

Commons: Public Spaces After Socialism



Friday, April 28 - Saturday, April 29
Harriman Institute, 1219 International Affairs Building
Columbia University

For a century or more, citizens of the Eastern Bloc viewed public space as the primary setting for urban life. Socialist architects and planners envisioned common space as a transformative cultural force, deploying “social condensers” meant to break down inequitable hierarchies and foster a sense of the collective. Private property effectively disappeared from view. But just as the nationalization of property transformed cities at the opening of the twentieth century, so too did privatization at the century’s close. This two-day colloquium on “Commons: Public Space in the Post-Socialist World” will explore the cultural, political, and socioeconomic implications of post-socialist urban transformation.

 COLUMBIA | HARRIMAN INSTITUTE
Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies

Friday April 28

Opening, breakfast: 10:00am -10:30am

Session I: 10:30am - 12:30pm

Global Forces, Local Spaces

Anar Valiyev, Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, Baku

State Spectacle in Baku

Despite state reassurances that Baku's glamorous remaking represents a "gift to the people," the social and spatial benefits of state boosterism are far from equal.

Angela Wheeler, independent scholar

Innocents Abroad: Transnational Gentrification in Tbilisi

Evangelizing the urban lifestyles they've been priced out of at home, expats and "post-tourists" have introduced such pop urbanist concepts as "co-living" and "co-working" that recall early Communist social experiments—but are now stripped of their social agenda.

Maia Simon, independent scholar

Khan Shatyr as Instructive Public Space

Khan Shatyr shopping mall's design and its relationship to its surrounding context create the impression of a modern Crystal Palace, functioning simultaneously as a public space and an exhibition of new economic models of consumption.

Lunch break 12:30pm - 2:00pm

Session II: 2:00pm - 4:00pm

Sociability

Milya Zakirova, independent scholar

Urban courtyard as common good: paradoxes of local protest in Russian cities

Defending their common areas against haphazard post-Soviet privatization, residents unable to prove their property rights in court resorted to Soviet rhetoric, defining that territory broadly as public space, common good, and its loss as an expression of the state's mistreatment of its citizens.

Serhii Tereshchenko, Columbia University

A District For Creative Brains: Rusanivka (1959-1972) in Kyiv

This presentation explores the first prototype for a techno-utopian "home of the future" in which intellectual workers would think, dream, and create together in their district to then go to their separate jobs and advance Soviet society.

Christina Crawford, Emory University

What is to be done with socialist spatial fluidity?

Porous site planning, in which shared open spaces flowed between residential, cultural, and service buildings, was made possible by the socialist land regime. What happens to these spaces after privatization?

Reception: 4:00pm - 5:30pm

Saturday April 29

Opening, breakfast 10:00am - 10:30am

Session III: 10:30am - 12:30pm

Informal Economies

Tamta Khalvashi, New York University (Fulbright)

Shady Optimism: Informal Economies and Transformation of Public Space in Postsocialist Georgia

Using the Georgian Black Sea city of Batumi as an example, this paper explores how optimism involved in the massive urban transformation of post-socialist cities implicate informal economic practices and networks, leading to new forms of social exclusion and marginalization.

Milica Iličić, Columbia University

Privatization, Occupation, Enterprise: a Case Study of Belgrade's *Zvezda* Cinema

This presentation reports on the occupation of a movie theater (which had been neglected in the rampant conversion of common space to capitalist ventures in Belgrade) by activists and the different ideologies and discourses that informed the instigators of the cinema's revival.

Oleg Pachenkov, European University of St. Petersburg

Every City Has the Flea Market It Deserves

In postsocialist cities where public space is eroded by haphazard privatization, the flea market functions as a public forum and reservoir of civic initiative. This presentation explores flea markets in Berlin and St. Petersburg as social and cultural—not merely economic—institutions.

Lunch break 12:30pm - 2:00pm

Session IV 2:00pm - 4:00pm

Post-Socialist Alienation

Angela Harutyunyan, American University of Beirut

Video as a Painterly Medium: The Dialectic of the Ideal and Alienation in Contemporary Art in Armenia

The paper investigates select video art practices in the context of Yerevan's urban transformations, symptomatic of the shifts within the local manifestations of global

capitalism, resurgent nationalism as the political ideology of the state, and disillusionment with the political promise of democracy that characterized the immediate post-Soviet years in the early 1990s.

Veronika Zablotsky, University of California, Santa Cruz

Gendered (Re-)Publics, Grey Zones, and the Art of Queer Heterotopia in Post-Soviet Armenia

Captured on a surveillance camera, an incidence of arson in a queer-owned Armenian bar reveals the state of post-Soviet publics, their transnational and geopolitical entanglements, as well as their irreducible grey zones.

Mary Taylor, CUNY Graduate Center

Publics, commons, and struggles over enclosure in turn of the millennium Hungary

In their important work on commoning, George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici present the act(s) of commoning as central to their definition of “the commons.” This presentation will draw on their contribution to the question of commons/commoning to discuss various forms of enclosure and privatization that have taken place, as well as struggles around them, in late socialist/post-socialist context of Eastern Europe, particularly Hungary.

Plenary Talk 4:00pm - 5:15pm

Closing Reception 5:15pm - 6:00pm