

RECLAIMING THE COMMONS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Warsaw, 19-21 April 2013

OVERVIEW

The financial crash of 2008 and the recession that followed have revealed the ongoing, systemic failures of our current political-economic model and provoked a surge in diverse protests across Europe, the Mediterranean and the United States. The popular social movements which emerged in 2011 – from anti-austerity rebellions in Greece and Britain to the 15M movement in Spain, Blockupy in Germany, and the anti-Putin protestors in Russia – are continuing to organize and strengthen ahead of the next phase of the crisis.

But in Central and Eastern Europe, due to different historical and socio-economic conditions, these vibrant, urgent social movements have not found resonance. Social and political activism has instead centered around urban movements which, in contrast to the vocal mobilizations in the West, focus specifically on organizing on a local scale and demanding a more democratic politics at the city governance level.

In Poland, for example, new social movements are working to expand direct democracy through participatory city budgets, the right to housing and common public spaces, fighting gentrification and social segregation, and protesting against the privatization of public services and resources. Organizing like this is happening on many levels throughout Central and Eastern European cities, but we have yet to connect the dots: to realize the common goals, tactics and strategies we can develop that will strengthen us as citizens not limited by our national boundaries, but motivated by a shared indignation at the injustices and inequalities delivered by the political-economic status quo.

The purpose of the first Warsaw conference is to bring together activists, academics, organizations and civic groups engaging in a wide range of socio-economic and political issues across Central and Eastern Europe, to discover the common grievances, common demands—and, ultimately, to find a common language that will allow us to begin to build a platform of principles enabling more effective, coordinated and diverse pan-European social and political action in the future.

The central questions we want to explore at the Warsaw conference are: Why was Central/Eastern Europe absent from the protests of 2011? What do Central/Eastern European urban movements have in common and how can they strengthen their cooperation? And how should they relate to, build off, and develop in the context of Western social justice movements like 15M and Occupy?

The first part of the conference, called “Today,” will focus on educating ourselves about the distinct conflicts, challenges, projects and goals we share as diverse social movements operating independently in cities across Europe. The second part, “Tomorrow,” will engage with those goals and challenges directly – and collectively – by centering on specific tactics and strategies we can employ to begin to increase our economic, political and social impact on institutions and decision makers.

We chose Warsaw as the site of the conference, in part, because of the largely developed Congress of Urban Movements that has grown in Poland, which already proved successful in bringing about political change at the local level (in Poznan), creating a new language of civic involvement and transcending traditional divides in the political and economic spheres. We are

confident that two days of structured discussions, workshops, networking and planning will lead to new insights about ways Central and Eastern European cities especially can play a more dynamic role in today's wave of social movements. By combining the diversity and locality of movements on a scale of transnational political action, we hope the Warsaw conference will be the beginning of many such encounters that help build new alliances across borders to shape our collective future.

AIMS

1. Situating the development of Central and Eastern European urban movements in the wider context of Europe's economic/debt crisis and the social mobilizations that have risen in response to that crisis.
2. Building connections between individuals and groups to coordinate information, tactics and strategies that increase movements toward direct democracy and social and economic justice across Europe's national boundaries.
3. Laying the groundwork for a viable political agenda to establish direct democratic principles at the local level of urban governments, ie. a pan-European platform, while engaging new actors and ideas in the political process.

SCHEDULE

Friday 19th April: WARM-UP

Venue: Museum of Modern Art

18.00 Film screening: „Dear Mandela” (dir. Dara Kell, 2012, South Africa/USA)

Description: When their shantytowns are threatened with mass eviction, three ‘young lions’ of South Africa’s new generation rise from the shacks and take their government to the highest court in the land, putting the promises of democracy to the test.

19.00 – 21.00 Panel discussion: Is right to the city a chance for a new universalism?

Panelists:

Krzysztof Nawratek (University of Plymouth)

Marta Zimniak-Hałajko (University of Warsaw)

Lidia Makowska (Urban Culture Association, Gdansk)

Moderator: Kacper Pobłocki (University of Poznań)

Saturday 20th April: “TODAY”

Venue: Museum of Modern Art

Moderators: Maria Dębińska (Res Publica Nowa), Michael Levitin (OWSJ)

9.30 Welcome

10.00 Keynote speech

Place, Autonomy and Provisional Revolution: territorial conditions of untimely activities

Krzysztof Nawratek, Lecturer and Master of Architecture programme leader in the School of Architecture, Design and Environment, Plymouth University, UK. Author of 'Holes in the Whole. Introduction to the Urban Revolutions' (2012) and 'City as a Political Idea' (2011). His main research interest lays in urban theory in the context of post-secular philosophy. He is working on projects focused on evolution of (post)socialist cities, crisis of the contemporary neoliberal city model, relationship between cognitive capitalism and urban form and urban re-industrialisation.

11.00 – 14.00 Panel 1: Urban movements in Central Europe: what are the commons and how to reclaim them?

Tauri Tuvikene, Tallinn. Tauri is an urban researcher and activist at Linnalabor, an “Urban Lab” based in Tallinn, Estonia, and a PhD candidate at University College London, Department of Geography.

Michaela Pixova, Prague. Michaela is a human geographer and activist from Prague. She obtained her Ph.D. at the Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague and is one of the founders of the watchdog organization Praguewatch.

Bálint Missetics, Budapest. Bálint is one of the founders and activists at A Város Mindenkié/The City is for All, an advocacy group for the homeless.

Norbert Petrovici, Cluj. Norbert is a sociologist, lecturer at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj, Romania and an urban activist.

Mariya Ivancheva, Sofia. Mariya is a sociologist and anthropologist, finishing a PhD dissertation at the Central European University in Budapest on the higher education reform in Bolivarian Venezuela. She is a member of the collective of Social Center Xaspel, the project New Left Perspectives, and the local group organizing the Transeuropa Festival in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Marta Madejska, Łódź. Marta is a doctoral candidate at the University of Łódź, an urban activist and researcher at Topografie Association and one of the organizers of the Second Congress of Polish Urban Movements.

14.30 – 17.00 Panel 2: Right to the city as a political project

Steve Rushton, London. Steve has been involved, as activist and writer, with Occupy London and numerous campaigns waged against austerity measures, fighting to preserve public libraries, playgrounds and low-income residencies in the British capital.

Andreas Kahrs, Berlin. Andreas is an organizer with Avanti Berlin, Blockupy and the Interventionist Left. He focuses especially on activist efforts in Poland, and is beginning his doctoral studies this year at Humboldt University.

Luka Tetickovic, Ljubljana. Luka is a journalist at an independent radio station, Radio Student, in Ljubljana. He recently became active as a prosecutor for the leftist-platform Študentska Iskra, which is an opposition group within Ljubljana's Student Union.

Ed Sutton, Zürich. Originally from Minneapolis (USA) and based now near Zürich, Ed has been active with Occupy Paradeplatz (Zürich) and Occupy WEF (Davos). He writes about radical movements for various publications.

Haris Tsavdaroglou, Thessaloniki. Haris has been involved in the squatting movement in Greece. He is a PhD candidate student in the School of Architecture at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, where he is preparing the dissertation: “Commons and Enclosures: dialectics of Space, Stasis, and Crisis”

17.15 – 18.30 Summary by **Bogna Świątkowska** (Fundacja Bęc Zmiana, Warsaw), followed by discussion (moderated by Kacper Pobłocki)

Sunday 21st April: “TOMORROW”

Venue: Res Publica Nowa

Moderators: Maria Dębińska (Res Publica Nowa), Michael Levitin (OWSJ)

The last day of the conference will be devoted to strategic planning of further activities. Discussions will focus on finding means of cooperation in the areas listed below.

9.30 Coffee

10.00– 13.00 Strategic planning 1: reclaiming space

Reclaiming spacial and housing policies and expanding affordable housing, with focus on eviction defense movements, legal strategies, direct action.

Reclaiming a clean and healthy environment with emphasis on 1) natural gas/fracking developments in Poland, 2) expanding the grow-local food movement and reclaiming the economic space, 3) affordable and environment-friendly transport.

14.00 – 17.00 Strategic planning 2: reclaiming the political space

Reclaiming the political space with emphasis on 1) emergence of alternative/third parties and the transformation of civic organizations into political parties, 2) opportunities for citizens' participation in the decision-making processes, 3) the rise of independent, startup and cooperative news outlets, 4) strategies for capturing public interest and support.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The language of the conference is English.

Participants from Poland can apply for a **travel refund**. To apply, please contact Maria Dębińska at mariadebinska@gmail.com by **5th April**.

Venues

Museum of Modern Art
address: Pańska 3
www.artmuseum.pl

Res Publica Nowa
address: Gałczyńskiego 5
www.publica.pl

ORGANIZERS

Maria Dębińska, Res Publica Nowa
PhD candidate at the Graduate School for Social Research, Polish Academy of Sciences, editor of the City section on Res Publica's website (publica.pl).

Michael Levitin, Occupied Wall Street Journal
Journalist from San Francisco, former correspondent for Newsweek, Los Angeles Times and other publications. Currently the editor of Occupy.com, living in Berlin.

Kacper Pobłocki, Congress of Polish Urban Movements
Teaches anthropology at University of Poznań. One of the organizers of the First Congress of Polish Urban Movements and co-author of *Anty-bezradnik przestrzenny* – a manual for urban activists coming out with *Res Publica Nowa* in May.

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