session 9: New forms of spatial inequalities in digitally transforming societies

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Keywords: Spatial inequalities, digital transition, segregation

Abstract: Research on segregation has reached a turning point, requiring new perspectives, conceptual frameworks and research design in order to be able to account for the fact that a growing share of activities take place in the digital space. The outbreak of the global Covid-19 pandemic accelerated digital transition (DT), which unleashed new opportunities for activities in digital space. One of the most notable of these new opportunities relates to the increase of remote working (Milasi et al 2022). However, there are large disparities in the ability to work remotely (Randall and Norlén 2022).

While existing research has established how different occupational groups have been affected by DT (e.g., Hannonen 2020; Milasi et al 2022; Randall et al 2022), less is known about what spatial implications DT would bring along. Van Wee and Witlox (2021) suggest that DT and its acceleration since the start of the pandemic will bring disruptive changes to the spatial functioning of societies, as DT affects every aspect of how people perform their daily routines. European Commission (2022) identifies DT as a key driver of spatial inequalities since both different population groups, cities and regions are affected differently by DT. Thus, a better understanding is needed of the changes in the spatial structures of inequality in digitally transforming societies. In this session, we would like initiate discussion on how the shift of activities to digital space (e.g., remote working) reshapes spatial inequalities in physical space.

1 Digital Translocalism – Technology-Driven Networks of Ukrainian War Refugees in the Czech Republic

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Keywords: Translocalism, ICT, war-refugees, everyday life

Abstract: The paper examines how Ukrainian war refugees in the Czech Republic use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to sustain everyday routines and maintain translocal connections with their homeland. Drawing on the concept of digital translocalism, the study explores how digital platforms enable refugees to remain embedded in both host and origin contexts. The research highlights the use of various digital platforms to manage daily activities, maintain social networks, and access services. Technologies facilitate not only long-distance communication but also economic participation, education, and cultural continuity. ICTs are shown to structure spatiotemporal routines — structuring routines around virtual interactions with family, employers, and institutions in Ukraine. Such practices shape refugees' cognitive geographies, blurring the boundary between “here” and “there”; they also often leave traces in online space — geotagged routines, timespace markers, or transient metadata — that can be used to capture dynamic forms of belonging across space and time. The paper positions technology as central to the formation of refugee strategies. By focusing on digital

infrastructures and everyday practices, the study offers insight into how ICT mediates displacement and transnational integration.

2 Regional inequalities in digital transition: comparative study of tech workers' life course geographies in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

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Keywords: Remote work, residential mobility, counterurbanisation

Abstract: With the progression of digital transition and remote work, changes in dynamics between cities and regions are expected, but the form and outcomes of these changes is less clear. More specifically, it is not known how digital transition affects people's residential decision-making in different life course stages, when moving between cities, suburbs and rural areas is considered. In this study we apply a comparative, life course perspective by investigating tech sector workers' residential patterns and mobility across age groups in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. By employing individual-level census data from 2011 and 2021, we provide a snapshot on the life course dynamics of tech sector workers across settlement system levels and countries. The results reveal that tech sector workers do not follow the typical life course logic, as younger tech sector workers are increasingly present in the lower levels of settlement hierarchy. The differences which appear between countries suggest a continued effect of the settlement system on residential mobility destinations.

3 Digital Transition (DT) and Shifting Urban Hierarchies in Post-Socialist Estonia: Remote Work, Residential Mobility, and Spatial Inequalities before, during and after COVID-19

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Keywords: Digital transition, residential mobility, Estonia

Abstract: Estonia's rapid digital transition (DT), accelerated post-independence, offers a unique case to study how remote work—a key socio-spatial manifestation of DT—reconfigures residential mobility and urban hierarchies in a transitioning society. This longitudinal study traces residential patterns across 2018, 2021, and 2024, capturing the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst. Employing a synthetic telework variable, this study: 1) identifies socio-demographically stratified populations most/least affected by DT; 2) explores couples' mobility patterns across Estonian urban hierarchies using multinomial regression; and 3) analyses differences between dual-teleworking and non-teleworking couples, and gender asymmetries among single-teleworking couples using spatial analysis and bivariate mapping at settlement level.

Preliminary results reveal clear ethnic and age differences in telework accessibility and generalised suburbanisation patterns both in Tallinn and secondary cities. The contrast between non-teleworking and dual-teleworking couples demonstrates that remote work is a driving force of suburbanisation, whereas for single-teleworking couples, male teleworking couples disproportionately locate in rural areas contrasting with female teleworking ones, which tend to remain in urban or suburban settings. This research highlights how DT changes the urban dynamics in post-socialist contexts and provides a comprehensive understanding on the effect of telework on the pre-existing urban divides.

4 Enduring Socio-Spatial Patterns in a Changing City: The Rise of the Digital Economy and Socio-Economic Transformations in Post-Transition Warsaw

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Keywords: Socio-spatial differentiation, structural change, neighbourhood

Abstract: This paper examines the relationship between Warsaw's economic and social changes over the past two decades and the persistence of socio-spatial inequalities in the city. The analysis focuses in particular on the development of the digital economy as a key driver of structural transformation. The first research question explores how these changes have influenced the socio-spatial structure of the city, while the second investigates how the degree of social differentiation has evolved across neighbourhoods. The findings reveal that, despite significant economic restructuring, rapid growth in knowledge-based sectors, and major demographic shifts, socio-spatial patterns in Warsaw have remained relatively stable. Spatial divisions established during the socialist and early post-socialist periods continue to define the urban landscape. While some neighbourhoods have experienced social upgrading or decline, the overall level of spatial inequality has not changed substantially. This indicates a strong inertia of socio-spatial structures in the face of systemic transformation. The study contributes to debates on urban change, spatial resilience, and the limits of economic and social transformation in reshaping the geography of inequality in post-socialist cities.

Session 10: Digital transformation and smart innovation: lessons learnt from Post-Socialist cities

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Keywords: Digitalisation, smart cities, smart growth

Abstract: Smart and digital transformation has fundamentally changed the way society functions. Digital life is no longer just a means of communication but instead, 'digital' has become 'natural', making it hard to distinguish digital transactions from our general presence in society.

There is a growing body of work by scholars from Post-Socialist countries inspired to look into smart and digital transformation that slowly tilts the gravity of 'smart' from larger cities to smaller and from Western context to elsewhere. These studies touch on the potential (and shortcomings) of smartification and digitalisation in the context of urban shrinkage, retrenchment of the welfare state, car-oriented development, socialist housing and infrastructure. For cities after transition, thinking about 'smart' can be one possible way to develop planning interventions for solving issues related to large housing estates, energy efficiency, citizen engagement, spatial mobility, crime, social services, etc.

Inspired by the recent smartification trend and growing literature from Post-Socialist countries, this session aims to present the empirical and theoretical accounts in discovering:

- Concepts and strategies for smart urban and rural transformation;
- Planning for smart growth and shrinkage;
- Social innovation for inclusive, vibrant and accessible urban communities;
- Sustainable urban transport and spatial mobility;
- Case studies of smart city/village initiatives;
- Critical reflections on smart cities/villages and smartification;
- Best practices of 'smart' and 'digital';
- and integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the planning and studying our cities and their inhabitants.

1 How Community Anchor Institutions Can Help Close the Digital Divide

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Keywords: Smart rural, digitalisation, digital divide

Abstract: Throughout recent years more and more attention has been paid to increase the digital skills of older populations who tend to be excluded from the success of e-governance and new digital services. Recent discussion has been developed around learning digital skills and local actors (such as digital

helpers) who support the people in need but less accounts have been re-considered the need to change the institutions in order to support overcoming from the rural digital divide.

Taking the case study from Estonia, from an advanced e-country's context, we provide insights into the potential for adopting the discussion to local anchor institutions such as libraries, post offices, village societies, and day care centres. These institutions can be important digital partners to deliver or advise on digital and technology. The presentation is based on the experience of a five-year research project aimed at creating pioneering innovative digital learning approaches for rural older populations for inclusive digital development.

2 From jog to job: exploring the spatiotemporal practices of run-commuting

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Keywords: Run-commuting, active mobility, spatiotemporal practices

Abstract: In the context of ongoing efforts to reduce car dependency in metropolitan areas, various forms of active commuting have attracted growing interest. Among these, running as a form of transportation to and from work has emerged as an important but understudied practice. A significant proportion of extant research has focused on the role of physical activity in mobility, on active commuting in general, walking or on running as a form of leisure-time activity. To date, run-commuting has been addressed primarily in the research of Cook, highlighting diversity in practices, spaces and technologies. The objective of this contribution is therefore to expand the knowledge on the topic of run-commuting, especially the deeper experiences, feelings, and concrete spatiotemporal practices associated with these runs. Two methods are employed in order to achieve this objective. First, diary entries by the runners are used to reflect on their daily runs to and from work. Second, follow-up semi-structured interviews are conducted in response to the diaries, as well as to further develop the runners' experience of run-commuting. Consequently, beyond methodological approaches, this paper will present preliminary results and outline possible directions for our research.

3 Smart and the City: Promises and Practices in Post-socialist Podgorica

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Keywords: Podgorica, smartification, smart city

Abstract: The smart city has become a leading global model for urban development, often associated with innovation, efficiency, and modernisation. In post-socialist contexts, however, smartification tends to unfold as a fragmented and symbolic process - serving more to align with modern narratives than to reform local governance. Podgorica, Montenegro's capital, has adopted a series of smart city strategic documents to guide such initiatives. This resulted in limited projects over the last couple of years, including a smart parking system, LED streetlight upgrades, surveillance in parks and boulevards, and, more recently, GPS-based bus tracking via Google Maps. Some of these projects were supported by private companies, reflecting an image-driven approach shaped by institutional centralisation and weak participatory mechanisms.

This paper examines Podgorica's digital urbanism through the lens of smartification and technopolitics, analysing how smart technologies are deployed, where they are placed, and what functions they serve. Relying on media sources, policy documents, and potentially expert insights, the paper will identify key tensions between digital visibility and spatial usability, policy ambition and everyday practice.

Rather than rejecting smart urbanism outright, the paper will offer a constructive critique of how Podgorica's smart city agenda might be reframed toward inclusive, transparent, and context-sensitive urban governance.

4 Opportunities and Challenges for the 15-Minute City under Digital Transition

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Keywords: Suburbanization, 15-minute city, digital accessibility

Abstract: The rapid suburbanization of post-communist cities, such as Vilnius, has created unique challenges for urban planning and service provision. These low-density areas, developed with minimal public or commercial infrastructure, complicate the application of the 15-minute city (15mC) concept, which relies on proximity to essential services. This paper explores how digital technologies could bridge the gap between physical distance and access to services in Vilnius's suburbs, potentially enabling a form of "virtual proximity," and investigates whether this digital transition can support the implementation of the 15-minute city (15mC) concept in low-density urban areas (LDUA). However, we also critically assess the risks of digital exclusion, particularly for marginalized populations, and the potential for technology to exacerbate existing social inequalities. Examining the case of Vilnius, this study contributes to ongoing debates about the future of suburban development in post-communist cities and the role of digital innovation in improving connectivity and service accessibility in suburban areas.

Session 11: Heritage and urban futures: Pathways beyond extractivism and transitions

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1 Roșia Montană after mining: struggle for preserving its heritage and securing its future

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Keywords: Heritage, post-extractivism, critical ecology, Roma

Abstract: For over twenty years, Roșia Montană—a former mining commune located in the Apuseni Mountains—has experienced significant socio-economic stagnation, despite its gold ore deposits and its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2022. As early as the 2000s, a Canadian-Romanian joint venture proposed an unprecedented mining initiative in Europe, which raised substantial concerns regarding its potential impact on the local environment as well as the area's distinctive cultural and architectural heritage. Although the project was ultimately halted in the face of sustained local and national opposition, the community has since endured a prolonged process of disintegration, depopulation, and internal division. The transition from an extractivist economy to alternative models of development has been uneven and inadequately addressed by local and national authorities— institutions historically complicit in promoting the controversial mining project, suspending viable and alternative development prospects. Much like the mining initiative of two decades prior, the UNESCO designation has not necessarily served as a protective mechanism. Rather, it has emerged as a source of contention, generating anxiety, distrust, that potentially deepens current inequalities that affects the local Roma community or creates new forms of marginalization or within the local population.

2 The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in Albanian Post-Communist Cities as a development opportunity

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Keywords: Cultural Routes, Council of Europe, post-communist cities, Tirana, European integration, cultural heritage

Abstract: The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (CoE) represent a significant instrument for promoting Europe's shared heritage, linking countries, cities, and communities around common historical, cultural, and identity-based values. These routes aim to strengthen intercultural dialogue,

sustainable development, and a sense of European belonging. In the Albanian context, post-communist cities such as Tirana face profound challenges in redefining their urban identity after a prolonged period of isolation and political transition. In this framework, cultural routes offer a valuable opportunity to revitalize urban spaces, promote both tangible and intangible heritage, and increase engagement with Europe's cultural networks. This study examines the importance of these routes in Albanian post-communist cities, with a particular focus on Tirana, and argues that active involvement in the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes network not only reinforces the Albanian people's belonging feelings to the entire common cultural European area, but also helps the Albania's integration process into the European Union. Through inclusive cultural policies, these routes serve as concrete bridges between local heritage and the shared European vision.

3 Evaluation of geomorphological conditions in the dynamics of urban development evolution in the city of Gjirokastra

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Keywords: Relief, urbanization, cultural heritage, tourism

Abstract: The current process of urbanization requires the understanding and assessment of geomorphological conditions in function of urban infrastructure. Gjirokastra is a city located on the eastern slope of the Mali i Gjerë mountain ridge, with a direct connection to the Drino valley. The urban geomorphological heritage is closely linked to urban geomorphology and the dynamics of landform transformations. Through urban geomorphology, the suitability of relief elements has been analyzed in relation to the expansion of residential and industrial objects. The dominant position of Gjirokastra Castle in relation to the surrounding segments created the conditions for the formation of the earliest urban center of the city, which then expanded toward the surrounding hills and the terrace of the Drino valley. The vertical zoning of the terrain has determined the placement of Ottoman-style houses in the hilly sector and apartment blocks along the Drino valley. Looking ahead, the gradual expansion of the city requires analysis of current terrain modeling processes. Scientifically-based criteria must be applied in the expansion of the cultural heritage zone, taking into account the evolution of landforms, which over the last four centuries have undergone significant morphological changes due to increasing urban pressure and cultural tourism.

Session 12: Discussing the emergence and dynamics of local conflicts

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Keywords: Local conflicts, emergence and dynamics, disruptive power and productive moments of conflicts

Abstract: Urban and regional development is fraught with conflict. In urban centres, housing shortages lead to ongoing disputes over housing policy, large-scale investment plans or mega-projects trigger conflicts, and environmental degradation brings people onto the streets. Political oppositions use the central public spaces of the larger cities as a stage to voice their demands. Deindustrialisation, peripheralisation and regional decline, on the other hand, provoke protests from communities that feel neglected, including in the local impacts of energy transitions. Collective emotions such as anger, fear, hope or solidarity shape these conflicts, which often arise at the interfaces of emotionally charged spaces: Where belonging and marginalisation are negotiated, where loss and re-appropriation of space collide, or where violations of dignity unfold. In this context, even small-scale transformation projects can trigger emotionally charged conflicts with the potential to escalate.

In the lay understanding, conflicts are disruptive events that, at best, need to be avoided. Conflict theory, on the other hand, sees conflict as a normal dynamic of societies, a driver of societal change; conflicts are said to have so-called 'productive moments' that can open up arenas for debate and bring tacit or hidden problems to the table. A nuanced view of the function and operation of conflict would imply that

it is neither something to be avoided at all costs, nor a genuinely positive force in society that can automatically help drive change in a desired direction or solve problems. They do, however, provide a window into current struggles, be they over conflicting interests, resources or values. Often local conflicts are expressions of wider or meta-conflicts that resonate in a local setting, using the locality as a stage for larger struggles for (or against) power, hegemony and rights.

Against this context, we invite the research community working on urban and regional change in cities and regions after (or continuously within) transition to

- discuss the issues, development and dynamics of local conflicts,
- understand the drivers and contextual factors of local conflicts,
- examine actor constellations and interests in local conflicts,
- better understand how local conflicts are embedded in wider societal tensions, and
- suggest other aspects that need to be considered in relation to local conflicts.

We invite papers that discuss conceptual and methodological issues as well as papers that focus on case studies. After the presentation of the papers and a short Q&A session, we would like to discuss the contributions of the papers according to our guiding themes listed above.

1 Local conflicts or arenas for meta-debates?

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Keywords: Local conflicts, meta-discourses, superblocks, Leipzig

Abstract: Local conflicts often reveal entanglements of local problems that need to be negotiated and so-called meta-debates dealing with 'big questions' related to social transformation and discourse in an age of polarised opinion, e.g. linked to climate change adaptation and mitigation, or refugee migration. Therefore, local conflicts are often characterised by a foreground — what is being negotiated — and a background that contextualises, drives and potentially magnifies them. Against this background, this paper analyses the Superblocks project, established in Leipzig between 2021-2024. Inspired by Superblocks Barcelona, the project aimed to create traffic-calmed areas and increase green infrastructure. Local civil society, the municipality and academia worked closely together and the co-production approach was applied. The conflicts that arose during project implementation showed an intertwining of local differences of interest with meta-narratives that either push or block change; the latter contributed significantly to the hardening of positions and to the emotionalisation and escalation of the disputes. Using this example, the paper analyses the conflicts that arose, particularly with respect to their fore- and background, and to discuss the question of how local conflicts become arenas for meta-debates and how to negotiate such complex conflicts.

2 Reflecting the role of affects and emotions in the local (non)conflicts in relation to collaborative housing (non)development

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Keywords: Affects and emotions, collaborative housing;(non)conflict, housing politics

Abstract: This paper reflects the role of affects and emotions both as empirical artefacts and interpretative devices in relation to collaborative housing (non)development. Through data involving participatory workshops related to collaborative housing perception in five municipalities in the Czech Republic, and follow-up local and state-level advocacy efforts, we aim to discuss and develop the concept of (non)conflict. By that we refer to a situation which involves strong affects (states of intensity) and emotions (intersubjectively shared affects), but do not necessarily lead to direct dispute or confrontation, but rather to avoidance of direct confrontation and frustration over the local housing policies and politics. Through this case, we further reflect how inability to both translate and acknowledge strong feelings into the political discussion and policy making may possibly influence the failure of introduction and development of various housing and urban innovations such as collaborative

housing models and cooperation between civic and public stakeholders. From a methodological perspective we aim to make a stronger case for acknowledging the role of emotions in the process of qualitative data gathering and analysis.

3 Mobilization around national and local conflicts: The case of Budapest

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Keywords: Protest, urban conflict, local initiatives

Abstract: The most visible signs of urban conflicts are the protest events, marches, and rallies. However, not all demonstrations organized in large cities are locally focused; the symbolic places (main squares or avenues, headquarters of national institutions) also attract other events, the mass protests featured in the headlines typically revolve around national issues. The local conflicts are not rare in urban areas and street protest is frequently used as an instrument for mobilization. The most known are the environmental movements, but urban issues like homelessness, displacement, lack of affordable housing or gentrification also provoke protest events. The presentation focuses on demonstrations rooted in local conflicts using the data base of protests held in Budapest during the first 12 years of the present autocratic regime (2010-22). The research questions the authors try to answer are as follows: - What were the main issues of national and local protest events? Were there some common points between them? - Who (national or local, formal or ad hoc organizations) were the major organizers of local protests? - Which of the local conflicts attracted masses to the streets?

4 The conflicts of a night time economy quarter and the post-socialist transformation in Budapest

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Keywords: NTE, gentrification, touristification, conflict resolution

Abstract: Historical inner city areas often transformed to new functions with the emergence of night time economy (NTE) and tourism, often planned and initiated by local governments as neoliberal development projects. However, externalities of NTE affecting housing quality and housing prices can cause antagonistic conflicts. In post-socialist cities too, after the regime changes these functional changes were among the first visible transformations. However, depending on the context, the post-socialist transformation of ownership structure and modes of governance affect how these processes play out. In our example of Budapest, I present how the politically controlled fraudulent privatisation of the housing stock resulted in an unplanned NTE quarter, and how the feudal political hierarchy between the national and the local level influenced this process, beyond the model of entrepreneurial urban governance. These neopatrimonial elements of the post-socialist transformation also determine how liberal democratic suggestions of conflict resolution can work. I present in details the struggles of the residents the lobbying of entrepreneurs and the actions of political power, and how the Night Mayor appeared in this context. I conclude that without liberal political and civil rights, instead of compromises of regulation and planning, the goal is the destruction of the opposite side.

5 Settlement development under pressure: Navigating social development in a shrinking town

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Keywords: Social development, depoliticization, poverty governance

Abstract: In the aftermath of the global financial crisis and its local repercussions, a former industrial town in Hungary emerged as a stronghold of far-right politics. In the contexts of economic decline, the influx of development funds transformed social development into a key area of emerging social tensions. The case study, based on qualitative data, explores how an NGO navigated its anti-poverty and social integration goals amid social discontent by adopting a depoliticization strategy in its social policy. The NGO entered the town as an external actor implementing a complex settlement development programme in a stigmatized neighbourhood. Despite higher-level recognition and politicisation of its

agenda, local actors perceived the NGO as part of the establishment, seeking to exclude it from local development. In response to their marginalisation, the NGO shifted its agenda from settlement and community development to an individualised, social investment policy. This depoliticisation strategy of social policy enabled the NGO to sustain its programme. While the NGO maintained its long-term goal of addressing structural inequalities, its shift towards an individualised, depoliticised development paradigm — aligned with broader national and EU trends — ultimately contributed to the marginalisation of place-based interventions targeting segregated neighbourhoods.

Session 13: The Geopolitics of Wartime Cities

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Gruia Bădescu | Konstanz/Paris

Keywords: Urban geopolitics, war, defence, security

Abstract: This CfP aims to bring geopolitics into the mainstream of human geography and urban studies to enhance our understanding of wartime cities as contested nexus points of social, spatial and political change; and, secondly to construct a comparative re-framing of cities at war. We will explore the relational and contrastive value of comparisons across different wartime cities, pointing at the significance of learning from non-conventional cases normally excluded from academic debates, moving beyond the so called 'global urban' theory producing usual suspects. We suggest that it is timely to start learning from and comparing across different geopolitical regional contexts offering instead multiple access points, from which to explore the ever-expanding range of conflicts, contestations and cultural formations shaping cities at war.

The papers may focus on the following broad topics (without being limited by them!):

- The extent to which the current (geo)political shifts worldwide offer a platform to re-think the geopolitics of wartime cities
- How and in what ways multiple forms of war possess potential to influence the nature of urbanization
- The everyday lives of wartime cities and of their residents
- The re-adaptation of urban economies and spaces to defence needs/imperatives
- The re-adaptation of urban societies and spaces to defence needs/imperatives
- Comparisons of how cities at war vary across different regional contexts
- The urban geopolitics of the populist, neo-nationalist and neo-authoritarian challenges
- (Urban) geographies of re-militarization
- City diplomacy and wars
- Wars and diaspora mobilization
- Ethnic divides in wartime cities

1 Military frontlines and the city

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Keywords: Military-frontline-cities, Ukraine, Donbas, Russian-war-of-aggression-against-Ukraine

Abstract: Abstract: Looking through a geographical lens, and informed by field observations collected during the first three and a half years of the full-scale stage of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, this talk considers the lives of cities and of their inhabitants in proximity of military frontlines, emphasizing their spatial and temporal dimensions. I develop a framework for understanding and classifying frontline cities and their evolution over time as the line of hostilities comes closer. My work is based in multiple rounds of fieldwork, using a combination of qualitative methods, conducted in Mariupol, Kharkiv, Izium, and the northern Donetsk oblast agglomeration between January 2022 and June 2025. Slava Ukrayini!

2 The War in Ukraine: Catalyzing the Evolution of City Diplomacy

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Keywords: City diplomacy, wars, diaspora mobilization

Abstract: This study examines transformations within city networks amid the war in Ukraine. The Russian aggression has catalyzed continent-wide solidarity, prompting national governments to adopt measures such as the Temporary Protection Directive for displaced Ukrainians. This EU-wide unity has enabled municipal actors—especially those from Eastern Europe—to reconfigure their roles in migration policymaking and city diplomacy. Employing a qualitative approach that includes content analysis of political statements, interviews, and focus group discussions, the research reveals a substantial reconfiguration of city network structures. Previously passive network members have become actively engaged, while Eastern European mayors now play increasingly pivotal roles in policy formulation. Prominent city networks—including UCLG, CoR, CEMR, Intercultural Cities, and Eurocities—are shifting focus from soft policies of integration and cohesion toward strategic engagements in security, development, and international diplomacy. Concurrently, a dual dynamic of inclusion and exclusion emerges, as municipal actors distance themselves from Russian policies while mobilizing support for Ukrainian cities and displaced Ukrainians. This abstract offers a novel framework synthesizing shifts in municipal engagement and policy dynamics, thereby laying the foundation for further research on Eastern European city diplomacy during wartime.

Session 14: Beyond Energy Efficiency: The Social and Spatial Opportunities and Challenges of Housing Renovation

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Keywords: Housing renovation, vulnerable groups, segregation

Abstract: Housing is a major source of global carbon emissions, accounting for more than 50% of total emissions in some European countries. Large-scale renovation thus presents an opportunity to accelerate sustainability transformations and thus also significantly improve housing conditions and quality of life in cities. National and local contexts shape housing renovation, including governance and funding, the role of different actors, including homeowners and housing associations, and so on. While renovation is promoted as a means to achieve energy efficiency and improve quality of life in cities, it also raises complex socio-spatial challenges. Concepts such as the eco-social paradox and green gentrification highlight how renovation may reduce housing affordability and accelerate displacement. A more people-centred perspective on sustainability transformations would help to better understand how renovation decisions are made and how different population groups, especially the more vulnerable, are affected.

This session invites contributions that explore the multiple dimensions of housing renovation in diverse urban settings within the post-socialist realm and beyond. We are particularly interested in comparative perspectives, understanding the governance frameworks, and empirical case studies that examine:

How are renovation efforts governed and financed?

What are the implications of renovation for housing affordability, tenure security, inequality and segregation?

How does the retrofitting of housing intersect with broader processes of urban regeneration?

We welcome papers from across disciplines, methodological approaches, and geographies. By bringing together diverse perspectives, this session aims to contribute to ongoing debates about how to make housing renovation both environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive.

1 Can the eco-social paradox in case of energy retrofit be overcome? The effects of energy improvements on housing affordability

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Keywords: Energy retrofit, housing inequality, gentrification

Abstract: The study focuses on the effects of energy retrofit initiatives on the patterns of housing inequalities and green gentrification. Green renovations of residential buildings have become the key measure to achieve the climate goals targeted by the EU. However, the facilitation of renovation can also exacerbate the patterns of inequality. Many efficiency solutions, even after the application of subsidies, remain unaffordable to low-income households, resulting in asymmetric benefits between groups. Efficiency projects also tend to have net-negative economic benefits for households. As part of indirect effects, the property values may result in renovictions, or lower the accessibility to the urban housing markets. Renovation support measures if not sensitive enough to mitigate potential negative outcomes can harm the just transition and lead to green gentrification exacerbating spatial inequalities. We analyse the nexus between the energy retrofit, housing inequalities and housing affordability, and discuss the possibilities for just and socially equitable energy transition in the housing sector.

2 How do housing renovation and new housing construction impact on residential segregation: Insights from Estonia's housing market

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Keywords: Residential segregation, renovation, new housing

Abstract: Housing renovation is key to the European Union's decarbonization efforts, as buildings consume 40% of energy and produce 36% of related emissions, with 75% deemed energy-inefficient (European Parliament, 2024). This is particularly important in the Baltic states, where much of the Soviet-era housing stock, built en masse between the 1960s and 1980s, was designed with an emphasis on energy abundance and low costs. These buildings now need major upgrades to boost energy efficiency and cut heating use. Grossman (2019) highlights the relationship between energy efficiency improvements and residential segregation dynamics. Renovation loans often exceed heating cost savings, raising housing expenses and potentially displacing low-income households or forcing them to cut essential spending or relocate. This paper aims to clarify the role of housing renovation and energy-efficient new housing construction in shaping socio-economic and ethnic residential segregation within Estonia's highly market-based housing system. We use comprehensive register and census data from the Infotechnological Mobility Observatory, covering all of Estonia's population and housing. We compare residents of renovated, new, and older apartment buildings in Estonia's largest cities, Tallinn and Tartu. While renovation of multi-family buildings has limited effects on displacement and segregation, new residential developments strongly reinforce socio-economic clustering.

3 Spatial opportunities and challenges in solar energy infrastructure in Durrës Region, a post-communist industrial city

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Keywords: Solar energy, spatial planning, smart growth, energy potential:

Abstract: The city of Durrës is one of the largest urban and industrial centers of Albania. The effects of climate change, urban growth and energy demand, economic development priorities, impose the adaptation of sustainable energy solutions. As a region with high solar potential, with favourable topographical, meteorological conditions and high solar exposure, the development of solar energy production infrastructure is a necessity in response to the challenges of sustainable development in terms of large economic and strategic investments in this region.

This paper aims to analyse the necessity of sustainable solar energy infrastructure planning in Durrës by treating the city as a typical case study of post-communist realities in Southeast Europe. Through the

methods of spatial analysis based on RS data, this case study highlights the potential possibilities of integrating solar energy in urban planning and the economic infrastructure of the region. The main purpose of this paper is to analyse how the integration of satellite data, digital maps and spatial analysis models can identify the most suitable areas for placing solar panels in public buildings, industrial areas and unused urban spaces. Aspect and slope analysis, sun exposure, land use and proximity to the power grid, this study concludes with a priority map for the development of solar infrastructure in the city.

4 Housing Age and Urban Zones in the Changing Patterns of Socioeconomic Segregation in Belgrade

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Keywords: Belgrade, segregation, housing age

Abstract: Abstract: This study explores the evolving patterns of residential segregation in Belgrade by analysing the interactions between socioeconomic structure and urban morphology across three census periods: 2002, 2011, and 2022. Employing a two-dimensional analytical framework, the research distinguishes between (1) urban zones—central, middle, and peripheral—and (2) housing age: pre-WWII, socialist (1945–1990), and post-socialist (1991–2022). Occupation serves as a proxy for socioeconomic status, and spatial patterns are assessed using location quotients and segregation indices to capture both localized and city-wide dynamics. Findings indicate a persistent and deepening centre–periphery divide, with higher socioeconomic strata increasingly concentrated in centrally located, post-socialist developments and pre-WWII housing, while peripheral and post-war socialist areas show greater heterogeneity or signs of marginalization. Evidence of gentrification and selective upgrading is observed in the central and inner-middle zones, whereas the socioeconomic profile of the urban periphery remains shaped by informal housing developments. The results confirm the complex nature of post-socialist urban transformation, where increased economic polarization does not uniformly translate into spatial polarization. Instead, micro-level segregation, housing market dynamics, and institutional legacies produce a patchwork of socio-spatial outcomes.

5 Smart and the City: Promises and Practices in Post-socialist Podgorica

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Keywords: Podgorica, smartification, smart city

The smart city has become a leading global model for urban development, often associated with innovation, efficiency, and modernisation. In post-socialist contexts, however, smartification tends to unfold as a fragmented and symbolic process - serving more to align with modern narratives than to reform local governance. Podgorica, Montenegro's capital, has adopted a series of smart city strategic documents to guide such initiatives. This resulted in limited projects over the last couple of years, including a smart parking system, LED streetlight upgrades, surveillance in parks and boulevards, and, more recently, GPS-based bus tracking via Google Maps. Some of these projects were supported by private companies, reflecting an image-driven approach shaped by institutional centralisation and weak participatory mechanisms.

This paper examines Podgorica's digital urbanism through the lens of smartification and technopolitics, analysing how smart technologies are deployed, where they are placed, and what functions they serve. Relying on media sources, policy documents, and potentially expert insights, the paper will identify key tensions between digital visibility and spatial usability, policy ambition and everyday practice.

Rather than rejecting smart urbanism outright, the paper will offer a constructive critique of how Podgorica's smart city agenda might be reframed toward inclusive, transparent, and context-sensitive urban governance.

Session 15: Methodological innovations in studying the urban in CATs

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Keywords: Visual methodologies, geospatial analysis, inequalities

1 Seeing the Left Behind: Evidence from Visual Geography Narratives in Latvia

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Keywords: Visual methodologies, left-behind areas (LBAs), Latvia

Abstract: In post-socialist Europe, peripheral rural places are often framed through narratives of decline, emptiness, and disconnection. This paper examines how visual methodologies can provide alternative, participatory approaches to researching "left-behind areas" (LBAs), challenging stereotypical imaginings and foregrounding local agency. Drawing from the Horizon Europe Re-Place project, we examine four rural Latvian sites—Roja, Rucava, Rogovka, and Alūksnes—each grappling with demographic shifts, infrastructural legacies, and socio-economic marginalization. By employing collaborative visual methods—including participant-directed photography and smartphone video ethnographies—we uncover how residents' (im)mobility, identity, and aspirations become inscribed in visual landscapes. These methods not only enhance the spatial sensitivity of geographic research but also reposition residents as co-authors of place narratives. This paper contributes to broader discussions on how visual methodologies can support more inclusive, reflexive, and affective understandings of post-socialist rural geographies and the evolving narratives of left-behindness.

2 Predicting income stratification of Polish cities based on satellite images

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Keywords: Urban inequality satellite imagery prediction

Abstract: Access to timely and reliable statistical data is essential for understanding and addressing socio-economic trends. However, in many geographic contexts - particularly within urban environments - official statistics remain limited or entirely absent, hindering informed decision-making by researchers, policymakers, and organizations. While nighttime lights (NTL) satellite imagery has traditionally served as a proxy for economic activity, its precision is limited. Recent advancements in high-resolution satellite imagery, combined with increased computational capacity, now offer promising alternatives for near real-time socio-economic monitoring. Compared to traditional statistical data, such imagery provides two major advantages: (1) near-instant availability and (2) the ability to generate predictions for any spatial unit, including non-administrative areas. In this study, we explore two approaches for feature extraction from high-resolution satellite imagery to predict socio-economic indicators. The first approach employs a classification model that maps satellite imagery to specific land use classes. The second leverages transfer learning: a model initially trained to predict NTL intensity is repurposed using its learned visual representations to predict socio-economic outcomes. We use these extracted features to model income stratification across Polish cities, measured by indicators such as the Gini index and the P90/P10 ratio.

3 Geographical Aspects of Gender Inequality

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Keywords: Gender inequality, Bratislava, international students.

Abstract: Current study examined the geographical aspects of gender inequality by focusing on international students' experiences in Bratislava's urban spaces particularly dormitories, public infrastructure, and transport systems. While past research has applied mixed-method approaches to local populations, our research extends GIS-based spatial analysis, interviews, and field observations to international students. The aim is to uncover how spatial arrangements and mobility patterns shape

gendered experiences and to highlight how stereotypes, exclusion, or cultural bias may influence daily life in an unfamiliar environment. International students provide unique insights as a mobile and often overlooked group in gender-sensitive urban research. By using Bratislava as a case study, the project addresses a regional gap in inclusive spatial planning. The findings aim to inform more equitable and culturally aware urban design, contributing to both academic discourse and real-world policy aimed at promoting gender equity and inclusive city development.

4 The Urban Transformation of Prizren in the Post-Communist Context: An Analysis through LU/LC and NDBI (2000–2018)

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Edon Shemsedini | University of Prishtina, Faculty of Mathematical - Natural Sciences/Department of Geography

Keywords: Urban transformation, geospatial analysis, LU/LC, NDBI, Prizren, post-communism

Abstract: Post-communist cities have undergone profound urban transformations as a result of political, economic, and social changes following the collapse of communist regimes. Prizren, a city with a rich historical heritage in Kosovo, represents a significant case study in this context. This study examines changes in land use/land cover (LU/LC) and urban structure in Prizren during the period 2000–2018, using LU/LC analysis and the Normalized Difference Built-up Index (NDBI). By utilizing satellite imagery and Geographic Information System (GIS) techniques, the research identifies key trends in urban expansion, reduction of green spaces, and growth in built-up areas. These changes reflect the characteristic dynamics of urban transformation in post-communist cities. The findings provide valuable insights for the development of sustainable urban policies and long-term spatial planning.

Session 16: Quality of life and urban differentiation in CATs

Organisers/Chairs: Dritan Rustja | Fitim Humolli

Keywords: Segregation, suburban development, housing

1 Applying the 15-minute city concept in the suburbs of a post-communist city: the case of Vilnius

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Keywords: 15-minute city, Vilnius, suburban development

Abstract: The rapid suburban sprawl of post-communist cities, which lacked suburban rings until 1990, is a widespread phenomenon. This process was primarily driven by the private initiative of suburbanizers and was weakly regulated by city authorities in most cases and Vilnius is not an exception. As a result, private housing developments were not accompanied by the development of public or even commercial infrastructure. This paper analyzes suburban development in Lithuania's metropolitan cities and explores possible alternative scenarios for providing essential services in these more distant, low-density areas. It also discusses the concept of 15-minute cities and the potential application of such ideas in suburban contexts. Engaging local communities and private businesses in cooperation with local authorities may prove crucial in these efforts. The paper is primarily based on empirical evidence from Vilnius, the capital city of Lithuania.

2 Through the Eyes of Prague Residents: Exploring the Ups and Downs of Urban Living Over Time

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Keywords: Satisfaction, Prague, housing, public amenities

Abstract: The quality of the urban environment is crucial for the well-being of residents and the sustainability of cities themselves. Given the ongoing population growth of Prague and its significance as a center of economic, social, and cultural activity, it is increasingly important to systematically monitor how the urban environment affects the daily experiences of Prague's inhabitants. The presented results build on the findings of the quality of life survey of Prague residents, offering an annual comparison of data from 2017, 2020, 2022, and 2024. The research is based on a representative questionnaire survey, mapping the satisfaction of Prague residents across significant areas, including housing, public amenities, climate change perceptions, and civic engagement. The temporal depth of the data allows for capturing key changes related to the Covid-19 pandemic, the housing crisis, and partially to shifts in the way the city is utilized. Although the results indicate overwhelming satisfaction with life in Prague, they also reveal important problems, such as deteriorating housing availability and deteriorating satisfaction with the capacity of some types of public amenities.

3 New socio-spatial differentiation finally comes: Mapping of segregation in Prague Metropolitan Area 2001–2011–2021

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Keywords: Economic segregation, Prague Metropolitan Area

Abstract: Prague Metropolitan Area belongs to the most dynamic urban agglomerations within the whole Europe. The main initiator of this population dynamics is gradually increasing international migration and in-migration of young adults. Subsequent reactions have the form of various deconcentration processes. Together, these concentration and deconcentration processes create a new socio-spatial differentiation. The main objective of this paper is to measure development of dissimilarity indices and to explain mechanisms behind new socio-spatial differentiation within the Prague Metropolitan Area (PMA). From the comparative perspective of European capital cities, Prague and its metropolitan area displays slightly different trajectories than the majority of European capitals. Instead of increasing segregation during the 2000s and desegregation in 2010s, the evidence from PMA has brought rather opposite results. While the main trends during the transformation period can be generalised under the motto - rich to poor, currently the motto - rich to rich, poor away - can be used. Methodologically the paper stands on analyses of ISCO classification from the last three population censuses held in Czechia in 2001, 2011 and 2021 at the level of localities (basic settlement units) for Prague.

4 Inner-city urban change: a multi-scalar view of residential segregation by age in Riga

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Keywords: Age segregation, inner-city, k-nearest neighbors

Abstract: As elderly populations rise, residential age segregation is intensifying in urban areas, marked by a growing separation between older and younger populations and driven by a confluence of factors including housing affordability, gentrification, studentification, aging in place, migration, socioeconomic disparities, and lifestyle preferences. Although Riga is an aging and shrinking city, its inner core exhibits a divergent demographic trajectory. This study investigates this phenomenon by contrasting the inner core with the wider city from 2011 to 2021 and employing a multi-scalar analysis for 2021 that gives special attention to the inner core. Findings reveal a complex spatial reorganization: the inner core has experienced a significant influx of children and youth while the elderly population has generally decreased, with remaining elderly increasingly concentrating in Soviet-era housing in

peripheral inner-city areas. These distinct, fine-grained dynamics challenge broader city patterns and have profound implications for neighborhood function, political outcomes, intergenerational relations, and resident well-being, demanding targeted policies for a spatially sorted population.

Session 17: From Fragmentation to strategy? Reimagining urban planning

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Keywords: Urban planning, urban sprawl, public space

1 Multiple transformations in Tbilisi: the search for planning as collective strategy

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Keywords: Urban transformation, collective strategy, Tbilisi

Abstract: Tbilisi has experienced remarkable transformations that can be understood through the lens of 'Multiple Transformations,' a phenomenon typical of post-socialist urban centers. Alongside legal, institutional, and social reforms, the city underwent significant spatial reconfiguration. I identify distinct stages in Tbilisi's urban evolution, examine the catalysts, and evaluate the consequences of this transitional journey. Our position is that the numerous transformations since the 1990s have endangered many public goods crucial for urban quality of life, while simultaneously dismantling coordination mechanisms in governance systems that could have facilitated the development of new urban management and planning approaches. The transition, therefore, created a paradoxical situation: generating a need for collective strategic action while making such action increasingly difficult to formulate and implement. The multiple transitions framework proved valuable not only for examining this specific case of urban change but also for connecting it to contextual possibilities for future strategic direction. For Tbilisi specifically, this analysis emphasized the extensive time required to reconstruct institutions, resolve false dichotomies, recognize the value in merging planning with market principles, and appreciate the fundamental concept of coordinated efforts toward shared objectives.

2 Dynamics of urban sprawl spatial patterns – a GIS/RS based approach in post-communist Municipality of Vora, Albania

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Keywords: Urban sprawl, GIS, RS, spatial patterns

Abstract: Urban sprawl is a multidimensional phenomenon that inherits economic, social, cultural, physical, and environmental dimensions. It is perceived among scholars as a pattern, process, cause and consequence. It's because of this complexity that urban sprawl is one of the main challenges of drafting territorial development strategies in the context of managing demographic growth, rapid urbanization and land use changes. Hence, understanding its spatial temporal patterns has become crucial for gaining essential insights into the sustainability, efficiency, and equity of urban development. This study aims to analyze the dynamics and spatial patterns of urban sprawl in post-communist era in Vora Municipality, Albania. By using an integrated approach of GIS/RS a series of multi-temporal satellite images have been utilized along with land use classification techniques to identify and measure the spatial and temporal changes in the study area. The analyses are focused on the spatial patterns of sprawl as well as on the assessment of the driving factors of this process. The results provide valuable insights in the interactions between natural and anthropogenic factors in urban landscape transformation, supporting the policymaking and sustainable territorial management.

3 Title: Imaginaries of Post-Soviet State: Between Caregiver and Destructive Force

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Keywords: State, responsibility, care, destruction

Abstract: This contribution interrogates the discursive construction and use of the third-person plural pronoun "they" in post-Soviet Armenia, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a small town between 2022-2024. Through the residents' narratives about decline and destruction, the study reveals how "they" functions as a multivalent linguistic device that reveals the complex power relations in the course of postsocialism. The ambiguous "they"—variously signifying state officials, political elites, or capital—operates simultaneously as an assignment mechanism and distancing strategy. While residents frequently invoke "they" to assign responsibility for destructive processes (deliberate dismantlement, resource extraction, and infrastructural abandonment), this research identifies a paradoxical ascription of both destructive and productive agency to the same entity. "They" also articulates a specific post-Soviet conceptualization of responsibility, wherein the state remains imagined as "khozyain" (master)—an absent yet morally obligated caretaker. This phenomenon reflects broader tensions between neoliberalizing governance and expectations of state responsibility

4 Policy as epistemic practice: sources of authority and loose relations between knowledge and decision-making

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Keywords: Participation, public space, epistemic authority

Abstract: Top-down public involvement in the (re)creation of public spaces is a helpful point of entry into the intricacies of the relationship between knowledge, policy- and decision-making regarding urban infrastructure. My research on evolution of top-down urban participation in the Czech cities since 1989 indicates that the relationship between knowledge and agency is often loose on policy and practice levels. Importantly, this looseness is predominantly understood as an unproblematic, operational norm. Roy (2025, 165) states: "Policy approaches are not only techniques of implementation but also ways of knowing. Such forms of knowledge are a crucial ingredient of the 'diagnosis and solution' calculus of policymaking." Her argument highlights that the policy itself contributes to formulating what is sufficient, relevant knowledge. In my contribution based on of Czech participatory (re)design of public spaces, I aim to explore how this role of policy manifests itself on two levels: Firstly, the urban participatory policies spread regardless of evidence and mainly without evaluation. Their epistemic authority is gained by other means. Secondly, while the policies frame and organize the knowledge solicited through participation, the use of knowledge in decision-making often remains vague.

Session 18: Emergent urban resilience across crisis temporalities: tracing the past, capturing the present, envisioning the future

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Keywords: Emergent resilience, temporalities, urban future-making

Abstract: As cities worldwide confront escalating challenges—from climate change and war to economic instability—resilience has become a key concern in urban governance. This session explores emergent urban resilience through a temporal lens, examining how cities respond to crises across past experiences, present improvisations, and future imaginaries. Understanding resilience requires close attention to these dimensions, as they all carry distinct significance, challenges, and methodological complexities. The past offers lessons and memories that shape how resilience is understood today—but how can we interpret past responses, especially in cities with fragmented or contested histories? The present is a fleeting moment when improvised and often undocumented practices emerge—how can we recognize and value them before they are lost? The future, influenced by what we choose to remember

or ignore, raises further questions: How do imagined futures shape today's decisions, and how has emergent resilience helped—or failed—to guide those visions?

Considering these questions, we invite contributions exploring the temporal dimensions of resilience in crisis-affected urban contexts, particularly in Ukraine and other war-torn or polycrisis regions. Submissions may address methodological challenges of researching resilience under emergency conditions, propose innovative approaches, or critically examine questions of inclusivity and contested narratives. By bringing together theoretical reflections, empirical studies, and methodological innovations, this session aims to co-create a richer, time-sensitive understanding of emergent urban resilience that moves beyond static frameworks to embrace the fluidity and uncertainty of cities in crisis.

1 Emergent resilience in cities at war: The case of Ukraine

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Keywords: Emergent resilience, urban systems, Ukraine

Abstract: As cities around the world grapple with a range of pressing challenges, including those posed by climate change, socio-political conflict and economic instability, the concept of urban resilience is becoming increasingly important. Unlike structural resilience, emergent resilience arises spontaneously in response to unforeseen systemic challenges during, or at the time of, the challenge, and over time. One such challenge is the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, which has lasted more than three years and continues to affect its cities. This situation forces us to consider the aspect of temporality in our conceptualisation.

In this session, we present an initial exploration of the concept of emergent urban resilience in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Our main aim is to develop a systematic understanding of the nature of emergent resilience in such a crisis context and to derive emergent resilience indicators systematically, distinguishing them from structural resilience. We also aim to highlight the importance of studying the phenomenon of emergent resilience in urban contexts during and after acute crises. This is an underexplored case type within current urban resilience discourse.

2 Urban gardening during wartime: three layers of memory as a source of Kyiv's resilience

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Keywords: Urban gardens, resilience, social memory

Abstract: It is proposed that urban gardens be considered a means of storing and transmitting knowledge and experience of overcoming crises. As various challenges are accompanied by disruptions to food supplies, the practice of urban gardening provides valuable support and serves as a backup option for alleviating social hardship. Kyiv's urban gardens during the war demonstrate that the social memory of urban gardening is multilayered. The fundamental level is not connected to particular events or challenges, but rather to the shared experiences and abilities of growing food within families or small groups. This concept is referred to as "pockets of socio-ecological memory" by Stefan Bartel et al. (2012). Other memories of urban gardening emerged during the prolonged economic crisis of the 1990s, when employees of bankrupt enterprises and organisations were given plots of land known as 'dachas' (Round et al., 2010). We consider this period of the dacha movement to be the second important layer of social memory of urban gardening. The third layer comprises the public environmental activism of recent decades in Kyiv, which has been driven by the large-scale, uncontrolled development of green areas. Together, these three layers of memory contribute to urban resilience in times of serious challenge.

3 Cultural role of bicycles in the Kharkiv area

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Keywords: Crisis, cycling, urban mobility

Abstract: This paper examines the cultural role of bicycles in the Kharkiv area from the years before the Russian invasion in 2022 to the present day, using a dataset comprising 70 Telegram news items and up to 200 local news articles. By applying a discourse and content analysis methodology, the study builds upon prior research conducted on cycling cultures and extends it within the context of Ukraine's ongoing crisis. The findings will serve as a pre-test and foundation for further PhD research on the transformation of cycling culture in Ukraine in response to war-related disruptions. This approach enables the calibration of methodologies for larger datasets, contributing to an understanding of the evolving role of cycling in urban resilience and mobility culture. The study aligns with broader discussions on modernization and socio-political transformations in Central and Eastern Europe, spanning changes in local culture and sustainable reconstruction.

4 Envisioning Ukraine's urban future: directions of post-war recovery through public events

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Keywords: Urban future, recovery topics, participants

Abstract: For more than three years, Ukrainian cities have faced unprecedented attacks and destruction by Russian aggressors. Amid this sustained devastation, numerous public events (conferences, symposiums, forums, etc.) have emerged with the aim of assessing the urban present and discussing the urban future of Ukrainian cities. These numerous gatherings reflect the remarkable resilience of Ukrainian society. Supported by international partners, they contribute to shaping diverse visions for Ukraine's postwar urban future. This research examines the themes and ideas discussed at these events, which focus on sharing knowledge about urban and rural recovery in Ukraine. It explores the role of cross-disciplinary collaboration in shaping recovery directions. The study employs the hexa-helix collaboration model, emphasizing the critical role of the affected community, a Ukrainian community that appears highly active despite the ongoing crisis. The research introduces the representatives of this community and the topics they contribute to the debate on Ukraine's urban future. The study aims to highlight the emerging postwar recovery initiatives in Ukraine, the resilience and solidarity of Ukrainian (and international) actors, and the evolving nature of critical recovery issues from the beginning of the full-scale invasion to the end of 2024.

5 Looking into a bright future in the midst of crisis: pro-growth and de-growth discourses in a shrinking city

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Keywords: Shrinkage, de-growth, pro-growth, discourse analysis

Abstract: The growth orientation of decision-makers has been considered one of the main hindrances to sustainable transition. This contribution aims to reveal obstacles, which are limiting de-growth approaches. The city of Ostrava provides an interesting case study since the problems caused by long-term shrinkage are known to decision-makers, but ignored, and present responses to urban shrinkage are purely pro-growth oriented, which causes problems for future of sustainable transition. Specifically, we focus on discourse as a crucial medium in ignoring de-growth approaches. For our study of this object, discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders is employed. We apply a poststructuralist approach to discourse analysis. It has been documented that in the existing paradigm in urban planning, pro-growth approaches are naturalized, while approaches that disrupt the existing paradigm are tabooed. Thus, poststructuralist approach paying attention to unquestioned assumptions about planning problems represents an advantage as it provides an opportunity to unpack the inner workings of the pro-growth paradigm and opening it up for contestation. In conclusion, the impacts of the discourse on the planning of the future development of Ostrava are presented.

6 Narrating Futures at the National Theater in Tirana, Albania

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Keywords: Agency, resilience, future-making, narration

Abstract: Envisioning “futures” has historically been central to the National Theater’s architectural and thematic orientation. The futuristic-style building was designed by architect Giulio Bertè and constructed between 1938 and 1939 during the Italian occupation. On May 17, 2020, amid the COVID-19 lockdown and following a prolonged state of exception caused by the 2019 earthquake, the Albanian government demolished the National Theater in Tirana. The historical building is now being replaced with a new design from Danish architect Bjarke Ingels Group. The demolition sparked a strong, two-year protest led by the Alliance for the Protection of the Theater.

Drawing on empirical research conducted for my doctoral thesis (2022–2025), I examine how competing visions of the “future” contributed to the recent politicization of the building. Since the fall of the communist dictatorship, the National Theater has struggled with the absence of a future vision for its internal structure, thematic orientation, and maintenance. My focus is on narrating future(s) as a politicized practice—its functions, implications, and whether it can serve as a form of agency and resilience for civic society. I argue that the National Theater became a key site of negotiation, not only over its preservation/demolition but also the capacity to envision future(s).

7 Crip Cities: How Crip Temporalities Can Enrich Studies of the Post-socialist City?

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Keywords: Crip, non-linear temporalities

Abstract: This presentation embarks on a journey that reimagines the post-socialist city – from merely a spatial category to a temporal phenomenon, a specific time of the city, shaped by the interplay of diverse and overlapping “durations”. A key argument of this presentation is that the time of the post-socialist city should not be interpreted through the logic of linear, chronically spatialized time. In other words, we should conceptualize the time of the post-socialist city as different, and idiosyncratic. This temporal difference should not be viewed as delay or backwardness – a deficiency to be corrected – but as a source of inspiration. I believe that the inspiration of crip temporalities can enrich discussion about post-socialist city by its very sensitive treatment of other, different and often very specific temporalities (Freeman 2010, Kafer 2013). Instead of perceiving these temporalities as defective, limited, delayed, or slowed down, the tradition of crip temporalities recognizes them as alternative, generative, and full of possibility. In doing so, it offers an opportunity to reconceptualize the post-socialist city – not as occupying a disadvantageous position, but as an inspiring source of insight for contemporary global challenges through its unique relationship with time.

8 Thinking Hanoi through the (Post-)Cold War: Geopolitics, Self-Built Housing, and Property Rights

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Keywords: Self-building, property rights, Vietnam War

Abstract: In this presentation, I examine the US war in Vietnam, socialist worldmaking, and socialist legality as fundamental factors in the development of self-built housing in Hanoi and the Vietnamese state’s subsequent extension of property rights during the transition to a market economy. Drawing on archival fieldwork and interviews, I highlight how the emergence and preponderance of self-built housing in Hanoi in the 1980s and 1990s was both contradicting and constitutive of the socialist system. What is on the surface a transgression of the socialist system—given its emphasis on individual developments and the need to acquire building materials on the market—is actually a mode of housing production that took on a character that could not have emerged out of any system but a socialist system, or any geography but a Cold War geography. I argue this in terms of the destruction of US bombing

campaigns, postwar economic exigencies, and the flexibility of lacking a private property regime. I ultimately suggest that thinking Hanoi through the Cold War (and thinking the Cold War through Hanoi) uncovers the multiscalar linkages between the bottom-up production of urban space and international geopolitics that ultimately culminated in the transformation of the Vietnamese spatial property regime.

Session 19: Housing Affordability Crisis: Can the Housing Inequalities Be Overcome by Policy and Planning Solutions?

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Keywords: Housing affordability, policy responses

Abstract: In recent decade the prices of buying and renting housing have risen faster than people's incomes in almost all of Europe. The housing crisis is deepening, where more and more people are finding it difficult to buy housing and cope with paying housing costs. The rise in housing prices and the availability of modern housing affect larger urban regions in particular. A public policy vacuum on housing has been filled by speculative opportunistic investment. The new economic and social realities in Europe have hit large sections of households hard especially the more vulnerable ones such as income-poor households or (forced) migrant newcomers and young people at the start of their housing career. How this housing context is being handled by local governments and other actors represents a large challenge and will be crucial to be observed and discussed.

The session invites (both conceptual and empirical) contributions related to this overall theme, e.g.

- dynamics in housing affordability, accessibility and inclusion,
- housing affordability challenges in relation to housing and spatial inequality,
- housing affordability and its consequences in case of vulnerable groups (forced migrant/refugees, low-income groups, single-parents, young people, etc.),
- inter-generational links to housing inequality and affordability (i.e., generational gaps, generational wealth transfers),
- access to housing for young people in relation to increasing inequality,
- effects of energy poverty, energy-efficiency-targeted retrofit programs, and financial crises on housing affordability,
- governments' and other urban actors' response to housing affordability crises (existing debates, approaches, interventions and their effects).

1 Crowded out and crowded in: development, displacement and property disuse in Albania

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Keywords: Housing inequalities, money laundering, investors

Abstract: Albania has one of the most unaffordable property markets in Europe, being impacted by a convergence of low average incomes, rapid increases in property values driven by foreign investment and speculation, and ongoing challenges with money laundering in the property sector. Data suggest this has led to residential overcrowding and population displacement at the same time as very high property vacancy rates, especially in new developments. This paper takes as its case studies Tirana, the Albanian capital, and Vlorë, a coastal city that will soon host the second international airport of the country as part of a plan to boost tourism numbers and attract further inward investment. It uses quantitative data on the housing market, property investment figures and data on money laundering risks, supplemented by qualitative data drawn from a series of interviews with urban stakeholders related to housing, infrastructure and development. Applying the theoretical framework of spatial justice, this research highlights that vulnerable groups, particularly younger people and those on low incomes, face a growing

risk of exclusion from the housing market, which manifests differently in the two case studies. Potential responses to this emerging crisis of being ‘crowded out and crowded in’ are suggested.

2 Housing prices and kindergarten accessibility in post-socialist suburbia

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Keywords: Kindergartens, housing prices, suburbanisation, Bratislava

Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between proximity to kindergartens and housing prices in the post-socialist suburban context of the Bratislava metropolitan region. While global research generally shows positive effects of school and kindergarten localisation on property values, this study addresses a gap in understanding within post-socialist suburban environments. Using log-linear regression analysis and real estate insertion price data, we explore whether kindergarten accessibility, measured by distance and capacity, translates into price premiums in the housing market. Contrary to prevailing assumptions, our findings reveal a negative association between proximity to kindergartens and housing prices. Despite statistical significance, the effect sizes are minimal, suggesting that kindergartens may not significantly influence residential property values in Bratislava's suburban hinterland. This result may indicate that higher-priced developments occur in areas less accessible to kindergartens. Our study challenges established paradigms of amenity capitalisation and underscores the need for context-sensitive interpretations and integrated urban planning. This study contributes empirical insights crucial for equitable and evidence-based planning strategies by extending amenity-based housing research to underexplored post-socialist suburban regions.

3 With, or without? For, or against? Corporate Landlords and the state in Berlin, Germany

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Keywords: Housing, financialisation, local politics

Abstract: This article investigates the relations between local housing policies and Global Corporate Landlords in Berlin, Germany. While previous studies on the financialisation of housing market have described the role of the state as facilitating and supporting the entry of institutional investors into the housing market, there is yet not much known about the relationship between the local state and institutional investors after the latter have taken ground and established themselves in urban housing markets. Studying the local political arena in Berlin we describe five distinct phases in which the relationship between financialised housing investors and the local state has undergone considerable twists and turns. We find that no stable partnerships between local authorities and financial investors have yet developed and identify a number of factors that explain the lack of engagement in building long-term collaborations on both sides. We argue that both local governments and financial investors are bound by complex and often contradictory logics that complicate their relations and create instability in partnership arrangements. A conflation of local “entrepreneurial” policy orientations and the interests of financial investors should therefore not be taken as granted. The case examined rather shows how instable and difficult achieving this cooperation can be.

Session 20: The transitions and variegated paths of industrial towns in Eastern Europe

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Keywords: Industrial towns, path change, periphery

Abstract: The session is focused on the diversity of paths taken by former ‘socialist’ industrial towns of Eastern Europe. Unpacking local histories and current economic, social, environmental processes in this specific cleavage of small and medium size towns should give us an insight in the agency, shifting narratives and spaces of transition at local scale, and how those are connected to the powerful processes of the organisation of global production networks, peripheral industrialization and financialization. The session also aims to highlight the drivers (agents, strategies and struggles) of change, how local resources (infrastructure, institutions, knowledge, traditions, trust) were mobilized throughout the subsequent waves of industrialization, and how current paths are related discursively and materially to the industrial past. Placing this ‘archetype’ of transition spaces in the focus of CAT discussions is meant to understand more how industrial development, decline and recovery shaped local histories throughout epochs, how such processes were related to the structural position of Eastern Europe as an industrial periphery moreover, to develop narratives of urban economic histories rooted in this very context without self-orientalizing the region and the knowledge we produce.

Papers with the following focus are particularly welcome.

- The drivers of path change of industrial towns: local and non-local agents, strategies and relations;
- Eastern Europe as a global industrial periphery: small towns in global production networks;
- State agency and industrialization;
- Counter-movements and local alternatives to industrial paths; industrial past and present as a source of subjectivity-making; the changing narratives and use of industrial spaces.

1 Rebranding Komló? Opportunities and limits in the transformation of a former mining town

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Keywords: Small town, shrinking, re-branding

Abstract: Komló, a small town of 21,000 inhabitants in Southwest Hungary, is located on the northern side of the Mecsek Hills. During the period of the planned economy, this small village with German roots was transformed into one of the country's first socialist cities. Its significance stemmed from its black coal mining, unique in Hungary. In the decade following the political transition, all mines closed, and the town lost about a third of its former population, entering a deep crisis in every aspect. Since then, various ways out of the situation have been sought. Although the employment situation has improved, the social crisis remains unresolved, and the town continues to struggle with a negative image created by its socialist and mining past, as well as its current crisis-ridden state, burdened by social and perceived rather than real ethnic tensions. From this situation, the community tries to position itself as an attractive residential and business location next to the nearby large city (Pécs). However, the rebranding attempt, which builds on natural endowments and geological heritage while trying to break with the mining past, currently shows more limitations than opportunities.

2 Community empowerment and the co-creation of path change in Burgas

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Keywords: Community empowerment, co-creation, path change

Abstract: The Tailored Empowerment Program (TEP) as an Approach to Creating Local Alternatives to Industrial Paths in Eastern European Cities. Post-socialist industrial towns across Eastern Europe continue to navigate legacies of centralized planning, heavy industrialization, environmental degradation. In this context, the concept of TEP, developed within the EmpowerUs project, offers a bottom-up approach focused on co-creation, participation and capacity building, to give local communities voice and agency. This paper explores the case of Burgas, Bulgaria, an industrial city shaped by its port, fishing, oil, machine-building industries. Drawing on the TEP's implementation here, we demonstrate how the approach supports knowledge co-production and fosters a shared community vision as a local alternative to dominant industrial narratives. The pilot, “Burgas on Three Lakes”, co-created as part of the TEP, illustrates how industrial cities can repurpose their environmental and social

assets to envision more inclusive and sustainable futures. A key TEP outcome -the formation of a community-based think tank that unified fragmented networks and initiatives, and co-developed a roadmap centered on citizen-oriented tourism and education. This also helped address environmental challenges, including pollution and degraded coastal ecosystems. The fieldwork results highlight emerging local narratives and community empowerment, while also noting limitations of the TEP implementation.

3 New path, new dependencies? The entanglement of local and non-local agencies in a former socialist industrial town in Hungary

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Keywords: State socialism, industrial periphery, agency

Abstract: The former 'socialist' industrial towns took diverse development paths since the early 1990s. Places which emerged as scenes of reindustrialisation (path change) and/or of the recovery of 'old' activities have been integrated in the European (hence, the global) industrial periphery. Studies focused on the CEE region identified various patterns of local agencies supporting the old-new trajectories to counteract multiple crises such as economic decline, population loss, poverty and environmental degradation. This paper is focused on three interrelated issues such as (1) exploring local agents, their strategies, and assets mobilised by them for path change; (2) how (whether) their scope was shaped by the various aspects of social relations rooted in socialist industrial past; (3) how new dependencies emerged due to the transition crisis, the post-2000 peripheral industrialisation and to the ongoing centralisation of state power since 2010. The argumentation is anchored in critical political economic approach combined with the current results of agency studies, and relies on the case study approach (Tiszaújváros, Hungary), drawing lessons relevant in the broader context of European industrial peripheries.

4 Symbolic Urbanscapes in Postsocialist Europe: Between Decolonization and Ostalgia

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Keywords: Spatial memory, antagonistic and agonistic conflicts, symbolic landscapes, postsocialist urbanism.

Abstract: The paper focuses on the architectural and topographical legacy of socialist modernism in the urban environment in Central and Eastern Europe, examining it in the context of politics of memory. In the postsocialist period, the revision of national narratives in Central and Eastern Europe has involved the reactivation of political and cultural traditions from previous eras and, in many cases, the deliberate "forgetting" of the socialist legacy. The latter does not necessarily imply the physical destruction of the relevant elements of the urban environment, but also their erosion and reformatting in the public consciousness, depriving them of their original ideological meaning and thus their symbolic neutralisation. In this regard, I propose the hypothesis that a postcolonial research lens can be productive not only for studying urbanism in the Global South, but also for the CEE. Symbolic landscapes, represented by mass construction of the 1950s to 1980s, are on the one hand associated with the "Soviet colonial past"; on the other hand, they are a constant source of so-called Ostalgia not only in the former GDR, but much further afield. This contradiction can be analysed using the concept of "entangled modernities" (Therborn 2007), which will be discussed in the proposed paper.

5 From Boom to Bust: Economic and Demographic Development in Small and Mid-sized Latvian Towns

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Keywords: Urban decline, demography, economy

Abstract: Towns worldwide experience cycles of growth and decline, with some areas becoming economically "left behind" after periods of prosperity. This phenomenon extends beyond post-

communist transitions of the late 20th century and represents a recurring pattern throughout history. This research examines factors influencing economic and demographic development in small and mid-sized towns in Latvia outside the Riga metropolitan area. The study's novelty lies in its extended historical perspective, analyzing development patterns in some cases from the second half of the 19th century to present. This approach combines empirical data with descriptive analysis of towns' economic performance and demographic indicators. Findings reveal that geography plays a crucial role in development, but equally important are infrastructure developments that reshape spatial relationships—new transportation networks, railways, and shifts in trade flows. Administrative functions and geopolitical changes also significantly impact trajectories, particularly in mono-industrial towns and border regions. These findings offer valuable insights for regional development planners and researchers, providing evidence of long-term development trends and identifying potential strategies for reversing decline and achieving sustainable growth.

6 The current trends of peripheral industrialization and the changing patterns of small town-centred commuting

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Keywords: Small towns, commuting, industrialisation, mapping

Abstract: In the CEE region the re-industrialisation process was the main factor of regeneration of local economies after the shock of transition. In our twin-project, we try to cluster the small towns (with 5-30 thousand inhabitants) by using a wide set of indicators. In this paper I will concentrate on commuting, as a strong factor dividing the appr. 160 centres after the turn of millennium. This indicator reflects strongly the increasing urban-rural cohabitation and help to identify the economically more powerful actors of the group. Upgrading the formerly used methodology we created some extra indicators reflecting the longer-term transformation of local economies (such as openness index, in-and-out-commuting rate etc.). We identify the important role of industry in commuting, as well as map some examples of spatial form of daily commuting.

Session 21: Mobilities and demographic change

Zaiga Krišjāne | University of Latvia

Keywords: Segregation, metropolisation, regional development

1 Time-Space Dynamics of Social Exclusion: Spatial and Evolutionary Analysis of Segregation in Czech Cities

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Keywords: Segregation, spatial inequality, post-socialist city

Abstract: This paper examines the spatial and temporal dynamics of poverty, social exclusion, and segregation in Czechia from 2015 to 2023, leveraging a detailed database on social welfare benefit recipients. By mapping the most pronounced concentrations of poverty and social exclusion in Czech cities and regions, the study addresses the pressing need to understand and mitigate the challenges faced by socially and spatially segregated communities. The findings reveal two key trends. First, despite economic growth and improved well-being between 2015 and 2019, the concentration of vulnerable populations in segregated areas intensified. Second, the COVID-19 pandemic and the War in Ukraine introduced significant social and economic uncertainties, accelerating these trends and deepening inter-regional and intra-urban disparities. These results are contextualized within the broader narrative of long-term social and urban development in a post-socialist country, with a focus on national and local policies addressing segregation and social exclusion. The study also explores narratives around at-risk

populations, linking the findings to international debates while emphasizing the unique characteristics of Central and Eastern Europe.

2 Metropolitanization in the Baltic states: from the identification of metropolises to the evaluation of regional inequalities

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Keywords: Baltic states, metropolitanization, uneven development

Abstract: Metropolitan development can be conceptualized through four interrelated dimensions that together define the process of metropolitanization. In essence, these dimensions reflect the urbanization of the metropolis, the fulfilment of metropolitan functions, and the demographic changes within metropolitan regions and non-metropolitan areas. The concept also includes the development of functional relationships in metropolitan regions, with particular attention to uneven suburban growth. In light of these dimensions, the aim of this contribution is to explore the patterns of metropolitan development in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, and to address the following questions: (1) Which cities in the Baltic states can be identified as metropolises? (2) Is the population distribution shifting in favour of metropolitan regions? (3) How is the distribution of population within metropolitan regions and non-metropolitan areas changing? (4) Is there significant potential for the emergence of a sub-central level in the suburbs of metropolitan regions? The analysis, including the identification of metropolises, is conducted on a sample comprising regional capitals and all other cities with populations exceeding 50,000. Metropolitan regions are delimited as socio-economic cores, following the traditional core-periphery framework

3 Security and return migration: a case study from Central and Eastern Europe

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Keywords: security, identity, highly skilled

Abstract: In the last two decades, the growing numbers of international migrants within the European Union has been experienced. Though, the trends of emigration from each CEE country were different which partly lies on historical and political ties between the home and the host country, the loss of labour force is a challenging problem for sending countries. The aim of the research is to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) and the Russian Ukrainian war (up to 2022) on international migration in the new EU member states. The pandemic has revealed a new, unprecedented pattern of expatriate workers, many of whom have chosen to return due to social isolation (e.g. quarantine, social distancing, restrictions on cross-border mobility) and difficult working conditions in the host country. However, mass return migration to the home country has been discouraged as the escalating Russian Ukrainian conflict and the resulting insecurity have greatly reduced the return to the eastern regions of the EU. Growing geopolitical tensions between the EU, the US and Russia in 2025 will further catalyse the uncertainty associated with international migration. This research explores the individual migration strategies and migration drivers behind migration decision-making in this new international environment.

4 Metropolitan and Non-Metropolitan Latvia: How Distinct Are the Demographic Trends?

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Keywords: Aging, metropolitan areas, population decline

Abstract: The growing socio-economic divide between thriving metropolitan areas and declining peripheral regions is a defining trend in contemporary European development. This paper examines how such disparities manifest in Latvia, focusing on demographic differences between the Riga metropolitan area and the country's non-metropolitan areas, post-industrial towns. Using recent research, we analyze population dynamics through natural growth and net migration, with particular attention to regional variations in aging. Since the early 1990s, Latvia has experienced major shifts in fertility, mortality, and

migration, with the most severe impacts occurring in non-metropolitan areas. Our findings show that population decline and aging are markedly more pronounced in remote and economically disadvantaged regions. In contrast, the Riga metropolitan area has demonstrated relatively favourable trends, including demographic stabilization driven by higher fertility and positive migration inflows. Notably, we identify a convergence in the dynamics of youth and older age groups in Riga surroundings, reflecting a demographic stabilization supported by migration inflows and relatively higher fertility. In contrast, peripheral areas and towns show deepening aging and decline. These patterns highlight the distinct trajectories of metropolitan and non-metropolitan Latvia and underscore the need for regionally targeted policies.

5 At the Edge: Migration and Peripheralization in Czechia's Westernmost Region

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Keywords: Population dynamics, regional development

Abstract: Karlovy Vary Region, located on the western edge of Czechia and bordering Germany, is the country's smallest self-governing region by population. Despite its strategic location and renowned spa towns, it has long struggled with demographic decline, selective outmigration, and limited access to key services. These challenges are shared by many peripheral regions across Central and Eastern Europe, and particularly by Czechia's borderlands, which underwent radical demographic and structural transformations in the 20th century. Drawing on detailed migration data from 1991 to the present and recent local surveys, this paper analyses migration patterns into and out of the region from a socio-geographical perspective. Migration flows are categorized according to the main urbanization processes of the post-transformation period: urbanization (or metropolization in the form of out-migration from the region), but also suburbanization within the region itself, and partially, counter-urbanization in recent years. Particular attention is paid to the structural drivers of emigration and the often-overlooked dynamics of immigration, including international arrivals. We reflect on how such regions navigate long-term demographic decline and discuss implications for regional development and policy in the context of Central and Eastern Europe.

6 Understanding patterns and the extent of urban shrinkage in small towns of Latvia

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Keywords: Urban shrinkage, PCA, Latvia

Abstract: Since the onset of the 21st century, the phenomenon of urban shrinkage has been extensively examined across Europe. Most European countries have experienced an increasingly aging population and internal migration from less-developed to more competitive metropolitan regions. In contrast to previous periods, a substantial body of literature has emerged since the turn of the century, focusing on the causes and impacts of shrinkage, as well as on policies and planning strategies. However, the state of knowledge from a cross-national comparative perspective remains limited, as studies have predominantly concentrated on large cities, with empirical evidence rarely addressing the contextual influence on local dynamics. This study examines the patterns and extent of urban shrinkage in small towns in Latvia. It seeks to bridge the gap between macro-theoretical conceptualisation and empirical observations of urban shrinkage. This research utilises Principal Component Analysis (PCA) to analyse the key demographic and socioeconomic indicators influencing urban shrinkage. The findings reveal the spatial distribution and various developmental trajectories of small towns, contributing to a deeper understanding of the economic and demographic drivers of urban shrinkage in Latvia.

7 The geographies of religion in the socialist new towns of Hungary – Spatio-temporal dynamics of de-secularisation and secularisation after the turn of the millennium

Keywords: New towns, religiosity, statistical analysis

Abstract: This presentation explores the geographies of religion in the socialist new towns of Hungary. While several scholars have examined the country's socialist new towns, as well as the geographies of religion in Hungary, these two bodies of research have remained largely disconnected. This analysis draws on statistical data from the 2001, 2011 and 2022 national censuses, focusing on religiosity broken down by the major religious denominations. Since these socialist new towns were originally designed as atheist 'ideal' model cities, the central research question is whether religiosity has strengthened or remained weak in these towns in the wake of the politico-economic transition, with the advent of the 'free world'. In addition to comparing the socialist new towns to one another, the analysis also contrasts them with a 'control group' of historical Hungarian towns with strong ecclesiastical traditions. This comparative approach enables the scrutiny of the local-level spatio-temporal dynamics of both de-secularisation and secularisation in post-socialist urban contexts. This study is part of the research project entitled "...the opium of the people"?

Session 22: Maintaining the city, maintaining the everyday

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Keywords: Maintenance, infrastructure, repair, breakdown

Abstract: Throughout decades of urban scholarship, the issue of everyday maintenance has been hardly visible. Scholars have focused on concepts related to urban change, development, innovation, and replacing existing structures with new ones. However, urban life crucially rests on processes of maintaining existing material and immaterial structures, repairing and caring for them. Only recently, against the background of several unfolding crises, did critical engagement problematizing the disregard, invisibility, and underpayment of these aspects gain momentum, and maintenance was considered as a distinct epistemology (Jackson 2014).

In our panel, we propose to explore urban maintenance issues, reflecting on their peculiarities in the context of post-socialist and post-communist cities. While current scholarship on maintenance tends to either examine the work that goes unnoticed or engage with breakdowns, emergencies, and crises, we aim to investigate maintenance in contexts where infrastructure was rarely intended to run unnoticed and was portrayed as visible achievements to everyone (Schwenkel 2020), where dysfunctionalities are often anticipated (Khalvashi 2019), and where repair and DIY hold a central place in maintenance practices (Sgibnev 2014). The maintenance issues we propose to explore are framed by, but not limited to, the following questions:

What are the power relations between institutional and everyday dimensions of maintenance?

Can we notice path-dependencies in the maintenance of post-socialist and post-communist infrastructures created in the notion of modernity, and how can we explain them?

How do maintenance practices exist with and through dysfunctionalities?

How do non-human agencies contribute to maintaining cities? How can we account for their agencies?

1 Ecology of maintaining the housing infrastructure in Aktau: practices of ignoring the breakage and making-things-work

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Keywords: Infrastructure, Kazakhstan, ecology, maintenance, breakages

Abstract: In Aktau, almost the entire water supply, including fresh water, heating, and electricity, has been provided centrally through one power plant. The city has been tightly dependent on the same infrastructure built in the 1970s, which has not yet been centrally modernized or repaired to eliminate

the constant state of breakages. Those involved in maintenance are in the constant state of negotiating what should be repaired, how, when, and at what expense.

This paper is based on in-depth interviews with the residents of the Soviet-built micro-districts of Aktau, maintenance workers, experts, and authorities; ethnographic observations of maintenance work; the analysis of laws and public discourse; and archival research. Further exploring the concept of ecology (Domínguez Rubio 2020), this paper details the conditions under which actors engage with maintenance. Looking at the maintenance practices holistically, I situate it within seemingly the duality of two maintenance practices: ignoring the breakage and making-things-work. This case allows us to explore the boundaries of dysfunctionality (Martínez and Laviolette 2019) and pay particular attention to breakages as an intrinsic part of every infrastructure.

2 Caring for the Tram in Samarkand: Repair and Maintenance as Moral and Material Negotiation

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Keywords: Infrastructural care, precarity, improvisation

Abstract: The tram system in Samarkand was built in a fast speed in 2017-2018 after president Mirziyoyev's decree. A reuse of the remnants of the old tramway system from the capital Tashkent, Samarkand inherited 20 tram wagons and a couple of drivers who followed their job. Yet after the installation the two-lines system was left to fend for itself. Without governmental subsidies the enterprise must survive from the fares alone, while administration diverts financial and technical risks to the drivers and the repairmen. In this presentation, I examine the complex dynamics between drivers, machines and repair staff as they navigate a system marked by neglect, precarity, and improvisation. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted with a small group of drivers and repair workers, I explore the ethics and practices of infrastructural care – the intertwining of moral and pragmatic reasoning – and the social and emotional toll of technical maintenance paid by the drivers. At a broader level, this case raises critical questions about the fate of public infrastructure in authoritarian post-Soviet context, where the urge for urban modernity collides with a “black-boxing” and rent extortion approaches to infrastructure — resulting in abandonment, invisibility, and chronic under-maintenance.

3 Violent Neighborliness: Maintaining a New Large Housing Estates

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Keywords: Housing, community, urban citizenship, responsibilization

Abstract: The presentation elaborates on how residents maintain a large housing estate in St. Petersburg, Russia. Built within the neoliberal housing policy, this housing estate is an urban space where social control and maintenance of the collective life is mostly exercised by residents. I analyze this as a case of neoliberal communitarianism (Houdt, Schinkel, 2014, Patton, 2009, Pyysäinen et al., 2017), or a governance model based on community mobilization and responsibilization. In contrast to existing approaches that trace neoliberal communitarianism in governmental programs and policies (Houdt, Schinkel 2014), I consider its «actual existence» in the maintenance practices of the residents (Birk, 2017). Referring to the materials of the groupinterviews with residents, I demonstrate, firstly, how they define maintenance of the territory, focusing on the distribution of responsibility and the role they assign to themselves. Secondly, I describe the local specificity of neoliberal communitarianism, namely, responsibilization deriving down-up from the local practice, and propose the notion of “violent neighborliness,” which reflects the radical form of responsibilization that residents exercise towards each other, and the concept of local urban citizenship, which captures the connection between the local community and maintenance of the territory.

4 Love is in the Toolbox: Everyday Politics of Maintenance in Chemnitz2025 Garages

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Keywords: Garages, DIY maintenance, GDR

Abstract: Using Chemnitz' designation as European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2025 and the programme's focus on socialist-era garages as a case study (Kulturhauptstadt 2018), this paper approaches repair and maintenance in post-socialist contexts as dynamic processes that forge user-object relationships (Möser 2012) and enable ongoing adaptation and learning in the everyday (Graham and Thrift 2007). This contribution explores how Chemnitz2025's focus on garages reveals underlying tensions between everyday practices of maintenance grounded in solidarity and DIY culture inherited from the GDR era (Casper 2021), and institutional and municipal approaches that tend to favor inaction or demolition in the context of urban development (Glorius 2022, Intelmann 2019).

Drawing on fieldwork insights gathered in the spring of 2023, this paper shows how garage users in Chemnitz mobilize strategies to care for both the material structures of garages and the social practices associated with them. By analyzing these concrete examples of (im)material maintenance practices, this contribution also aims to question the role of major cultural events such as ECoC in the recognition of DIY and grassroot practices of care and repair, as well as exploring how this recognition can reshape power relations between municipal authorities and local communities.

Session 23: Gentrification and inner-city developments

Chair: Luděk Sýkora | Charles University, Faculty of Science, Department of Social Geography and Regional Development

Keywords: Gentrification, inner city development

1 The Transformation of Space Interpreted through the Model of Adaptive Cycle Theory

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Keywords: Gentrification, subcultures, adaptive cycle, Berlin

Abstract: The patterns of the continuous transformation of urban space, and the local significance of various elements of this process, raise numerous questions regarding the capitalist spatial relations of commodity power. The materialization of social values becomes intertwined with urban settlements, a process this study aims to highlight through the specific characteristics of gentrification trends in Berlin, particularly in the Kreuzberg (SO36) district. The research aims to demonstrate the commodification of urban space through case studies comparable to the sample area, applying C.S. Holling's Panarchy theory. The results of the investigation reveal the transformation of values associated with segments of the built environment and their symbolic role in the social conflicts driven by gentrification. The critical perspective of my work questions the uniformizing forces of our time within the estranging urban space. The gentrification of Berlin, specifically in Kreuzberg, will be presented through three symbolically significant case study areas, which, situated within the economic and urban transformation context described by Crawford Stanley Holling's Panarchy theory, emerge as subcultural hubs opposing the exploitation of the built environment and urban space.

2 The Role of Foreigners in the Population Development and Transformation of Prague

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Keywords: Population, foreigners, Prague

Abstract: The growing number of foreigners represents one of the major challenges facing contemporary cities. In Prague, the capital of Czechia, foreigners play a key role in population growth and the development of the city's socio-spatial structure. Without them, Prague's population would decline by approximately 1,000 inhabitants per year. Their share of the total population has risen to

25%. This paper presents a unique demographic forecast of Prague's foreign population, projecting an increase from the current 350,000 to between 600,000 and 900,000 by 2050. This growth is expected to have a profound impact on the city's overall demographic development. Foreigners not only drive population growth but also significantly contribute to changes in the social structure and the regeneration of the urban environment. They are becoming key actors in the process of gentrification in Prague. The foreign population in Prague is highly diverse and should not be viewed as a homogeneous group. Given their considerable influence on both current and future urban dynamics, understanding this population is essential for effective urban planning and policy-making.

3 Housing Choices of Young Families: Housing Estate, Inner-City Neighbourhood, or Both?

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Keywords: Families, gentrification, housing estates

Abstract: This study examines the emerging trend of family gentrification in post-socialist cities, focusing on young middle-class families' increasing preference for inner-city housing estates. While the discussion on post-socialist cities has predominantly focused on the role of young families in suburbanization, their role in inner-city revitalization remains understudied. Through a qualitative case study of the Invalidovna housing estate in Prague, this study explores young families' residential choices within broader socio-economic, cultural, and historical contexts. Although the ideal of owning a house home with a garden remains strong in Czech society, suburbanization challenges—such as inadequate public services and facilities and long commutes—often made the inner city more appealing. Choosing an inner-city housing estate over pre-war tenement houses, families prioritized a convenient spatial layout of flat and well-designed public spaces and pedestrian-friendly environments. However, the preference for homeownership and financial constraints were key factors shaping families' decisions. In this context, intergenerational transfers often played a crucial role in enabling families to move to inner-city housing estate. The study contributes to discussions on the residential mobility of young families and urban transformation, highlighting the role of housing estates in post-socialist cities in attracting socio-economic groups that may be seen as gentrifiers.

4 Mapping gentrification in Prague inner city neighbourhoods: a quantitative analysis

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Keywords: Gentrification, inner-city, Prague

Abstract: We can perceive gentrification as the transformation of a formerly industrial working-class inner-city neighbourhood's socio-demographic and economic composition due to the arrival of wealthier members of the middle class, leading to the displacement of lower-income residents, such as former working-class or poorer native population. The main objective of this paper is to map selected aspects and evaluate the scope of the gentrification process in Prague using population census indicators. We will answer the following research question: Which localities of the inner city are gentrified, and to what extent? Contrary to publications that dealt mainly with qualitative case studies of gentrified localities, we will focus on quantitative analysis and the whole area of Prague's inner city (140 localities of tenement houses). Recently, a classical form of gentrification was confirmed in selected inner-city neighbourhoods in Prague, but other processes of inner-city transformation are also present in these localities. The analysis distinguishes six clusters of localities and describes specific processes with various intensities of gentrification and residential change, using selected indicators of socio-economic status of the residential population based on the Population Census 2021.

Session 24: Post-socialist urban periphery between placelessness and creative cultural co-production: The multiplicity of local identities, meanings, and practices

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Keywords: Urban periphery, local identity, placelessness

Abstract: The transformation of local identities is a largely overlooked aspect of what is traditionally described as ‘post-socialist transition’. The session focuses on the spatialities of urban identities defined as spatial structures within the physical, the mental and the lived (in Lefebvrian terms) spaces and the multiplicity of spatial objects, meanings and practices. The spatial focus of the session is shifted from the historical centers of post-socialist cities towards the urban periphery as it is also overlooked by research yet the most inhabited part of the urban continuum. While the centers are regarded as representing the cities and even the whole countries in general, the meanings and imageries of the periphery are disputable and even contested. The periphery seems placeless with vivid remnants of standardized socialist mass housing and stagnating street retail – and at the same time in certain cases described as the focal point of the emerging speculative urbanism, nationalist aspirations in urban design and a birthplace of bottom-up citizen initiatives.

The papers researching this contradictory and differential process of socio-spatial transformation in terms of multiple local identities in post-socialist urban peripheries, including their applied effects from ‘new urban tourism’ to ‘creative cultural co-production’, are invited to apply to this session.

1 Festivals as Tools for Identity Formation and Space Reuse in Kosovo

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Keywords: Cultural interaction, festivals, Kosovo, tourism

Abstract: Festivals represent gatherings of people, generally with good purposes, often acting as forms of cultural interaction, particularly in urban peripheries and smaller towns. Organized in specific spaces and experiencing growth trends globally, they are increasingly becoming a subject of study not only in the geography of tourism but also across various research fields due to their social, cultural, and economic impacts. This study—lacking so far for the territory of Kosovo—aims to fill this gap by analyzing the spatial distribution of festivals, their types, and their impact on building local identity, fostering social inclusion, and reusing urban spaces. Based primarily on semi-structured interviews, the findings show that festivals in Kosovo began in the mid-20th century and have developed in an unstable manner, with 26 out of a total of 146 festivals discontinued. The greatest challenges were recorded during the 1990s when Serbian pressure on Kosovo peaked, while today, they are contemporary yet remain significant. Music festivals were the most dominant type, and the highest concentration is found in Prishtina. Their social, cultural, and economic impact at both the local and national levels was assessed as partially positive.

2 The attractiveness of urban periphery as a spatial representation

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Keywords: Attractiveness, spatial representations, urban periphery

Abstract: The paper uses the research of Moscow urban periphery to define the concept of place attractiveness. The periphery, opposite to the center, lacks symbolic capital and is often seen as placeless both by residents and tourists. Place attractiveness being not an established category yet is largely reduced to a set of objects and features of a certain place aimed at satisfying the needs of an individual or meeting one’s expectations. Attention to perceived attributes and symbolic capital of a place indicates the close connections of the concept to the categories of spatial representations, e.g., local identities, geographical images, spatial myths, as well as the Tuanian concept of place as a meaningful location. An attractive place appeals people’s attachment and brings to life unique positive place images and/or identifiers of organic identity-based place branding. Thus, place attractiveness could be regarded not as a property of a place but as a category of spatial representations. This turns it into a spatial representation

reflecting the ability of place to satisfy the needs of individual, meet one's expectations, and which is the most important, form place attachment and positive place images. In short, place attractiveness is an established positive representation of the place.

Session 25: Informality in South-eastern Europe

Organiser/Chair: Daniel Göler

Keywords: Informality, housing, infrastructure

1 Informality and Urban Management Projects in Albania – three decades later

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Keywords: Informality, urban, upgrading, housing

Abstract: The urban land management project in Albania, started in 1998 under the auspices of the World Bank and the Albanian Government. However, the pilot examples on which the project scaled-up in Albanian reality, were initiated by Co-plan, a local NGO, in 1994 in the informal suburbs of Tirana. Based on this experience, the article provides some conclusions on the impact of these projects after three decades. This will be linked to the context that pushed Albanian governments, between 1998 and 2010, to adopt the model of neighborhood upgrading in informal suburbs, catalysing in the process local grassroots organizations. Albanian institutions lacked the know-how for self-helped community-led housing projects with minimal state intervention. This alternative of public housing, in the framework of the neoliberal agenda, required a shift in the mentality of the government and the planning system. In this regard, the article will analyze the main points characterizing the methodology introduced by Co-plan, such as the importance of operating within an open co-evolutionary system in which formal-informal evolve and adapt in the process; etc. The paper concludes with a reflection on the current stage of development of these areas.

2 Locked in the now: daily bargain for bare necessities in informal settlements

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Keywords: Informal settlements, evictions, infrastructures

Abstract: People squatting or living in informal settlements have little close to no possibility in projecting future. Their daily dynamics are based on ensuring that they have access to critical infrastructures, such as water, heating or electricity, avoiding eviction, losing their children into public foster care system or the mere feeling of safety, both in public spaces and in the spaces they call home. For the last 3 years I have been documenting life among two informal settlements in Bucharest, in an ethnographic effort of explaining the daily routines of these communities. I argue that most of their daily efforts are targeted towards perpetual negotiations with different actors, both statal and private, in a constant endeavour of not losing the fragile perceived stability. This constant bargain for their bare necessities and the integrity of their family keeps them locked in a state of perpetual present. There is though among them a shared strong abstract hope for the future as to grow their children out of extreme poverty, in a better social position than they are.

Session 26: Pedaling Through Change: The Politics, Histories, and Cultures of Cycling in Post-Socialist Cities

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Keywords: Cycling, post-socialism, gender

Abstract: Over the past two decades, research on cycling has experienced a resurgence in the social sciences and related disciplines, leading to countless research papers and numerous edited volumes (Cox, 2020; Spinney, 2020; Vivanco, 2013).

In Western and Northern Europe, qualitative approaches to cycling that emphasize it as a form of journeying that derives meaning from political, historical, and sociocultural contexts (Adey, 2006) have gained traction. Cities in these regions have witnessed a significant increase in cycling adoption, prompting a shift also in academic focus from merely transport planning toward examining the broader societal implications of this form of travel. In this line, Rachel Aldred (2010) has argued that cycling is not only influenced by political decisions of infrastructuring but also actively shapes the political agency of those who relate to a form of “cycling citizenship”. However, despite such uptake, post-socialist urban spaces have not gained similar attention.

Hence, this session seeks contributions that explore the political, historical, and sociocultural dimensions of cycling in Central and Eastern European (CEE) and former Soviet Union (FSU) countries that:

- Investigate how post-socialist urban planning and historical legacies shape cycling cultures and its uptake in CEE and the FSU.
- Explore gendered and intersectional dimensions of cycling practices.
- Examine cycling’s role in care mobilities and unpaid care work.
- Analyze the sensory and ambient dimensions of cycling using alternative methodologies.
- Provide insights into cycling as a form of local and transnational civic activism.

We welcome contributions from scholars across disciplines, in traditional papers or other formats.

1 The Rural Legacy of the Bicycle: Cycling in 19th and 20th Century Estonia

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Keywords: Sustainable mobility, cycling advocacy, history

Abstract: The bicycle is widely regarded as a vehicle of a sustainable future, prompting extensive scholarly interest in the conditions shaping its adoption. Because of the bicycle's perceived urban future, almost all of this research focuses on cycling in cities. Drawing from various historical sources, I argue for the importance of acknowledging the history of rural cycling. During the 20th century, rural populations in Estonia embraced the bicycle more extensively and for a broader range of everyday activities than their urban counterparts, who primarily viewed it as a recreational tool. Even among city dwellers, who adopted the vehicle earlier, cycling occurred mainly outside urban settings, particularly in the form of touring. Since the late 1980s, cycling advocates have worked to promote the bicycle as a practical mode of transport within Estonian cities. However, these efforts continue to be challenged by the enduring cultural perception of the bicycle as a vehicle tied to summer leisure, nature, and the rural working class. Recognizing this rural legacy challenges the prevailing urban bias and calls for a more nuanced understanding of cycling cultures in shaping sustainable mobility futures.

2 Cycling Infrastructure in the Crossfire: Right-Wing Discourses and the Politics of Sustainable Mobility in Post-Socialist Bratislava

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Keywords: Cycling activism, culture wars

Abstract: This study explores the contemporary challenges faced by cycling activism and institutional efforts aimed at developing cycling infrastructure in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. As a post-socialist city, Bratislava exhibits historical and structural barriers to sustainable urban mobility, where cycling has rarely been prioritized in transport policy. Recently, however, cycling initiatives have become increasingly visible—both physically in the urban space and symbolically within broader “culture wars.” This research focuses on how right-wing and far-right political actors, along with affiliated media and online communication channels, frame progressive efforts to promote sustainable transport as ideological impositions. Using discourse analysis, the study examines the strategies employed to delegitimize cycling infrastructure as part of a broader resistance to ecological

modernization. By analyzing these narratives, the paper aims to uncover the underlying power dynamics that shape urban transformation in Central and Eastern Europe and to understand how contested visions of the city are mobilized in the post-socialist context.

3 Affective Vélocularities of Care through the Lens of Post-Socialist Ideologies and Urbanism: Methodological Notes

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Keywords: Cycling, CEE, care

Abstract: This paper discusses the preliminary findings from the EU-funded research project VELOCARE that looks at women's affective vélocularities of care in Tallinn. Cycling research in the CEE is still very grounded in technocratic and quantitative approaches within the fields of transport planning and road engineering. Very few studies in the region explore how cycling as a form of everyday journeying intersects with questions of identity, civic activism and gender. Research on the latter remains particularly scarce, possibly because in the CEE countries feminist thinking and initiatives are often associated with socialist ideologies of Soviet occupiers (Song et.al., 2023). VELOCARE aims to fill this research gap by focusing on women's everyday challenges and joys of co-cycling in Tallinn. By employing GoPro cameras and mobile interviews to capture participants' affective experiences of cycling, the project seeks to deepen understanding of how post-socialism—both ideologically and urbanistically— influences women's decisions to use bicycles for performing care-related tasks. As the project remains in its early stages, the presentation will primarily explore the epistemological and practical decisions shaping its methodology—addressing issues such as representativity, data volume vs value and the (ir)relevance of audiovisual outputs in an era of sensory overload.

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