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# CATference 2022

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## CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

### **Re-evaluating residential heritage of socialism: Symbolic transformations of socialist cities**

Session organiser:

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Over the past two decades, huge residential areas from the socialist period have increasingly become the objects of various urban planning initiatives and, simultaneously, the sites of numerous social, cultural, artistic and educational projects. In most cases, debates around the socialist architectural legacy went far beyond the issues of preservation or aesthetic values, and directly addressed the most critical points of ongoing public discussions on urban development, socioeconomic change, national and local identities, as well as recent history (Young and Kaczmarek 2008; Czepczyński 2008; Bartetzky, Dietz, and Haspel 2014; Hatherley 2016). The war in Ukraine and the need for subsequent reconstruction of Ukrainian cities will make these debates even more acute and urgent.

Scholarly literature has widely characterized socialist-era architecture as a “dissonant”, “uncomfortable” or “neglected” heritage. However, numerous experiments to build large-scale residential areas in socialist countries became an essential element of the social mass housing development project in the twentieth century (Glendinning 2021, Drummond and Young 2020, Meuser and Zadorin 2015). This enables us to see a very important, but often poorly articulated reality: built legacies of socialism are an integral and vital part of the modern world, without which it would have appeared markedly different.

Today the residential legacy of socialism finds itself in very different national, ideological, social and urban contexts. Approaches to dealing with this heritage can vary widely, and involve a dual challenge. Along with the task to find new practical tools to better integrate socialist-era mass housing districts into a new reality, there is a pressing need to unpack how their symbolic representation has embodied the ideas and values of the socialist past. This makes residential mass housing areas a particularly illustrative case to explore and more deeply understand many of the significant social processes, which take place in former socialist countries.

How have approaches to the socialist-era urban heritage and its public perceptions varied in different national and local contexts across Eastern Europe? What can we learn from those differences to better understand ongoing urban dynamics and social transformations in former socialist countries? How has the socialist residential heritage integrated into new urban cultural landscapes? In what way does it change and help to shape them? How do new social and urban initiatives around the socialist heritage represent changing attitudes towards the socialist past, and how do they contribute to the current memory policies in different local contexts? Do those processes somehow foster the identification of new contours, intersections or fractures in the local and regional identities within so-called “post-socialist” space? And does the analysis of current tendencies in the re-valuation of the socialist-era mass housing legacy encourage us to go beyond the very term of post-socialism?

This session seeks to look at the ongoing activities around the socialist-era residential heritage as a sort of a mirror which reflects important tendencies in shaping new attitudes towards the socialist past and re-thinking its symbols that are taking place today in the social, cultural and urban development of the former socialist countries. It aims to understand how the huge residential areas which were designed to embody socialist ideals are perceived today by the public, what symbols and values they represent and how dealing with the socialist urban legacy in different local contexts has contributed to the development of the current memory policies (Lisiak 2009; Huyssen 2003; Stenning 2000; Light & Young 2010). Discussion on these issues could also give another important argument in favor of the need to move beyond traditional geographical and temporal boundaries in the typical understanding of socialist and post-socialist urbanisms (Müller 2019; Müller & Trubina 2020; Ferenčuhová & Gentile 2016; Drummond & Young 2020). Expected panel presentations could demonstrate how approaches to the urban legacy of socialism play out in diverse urban mechanisms and social practices, across different regional borders and in various manifestations, such that they seldom differ from approaches to the “non-socialist” legacy.

The session will place a special focus on those major residential districts which rapidly developed and were built from scratch in the vicinity of the huge industrial installations of the socialist era. Today these areas are inhabited by hundreds of thousands of people, and they are in many respects still playing a pivotal role for the current urban spatial development. This is especially true in territories of the former Soviet Union, whose territory became a sort of a testing ground for unprecedented large-scale social urban planning experiments that had long-lasting effect on the urban development for decades. Today the debate over such socialist-era landmarks and monuments has turned into a particular form of a public dialogue about the contested past, urban social concerns, the individual memories of residents and the search for new cultural symbols.

The session participants are invited to discuss the following issues:

- How socialist-era residential districts have been integrating into the new urban fabric, and how they are changing existing symbolic urban landscapes;
- What kind of attitudes and emotional attachments have been characterizing territorial and urban identity in those districts today;
- How public activities around the urban legacy of socialism represent different ways of symbolic re-thinking of the socialist past in various local and regional contexts;
- How these activities represent the establishment and re-structuring of the new local identities and narratives of local and national history in terms of existing memory policies in Eastern Europe;
- What new forms of civic engagement are emerging in the preservation activities around socialist urban heritage in the post-socialist countries, and what effect they have on social participation in different regional contexts today;
- What we can learn about the global nature of socialist urbanism while viewing various approaches to working with the socialist-era residential heritage in different local and national contexts.

If you are interested, please send your abstract to Mikhail Ilchenko ([mikhail.ilchenko@leibniz-gwzo.de](mailto:mikhail.ilchenko@leibniz-gwzo.de); [ilchenko.mik@gmail.com](mailto:ilchenko.mik@gmail.com)) by the 15th May 2022. Please also upload your abstract to the CAT-ference website, indicating that you intend to present in this session.

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