

**„Urban Peripheries?“ Emerging Cities in Europe's South and East, 1850–1945**

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„Knowledge and/in the city“ has become a trending topic in recent historiography, both in history of science, technology and medicine as well as in Urban Studies. So far there has been a strong focus on the metropolis. Yet what about „peripheral“ cities in Eastern and Southern Europe? Are they only smaller copies of London, Paris and Berlin? What is to be gained from studying how knowledge about engineering, urban planning and public health was appropriated and applied in „non-metropolitan“ cities? So far these cities have been mostly described as being on the receiving end. Knowledge (in a broad sense) on how to modernize urban space was created and tested in the metropolis and then passed on. This postulates a transfer from the center to the periphery and hence a clear epistemological hierarchy.

The conference “Urban Peripheries? Emerging Cities in Europe's South and East, 1850-1945”, that took place in Barcelona this past September 26-27 in 2016, wanted to question this assumption. It was organized by Eszter Gantner and Heidi Hein-Kirchner (Marburg) and Oliver Hochadel (Barcelona). The underlying assumption was that „peripheral“ – or should we rather say „emerging“ – cities understood that the experience of similar cities was often much more helpful in solving their concrete problems (e.g. sewage systems) than the metropolitan model. Therefore the conference wanted to reconstruct the mechanisms and strategies behind choosing certain „best practices“, i.e. urban models that serve smaller cities. This search for practical models should thus help to elucidate the networks between these urban spaces.

The thirteen papers were loosely organized into four thematic categories, the first of

which was entitled „The Interurban Exchange on Urban Planning.“ ANNA MAZANIK (Budapest) initiated the discussion with her paper on the circulation of knowledge and foreign models of urban reforms in Moscow. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the public discourse on modernization was rooted in the idea of Moscow's backwardness, particularly with regards to its sanitation system as compared with those of „European modernity“, which were viewed as the gold standard. This theme, along with those of „public good“ and „municipalization“, mobilized modernization efforts, which, in one particular case, stretched all the way to Memphis, Tennessee, which was chosen as the model for the new sewage system installed in Moscow. This highlights the eclecticism of the sources of information and experiences that Moscow used as models, as well as the dialectic of knowledge exchange between larger and smaller cities. In practice, the most typical solutions for Moscow involved the synthesis of several models from both established and emerging urban centers.

CATHLEEN M. GIUSTINO (Auburn) spoke about urban planning in Prague, looking at case studies demonstrating both the embrace of and resistance to knowledge transfer. Whereas the pre-WWI urban reconstruction of the city's Jewish quarter was viewed as a sort of Czech „catching up“, the post-WWI plans for redesigning the Castle environment were met with antagonism and did not succeed. As Giustino demonstrated, crucial to understanding the reasons for this is pinpointing the various interest groups and constellations of power at place in the city, in this case the architects and art historians. Within these groups existed tensions between universalism and nationalism, as well as the question of how to develop the city while preserving historic roots.

The last speaker of the first section, GORAN HUTINEC (Zagreb), spoke about the urban modernization of post-Habsburg Zagreb. This was a story about a small town living in the shadow of Budapest which after 1918 underwent processes of expansion of municipal government and democratization, both acting as catalysts for development. The new bourgeois elites needed to prove

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themselves as modern while at the same time resisting the „Americanization“ of the way of life of the Zagreb citizens. The search for „best practices“ in urban planning shows once more an eclectic approach. The reformers tried to strengthen their ties with their „non-Hungarian“, Slavic neighbors as well as traveling to North Italy and Switzerland in order to learn from Western cities.

HARALD R. STÜHLINGER (Zürich) started off the second session „Technology Transfer between ‘Peripheries‘“ with his paper on „The book, the public space, and the manhole cover.“ In 1865, Adolphe Alphand started a book project called „Les Promenades de Paris“ which served as a sort of city planning reference guide, containing a treasure trove of illustrations, exact sections, plans and perspectives on how to improve the appearance and sanitation of parks and avenues in Paris. This book made its way all over the continent, and in one example its plans were copied in Vienna, where small iron fences were placed for the protection of trees along one of the avenues. Stühlinger used this story to bring up the concept not only of spatial periphery but also of a temporal one, that is, the existence of a time-lag in which the development of smaller cities occurred significantly later than that of Paris and London. In some cases, rather than being a limitation, this temporal periphery came with potential benefits. In the second part of his talk he interpreted manhole covers as a sort of media, not only revealing what lies underneath them, but also as iconic representations of the city.

Next, IGOR LYMAN (Berdyansk) talked about port cities along the Black Sea, following their specific modernization discourses and character. In his account, the contexts of frontierity, regionality, and imperial connection were fundamental in understanding these developments in the course of the nineteenth century. Especially of interest in his discussion of the perception of these cities by contemporaries, both locals and visitors from abroad, and how the cities were viewed as aligning, or not, with European standards.

BARRY STIEFEL's (Charleston) paper on the early auto industry in Barcelona (1900–1950) marked the first contribution

from the South of Europe. Stiefel argued that ‘emerging cities’ like Turin, Stuttgart, Detroit, and Barcelona played an important role in auto production. This case study also showed the possibilities of using actor-network theory as an analytical tool. In this instance, Stiefel was able to trace the construction, not only of physical cars but of symbolic cars as well, as they were presented to the public through advertisements. The argument prompted the group to think even more carefully about the numerous ways in which cities ‘emerge’ – not just physical expansion, but as (competing) forms of experience and imagination.

In the third session „Curing and Controlling: Public Urban Health“ HEIDI HEINKIRCHER (Marburg) highlighted the inherent tensions in the efforts of the city of Lviv (Lemberg) to conceptualize and implement an urban policy of urban health. On the one hand the city councilors sought for „best practice models“ from German towns (and not the Austrian-Hungarian empire which they were a part of), and in an eclectic and pragmatic way. On the other hand the city council, dominated by ethnic Poles, pursued a nationalist agenda, to transform Lviv into a „Polish town“. As in many other Eastern European cities, the growing anti-Semitism manifested itself also in issues of urban planning, identifying problems of health and sanitation with the „filthy Jewish quarter.“

SEAN BRADY (Dublin) spoke on the topic of the mobilization of Sicily's numerous towns and cities against an influenza epidemic in 1918–19. At this time, 60 Percent of the Sicilian population lived in cities of 10,000 or more, and over ten urban centers had populations of over 30,000. Brady's case study drew parallels between this and the wartime scenario: both characterized by mass death and mobilization which created friction. The cost of both of these handicapped the island for years to come. The object of Brady's study was quite unique, focusing on the contours of meaning regarding this event which Sicilians shared, or not, and which often resulted in these frictions. At stake were perceptions of urbanity, jealousy, and conflicts with suspicious peasants, other doctors, etc. The paper also demonstrated the need to think about the scale and concentration of urban

areas. Whereas some case studies may have treated ‘the city’ as the primary unit, Brady’s study relied on the relations between cities and towns in Sicily as a whole.

Starting off the second day of presentations, CLARA FRYSZTACKA (Frankfurt an der Oder) spoke on the topic of urban poverty as a symptom of urban modernity in Polish Warsaw. Her investigation involved a discourse analysis of magazines targeted to the upper and emerging middle class, where the new narrative of urban poverty was connected with urbanization processes and framed according to discourses concerning the imagined nation and the global Western modernity. In this way, the press contributed to the „modern“ construction of Warsaw by speaking of its „dark side“. For example, during the cholera epidemic the press highlighted that the illness was typical also in other cities, thus divorcing it from the contexts of the nationalist and socialist Polish movements.

Speaking to the South European case, CELIA MIRALLES (Lyon) traced the design and construction of a modern tuberculosis dispensary in Barcelona in the mid-1930s. This project was undertaken by the GATC-PAC, a group of Catalan modern architects. In their discourse they rejected the models of Northern Europe and turned to the „Mediterranean“ model. In practice, the architectural models at the service of health followed and adapted came more from the „periphery“, the Soviet Union and, surprisingly, Italy, given the political situation at the time (the leftist Spanish Republic and Mussolini’s fascist state). In this account, discourses of „catching up“ were mixed with the avant-garde discourses of innovation, and the realized construction echoes many of the aesthetic values of the modernist movement in architecture.

The final session „How to build a Modern City: Avant-Garde Architecture in the ‘Periphery’“ began with a talk by ESZTER GANTNER (Marburg) regarding the case of Géza Maróti, the young artist awarded for designing the Hungarian pavilion for the 1906 World Fair in Milan. Later, he would go on to work in Budapest, Milan, and Detroit. The focus of her paper, therefore, was on reconstructing how „best practices“ traveled between these cities. Methodologically, Gant-

ner proposed a series of coordinates with which to describe emerging cities, and these involved concepts of nationalization, national and global trends, experts, urbanization, and the goals of increasing the importance of the city. The account of Maróti also was a great reminder of the importance of relationality in the interurban network. Reconstructing these social networks is an important step in understanding the spread of ideas.

TAMARA BJAZIC KLARIN’s (Zagreb) paper on urban planning in Zagreb in the interwar period highlighted the importance of international competitions. They clearly served as a platform for knowledge exchange but at the same time raised questions of expertise and authority. Who is qualified to sit on those boards and to take decisions? How do you avoid corruption and how can they remain unbiased? Last but not least, LUCILA MALLART (Nottingham) spoke on the collaboration of two prominent art historians and politicians, Josep Puig i Cadafalch from Barcelona and Nicolae Iorga from Bucharest. The resulting academic exchange between these two cities in the following years presents a case of what Mallart calls „transnationally produced national history“. Puig contributed to Romania’s national history writing, and Iorga drew on Catalan archives to study the medieval crown of Aragon. This paper clearly showed what a fruitful topic the knowledge exchange between „peripheries“ can be and how little it has been studied so far.

Already the conference title had put the term „periphery“ in quotation marks and added a question mark. The 13 papers, showing the multidirectional exchange and above all appropriation – and not mere reception – of knowledge related to urban planning and public health, thoroughly deconstructed any remaining vestiges of the periphery-center model. What emerged instead were interurban networks through which knowledge was created and rather than disseminated, eclectically assembled and adapted to local needs. In the final discussion Eisenstadt’s concept of „multiple modernities“ was proposed as a possible solution.

These questions will be pursued further in early May 2017 at a second conference at

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the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe, Marburg, where the speakers will present revised versions of their papers. The Barcelona conference was funded by the Fritz-Thyssen-Stiftung (Germany).

### **Conference Overview:**

#### *SECTION I - The Interurban Exchange on Urban Planning*

Anna Mazanik (Central European University, Budapest): The Circulation of Knowledge and Foreign Models of Urban Reforms in Moscow, 1870-1917

Cathleen M. Giustino (Auburn University): Urban Planning and Historic Prague: Reception of and Resistance to Knowledge Transfer in East-Central Europe before and after World War I

Goran Hutinec (University of Zagreb): Post-Habsburg Transfer of Knowledge as a Driving Force in Urban Modernisation of South-east Europe – the Zagreb Example

#### *SECTION II - Technology Transfer between „Peripheries“*

Harald R. Stühlinger (ETH Zürich): The book, the public space and the manhole cover. The untold history of urban infrastructure

Igor Lyman (Berdiansk State Pedagogical University): Interchange of Modernization Experiences: „Russian“ Port Cities on the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov

Barry Stiefel (College of Charleston): In the Driver's Seat of Modern Urbanization: A Case Study of Barcelona and Automotive Industry Development in the Emerging Cities of Southern Europe, c.1900-1950

#### *SECTION III - Curing and Controlling: Public Urban Health*

Heidi Hein-Kircher (Herder Institute, Marburg): Application of Knowledge on Epidemics and of Public Health Conceptions in Urban Planning and Urban Services for the Public in Lviv around 1900 – a Case study

Sean Brady (Trinity College Dublin): Neither Insular nor Peripheral: Sicily's Mobilisation against the Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919

Clara Frysztacka (Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt/O.): Urban Poverty: A Symptom of Urban Modernity in the European Peripheries?

Celia Miralles Buil (Université de Lyon): „Central“ Speech, „Peripheral“ Practices: how did Barcelona Health Agents use the European Interurban Network between 1931 and 1936?

#### *SECTION IV - How to build a Modern City: Avant-Garde Architecture in the „Periphery“*

Eszter Gantner (Herder Institute, Marburg): Travelling Architecture: Géza Maróti between Budapest, Milan, Mexico City and Detroit

Tamara Bjažić Klarin (Institute for Art History, Zagreb): Shaping the City – International Competitions as a Platform for Knowledge Exchange

Lucila Mallart (University of Nottingham): Transnational Research and National History Writing between Barcelona and Bucharest in the Interwar Period

Heidi Hein-Kircher (Herder Institute, Marburg), Oliver Hochadel (IMF-CSIC, Barcelona): Commentary

Tagungsbericht „Urban Peripheries?“ *Emerging Cities in Europe's South and East, 1850-1945*. 26.09.2016-27.09.2016, Barcelona, in: H-Soz-Kult 25.01.2017.