

**Heritage Studies and Socialism:
Transnational Perspectives on Heritage in
Eastern and Central Europe**

Veranstalter: Eszter Gantner, Herder Institute Marburg; Corinne Geering / Paul Vickers, International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture, Gießen

Datum, Ort: 23.11.2016–25.11.2016, Gießen

Bericht von: Andreas Ludwig, Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam

Heritage studies as a cross-disciplinary understanding of material and immaterial culture are confronted with political, regional, and institutional frameworks which make comparison essential. The Workshop, organized by Eszter Gantner (Herder Institute Marburg), Corinne Geering and Paul Vickers (both International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture, Giessen) and supported by the Leibniz Research Alliance „Historical Authenticity,“ aimed to debate concepts of temporality, authenticity, and originality as core concepts of heritage and brought together scholars of heritage studies concerning Central and Eastern European countries during socialism. The question was raised by the organizers, whether a pre-1989 „socialist“ interpretation of heritage would show common trajectories to integrate the diverse local and regional practices as well as national frameworks of heritage. In the workshop, socialist and post-socialist developments were discussed and state policies ranging from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Ukraine, Romania to former Yugoslavia and reaching out for Cambodia and Africa as well.

In her keynote-lecture, ASTRID SWENSON (London) framed the heritage debate as the development of historical consciousness since the beginning of the 19th century that may be better understood by following institutions and actors. Knowledge circulation within both international fields and national boundaries, as well as stoppages characterized this development over time. With restoration being the typical concern of the 19th, preservation that of the 20th century, and rebuilding that of Post World War I and World War II, the term „heritage“ is comparatively modern. Swenson introduced temporality as an overall

perspective to integrate different, and changing, approaches towards the preservation of historical sites, buildings, and culture, and thus to understanding the past beyond enthusiasm and nostalgia. Heritage should therefore be understood as both an analytical and a historical category to deal with material (and immaterial) relics.

The first out of seven panels focused on socialist interpretations of heritage. MELINDA HARLOV (Budapest) inspected vernacular heritage in Hungary which she interpreted as primarily rural and „folk“ fitting the socialist ideology. With party support, villages were subject to preservation, while folk dances, as in other countries, became an official, collectively organized cultural activity. Harlov pointed out that this heritage policy on rural Hungary emerged when the traditional peasant society was being reshaped by the Communist party and thus lost authenticity. NELE-HENDRIKJE LEHMANN (Freiberg) outlined the development of industrial heritage preservation in the GDR which already had begun in the early days of the century but was integrated into a wider concept of the historical representation of the working class during the 1970s beyond political historiography. These years, the concept of „Lebensverhältnisse“ (ways, or conditions of life) as an analytical path widened a historical perspective, integrated volunteer work, and, as a specifically „socialist“ concept, aimed to turn contemporary industrial sites into possible future history. The audience critically debated the „grassroots“ approach both presenters had emphasized.

In a second panel actors in preservation were discussed. BIANKA TRÖTSCHEL-DANIELS (Dortmund) reported on the East German „Erberat“ (Heritage Council) which was founded in 1980 and documented the official recognition of heritage. The „Erberat“ debated ways in which the GDR should come to terms with history and the roots of socialisms in history which, under the terms of „Tradition und Erbe“ (tradition and heritage), had been defined more broadly in the years before. The influence of Polish conservation and restoration specialists was analyzed by ALICJA GZOWSKA (Warsaw). Originating in the experiences of post-war reconstruction

of Warsaw, a state-promoted agency developed which was actively involved in preservation projects around the world. „Polish specialists“ in reconstruction became well known as both organizers and consultants in Europe, Africa, and the Far East. As a third presenter in this panel, OLGA OLKHEFT (St. Petersburg) described the restoration school of the Hermitage in Leningrad/St. Petersburg where a careful study of paintings was combined with techniques to preserve the actual state in which these objects were in over time. As she pointed out, the isolation of the Soviet Union from the outside world favored a conservative, though distinctively „honest“ method of preservation. Did these specific actor-based conservation strategies survive the collapse of communism? The GDR system of industrial heritage preservation lost its significance in the construction of future history and the Polish system collapsed in privatization. However, the Hermitage approach still continues and in the discussion its slowness and precision was interpreted as being opposed to more shiny western understandings.

MICHAEL FALSER's (Heidelberg) keynote lecture led the audience to Cambodia where the temple of Angkor developed into a national heritage site over the course of 150 years. The city of the Khmer kings and the silhouette of its temples were used as symbols for the conflicting parties in Cambodian history while the site itself was a theater of different initiatives towards conservation, from colonial France to India, reflecting the Buddhist-Hindu conflict over the temples, to international support. Angkor Vat was negotiated within the Cold War and used by the Khmer Rouge to seek for international recognition. It thus should be regarded as a political symbol.

In panel three, international aspects of preservation under communism were debated. NELLY BEKUS (Exeter) analyzed the diverse policies towards preservation at republic-level and in union-wide agencies within the USSR. Post World War II reconstruction affected heritage policy in many ways. As much as industrialization and urbanization destroyed historic cities and sites, reconstruction of historic buildings played a

positive role as well. Preservation strategies were first developed on the republic level with different results while an awareness of heritage on the union level was only developed from the 1960s with civic activists later becoming committed to the cause. As Bekus pointed out, contradictory developments were mediated rather than steered by the state and in the discussion the differences between the former Soviet republics were emphasized. SVETLANA BOLTOVSKAJA (Marburg) then turned to internationalist aspects of Soviet cultural and educational politics. Many students from the so-called „emerging nation-states“ attended universities in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries, while at the same time Russian/Soviet/communist culture was being exported into Third World countries, especially those in Africa. Boltovskaja reported on Soviet style monuments, made in North Korea, and cultural centers in major African cities as well as books and film describing the „good Russian“ educating the „good people“ in Africa as non-racial and paternalistic. After 1991, all Soviet cultural centers were closed but associations of former students in the USSR do still exist.

Panel four put a focus on international preservation organizations. JULIA RÖTTJER (Darmstadt) described the diverse rationales of defining heritage sites in Poland and the struggles with international approval by Unesco. She pointed out the closely connected narrative of heritages sites with sites of the national past, like the city centers of Warsaw and Krakow or the Auschwitz concentration camp. While the reconstruction of Warsaw emphasized 18th century Poland and Krakow was listed heritage as a central European center of arts, in Auschwitz the narrative of Polish national martyrdom was foregrounded. Proposals for world heritage site listing were controversially debated and Auschwitz and Warsaw were initially rejected for different reasons. Röttjer asked how the socialist and national interpretations of these heritage sites were interrelated. The following presentation of DIÁNA VONNÁK (Halle) broached the issue of East European Holocaust heritage. Using the example of the Golden Rose synagogue in Lviv, Ukraine, she described the re-

discovery of the historical city in the course of the 1990s and the difficult negotiations over the Jewish legacy only in recent years with international NGOs, the municipality, and different local Jewish communities as players. Both presentations were discussed by the audience in terms of minority politics and dominant, if not conflicting historical narratives.

The reevaluation of socialist heritage was debated in panel five. ANDREAS SCHÖNLE (London) presented the Moscow All-Union Agricultural Exhibition venue where current private development tries to „decontaminate the exhibition from its ideological backgrounds“ and emphasizes Stalin-style architecture over structures implemented under Khrushchev. New construction on the site is not allowed but the interpretation of heritage seems undecided, today, as the place underlies concurring usages as an exhibition ground and a heritage tourism site. Polish animation film was presented by EWA CISZEWSKA (Lodz) who outlined its immense popularity within the country and abroad. With puppets acting in children’s films and television broadcasts, animated films were part of the popular culture in socialism. The legacy of the state-owned Se-ma-for film studios in Lodz was been taken up today by a number of museums and the revitalized film studios. The subsequent discussion focussed on whether this could be considered a revalorization of socialist heritage.

VLADIMIR LEVIN (Jerusalem) then in his keynote lecture took the audience to the sites of Jewish heritage in the former Soviet Union. Looking for traces of Jewish life in the territory Levin estimated that ten per cent of all synagogues were still existent but mostly are not used for religious purposes anymore. Although there was a general anti-religious policy in the Soviet Union, anti-Semitism only occurred during the post-war years and the losses resulted from either neglect, war-time destruction, or modernization. Ironically, former synagogues and other religious places were preserved through re-use of the edifices for mundane purposes. Today, the Jewish legacy is not emphasized in heritage debate or museums.

Panel six, debating the „old city“ within urban planning, started with LILIANA IUGA’s

report on Romania. Preservation, although existing since the mid-1950s, did not play a major role in Romanian heritage policy because, as Iuga stated, first, the country’s history was considered difficult and, second, new buildings were simply cheaper. While the traditional walled-in cities of German origin were acknowledged and seemed worth preserving because of their density, the „open“ Romanian town in Wallachia and Moldavia was not considered of historical value, not even in Bucharest where most of the buildings date from the late 19th century or later. Czechoslovakia represents a contrasting case, as ČENĚK PÝCHA (Prague) argued in his presentation of northern Bohemian heritage sites. Here, a continuity of preservation reaching back to the turn of the 20th century could be observed and the list of heritage sites still contained more religious buildings than other under socialism, although not branded religious but listed under „feudalism.“ A further example was provided by BILJANA STEFANOVSKA (Darmstadt) in her presentation of Skopje, Macedonia. Here, after an earthquake in 1963, the old city center was re-erected in late modernist style and again recreated in post-modern „historical“ styles during the 2000s. This historicizing monumental style is heavily criticized, today, by students and other activists. In the discussion, the modernization of the city centers of socialist towns during the 1960s was emphasized and compared to international developments in terms of destruction and neglect of heritage.

The final panel connected heritage and the memory debate. IRYNA SKŁOKINA (Lviv) reported on the contrast between official tourist promotion which, under socialism, emphasized modernity and development, and an emerging memory tourism fired by emigrants to the West as well as from Poland especially to western Ukraine. Skłokina stated that all different tourist segments were following their own interest while the official narrative proved dysfunctional. EWA STAŃCZYK (Amsterdam) in the final presentation of the workshop compared the preservation and use of Jewish photographs in Lublin and Prague. In Lublin, photographs of Jewish families serve as proof of the mul-

ticultural (and pro-European) heritage of the city as these pictures are publicly presented in large size in the urban scenery. In Prague, a collection of portraits of the employees of the Jewish community of the 1940s discovered in the Jewish Museum points to the unknown identity of the individual. Thus, both archival collections refer to a recently developing interest in Jewish history in Central and Eastern Europe. The audience discussed this as a focal point of heritage and debated whether loss and passing time would evoke nostalgia.

In the concluding discussion, further directions for research were addressed. Comparison over space and time, not only between the countries of the Eastern bloc over the 50-year time span of socialism but also to the Western discourse and other world regions were a central focus of the debate. What socialism actually means in the different societies was discussed and the role of propaganda and education were addressed as further fields of future debate. Indeed, the understanding of heritage within a socialist understanding of development and within a national discourse seemed quite diverse. Core concepts relating to heritage such as materiality, authenticity, place, distance in time, and agency, this reviewer would like to add, should be discussed in detail for an in-depth understanding of the „making of history“ integrating relics and publics. Debating heritage as a concept would also have to consider developments in other fields of cultural studies and social sciences like urban history, sociology, material culture and museum studies as the presentations suggested. Did, for example, socialism become heritage simultaneously, as has been recently debated in urban history (EAUH conference in Helsinki, August 2016), can there be parallel developments detected in museums, is there any continuity to be observed in post-socialist societies or is rupture and discontinuity the primary reaction (as debated during the recent „Reluctant Heritage“ workshop at CEREFREA, Bucharest, November 2016)? What frames these diverse but still isolated debates is a notion of historicity and a „practical turn.“

Conference Overview:

Astrid Swenson (Brunel University London):

When is Heritage? Temporality and Transnational History (keynote lecture)

Panel 1: Socialist Interpretations of Heritage

Melinda Harlov (Eötvös Loránt University, Budapest): Vernacular Heritage in Hungary, a Category that Fitted to the Socialist Ideology

Nele-Hendrikje Lehmann (Freiberg University of Mining and Technology): Industrial Heritage in the GDR, 1949–1989

Panel 2: Heritage Actors

Bianka Trötschel-Daniels (Technical University of Dortmund): The ‘Heritage Council’ in the GDR

Alicja Gzowska (University of Warsaw): Socialist Fraternal Assistance or Commercial Success? International Activities of Polish State Workshops for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage

Olga Olkheft (European University St. Petersburg): „We are the Rare Place Where the ‘Iron Curtain’ Played a Positive Role“: The Conservative Tradition of the State Hermitage Restoration

Michael Falser (Heidelberg University): „Saving Angkor“ during the Last Breath of Cold War Politics. Heritage studies in a Transcultural Perspective (keynote lecture)

Panel 3: Heritage and Communist Internationalism

Nelly Bekus (University of Exeter): Tracing Multiple Logics in Soviet Heritage-Making: pan-Soviet, National and International Agencies of Cultural Power

Svetlana Boltovskaja (Herder Institute Marburg): Soviet Heritage and Communist Internationalism: Eastern European and African encounters

Panel 4: International Organisations

Julia Röttjer (German Institute of Polish Studies Darmstadt): Committees of International Experts and Sites of National Martyrdom: Socialist Poland’s Contribution to the Early World Heritage Program

Diána Vonnák (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle): UNESCO on the

Ground in the Restoration of the Golden Rose Synagogue in Lviv

Panel 5: The Revalorisation of Socialist Heritage

Andreas Schönle (Queen Mary University London): Appropriating Stalinist Heritage: State Rhetoric in the Repurposing of VDNKh

Ewa Ciszewska (University of Łódź): Socialist Film Animation Heritage in the Service of Contemporary Polish Animation Production and Museum Practices

Vladimir Levin (Hebrew University of Jerusalem): Jewish Heritage in the Soviet Union (keynote lecture)

Panel 6: Urban Planning and the Historic City

Liliana Iuga (Central European University Budapest): „Every Town Has a Historical Past, yet not Every Historical Past is Valuable“ – Approaches to the Concept and Management of the Historic Town in Socialist Romania

Čeněk Pýcha (Charles University Prague): Socialist Heritage Preservation in Northern Bohemia. Making Sense in the Public Space

Biljana Stefanovska (Technical University Darmstadt): Semantic Shift in Architectural Language: Remodeling the City Center of Skopje

Panel 7: Memory and Heritage

Iryna Sklokina (Center for Urban History of East Central Europe Lviv): Traveling in the Soviet Ukraine: the Making of the National Memory Canon through Heritage Tourism Practices

Ewa Stańczyk (University of Amsterdam): Transnational Heritage: On the Uses of Jewish Photographs

Tagungsbericht *Heritage Studies and Socialism: Transnational Perspectives on Heritage in Eastern and Central Europe*. 23.11.2016–25.11.2016, Gießen, in: H-Soz-Kult 26.01.2017.