

Introduction

Urban Identities: Renewal and Heritage

Traditionally, social, ethnic and religious diversity characterized Central European towns. It applied to urban settings regardless of their size and was equally true of capitals and small towns. This organic diversity has been their natural and self-evident feature for centuries. One may even say that it was an important part of their identity. Although, as far as social structure is concerned, the population of towns is still differentiated, heterogeneity has declined in ethnic and religious terms. One may only discover traces of past diversity in some places. The root causes of this are the large-scale changes that have impacted the region in the modern age. Regardless of whether these unfolded gradually or in a dramatic manner, political, social, and economic processes drastically transformed the patterns of the urban realms of the region in the 20th century. Changes include the composition and structure of the population, built environment and urban–rural relations, etc. The disintegration of empires, the changes of international boundaries, the destruction following the wars, furthermore, the forced and insensitive development projects, ethnic cleansing, deportations, annihilation or expulsion of communities are part of the history of nearly all Central European cities. Also, there were more peaceful demographic processes that brought about changes in the same locations. In some fortunate cases, continuity is still detectable, while in other places history has resulted in fragmentation. There are towns that one may consider as cases for a complete break with the past, either due to a completely new built environment or the change of population. Accordingly, grasping the current identity of cities is a difficult task. It is not only an open-ended process but it could also be interpreted in many ways, depending on the perspective and the focus.

This thematic issue of the Central European Horizons intends to examine the 20th century history of urban centres of Central Europe – an area ranging from the Baltic zone to Serbia – specifically, how the changes that impacted the region influenced individual towns. What are the elements that have disappeared, what has remained, and how current inhabitants relate to these

changes? How the memories of past epochs live on? What the identity of cities comprises of? The authors who answered our call for articles approached these issues in many ways. Our first thematic issue starts with the study of Veronika Szeghy-Gayer on politics of memory and the local identity of today's Košice/Kassa. Gruia Bădescu's paper deals with the changes in the built environment of Fiume/Rijeka after World War II, while Péter Bedők focuses on changes and the political contexts of the demographic patterns and the related violence in the region of Vilnius/Wilno during World War II. The last paper of this issue, by Csaba Zahorán, discusses the Hungarian perception of the changes of Transylvanian towns in the interwar period.

Csaba Zahorán



Kolozsvár/Cluj, 1934 (detail, Azopan.ro / Attila Horváth's family)