

# Authoritarian Urbanism

Contemporary Manifestations,  
Global Entanglements  
and Contestation

**09.-11.**

November 2023

---

Oberlichtsaal  
Geschwister-Scholl-Street 8  
Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

©2023, Authoritarian Urbanism

Annual conference of the Institute for European Urban Studies (IfEU) , Bauhaus Universität-Weimar

Design by Dilara Hadroviç

Annual conference of the Institute for European Urban Studies (IfEU)

Organizer:

***Daniela Zupan***

Institute for European Urban Studies,  
Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

Cities are generally understood as ‘cradles of democracy’, as central sites for political action, pro-democracy and emancipatory movements, and as battlefields where authoritarian and illiberal tendencies are resisted and contested. Accordingly, research has produced ample knowledge on the interplay of cities and democracy. The complex relationship between cities and authoritarianism, in turn, has received far less attention. Yet, cities are focal points for authoritarian interventions, they are breeding grounds for authoritarian movements, and they play a crucial role in maintaining and stabilizing authoritarian regimes.

The recent surge of authoritarian tendencies around the globe has led to a renewed interest in these processes. In the last couple of years studies have documented contemporary manifestations of authoritarian urbanism and highlighted the role of urbanism in authoritarian state-building; research on post-politics and post-democracy

has illuminated how the current neoliberal order undermines democratic practices in and through urban development; and works have shed light on the interplay of authoritarianism, illiberalism and right-wing populism and their socio-spatial dynamics in cities.

This conference sets out to further this debate. It brings together scholars from different disciplinary background within the field of urban studies to shed light on contemporary forms, mechanisms and dynamics of authoritarian urbanism in a global perspective. In particular it aims to advance our understanding of how urbanism is linked to, and instrumental for rising processes of authoritarianism. Gaining a better understanding of this complex interrelationship is crucial for countering authoritarian tendencies and for devising strategies to reverse them.

**Thursday, November 09, 2023**

12:00-13:00

**Registration**

13:00-13:30

**Official Opening**

*Daniela Zupan*, Organizer, Director of the Institute for European Urban Studies, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

*Peter Benz*, President of the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

*Sigrun Langner*, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

13:30-14:30

**Panel 1 - Authoritarian Urban Renewal,**

Moderated by *Lisa Vollmer*, BUW

*Deniz Ay*, University of Bern "Post-Conflict Urban Renewal as an Ethnocratic Regime Practice: Racialized Governance of

Redevelopment in Diyarbakir, Turkey"

*Penny Koutrolikou*, National Technical University of Athens "Entangled Authoritarianisms in Athens' City Centre"

14:30-15:00

**Break**

15:00-16:30

**Panel 2 - Instruments of Authoritarian Urbanism I,**

Moderated by *Grischa Bertram*, BUW

*Erika Nagy*, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Hungary: "How to

Cement an Authoritarian Regime Economically? Relating Changing Municipal-Central State Nexus and Peripheral Industrialisation in Hungarian Small Towns"

*Dasha Kuletskaya, RWTH Aachen:*  
“The ‘Legitimized Architecture’ by Dana Holdings: Authoritarian Urbanism under the Lukashenko Regime in Belarus”  
*Olga Suslova, Gustave Eiffel University*  
Paris: “Transition of Authoritarian Urbanism: Advancing and Contesting Urban Renewal in St. Petersburg (Russia)”

16:30-17:00

**Break**

17:00-18:00

**Panel 2 – Instruments of Authoritarian Urbanism II**

Moderated by *Grischa Bertram, BUW*

*Hugo Fanton, University of São Paulo:*

“The Wall Street Consensus on the Production of Cities and the Rise of Neoliberal-Authoritarian Urbanism in Brazil”

*Tuba İnal Çekiç, Hertie School Berlin:*

“The Anatomy of an Authoritarian Urban Policy and Resistance Strategies in İstanbul”

18:00-18:15

**Break**

18:15-19:45

**Keynote**

*Michał Murawski, University College London:*

“Re-Colonial Russia: Eco-Scaping Putin’s Paradise, From Authoritarian Freedom to Culture Z”

20:00

**Wine Reception**

*IfEU - Belvederer Allee 5, 99425 Weimar*

**Friday, November 10, 2023**

09:00-09:30

**Registration**

09:30-11:00

### **Panel 3 – Infrastructuring the Authoritarian City**

Moderated by *Helmut Aust*,  
Freie Universität Berlin

*Yimin Zhao*, University of Zurich /

Renmin University of China: “The Infrastructural Lives of Authoritarian Urbanism: Lessons From Beijing”

*Asebe Regassa*, University of Zürich:

“Authoritarian Sedimentation in and through Addis Ababa’s Urban Infrastructure”

*Nitin Bathla*, ETH Zürich: “Authoritarian Urbanism Beyond the City: A Multiscalar Analysis of Infrastructure State and Accumulation by Segregation in Neo-liberal India”

11:00-11:30

### **Break**

11:30-13:00

### **Panel 4 – Actors and Networks,**

Moderated by *Sandra Huning*, BUW

*Arnisa Halili*, Bauhaus-Universität

Weimar: “The Role of “the Diaspora” in Contemporary Authoritarian Urbanism in Tirana”

*Marcell Hajdu*, Bauhaus-Universität

Weimar: “Political Competitions: Sporting Events and Right-wing Populism in Budapest”

*Oxana Gourinovitch*, International Heritage Centre: “A Tale of two Cities: Vilnius and Kaunas in the National Narrative of Smetona Regime”

13:00-14:00

### **Lunch Break**

14:00-14:45

### **Book Tables**

**“Global Authoritarianism.**

**Perspectives and Contestations from the South”** (International Research Group on Authoritarianism) (eds.), transcript 2022, presented by *Hugo Fanton*

**“Space, Planning, Politics. Inquiries into an Evident, yet Inextricable Relationship”** (Welch-Guerra/Grau)

(eds.), (appearing 2023);

presented by *Max Welch-Guerra & Victoria Grau*

**“Spatializing Authoritarianism”** (Koch)

(Ed.), Syracuse University Press 2022,

presented by *Alke Jenss* and *Ayşegül Can*

**“Autoritärer Urbanismus”** (Zupan) (ed.)

Special Issue in sub\urban,

presented by *Daniela Zupan,*

*Kristine Beurskens* and *Gala Nettelbladt*

**“We, the City. Plurality and Resistance in Berlin and Istanbul”**

(İnal-Çekiç/Wozniak) (eds.), JOVIS 2022,

presented by *Tuba İnal-Çekiç*

**Film sequences of “Mother India“**

(appearing), presented by *Nitin Bathla*

14:45-15:00

**Break**

15:00-16:30

**Panel Discussion - Urban Resistance to Authoritarianism**

Organizers: *Gala Nettelbladt & Matthias Naumann* BBSR *Kristine Beurskens* IfL Leipzig

Participants: *Tuba İnal Çekic* Hertie School, *Alke Jenss* Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut Freiburg, *Lela Rekhviashvili* IfL Leipzig, *Kirsten Angermann* Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, *Felicitas Kübler* Universität Klagenfurt, *Andrei Semenov* Nazarbayev University, Astana

16:30-17:00

**Break**



17:00-18:30

### **Keynote**

**Virág Molnár**, *The New School for Social Research, New York*: "Budapest, the Populist City: Imperial Nostalgia and Neoliberal Authoritarianism"

19:00

### **Conference Dinner**

*At "Pause" at the back of the DNT in Weimar*

## **Saturday, November 11, 2023**

09:00-10:30

### **Panel 5 - Contesting Authoritarian Urbanism I**

Moderated by **Niloufar Tajeri**, TU Berlin

**Nadja-Christina Schneider**, *Humboldt-Universität Berlin*: "The Architect's Vengeance: 'The Tower of a Forgotten India'"

**Ayşegül Can**, *Istanbul Medeniyet*

**University**: "The Rise of Urban Resistance Movements and Spatialized Oppression: The Gezi Legacy"

**Günter Gassner**, *Cardiff University*:

"Authoritarianism and the Radical Left: Urban Guerilla and Revolutionary Antifascism in Berlin"

10:30-11:00

### **Break**

11:00-12:30

### **Panel 6 - Contesting Authoritarian Urbanism II**

Moderated by **Arnisa Halili**, BUW

**Anna Schnieder Krüger**, *Humboldt-Universität Berlin*: "Countering Urban Authoritarianism through Everyday Life on and around University Campuses in Delhi"

**Arshi Javaid**, *Humboldt-Universität*

**Berlin**: "Urban Authoritarianism: Mediation, Resilience and Accelerated Transformations in Srinagar City"

*Ahmadreza Hakiminejad & Mahsa Alami  
Fariman, Coventry University, UK:  
"City as Stage: Performative Body and the  
Authoritarian City"*

12:30-13:00

**Final Reflections**

*Daniela Zupan with Max-Welch Guerra,  
Bauhaus-Universität Weimar,  
Erika Nagy, Centre for Economic and  
Regional Studies, Hungary &  
Andrei Semenov, Nazarbayev University  
Astana*

14:30

**Guided Tour through Weimar**

*with Oliver Trepte*

Meeting Point: in front of the DNT  
(Deutsches Nationaltheater Weimar)



## Abstracts

<b>Michał Murawski</b> , University College London.....	12
<b>Virág Molnár</b> , The New School for Social Research, New York.....	14
<b>Deniz Ay</b> , University of Bern.....	15
<b>Penny Koutrolikou</b> , National Technical University of Athens.....	17
<b>Erika Nagy</b> , Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Hungary.....	19
<b>Dasha Kuletskaya</b> , RWTH Aachen.....	21
<b>Olga Suslova</b> , Gustave Eiffel University Paris.....	23
<b>Hugo Fanton</b> , University of São Paulo.....	25
<b>Tuba İnal Çekiç</b> , Hertie School Berlin.....	26
<b>Yimin Zhao</b> , University of Zurich / Renmin University of China.....	27
<b>Asebe Regassa</b> , University of Zürich.....	29
<b>Nitin Bathla</b> , ETH Zürich.....	31
<b>Arnisa Halili</b> , Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.....	33
<b>Marcell Hajdu</b> , Bauhaus-Universität Weimar.....	35
<b>Oxana Gourinovitch</b> , International Heritage Centre.....	37
<i>Panel Discussion: Urban Resistance to Authoritarianism</i> .....	38
<b>Nadja-Christina Schneider</b> , Humboldt-Universität Berlin.....	40
<b>Ayşegül Can</b> , Istanbul Medeniyet University.....	42
<b>Günter Gassner</b> , Cardiff University.....	44
<b>Anna Schnieder Krüger</b> , Humboldt-Universität Berlin.....	46
<b>Arshi Javaid</b> , Humboldt-Universität Berlin.....	48
<b>Ahmadreza Hakiminejad &amp; Mahsa Alami Fariman</b> , Coventry University, UK.....	50

Keynote:

**Michał Murawski**

University College London

## **Re-Colonial Russia: Eco-Scaping Putin's Paradise, from Authoritarian Freedom to Culture Z**

Zaryadye Park – ceremonially opened by Vladimir Putin in September 2017 – is a multi-billion ruble, multi-functional public space dramatically situated in the heart of old Moscow, on a historically-charged site abutting Red Square and the Kremlin. At once futuristic and rustic in appearance, Zaryadye – billed by its hip New York designers (Diller, Scofidio+Renfro of High Line fame) as a “wild urbanist, hybrid landscape” – is touted as the world’s most high-tech, eco- progressive public park. At the same time, Zaryadye – nicknamed “Putin’s Paradise” by its critics – is heralded as a magnanimous “gift” from Putin to Muscovites; and suffused with neo-imperial aesthetics, patriotic-military trinkets and brazen, invasive technologies of surveillance and control.

This talk presents a series of short vignettes, focused on the relationship between Zaryadye and ideologies of “spontaneity” and “authoritarian freedom” articulated by the ideologues of Russia’s architectural and

infrastructural makeover; and on the portents and echoes of war, expansionism and recolonial violence that could be detected amidst the trees and shrubs of Zaryadye prior to and following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The political aesthetics of Zaryadye, as well as its institutional undergirdings, come full circle in plans for a Zaradye-esque "eco-park and techo-park", to be built on the territory of the obliterated Azovstal steel plant in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol – the site of the most terrible acts of violence, urbicide and attempted genocide carried out to this date by Russia's occupying forces on the territory of Ukraine.

Keynote:

**Virág Molnár**

The New School for Social Research, New York

## **Budapest, the Populist City: Imperial Nostalgia and Neoliberal Authoritarianism**

Scholarship on contemporary populism has grown significantly in recent years, but its spatial and material aspects have received scant attention. My project fills this gap by examining two of the most politically charged symbolic spaces in Budapest that have undergone major reconstruction since the populist turn in 2010: the Kossuth Square area with the Hungarian Parliament in its center and the Castle District with special focus on the former Royal Palace. These case studies illuminate how urban space and the built environment have been instrumentalized in the service of populist rule by materializing strategically edited and sanitized narratives about Hungary's imperial and interwar pasts. The analysis shows that these transformations of the built environment do not simply passively represent populist power, but their design, construction, and changing uses provide key insights into the broader political logics of populist regimes.

# Post-Conflict Urban Renewal as an Ethnocratic Regime Practice: Racialized Governance of Redevelopment in Diyarbakir, Turkey

*Deniz Ay\* & Kaner Atakan Turker*

\*Presenting Author, Institute of Geography and Center for Regional Economic Development, University of Bern, Switzerland

This paper explores the governance of a state-led urban renewal project in a politically contested area in the aftermath of a major armed conflict. Building on the ethnocratic regime theory, we explore the governance of the urban renewal process in the historic district of Suriçi by focusing on the political, spatial, and governmental underpinnings of displacement and dispossession in the context of the unresolved “Kurdish Question” of Turkey. We argue that this exclusionary and state-led urban renewal project is shaped around the ethnocratic state interests with limited real estate returns that aims to sanitize and dehistoricize the historic core of Diyarbakir given its political and socioeconomic significance for the Kurdish Movement. The rhetorical formation of a “renewed” historic core epitomizes the racialized governance that intensifies the



race-class realities sitting at the center of the decades-old ethnic conflict in Turkey. The central government authority's use of gentrification in practice illustrates the ethnocratic regime's spatial, political, and economic repercussions for the Kurdish population as the country's largest ethnic minority. Suriçi's redevelopment illustrates that ethnocratic regime practices coexist with a democratic façade and militarization activates an ethnocratic urban regime. Our findings contribute to the literature on space and power by illustrating the incompleteness and paradoxical elements of settler-colonial urbanism.

# Entangled Authoritarianisms in Athens' City Centre

*Penny Koutrolikou*

National Technical University of Athens

From being imagined as the 'cradle of democracy' a brief walk around the centre of Athens while discussing with some local residents will soon persuade the wanderer otherwise. It is very difficult not to wonder why the city centre looks like a continuous construction site or like a fragmented barricade wall of tall metal plates or if there is something dangerous going on judging by the omnipresence of armed police on foot and on motorbikes. Although these images have become almost banal for people working and living in the city centre, it doesn't mean that they are not commented and challenged.

Present-day Athens has little to do with residents' participation in the decisions that concern its production and governance of space and urban life. Rather, one might argue the city centre has been overwhelmed by multiple often entangled authoritarianisms. The ever-presence of riot, special and other police bodies around Exarcheia square, with the pretext of protecting the metro works, is probably the most visible aspect of authoritarian urbanism

producing its own spatialities, materialities, embodiments and, of course, violence. Yet authoritarian urbanism is encountered in many other, less explicit ways in the city. For example it can be found in the Mayor's insistence of going ahead with a planned semi-pedestrianization ('Grand Promenade') without considering any critiques and reactions voiced. Or, in the ways that companies and foundations can get a fast-tracked go-ahead with neoliberal redevelopment aspirations and plans bypassing regulations and residents. In more invisible ways, authoritarian urbanism is also reproduced through the discursive constructions of neighbourhoods that in turn legitimize authoritarian interventions upon them.

Drawing on analysis and reflections from the city of Athens, this contribution discusses the entangled authoritarianisms that (re)produce the city's spaces, affect the lives of those living and working in it, and are implicated in everyday as well as institutional power articulations.

# How to Cement an Authoritarian Regime Economically? Relating changing Municipal–Central State Nexus and Peripheral Industrialisation in Hungarian Small Towns

*Erika Nagy*

Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Bekescsaba Group,  
Hungary

In the last two years, series of demonstrations in small and mediums size towns indicated that local communities are against the current economic development policy of the Hungarian government which has placed the heavily polluting e-vehicle battery industry in the focus. Despite local movements, major investment projects are still being subsidized and environmental regulations are neglected – while the whole process is masked by the narrative of the ‘green turn’ in automotive industry. The failure of community actions is rooted in the interrelated processes of the financialization of municipal governance, subsequent austerity schemes enforced in the European periphery in crisis times and the systematic dismantling of the municipal system in Hungary. The paper aims to highlight the turning points in centralisation of state power/the loss of municipal

autonomy and how it became instrumental to get and unlimited control over local resources (land, water, urban infrastructure, etc.) and customize those to the needs of selected investors/industries considered as potential pillars of the current regime. This specific focus also takes us beyond the metropolitan context and reveals the multiple dependencies of small towns in an authoritarian system in the age of financial capitalism.

# The “Legitimized Architecture” by Dana Holdings: Authoritarian Urbanism under the Lukashenko Regime in Belarus<sup>1</sup>

*Dasha Kuletskaya*

RWTH Aachen

This paper traces the success story of Dana Holdings, a private real estate company owned by the Serbian oligarch family Karić. The company came to Belarus in 2008 and, over the next decade, had come to dominate the Belarusian housing market. In 2021, Dana Holdings was responsible for constructing almost half of all residential space built in Minsk that year. Over the past fourteen years, Dana Holdings has been granted over 14 sq. km of land in prime locations of Minsk to develop residential, business administrative, and retail complexes. All projects realized by Dana Holdings in Minsk have one thing in common: permissions for their realization were granted by special decrees of the president of Belarus. These decrees rank second high after the constitution in the Belarusian legal system and possess the power to overrule all other legislative documents, including zoning laws and building regulations. In the case of the land granted to Dana Holdings, these decrees

allowed for highly speculative housing developments with rates of return on investment over 60 percent. Taking four projects by Dana Holdings as examples, this paper focuses on the intersections of law, finance, and architecture. It explores how political intervention by an autocratic head of state can define urban development. In so doing, the paper introduces the concept of “legitimized architecture” as a way of describing the spatial dimensions of laws, codes, and regulations.

---

<sup>1</sup>Parts of this research were published in: Kuletskaya, Dasha. 2022. “The “Legitimized Architecture” of Minsk World: Primitive Accumulation through Housing under Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Belarus.” *Architectural Theory Review* 26 (1):105-25. doi: 10.1080/13264826.2022.2056214

# Transition of Authoritarian Urbanism: Advancing and Contesting Urban Renewal in St. Petersburg (Russia)

*Olga Suslova*

Gustave Eiffel University Paris

This contribution discusses post-Soviet transformations of authoritarian urbanism using St. Petersburg as an example. Specifically, it focuses on the transition between two urban renewal ('Renovation') policies in St. Petersburg, RZT (2008) and KRT (2022), which aim to demolish the supposedly decaying Soviet housing. Both policies are authoritarian in the sense that they are imposed on citizens by officials who are not fairly elected. However, they both contain surprisingly democratic features.

In the case of RZT, the relocation of residents was supposed to be within the perimeter of a neighbourhood: the relocation of flat owners outside this perimeter was only done with the agreement of the owners themselves. This makes RZT an example of urban renewal without forced displacement, which became possible because of the fragmented structure of housing ownership in the city after the privatisation of the 1990s.



In KRT, however, this aspect was dropped - it was unrealistic from an economic point of view - but other unexpected features were included instead. The first is the possibility of a vote by flat owners to include/exclude a building in/from a program, copied from Moscow's urban renewal policy (2017). The second is the implementation of design: new neighbourhoods are supposed to follow the federal KRT standard of urban design, based on the principles of new urbanism. Finally, the third is the creation of a publicly elected committee on KRT in response to unprecedented protests by residents. These protests were so great that the city paused the KRT law until 2024.

This research draws on local literature in the fields of urban studies, urban and political sociology and urban geography, with a methodology consisting of interviews with planners and residents, on-site and online ethnographies, analysis of planning documents, media reports and public hearing protocols.

# The Wall Street Consensus on the Production of Cities and the Rise of Neoliberal-Authoritarian Urbanism in Brazil

*Hugo Fanton*

University of São Paulo

This article aims to analyze the advance of financialized land appropriation in Brazil, focusing on the specificity of urban space. The combined activities of real estate funds, construction companies and governments in favor of the financialization of urban development, especially in the post-2008 crisis context, has generated a new pattern of urban governance, from neoliberal urbanism to Neoliberal-Authoritarian Urbanism, under the guidance of the Wall Street Consensus. As a result, urban populations are increasingly submitted to markedly authoritarian political forms of imposing the interests of the real estate-financial complex, in which the State becomes a partner in the management and creation of financial assets based on the use and occupation of land, and in the transformation into collateral of the land on which families settle in informal occupations. This new context requires social movements to build new strategies of struggle to face a period of intensified urban conflicts and the advance of financialisation on social reproduction.

# The Anatomy of an Authoritarian Urban Policy and Resistance Strategies in İstanbul

*Tuba İnal Çekiç*

Hertie School Berlin

The relationship between authoritarianism and urbanization has been widely studied, with an increase in attention since the late 1990s (Brenner and Theodore 2002, Leitner et al. 2007, Lovering and Turkmen 2011). This increase in attention reflects the growing trend of states reconfiguring themselves in non-democratic ways in response to the effects of the crisis of capitalism (Bruff 2012). Authoritarian urbanism refers to this reconfiguration in cities, where neoliberal urban projects and initiatives have led to authoritarianism. This paper therefore will examine the concept of authoritarian urbanism in İstanbul, Turkey and the resistance against it. In addition to the state's reconfiguration strategies in cities in Turkey, the paper will as well explore the mechanisms and strategies of resistance against authoritarian urbanism in İstanbul, including protests, grassroots organizing, and alternative urban development initiatives and opposing urban governance structures. While authoritarian urbanism poses significant challenges for İstanbul, the resistance against it offers a glimpse into the possibility of creating a more inclusive and democratic city.

# The Infrastructural Lives of Authoritarian Urbanism: Lessons from Beijing

*Yimin Zhao*

University of Zurich / Renmin University of China

This paper offers a new approach to interrogating authoritarian urbanism by focusing on its articulations with urban infrastructures in the name of disciplining urban densities. It has been highlighted in China's national agenda since the mid-2010s that the control of urban densities is a key to upgrading the biggest Chinese cities into "world-class" ones. In Beijing, this ideal has been translated into a process of intense deforming of the urban, signalled by the demolishing of 210 million square metres of "unauthorised" buildings and the expelling of tens of thousands of migrant workers who were labelled "low-end" by local authorities. Nevertheless, this intense deforming of the urban has increasingly been deployed through the building and expansion of various urban infrastructures, many of which seem to be inclusive and supportive, if not modern and fancy, at first glance. Such a paradox hence marks the starting point of this paper: what political dynamics are at work when urban infrastructures are not interrupted but instead

newly erected and hence made visible? How to investigate the tensions between the promising infrastructures and the suffering urban subjects in the intense deforming of the urban? Drawing on fieldwork in selected sites in Beijing, this paper aims to address such questions with both solid empirical evidence and in-depth theoretical implications, so as to generate broader reflections on the articulation between urban infrastructures and the transformation of authoritarian urbanism.

# Authoritarian Sedimentation in and through Addis Ababa's Urban Infrastructure

*Asebe Regassa*

University of Zurich

Infrastructures cement authoritarian practices and discourses, on the one hand, and may enhance people's imagination, memory, and freedom of mobility, on the other. Likewise, urban spaces converge authoritarian and democratic praxis, representations, and narratives and, thus, become sites of contestation over the past, present, and future. This paper uses the concept, authoritarian sedimentation, to illustrate how infrastructures in Ethiopia's capital city, Addis Ababa, serve as technologies of installing, cementing, and consolidating authoritarian rules and narratives, under successive regimes. Addis Ababa was established in 1880s as a settler city to serve as a political center for the newly founded Ethiopian empire. Since then, successive regimes have built infrastructures (e.g., monuments and buildings) that not only enhance the installation of authoritarian rule but also engrain selective historical accounts and silence others. In this paper, I will focus on the symbolic representation of monuments and

buildings under previous regimes, and on the current government's mega infrastructural projects in the city and its authoritarian underpins. By doing so, I will demonstrate how authoritarian practices and narratives are sedimented and projected into the future.

# Authoritarian Urbanism Beyond the City: A Multiscalar Analysis of Infrastructure State and Accumulation by Segregation in Neo-Illiberal India

*Nitin Bathla*

ETH Zürich

Following Mau Goswami's seminal work on the production of colonial state space in India, this article explores the production of new India under the authoritarian turn. Here new not only denotes the values of economic and religious nationalism and the erosion of social justice, but also new state space. The extension of state infrastructure works such as highway corridors into previously bypassed territories is leading to the explosion and reterritorialisation of the postcolonial state space. To put things into perspective, on average, the National Highways Authority of India constructed a 5.5-kilometre stretch of a standard 6-lane highway daily in 2021. The ambition is to triple this rate by 2025 to transform India into a 5 trillion USD economy. The production of space through highway corridors has been a central feature of India's fast-paced growth trajectory under neoliberalism. It has emerged as the dominant mode through which 'accumulation by



dispossession' functions in India, whereby the 'land broker state' attempts to remove barriers for transnational capital to invest in rural land markets. Under the ongoing highway development programme curiously entitled Bharatmala (Garland of roads around Mother India), 100 new highway corridors spanning 34,600 kilometres have been planned across the length and breadth of India at the cost of USD 74 billion. The title of the highway programme builds upon the nationalist imaginary and contemporary mythology of Bharat Mata or the nation as mother goddess, where the highway corridors are presented as a garland on its mythical body. Such rapid construction of highway corridors is catalysing an authoritarian urbanism where extended urbanisation, religious nationalism, and bellicose militarism undergo a toxic amalgamation. However, these new state spaces are also sites of conflict, crisis, and contradiction that exacerbate rather than alleviate the economic dislocations of postcolonial urbanisation, which this contribution brings into critical examination.

# The Role of “the Diaspora” in Contemporary Authoritarian Urbanism in Tirana

*Arnisa Halili*

Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

Remittances are fundamental for the economy in many Western Balkan countries, including Albania. Although the money sent from “the Diaspora” is intended to improve people’s living standards, remittances have strongly affected the inequality in the country. Further, a significant amount of the remittances is invested in the construction sector, shaping not only the appearance and identity of the city, but also the decisionmaking processes.

In addition, current urban development trends in Tirana are shaped by the longing of “the Diaspora” for a home in Albania: In the last years there has been a notable shift from building a house in their hometowns or the countryside where they grew up to buying apartments in the capital city. The complex role of “the Diaspora” as financiers but at the same time consumers of the new urban projects in Tirana has been barely addressed in the academic discourse.

In my talk, I want to introduce the not necessarily intended

but significant role of “the Diaspora” in contemporary Authoritarian Urbanism in Tirana. Moreover, I would like to highlight the challenges when researching “the Diaspora” in this field. The case study must be seen symbolically, as this is not an Albanian phenomenon but an important aspect when trying to fully understand contemporary Authoritarian Urbanism against the background of “diasporic societies”.

# Political Competitions: Sporting Events and Right-wing Populism in Budapest

*Marcell Hajdu*

Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

In 2017, the Hungarian government withdrew its bid for hosting the 2024 Olympics to prevent Budapest's residents from deciding the fate of the bid in a local referendum. The demise of the "Olympic Dream" did, however, not mean an end to the development of the city as "the capital of sports". On the contrary, the hosting of international sporting events and the development of facilities necessary for these remained a central consideration of the national government up until today. Even the possibility of a new Olympic bid returned into public discourse recently. The identity forming power of sports – for participants and spectators alike – makes them a central consideration for politicians. Contemporary authoritarian regimes often rely on large sporting events to construct a more favourable image for themselves internationally, while also strengthening their domestic legitimacy. Football especially – with the rampant corruption that surrounds it, its thoroughgoing marketisation, patriarchal structures,

and the regular surfacing of nativist sentiments around it – is often intimately entangled with right-wing authoritarian politics. Contemporary Hungary is a case in point, where the predilection of the regime’s leader for the game takes an almost mythical dimension and often serves as a frame of explanation for the regime’s politics. Through the example of several sports-related urban developments from post-2010 Budapest, this contribution examines the role of sports in the current Hungarian government’s populist political articulations. Rather than focusing on the reproduction of the antagonistic relations that structure the regime’s political identity, it looks at how sports function as a nodal point connecting various communities within an overarching political project. The production of urban space plays a central role in this context due to the eminently spatial and embodied character of sports.

# A Tale of Two Cities: Vilnius and Kaunas in the National Narrative of Smetona Regime

***Oxana Gourinovitch***

International Heritage Centre

At the beginning of the “short” twentieth century, the cities of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania found themselves at the epicenter of a heritage contest among the emerging nations of Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus. In Lithuania, the authoritarian regime led by Antanas Smetona leveraged its failure to control Vilnius as a potent tool for national propaganda. This strategy was highly successful in unifying and mobilizing the society of this young state. The paper examines the propaganda technologies used to narrate the “loss of Vilnius” and their influence on the planning of a “provisional capital” in Kaunas. It also investigates the management of Vilnius’ architectural heritage after the city came into Lithuanian possession -- when Lithuania itself fell under control of a succession of Soviet, Nazi, and reinstalled Soviet regimes.

# Panel Discussion: Urban Resistance to Authoritarianism

Organizers: **Gala Nettelblatt & Matthias Naumann** BBSR,  
**Kristine Beurskens**, IfL Leipzig

Participants: **Tuba İnal Çekic**, Hertie School, **Alke Jenss**,  
Arnold-Bergstraesser-Institut Freiburg, **Lela Rekhviashvili**, IfL  
Leipzig, **Kirsten Angermann**, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar,  
**Felicitas Kübler**, Universität Klagenfurt, **Andrei Semenov**,  
Nazarbayev University, Astana

When and by what means does resistance start and what different forms can this take in the context of authoritarian urbanism? By foregrounding the forms and potentials of resistance in authoritarian urban contexts, this panel builds on a special issue on authoritarian urbanism forthcoming in the German-speaking critical urban studies journal *sub\urban*. Comprehending cities as crucial sites of authoritarian interventions, we want to focus on how cities are also central spaces for progressive movements and commonly regarded as bastions of resistance against illiberalism and authoritarianism. In doing so, we aim to reflect the diverse forms of resistance to authoritarian urbanism as well as the conditions under which it takes place.

Our aim with this panel is twofold: First, we want to point

to the complexity of urban resistance, for example in terms of its forms, actors, intentions and effects. Second, we focus on its multiple and locally-situated meanings in diverse contexts. Thus, we invite our discussants to consider: 1) How can resistance be framed in the context of authoritarian urban practices? What examples broaden our understanding of resistance to authoritarian urban politics/urbanism? 2) What potentials do critical urban theory or artistic interventions offer for understanding resistance in the context of authoritarian urbanism? 3) What are similarities and differences between resistance in autocratic contexts on the one hand, and in contexts that tend to be democratic on the other?



# The Architect's Vengeance: "The Tower of a Forgotten India"

***Nadja-Christina Schneider***

Humboldt-Universität Berlin

The 'political animated short' film *The Tower of a Forgotten India* (2019), for which Uday Berry won an award in the category of Best Fiction at the 2021 Architecture Film Festival London, tells the fictional story of an architect responsible for preserving the remains of a recently destroyed significant structure of modern architecture amidst a newly built tower in the old city of Delhi. This tower and the project to save the modernist heritage, however, increasingly comes under fire from an unnamed Hindu nationalist politician who declares it "un-Indian" and incites his supporters against it until they eventually destroy it. The architect sees not only the modern architectural heritage, but the cultural heritage of a plural and secular India threatened. His protest is not heard and so he decides to kill the right-wing politician. Uday Berry's short film explicitly refers to the destruction of the iconic Hall of Nations designed by architect Raj Rewal and structural engineer Mahendra Raj in April 2017. For many, it is emblematic of a deeply problematic approach by the Indian state to its modern architectural heritage, which for critical

observers is far more than just “thoughtless,” but rather can be understood as an expression of authoritarian urbanism. Numerous interventions by architects have so far found little support outside this community. Using the example of Berry’s short film, the presentation addresses the question what potential the medium of film has to promote critical awareness and resistance.

# The Rise of Urban Resistance Movements and Spatialized Oppression: ‘The Gezi Legacy’

*Ayşegül Can*

Istanbul Medeniyet University

Gezi Park protests were triggered by a seemingly insignificant-looking urban decision and evolved into an important right-to-the-city movement and the biggest civil unrest in the history of Turkey. The current government has been increasingly implementing controversial urban projects that aim to raise the ground rent and land speculation in Istanbul (and in the whole of Turkey), and more oppressive policies to silence any opposition that may occur against them. Gezi park protests became the tipping point for political and urban dissent and transformed the narrative for civil society in Turkey.

In this paper, I aim to analyse the effects of Gezi Protests on the urban social and resistance movements in Istanbul and the latest acquittal of all of the prominent figures from the protest-related lawsuits. To be able to do that, I employed semi-structured interviews (around 10 important people in urban resistance movements and Gezi protests), document analysis, and cyber ethnography tracing hashtags that

contained and reflected on Gezi protests in the last 7-8 years. My findings inform on the 'legacy of Gezi' and the transformation of urban resistance and movements in Istanbul and Turkey.”

# Authoritarianism and the Radical Left: Urban Guerilla and Revolutionary Antifascism in Berlin

**Günter Gassner**

Cardiff University

“Urban guerrilla aims to destroy the state apparatus of power at individual points, to suspend it in places, to destroy the myth of the omnipresence of the system and its inviolability. Urban guerrilla presupposes the organisation of an illegal apparatus, i.e. apartments, weapons, ammunition, cars, papers. [...] The Red Army Faction organises illegality as an offensive position for revolutionary intervention” (RAF 1971).

“Everything starts with Antifa, nothing ends there. [...] ‘Revolutionary’ means the orientation towards a fundamental transformation of existing living conditions” (AAB 1998).

As part of my ongoing investigation of illiberal spatial practices, in which I contrast illiberal with both liberal and anti-liberal understandings of freedom, in this paper I focus on two different urban projects that are part of the radical left. The first one is urban guerrilla warfare as promoted and

practiced by the first generation of the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) in Germany in the 1970s. The second is revolutionary antifascism as developed by the Antifaschistische Aktion/ Bundesweite Organisation (AA/BO) including the AAB in Germany in the 1990s.

What these projects share is a political horizon of self-determination, fundamental equality of people, and the inadmissibility of any form of exploitation. What they share is also a conceptualisation of revolution as a continuous process. Yet, while for the RAF this process is a series of points of destruction and terror, for the AA/BO it is a pragmatic process that does not forego maximum demands.

Based on an analysis of archival material, I explore the following questions:

- 1) What is urban about urban guerrilla and about revolutionary antifascism?
- 2) How do these projects spatially intervene in the authoritarian post-WWII city?
- 3) How can we understand the authoritarianism within processes of the radical left, i.e. how are spaces created (or not) to reach, politicise and radicalise people?

# Countering Urban Authoritarianism through Everyday Life on and around University Campuses in Delhi

***Anna Schnieder-Krüger***

Humboldt-Universität Berlin

This paper discusses everyday life on university campuses in Delhi as examples of living (well) together. The aim is to understand living (well) together as a tactic to counter the increasing polarization and separation within the Indian society, but also within the city. Both the city and the university campuses are contested spaces. The material and structural changes in both spaces can be understood as an ongoing negotiation process on memories, ideas of belonging and ownership.

Focusing on the constant interplay between the physical and structural space of the campus and students' everyday engagement with these spaces the paper wants to add a new perspective to the increasing polarized views on meaning(s) and role(s) of students, especially in relation to the city "around".

Therefore, this paper understands campus spaces as cities within a city as well as hubs of social debate. Public

university campus spaces are a central venue of the negotiation of societal and political debates in India. As spaces for dissent are shirking, questions on citizenship, belonging, and freedom of speech were and are not only debated on the streets, but especially in campus spaces. The aim is to question the dichotomy between those two spaces – the campus and the city.



# Urban Authoritarianism: Mediation, Resilience, and Accelerated Transformations in Srinagar City

*Arshi Javaid*

Humboldt-Universität Berlin

The paper looks at “Urban Authoritarianism, Resilience, and Accelerated Transformations in Srinagar City.” The essence of the old city forms an integral part of how the city dwellers identify with their past and present. The transformations bring in a contesting production of history and memory, promoted by a touristic gaze and development initiatives that contradict the community’s history and memory. The new production is enabled through photography, film, and recorded music and is taken across by the explosion of the internet.

This paper looks at how these contesting narratives not only stake the past but also alter the imagination of the future of the community and the city. The paper further investigates how this production works as a seductive call for creative forgetting of the differential meanings of the old city, which is not only a spatially bounded geographical cluster but also a cluster of social and political networks of varying intensity. The paper will also look at how these

reproductions are designed for memory fatigue and historical and cultural saturation and how the tensions are mediated.

# City as Stage: Performative Body and the Authoritarian City

*Ahmadreza Hakiminejad & Mahsa Alami Fariman*

Coventry University, UK

In a cold day in December 2017, on the curbs of Enghelab Street in central Tehran, a defiant woman climbs a utility box, takes her hijab off, ties it to a stick and waves it to the crowd. Her eyes stared soulless towards her city, waving her white scarf in silence. The performer reclaimed the street to convert it into a theatrical stage with its astonished audience. This simple yet courageous bodily phenomenon tending to reclaim the city became a symbolic act of protest against the compulsory hijab.

In light of the ongoing Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran – ignited by death in custody of Kurdish-Iranian woman Mahsa Jina Amini for ‘improper hijab’ in September 2022 – performance as act of resistance has become a semiotic way of protest in the face of the authoritarian city. Enacting the factual moments of oppression, suffering and even joy, Iranian urban women rebel against a city that tends to control the public body – and create a novel space of theatrical disobedience. In this paper, we aim to critically explore and theorise these moments of performative

resistance in the public urban spaces through the lenses of feminist geographies, 'the right to the city' and politics of space. In this context, the authoritarian city is produced by a) entities associated with a politico-ideological power fuelled by religious fanaticism and b) autocratic urban forms.





UNESCO-Platz

anseestraße

Jakobstraße

Brühl

Marstallstraße

Goetheplatz

Teichplatz

8

Herderplatz

Kegeipl.

Gelehtstraße

Elsfeld

9

Rittergasse

Kaufstraße

Burgpl.

4

3

Marktstraße

7

13

Platz der Demokratie

6

Frauenplan

Puschkinstraße

straße

Gropiusstraße

Steubenstraße

12

5

Seifengasse

11

Ackerwand

Hegelstraße

Hegelstraße

Wielandplatz

Beethovenpl.

Humboldtstraße

Marienstraße

Amalienstraße

Theodor-Hagen-Weg

Knecht-Straße

Rudolf-B

Bauhausstraße

1

Belvederer Allee

2

Ilim

Ilim

Über dem Kegele...

Le

Ilm

Pa

de

## **Main Conference Venues:**

- 1) Conference:** Oberlichtsaal (Room 213)  
Geschwister-Scholl-Str. 8A, 99425 Weimar
- 2) Wine Reception:** Institute for European Urban Studies,  
Belvederer Allee 5, 99425 Weimar
- 3) Conference Dinner:** Pause, Theaterplatz 2, 99423 Weimar,  
—> *entrance from the back door (Sophienstiftsplatz)*
- 4) Start of guided tour:** Theaterplatz 2, 99423 Weimar

## **Food Recommendations:**

- 5) Brotklappe:** Frauenplan 8, 99423 Weimar  
*(Sandwiches, sweets, coffee)*
- 6) Fritz Mitte:** Schützengasse 8, 99423 Weimar  
*(Fries, curry sausage)*
- 7) Phô Cô:** Marktstraße 1, 99423 Weimar  
*(Vietnamese food)*
- 8) Damas Weimar:** Jakobstraße 11, 99423 Weimar  
*(Syrian food)*
- 9) Jelo Weimar:** Mostgasse, Kaufstraße 26, 99423 Weimar  
*(Regional organic food and soups)*
- 10) Sächsischer Hof Weimar:** Eisfeld 12, 99423 Weimar  
*(Thuringian food)*
- 11) Gretchens Restaurant:** Seifengasse 8, 99423 Weimar  
*(International food, organic)*
- 12) Teehaus Teuner:** Steubenstraße 12, 99423 Weimar  
*(Tea shop)*
- 13) Restaurant Laura Adama:** Markt 21, 99423 Weimar  
*(West african food)*

