

INTEGRATING HERITAGE IN URBAN PLANNING: MULTI- DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSFORMATION PROCESSES OF EUROPEAN CITIES IN THE 20TH CENTURY

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This publication evolved in close connection with the conference “Cities in Transition. A review of historical discourses, planning decisions and conservation strategies”, which took place on 16 and 17 November 2023 at TU Wien¹. The conference was devoted to historical transformation processes affecting urban areas and buildings in European and North American cities in the 19th and 20th centuries. An interdisciplinary group of international speakers discussed historical planning strategies and political and social aspects of planning history. A particular focus lay on how these interact with the development of monument protection and the discourses on architectural and urban heritage that accompanied historical transformation processes.

In line with the topic and aims of the conference, this volume further elaborates on the connections between urban planning strategies and heritage conservation. Their mutual influence and interplay become especially apparent when considering historical case studies of European cities in the 19th and 20th centuries.

¹ The symposium was conceived by Birgit Knauer, who is a Research Associate at the Department of Heritage Conservation and Building in Existing Fabric at TU Wien. She selected the contributions together with Carmen M. Enss and Laura Demeter, members of the UrbanMetaMapping research consortium, which was based at the Centre for Heritage Conservation Studies and Technologies (KDWT) at the Otto-Friedrich University of Bamberg.



1 URBAN TRANSFORMATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF URBAN HISTORY AND HERITAGE STUDIES

The significance of heritage conservation issues in planning history has already been the subject of various publications (e.g. Larkham, 2003; Pendlebury, 2003; Fischer & Altrock 2018). Some of these specifically address conservation practices and discourses during periods of urban transformation, shedding light on heritage conservation institutions as actors involved in planning processes (Enss & Vinken, 2016; Warda, 2018; Knauer, 2022). Increasing attention has recently been given to studies that focus on urban development and heritage preservation in Central and Eastern Europe. However, these have tended to analyse either individual case studies of urban planning strategies in the postwar context (Grau & Welch Guerra, 2024; Welch Guerra et al., 2023), particularly in socialist countries (Gantner et al., 2021), or to focus on mechanisms of heritage preservation (Bădescu, 2021; Demeter, 2018; Gantner, Geering & Vickers, 2022; Grama, 2019; Iuga, 2016). Systematic interdisciplinary studies of the history of urban transformation and the major role played in this by heritage conservation have also mostly focused on developments in countries such as Poland (Popiołek-Roßkamp, 2021) or the GDR (Briesen & Strubelt, 2022) without providing a comparative analysis.

This collection fills a gap in the existing scholarship by presenting multifaceted research on the historical transformation of cities in Western, Central and Eastern Europe. Case studies from various countries, including Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, and the United Kingdom, examine the connections between historical planning strategies and heritage conservation theory and practice during the transformation processes of the 20th century. The contributions focus particularly on the period following the Second World War and address planning theories and practices of built cultural heritage conservation in the “capitalist Western” European context as well as parallel developments and transformations undertaken by the communist and socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. A specific emphasis has been placed on the developments in former communist countries by highlighting continuities and discontinuities from the interwar period to the Second World War or in the context of the regime changes in 1989. This volume thus highlights the complex processes and contexts that characterised urban policies and heritage conservation practices under these regimes. Several chapters show the developments as continuous processes and make reference to local particularities.

This volume doesn't make any claim to be exhaustive; rather it seeks to pave the way for new studies that explore these topics through an interdisciplinary and transnational lens. The contributions to this volume cover a wide range of topics at the intersection of planning history, urban history, historical geography, and monument preservation, making a significant contribution to all these fields. Authors from these disciplines discuss the historical evaluation, selection, and planning processes relating to the built environment and the accompanying discourses conducted in the media and in public on the preservation or destruction of buildings. Of special interest are the various actors – individuals, institutions or organisations, networks, and specialist

groups – that consciously and unconsciously influenced or reacted to urban transformation processes by various means. But it is not only the (long-term) effects of planning and conservation decisions on the building fabric that are examined. The chapters also shed light on structural and social consequences of planning and conservation strategies that have not yet received much international attention, and which continue to have an impact today.

2 OBSERVATIONS ON THE MUTUAL INFLUENCE AND INTERACTION OF URBAN PLANNING STRATEGIES AND HERITAGE CONSERVATION PRACTICE

Analysing historical urban development and transformation processes in various countries reveals the complex relationship between urban planning, politics, and the preservation of cultural heritage. General observations can be gathered under four main headings:

2.1 Politics, urban development and conservation practice

Several case studies illustrate the close link between politics, urban development, and conservation practice (Knauer, Pendlebury, Oláh, Meissner, Coccoli). During phases of transformation, the historic fabric of cities has been repeatedly subjected to an extensive assessment and selection process. Decisions on the preservation or removal of buildings and urban fabric were based on various factors. These often included not only questions of architectural and historical value, but also political and strategic concerns. Particularly in the aftermath of (intentional or unintentional) destruction, it became necessary to deal with the remaining historic building stock from a planning and heritage conservation perspective.

Destruction and political upheaval have often led to the rewriting of urban narratives. Both planning interventions and selective preservation played a role in this. This involved evaluating the “character” of cities or urban areas and the existing building stock and often deliberately foregrounding (selected) historic buildings. The contributions to this book demonstrate how these decisions in politics and planning changed the structure and townscape of cities and reveal the shifting understanding of cultural heritage over time. For example, the multi-ethnic aspect of cities in Central and Eastern Europe was downplayed in the post-war period in favour of functionalist goals, such as the preservation of historic city centres for tourism (Demeter) or propaganda purposes (Getka-Kenig).

2.2 Conservation of historic city centres beyond political differences

Not only individual – iconic – buildings were repeatedly instrumentalised to fulfil a range of political and social purposes, so were “old towns” and historic urban areas. In the course of the 20th century, interest shifted from the preservation of single monuments to the ensemble and the integration of historic monuments into development and modernisation projects.

Interest in managing built heritage and integrating historic city centres into post-war modernisation and development projects in the 1950s and 1960s grew simultaneously in Western and Eastern Europe (Pendlebury, Oláh, Demeter, Špikić, Getka-Kenig). Modernisation and post-war reconstruction projects and discourses, impacting historic city centres, developed in parallel despite various political agendas.

2.3 Values, (re-)assessment, and the influence of various actors

Another topic that comes under scrutiny is the shifting definition of cultural heritage in the period from 1900 to 1990 (Knauer, Coccoli, Guinand/Musil). Planning decisions (e.g. over transport links, public infrastructure, and conservation campaigns) brought about an upgrading of the historic building stock, transforming not only the built environment but also urban social structures. At the same time, planning decisions led to reassessment and preservation. These mechanisms and patterns have been repeated throughout history, but have also been changed by the intervention of new actors and interest groups.

Selective preservation practices can be observed repeatedly throughout history: Attributing value to buildings, structures, and larger ensembles sometimes reflects the interests of a “few” and their narratives of the past. In pursuing urban development, planners and administrators in many cities have also had to deal with “dissonant heritage”, for example with the built legacy of former authoritarian political systems. Efforts were sometimes made to erase “unwanted memories” of the past and “unpopular narratives” from collective memory (Getka-Kenig, Demeter, Meissner, Hauer/Krammer). The question of preserving the heritage of social and ethnic minorities is an issue that requires further exploration.

By contrast, bottom-up, activist-led interventions against planned demolitions (Meissner) as well as performative and artistic interventions in urban space to protest against political planning decisions (Robine) show how societies can appropriate urban space in opposition to authoritarian forms of governance and efforts to transform heritage.

2.4 The impact of transformation on the social structures of cities

Often as result of economic and political pressure, historical urban-planning decisions have had a massive impact on the social structures of cities. The contributions to this volume show how cities' multi-layered – and often multiethnic – pasts have been changed by (conscious) planning decisions and transformation processes (Demeter, Geta-Kenig and Špikić). Efforts to revitalise urban districts often led to displacement and gentrification (Guinand/Lelek/Musil), sometimes despite the best efforts of city administrations (Knauer, Coccoli). The reassessment and “upgrading” of urban fabric thus had both positive and negative long-term consequences.

3 OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE OF THE VOLUME

This volume consists of two parts, in addition to its introductory and concluding chapters. The first comprises six chapters dealing with the planning and politics of preservation across Europe from an interdisciplinary perspective. The second part, with five chapters, covers cultural, social, economic, and functional aspects of urban transformation and their long-term consequences for heritage and related public discourses.

3.1 PART I: Planning and Politics in Historic City Centres

The main topic that the authors address in the first part of the volume is the role of heritage conservation in shaping Europe's historic city centres in the context of modernisation, development, and post-war reconstruction. Covering the period from the interwar era to the 1970s, the various chapters capture how the modernisation debates and projects were carried out in various European cities and affected historic cities and city centres. By focusing on case studies from Austria, the UK, Hungary, Croatia, Poland, and Romania, this section highlights developments that show parallels across diverse political systems, which strongly impacted how authorities, experts and professional institutions carried out the modernisation, development, and reconstruction of cities and their historic centres.

Birgit Knauer provides a long-term view of the evolution of heritage conservation and urban planning in Austria from the beginning of the 20th century until the 1970s. Focusing on the case of Vienna, she identifies four historical periods that transformed the city and were connected to both planning strategies and debates on heritage and heritage practices. She accomplishes this by conducting a thorough analysis of the role of institutions, such as the Federal Monuments Office, in pursuing heritage conservation in times of major urban and political transformation. She also considers how discourses on how to integrate heritage conservation measures within urban planning practice have shifted in line with changing interests.

John Pendlebury's insights into the contribution of the British urban planner and architect Thomas Sharp (1901–1978), a rather marginalised figure, to shaping the concept of “townscape” in Great Britain are outlined by various case studies. By discussing the visions and proposals contained in Sharp’s writings of the mid-1940s for historic cities such as Durham, Exeter, and Oxford, Pendlebury draws attention to the immediate and lasting legacies of Sharp’s personal engagement in the way these cities transformed or preserved their historic cores during reconstruction or redevelopment processes in the post-war period. Sharp’s principles of “townscape”, which Pendlebury calls a “methodology of modernity” and “methodology for planning”, are revealed in his extensive analysis of the bombed cities of Durham and Exeter and in his contributions to the debates on the modernisation of Oxford and Cambridge during the 1950s and 1960s. For Pendlebury, Sharp’s advocacy of a methodology of planning that is “historically informed and historically sensitive” is essential in understanding his legacy in the cities where he was directly involved in planning debates and decision-making processes.

Similarly, **Gábor Oláh** pursues a paradigm shift in his conceptual analysis of the transformation and creation of the “historic” urban core of the Hungarian city of Budapest during the 1960s. Oláh’s interdisciplinary approach brings together research methods from the digital humanities, conceptual history, and discourse analysis to highlight how professional discourses, as reflected in Hungarian architectural journals during the 1960s, articulated concepts of urban heritage and urban planning. Furthermore, the author shows how the architectural and urban planning community eventually contributed to shaping the understanding of “conservation areas” and formulated the argument for the preservation of the district of Buda as a whole, moving beyond the tradition of protecting single monuments. The role of Pál Granasztói and the problematisation of “townscape” in the Hungarian context are also extensively discussed.

Taking a similar approach, **Marko Špikić** analyses how various professional groups (urban planners, architects, conservation experts) discussed how to deal with historic cities in Croatia affected by the Second World War and the resulting population displacements. He traces the arguments made in favour of protecting and restoring ruins and historic towns in the context of political transformation – in this case the consolidation of Yugoslavia and the socialist ideology – in a qualitative analysis of various academic publications, conference debates, press articles, and political speeches.

Poland is emblematic of the post-war reconstruction and restoration debates in Central Europe, as examined in this volume by **Mikołaj Getka-Kenig**. He discusses various Polish cities, highlighting how the socialist regime approached the integration of “historic districts” such as “old towns” in debates on post-war regeneration. Similar to Špikić’s approach to Croatian cities, Getka-Kenig analyses the ideologically motivated and historically informed reconstruction and renovation projects undertaken in Warsaw and Gdańsk, which were later repeated in other towns and cities such as Poznań,

Krakow, Toruń, and Sandomierz. The author notes that debates on extensive urban transformation were eventually also carried out in smaller Polish cities that were not affected by the war, something Pendlebury also identified in reference to post-war Britain. Finally, he examines the integration of formerly German cities and the “Polonisation” of urban space through heritage conservation and reconstruction projects.

Laura Demeter contributes to debates on the nationalisation of historic cities in Eastern Europe that were shaped by multi-ethnic communities. She discusses how questions of this multi-ethnic legacy were included in debates on the modernisation and conservation of historic cities and how they evolved in the long term. In a case study on the medieval city of Braşov (Kronstadt), which was shaped by the Hungarian and Habsburg monarchy, she examines the state’s modernisation policy towards this multi-ethnic city after 1918 in the context of the formation of the modern nation-state of Romania. This chapter shows how political regimes such as the Romanian monarchy (1918–1948) and military dictatorship (1940–1945) pursued top-down policies to nationalise urban space. This reached its peak under the communist regime, which engaged in a comprehensive project of conservation and restoration of the historic city of Braşov as an ensemble worth preserving for its value as a “medieval historic centre”, emphasising its potential as a centre for tourism and promoting a narrative that silenced the multi-ethnic character of the historic city.

3.2 PART II: Cultural, Social, and Functional Transformation. Long-term Consequences for Heritage and Public Discourse

The second part of the volume brings together a selection of case studies from Austria, Germany (GDR), Bulgaria, and Italy, which reflect upon the social and economic implications of urban planning processes and how they deal with both official and unauthorised aspects of heritage conservation. The authors in this section also analyse the role of actors involved in processes of urbanisation and preservation in post-war Europe, considering aspects such as forms of activism, the appropriation of urban space by various social groups, social exclusion, gentrification, and informality. They draw on theories and methods from disciplines including visual studies, urban planning, heritage conservation, architecture and history.

Part I provided an extensive overview of “authorised” urban planning and heritage conservation actors – from individual experts, via state authorities, to professional institutions – in various European contexts and under a range of forms of political governance. **Friedrich Hauer** and **Andre Krammer** take up this topic in the second part of the book, drawing our attention to a neglected aspect of urban planning debates in 20th century Europe, namely the role of “informality” in processes of shaping urban spaces that go beyond institutional, legislative, and professional practices. By discussing the “informal settlements” that shaped Vienna’s peripheries in the post-war era, this chapter highlights

bottom-up initiatives that eventually challenged “authorised” forms of urbanity. These initiatives of “urban planning without planners” also contributed to shaping the discourse on urban planning and the subsequent safeguarding and integration of the “informal settlements” into expanding urban structures and networks in the city.

Concentrating on visual narratives, **Kathrin Meissner** analyses grass-root civic initiatives and the changing discourse on the legacy of the GDR, as exemplified by the authorities’ treatment of the gasometer in Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg district. She discusses the roles and discourses of various groups involved in documenting the “demolition” of the gasometer, forms of activism, protest activities, and campaigns for their preservation throughout the 1980s, which eventually contributed to the creation of a “local urban icon”. By problematising “demolition” as part of the urban redesign of the formerly industrial space, Meissner contributes to the construction of a visual urban history of the GDR’s industrial past and its patrimonialisation.

Similarly, **Melody Robine** discusses how performative and artistic interventions in the urban space of Sofia provided a powerful platform for Bulgarian society to engage with the legacy of the former socialist regime after 1989 and to critically reflect on the liberal economic policies that shaped the capital city in the transition to a market economy. She focuses in particular on the outcomes and methodologies developed within the *Visual Seminar* (2003–2006) organised by the Institute of Contemporary Art – Sofia and the Centre for Advanced Study Sofia. The seminar served as a platform to encourage Bulgarian society to engage with urban space in a creative manner. By means of visual education and public participation, the project aimed to raise awareness of the urban transformation of the post-communist city and shift the interest in dealing with the urban space from planners, designers, and experts to its users such as citizens and communities.

Carlotta Coccoli takes a critical approach towards the integration of heritage conservation practices in the urban transformation of socially vulnerable neighbourhoods in Brescia. The author takes a long-term view, considering state initiatives and focusing on the decaying historic centre of Brescia starting from the 1970s. While initial plans linked improving the city centre’s urban fabric with increasing the quality of life in the district, the most recent initiative, launched in 2000, aims not only at physical and functional improvements, but also seeks the social transformation of the neighbourhood. By emphasising the potential of recent strategies to transform the cultural and multi-ethnic character of the district, the author highlights the negative impact of the “gentrification” process of the once “notorious” area in the historic city centre of Brescia on its social composition.

In their long-term analysis, **Sandra Guinand**, **Viktória Éva Lélek**, and **Robert Musil** also address issues related to commercial exploitation and the growing economic value of Vienna’s stock of *Gründerzeit* (1848–1914) buildings, which had been neglected until the 1960s. The authors reveal how recent

patrimonialisation and preservation practices contributed to the increase in the economic value of buildings from this period. They discuss the successive phases of commodification, de- and recommodification with reference to selected examples of *Gründerzeit* buildings throughout the 20th century and the social and socio-cultural consequences of these historical shifts.

In her concluding remarks, **Heike Oevermann** emphasises the relevance of the topics discussed in this volume for today's societies. In her opinion, particular attention must be paid to polarising discourses that carry the risk of capitalising on the all too often misused heritage conservation discourses and practices. The author argues for a differentiated approach to ensure the integration of heritage conservation into urban planning practices and discourses, one that should emphasise the relevance of the multiplicity of actors, acknowledge the existence of dissonance, and recognise diversity beyond the economic interests of a few and the dominant normative discourses.

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