

Call for Applications

PhD School (online) 7-10 April 2027

At Risk: Preparing, Responding and Transforming Endangered Residential Environments

The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), RWTH Aachen University, Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe in Leipzig (GWZO), are jointly convening the PhD School "**At Risk: Preparing, Responding and Transforming Endangered Residential Environments**", in the framework of the collaborative research project cities.building.culture.

Case Study: Gyumri, Armenia

On 7 December, 1988, a **devastating earthquake** in northern Armenia killed an estimated 25,000–50,000 people and injured up to 130,000. With a magnitude of 6.8, it caused catastrophic destruction, particularly in **Gyumri, Armenia's second-largest city.** The disaster was followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union, war, an energy blockade, economic decline and population loss. Large-scale housing privatisation shifted responsibility for maintenance and recovery to residents, including those living in damaged or incompletely reconstructed buildings. Ambitious **post-earthquake reconstruction** plans also left behind vast areas of **unfinished construction**, the future of which remains uncertain.

Nearly four decades later, Gyumri's residential environment continues to reflect the cumulative effects of these **crises, institutional changes and unresolved reconstruction**. As the common case for the PhD School, Gyumri provides a basis for exploring strategies to address inherited vulnerabilities, unfinished transformations and uncertain urban futures, with a focus on developing more sustainable and resilient residential environments.

Topic

The PhD School examines how risks affect inherited residential environments and shape their long-term transformation. Taking earthquakes, war-related destruction and climate change as examples, it explores how the nature and duration of threats influence approaches to recovery and adaptation. The PhD school examines how residential environments are transformed across **different temporalities of risk**—before, during and after disruptive events, and in anticipation of future threats.

A central premise of the PhD School is that **decisions taken under conditions of urgency and uncertainty can themselves produce long-lasting spatial, social and institutional consequences**. Temporary solutions may become permanent; emergency interventions may determine future patterns of housing and urban development; and existing vulnerabilities may be reduced, reproduced or transformed. Looking retrospectively at the long-term consequences of past decisions can therefore provide a critical perspective on decisions being made in the present and on strategies for future preparedness.

Guiding Questions

- How do existing residential legacies shape vulnerability and capacities to respond to different risks?
- How do the timing and conditions of decision-making influence responses to risk?
- Which short-term decisions can generate long-term residential and urban consequences?
- How can knowledge of long-term consequences inform decisions made under present conditions of uncertainty?
- How can experiences from one temporal and spatial context contribute to thinking about other risks and contexts?

With funding from the:

Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space

KIT Karlsruher Institut für Technologie

GWZO Leibniz-Institut für Geschichte und Kultur des östlichen Europa

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cities building culture

the residential heritage of the Soviet Union in times of multiple crises



Thematic Areas:

residential heritage and values

governance and planning

everyday adaptation

physical vulnerability

During a four-days online program, participants will have the opportunity to work closely with cities.building.culture researchers, local experts, and invited speakers, engaging in a combination of lectures, presentations, and interactive workshops. The participants will also have the chance to present their own research and receive feed-back.

The PhD School provides a setting to:

- Develop a broader understanding of topics such as risk, resilience, urban transformation, and the factors that shape how residential environments respond to change and uncertainty
- Engage with current research, practices, and perspectives on how cities and residential environments evolve in response to different risks and changing conditions;
- Develop approaches for translating lessons from one context into strategies for addressing risks in other contexts;
- Experiment with collaborative methods of working and learning through interactive, small-group formats.

Eligibility

The PhD School is open to doctoral candidates from the fields of architecture, urban studies, planning, heritage conservation, urban geography, anthropology and related disciplines.

How to Apply

Please submit the following materials by **December 15, 2026** in one PDF document:

- A motivation letter (max. 1 page) explaining your research interests and their relevance to the PhD school themes
- A short CV (1 page)
- A brief abstract of your current doctoral project (300 words)

Send your application materials to iuga@staedtebau.rwth-aachen.de

For more information on the project, please visit our website cities-building-culture.com

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