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Tagungsbericht: Interpreting 20th Century European Urbanism

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Tagungsbericht: Interpreting 20th Century European Urbanism. Second urbanHIST Conference

Vom 21.–23. Oktober 2019 in Stockholm

The Second urbanHIST Conference was dedicated to the main theme ‘Interpreting 20th Century European Urbanism’ and took place at the Wenner-Gren Center in Stockholm, 21–23 October 2019. It was organised as an integral part and grand finale of urbanHIST, a Horizon 2020 European Joint Doctorate programme (2016–2020) that focused on the history of twentieth-century European urbanism. This ambitious research and training programme was initiated and led by Max Welch Guerra, urbanHIST Director, Bauhaus University Weimar, Germany (BUW), María Castrillo Romón from the University of Valladolid, Spain (UVa), Martin Pekár from Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia (UPJŠ), and Abdellah Abarkan from the Blekinge Institute of Technology in Karlskrona, Sweden (BTH).¹ Its dual leitmotif – consisting of the concept of multidisciplinary and the pursuit of a pan-European perspective – formed a common thread through the whole programme. The urbanHIST consortium conducted two conferences to discuss these core issues. The first one was held as ‘Young urban(H)IST Conference’ at UPJŠ in Košice 1–2 October 2018 and addressed mainly early career scholars. The second event, which constitutes the subject of this report, was hosted in Stockholm a year later and was intended to appeal to a broader audience, regarding both the research experience and the academic background of the participants.

This international symposium was conceptualised and organised by Abdellah Abarkan (BTH), Helene Bihlmaier (BUW), and Andrea Gimeno Sánchez (BTH) and comprised 13 paper sessions, four keynote lectures, and three roundtable discussions. Its underlying aim was to incorporate the urbanHIST doctoral fellows in shaping the general orientation of the conference. They were thus invited to establish the paper sessions according to their research foci and to co-chair them with a senior scientist at their side.

¹ For further information see www.urbanhist.eu [25.04.2021]; Helene Bihlmaier, A multidisciplinary research and training programme on the history of European urbanism in the twentieth century, in: *Planning Perspectives* 35:4, 2020, p. 731–739.

Within the wide spectrum of individual research interests, housing in its broadest sense can be identified as one of the superordinate thematic complexes: In the session 'Facets of Modernity in Housing Development', Agnès Dudych (UPJŠ) and Mariusz Czepczyński (University of Gdańsk) investigated the impact of political, economic, and ideological contexts on housing development over the course of the twentieth century. Ondřej Jirásek (UPJŠ) and Sasha Tsenkova (University of Calgary) continued this topic in a second panel. In 'Housing beyond State Power', Noel Manzano (UVa) and José Luis Oyón (Polytechnic University of Catalonia, Barcelona) addressed strategies used by excluded populations to circumvent the real estate market and the respective administrative and planning responses in a historical perspective. Marcelo Sagot Better (BUW) and Patrik Faming (Boverket) stimulated 'Discourses of Consumption in Modern Architecture and City Building' ranging from the housing unit to larger urban development, focused on outcomes and long-term consequences in contemporary debates.

Spatial transformations of cities formed a second overarching theme that was assessed from different perspectives: In the session 'Post-Socialist Transition: Between Conflicts and Legacy', Azmah Arzmi (BUW) and Florian Urban (Glasgow School of Art) discussed the consequences of the vacuum created by the collapse of communism, whereas Adam Górka (UPJŠ) and Henrieta Moravčíková (Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, STU) tackled 'The Impact of Industrialization on Central and Eastern European Cities' from multiple perspectives: as indicators of urban development in the past and as difficult legacy today. 'Urban Regeneration in European Cities', which contributed to radical changes especially after World War II, was examined in a larger perspective by Federico Camerin (UVa) and Nicole de Togni (Politecnico di Milano), while in 'Nature and the City: (Re-)Creating Urban Landscapes' Ksenija Krsmanovic (UVa) and Dirk Schubert (HafenCity University, Hamburg) specifically focused on urban regeneration projects that reinforced the connection of the urban fabric and its green spaces.

The final thematic complex sought new historical and historiographical approaches: Under the heading 'Cities and the Environment', Andrea Gimeno Sánchez (BTH) and Ebba Höglström (BTH) discussed new narratives on architectural and urban history in consideration of the anthropogenic climate change. Helene Bihlmaier (BUW) and Stephen V. Ward (Oxford Brookes University, OBU) assessed the 'Dissemination and Mobility of Town Planning Ideas' and their adoption or adaption processes. Andreea Blaga (BTH) and Ann Maudsley (ArkDes) furthered this topic in a second panel. Finally, Helene Bihlmaier (BUW) and María Cristina García González (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid) discussed promoters and protagonists who have fostered the writing of plan-

ning histories or pursued planning historiography in the session ‘Writing Town Planning Histories’, which was continued by Elvira Khairullina (UVA) and Peter J. Larkham (Birmingham City University).

Complementary to the individually shaped paper sessions, the four keynote lectures were composed to mirror the general urbanHIST research spectrum at the intersection of urban and planning history: Henrieta Moravčíková (STU) spoke on ‘Bratislava, the (Un)planned City: The Impact of 20th Century Urban Planning on the Urban Structure of the Slovak Capital’, Sasha Tsenkova (University of Calgary) discussed ‘Post-Socialist Urbanism and Housing Riddles’, Luďěk Sýkora (Charles University Prague) highlighted ‘Socialist Cities and their Post-socialist Transformations’, and Stephen V. Ward (OBU) introduced ‘The Anglophone Planning World and European Urbanism’.

Finally, the three roundtables were set to bring together the dual urbanHIST leitmotif and an important current Swedish research topic: ‘The Other Town Planning Histories’ (moderated by Eliana Perotti, ZHAW Zurich) thematized neglected planning histories and sought to include them into a larger geographical perspective, whereas ‘The Diverse Histories of European Urbanism in the Long 20th Century’ argued the diversity of different research approaches and traditions regarding the history of the city and its planning process (moderated by Peter J. Larkham, Birmingham City University). The third discussion panel, co-organized by both Swedish urbanHIST partner institutions ArkDes and Boverket, addressed ‘Gaps in Sustainable Urban Development Research’ (moderated by Per Haupt, BTH).

Beyond that, the opening lecture was given by Håkan Forsell (Stockholm University), who spoke on ‘The Explosive Void. Stockholm Development During the 1980s and 1990s’, and a range of social events integrated the host city into the programme. The guided tour through Stockholm and a joint visit of the Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design (ArkDes) complemented the conference.

Even though the urbanHIST programme focused constitutively on European phenomena, the conference welcomed researchers from all continents, a fact that reflected the international interest in the urbanHIST research fields. Owing to the inspiring contributions and active participation of about one hundred attendees, the conference integrated the involved PhD candidates into an international academic network of urban and planning historians and created a stimulating framework for further academic debate.

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