



CAT-ference 2019 session proposal

Title: Liminal post-socialist cultural landscapes? Persistent ambiguity of spatial symbols thirty years on

Description:

In his 2008 book, *Cultural landscapes of post-socialist cities: representation of powers and needs*, Mariusz Czepczyński proposed an examination of the cultural landscapes of post-socialist cities through the lens of liminality, an anthropological concept describing the intermediate state of ambiguity between two defined “pre” and “post” states (following van Gennep, 1960). Post-socialist landscapes, he argues, “are liminal in an essential sense of the word: not socialist anymore, but still not truly liberated from the old traumatic and totalitarian burdens, [...] sandwiched in between things they want to remember and things they would be happy to forget” (Czepczyński, 2008, p. 182).

This session seeks to revisit this concept by examining the persistent ambiguity of socialist symbols which did not “fall victim” to the reactive iconoclasm of the early 1990s. In which ways are remaining buildings, street names and monuments instrumentalized to serve current political goals, including those of groups opposing dominant narratives? How are these structures subject to pluralistic interpretations in the present day and are there examples of their fixed recoding in the later post-socialist era? Moreover, in which ways have eradicated symbols (demolished buildings, removed monuments) persisted in the popular or collective imaginary of these cities and towns?

Furthermore, how have new symbols such as street names, monuments and new construction, including reconstructions of buildings demolished during socialist times (following Bartetzky, 2012, 2017) been recontextualized and recoded in the intervening three decades? How has the imprinting of new symbols following post-socialist historiographies (Young and Light, 2001) contributed to the liminality, ambiguity and indeterminacy of post-socialist landscapes as a whole?

Finally, this session seeks to examine how the lasting liminality of post-socialist landscapes has affected urban development goals. How has the inability to discretely define the meaning of specific symbols resulted in stalemates about “what to do about them” and revisions of earlier plans?

Session Organiser:

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References:

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- Czepczyński, M. (2008) *Cultural landscapes of post-socialist cities: representation of powers and needs*. Surrey: Ashgate.
- van Gennep, A. (1960) *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Young, C. and Light, D. (2001) 'Place, national identity and post-socialist transformations: an introduction', *Political Geography*, 20(8), pp. 941–955.