

»OLD« VS. »NEW« TOWNS.
MEMORIES, HISTORIES, AND HERITAGE AFTER POPULATION
TRANSFERS AND BORDER CHANGES

(International academic conference)

Location: Monday, 11th of October 2021, Faculty of Humanities University of Primorska,
Titov trg, 5, Koper-Capodistria, Levant 3

09:00 – 10:50

Opening and welcome addresses

MIRJAM MILHARČIČ HLADNIK (ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Migration Institute, Ljubljana): The new town Nova Gorica on the new border and the old routes of migration - Memories of defection and the imaginings of “new” life.

ALEKSEJ KALC (ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Migration Institute, Ljubljana, University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Koper-Capodistria): Society and immigration in Slovenian coastal towns in the 1950s. Some reflections on research approaches.

KATJA HROBAT VIRLOGET (University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Koper-Capodistria): The discourse of urban vs. rural, social relations and heritage in Istrian urban society before and after »exodus«.

Discussion

11:10 – 12.50

MICHÈLE BAUSSANT (CNRS, CEFRES (USR3138, CNRS, Mae), Prague, ICM Fellow): A place that changes its place: Alexandria, between place and milieu of memory

ŠPELA LEDINEK LOZEJ (ZRC SAZU, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Nova Gorica): Under the Campanilles of Saint Marco vs. Town without Bell Towers.

MARIA KOKKINO (CEFRES, Charles University, Prague, postdoctoral fellow): Persistent memories of transformed spaces.

Discussion

14:30 – 16:00

JANJA SEDLAČEK: The role of the Port of Koper in economic and social transformations of the city of Koper after the second world war.

NEŽA ČEBRON LIPOVEC (University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Koper-Capodistria, postdoctoral fellow): The bathtub quest: The living standard and ideological discourses in the modernisation process of housing in post-war Koper/Capodistria

Discussion / Conclusions

The conference will discuss historical, memory, and heritage questions related to violent and / or silenced pasts related to mass migrations and changing of national borders in a comparative way. After the political reorganization of Europe in 1945, North Africa and other former colonial countries, expulsions or massive emigrations of ethnic minorities were performed. They were considered the “losers” of history, their towns became “home” to other populations that did not necessarily have bonds to the place and cultural heritage of the previous populations. The researchers will discuss silenced and conflict memories, contested heritage discourses, appropriations and interruptions of histories along with questions of changeable national/ethnic borderlands’ identities. Case-studies in a comparative perspective will be presented, from the creations of new towns in a social and material dimension and the tangible, visual traces of post-colonial worlds and the different topographies and memory layers in transit shaped by colonial migrations and independence exiles.

In Slovenia two study-cases will be compared, both related to the change of Italian-Yugoslavian border after WW II in a multiethnic environment: Nova Gorica as a newly created socialist city, built vis-a-vis and instead of the historical regional center of Gorica, which remained on the Italian side of the state border, and the Istrian towns, from where the majority of the Italian-speaking population emigrated, and was replaced by newcomers from Slovenia and other parts of Yugoslavia. Two cases of specific and differently perceived urban, social and cultural reorganization.

On a different case study, the example of Egypt and the traces left by the different populations that left the country, in particular the Jews, will provide an opportunity to develop a reflection on the heritage of absence. Through this case, the aim is to develop a more general reflection on the weight of the past in the present, notably through the issue of the recovery of Jewish heritage and vacant properties, and on the choices of present regarding the past, through the erasure of buildings, traces and post-signs of memory.

The conference, organized by Katja Hrobat Virloget, Aleksej Kalc, and Michèle Baussant, is the result of two joint research projects, the Slovenian-French bilateral Proteus project entitled “Pasts without history and displaced histories of people without traces” (Baussant, Hrobat Virloget) and the Slovenian SRA project “Migrations and social changes in a comparative perspective: the case of Western Slovenia after WW II” (Kalc) from University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Koper-Capodistria, ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Migration Institute, Ljubljana and CNRS, CEFRES, Prague.

ABSTRACTS

MIRJAM MILHARČIČ HLADNIK (ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Migration Institute, Ljubljana):

The new town Nova Gorica on the new border and the old routes of migration - Memories of defection and the imaginings of “new” life.

In Yugoslavia and Slovenia, the period between 1947 and 1963 was characterized by closed borders, minimal opportunities for legal emigration and severe control of the mobility of people. The estimated numbers show that of all those who left the country illegally in this

period around 75% were young people below the age of 25. Young people wanted to leave the country for political, economic, social and cultural reasons as well as a general resistance to political control, economic hardship, cultural deprivation and social exclusion. The presentation of seven testimonies about the defection and other types of youth emigration from Slovenia/Yugoslavia after the second world war is focused on their agency and reveals the diverse combinations of intimate, personal reasons for the decisions. The common circumstances were not only the political repression and economic non-development but also the existing transnational networks of support and migrants' social capital. It is obvious that the illegal emigration of young people was deeply embedded in already established "migrancy" and the old routes of migration.

ALEKSEJ KALC (ZRC SAZU, Slovenian Migration Institute, Ljubljana, University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Koper-Capodistria):

Society and immigration in Slovenian coastal towns in the 1950s. Some reflections on research approaches.

The paper will discuss some questions on archival sources for the study of the repopulation and the reconstruction of the social fabric in Slovenian coastal towns of Koper, Izola and Piran after the »exodus« of almost all of the Italian inhabitants in the 1950s. This population transfer and replacement entailed a radical change in ethnic as well as cultural physiognomy of the area. From the point of view of historical research this also poses several methodological issues and questions about the usage of archival sources for gaining the insight into the immigration movement.

KATJA HROBAT VIRLOGET (University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Koper-Capodistria):

The discourse of urban vs. rural, social relations and heritage in Istrian urban society before and after »exodus«.

The paper will reflect on the stereotypical discourse of urban, civilised vs. rural, barbaric and the way it changed through time due to the social and ethnical changes in the urban Istrian

communities from the time before “exodus” to the time after it. The paper will show some findings on the processes of immigrations and immigrants’ identities, reflecting also on the social relations in the old and new urban Istrian society, where the orientalisng discourse can be clearly visible. Linked to the social and ethnical changes in the urban Istrian communities a reflection will be made on the valorisation of urban heritage and place attachment of the old and new inhabitants. A reflection will be made on the attitude of the new inhabitants towards the material reminders of the unknown or alternative past.

MICHÈLE BAUSSANT (CNRS, CEFRES (USR3138, CNRS, Mae), Prague, ICM Fellow):
A place that changes its place: Alexandria, between place and milieu of memory.

This conference deals with the heritage of absence and the construction of presence through the case of Egyptian Jews. This community almost disappeared from the country along with other minorities for more than fifty years. Despite the transformation of its landscapes, its eviction from the country, the long-term absence of a discourse concerning the Jewish past of Egypt, some part of its history and material heritage is reemerging and preserved, in situ and abroad. In contrast, other parts are silenced notably for fear of compensation claims.

Based on multi-sites fieldwork in Egypt and many countries Egyptian Jews settled, on interviews and observations, my communication will focus on the resurgence today of crossed and parallel social constructions of the presence and absence of the Jews and Egyptians, both in Egypt and abroad and by Jews and Egyptians: in return trips in Egypt, in social media, newspapers, cinema, official heritage initiatives, publications, or exchanges between Egyptians and Egyptian Jews on the internet and via Facebook. My objective is to highlight how, why, for whom the Jewish (and Egyptian) past sticks to the present for populations separated for decades or not directly concerned. My concern is to understand how this past became something people can relate to, despite the gradual erasure of its landscapes and the disappearance of the Egyptian Jewish community within and outside Egypt.

ŠPELA LEDINEK LOZEJ (ZRC SAZU, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Nova Gorica):

Under the Campanilles of Saint Marco vs. Town without Bell Towers.

The author makes initial reflections on the heritage-making in Koper, and Nova Gorica, resulting from the migration flows after the Second World War.

Drawing on the work of Sharon MacDonald (2012, 2013), the author first differentiates different modalities of the past in the present – memory (individual and collective), nostalgia, historical consciousness, past presencing, tradition and heritage(-making). Following the recent critical heritage studies (e. g., Smith 2006, Harrison 2013, 2020), she understands heritage not as a passive process of preserving things from the past but as an “active process of assembling a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future” (Harrison 2013: 4). The choice, what is and what is not heritage, is usually determined by state administration and various expert assessments embedded in power relations, where it is difficult to acknowledge dissonant subaltern heritage claims and initiatives.

In the second part, she provides a brief overview of the entries in the Register of the immovable cultural heritage for the towns of Koper and Nova Gorica and outline their heritage-making dispositifs, which are strategic socio-technical and/or bio-political assemblages “composed of various people, institutions, apparatuses (dispositifs) and the relations between them” (Harrison 2013: 35).

MARIA KOKKINO (CEFRES, Charles University, Prague, postdoctoral fellow):

Persistent memories of transformed spaces.

Tiehonin was a place of recovery for refugees from the Greek civil war who found a home in the Czech Republic. It was originally a military place, a barracks that was made available to patients with heavy disabilities, and it operated as such, under the auspices of the Czechoslovak Red Cross, for six years (1955-1961) before it became a barracks again. How does memory "remake" the past of the spaces, when the traces of the latter fade away? Through photos and stories about Tiehonin, this presentation aims to elaborate a preliminary reflection on the memory of the past through photographic traces that show "what has been", (Barthes 1980:133) and perhaps it is no longer.

JANJA SEDLAČEK:

The role of the Port of Koper in economic and social transformations of the city of Koper after the second world war.

After 1947 and especially after 1954, when the Free Territory of Trieste was dissolved, the north Istrian city of Koper went through significant political, economic, social, and cultural changes. The processes of emigration, followed by immigration were taking place in the city, accompanied by the processes of formation of new political, economic, cultural, and social reality.

In decades, following world war II, Koper industrially blossomed. In the time 1948-1975 it among all the Slovene municipalities showed the second-largest progress in the number of industrial workers relative to the number of all citizens.

One of the most important generators of this industrial development without a doubt was the Port of Koper. But the Port of Koper was not only a factor of economic growth, but in many ways, it was also an important factor of social and cultural changes in the city of Koper. It attracted a working force from the Slovene as well as other parts of the Yugoslav territory. Although at the beginning energy and financial resources were mostly directed into building and growing of facilities, the Port of Koper eventually became an important local investor, building apartments for families and residencies for the single workers from other Yugoslav republics, investing in education and sport, etc.

The presentation will therefore focus on the unique story of the building and early development of the Port of Koper and its role in social and cultural changes in the city and will do so mostly through the lens of those, who were actively involved in the life of the Port of Koper – through memoirs of the two long-term directors and the internal bulletin.

NEŽA ČEBRON LIPOVEC (University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Koper-Capodistria, postdoctoral fellow):

The bathtub quest: The living standard and ideological discourses in the modernisation process of housing in post-war Koper/Capodistria

The contribution stems from archival documents of the Regional archive in Koper, related to building projects, which provides precious data on the living standard in the contested city of Koper in the early post-WWII period (early 1950s), still during the buffer-state Free Territory of Trieste. In the analysis, we will relate one particular report on living standard in the historic town with the then contemporary building projects of new housing, within which a major dispute arose about the norms and standards of refurbishing new dwellings. Using also other relevant sources, such as newspaper articles of the time, we shall investigate the underlying ideological and political discourses. In the spirit of the micro-history approach, the contribution represents a reflection, or reading, of this tiny local reality with the help of the lefebvrian trialectics of production of space.