



URBAN FUTURES: IMAGINATIONS, ANTICIPATIONS, AND POLITICS

International Conference

Ljubljana, May 8–10, 2023



URBAN
FUTURES



Book of Abstracts

International Conference

URBAN FUTURES: IMAGINATIONS, ANTICIPATIONS, AND POLITICS

Organizers:

Saša Poljak Istenič, ZRC SAZU, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology, Ljubljana

Valentina Gulin Zrnić, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb

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The conference is a part of the bilateral project Urban Futures: Imagining and Activating Possibilities in Unsettled Times funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (J6-2578) and Croatian Science Foundation (IPS-2020-01-7010).

Ljubljana – Zagreb, 2023

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URBAN FUTURES: IMAGINATIONS, ANTICIPATIONS, AND POLITICS

The conference stems from the urban ethnological/cultural anthropological project *Urban Futures: Imagining and Activating Possibilities in Unsettled Times*, dedicated to researching future-making in Croatian and Slovenian cities. Future-making refers to a comprehensive understanding of elements combined in imagining, anticipating, and perceiving futures – cognitively, discursively, and affectively – as well as in modalities of everyday life and engagement that contain a particular relationship towards futures. “Future” is a novel object of study in ethnological/cultural anthropological terms and is considered culturally and contextually dependent. The project sets the stage for researching multiple urban futures – desired and undesired, official and alternative, supported and resisted, contested, challenged, invisible, “silenced,” or “stolen.”

The conference focuses on issues identified as crucial for the future of the studied cities/towns – their politics, development, and urban living. It brings together project researchers and invited speakers who will contribute their theoretical and research insights, enabling this cross-national project to establish a wider network for comparative ethnological/cultural anthropological (urban) futures research. The presentations will offer insights into imagining sustainable, island, post-industrial, and post-earthquake futures and the analyses of European strategies, civil initiatives, and individual engagements in future-making.

Saša Poljak Istenič and Valentina Gulin Zrnić, project leaders

The project and the conference are funded by Slovenian Research Agency (J6-2578) and Croatian Science Foundation (IPS-2020-01-7010).

More about the project, researchers, activities, and results: www.citymaking.eu



CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

MONDAY, MAY 8, 2023

17h City Tour, 1001 story of Trubarjeva Street in Ljubljana
DINNER

TUESDAY, MAY 9, 2023

9:30 Welcome & Introduction

10:00–11:00 Keynote
Daniel Knight
Thumbelina's Fury: Viable Futures in a World in Polycrisis

Moderator: Jasna Čapo

BREAK

11:15–12:15 Sustainable Futures I
Moderator: Tihana Rubić

Anna Horolets, Alexandra Schwell, Saša Poljak Istenič

Care for the Future: Innovation and Maintenance in Urban Gardening

Saša Poljak Istenič, Tatiana Bajuk Senčar

Bees as Symbols of Sustainable Urban Futures

BREAK

12:30–13:30 Sustainable Futures II
Moderator: Nina Vodopivec

Alexandra Schwell

When the Lights Go Out: Mobilizing for the Blackout

Marina Blagaić Bergman, Valentina Gulin Zrnić

Thinking Future with Energy: The Case Study of the Island Town of Hvar

LUNCH

15:30–17:00

European Strategies and Initiatives
Moderator: Mirna Tkalčić Simetić

Tatiana Bajuk Senčar

European Dimensions of Urban Future-Making

Jaro Veselinovič, Nevena Škrbić Alempijević

Future-Making in the European Capitals of Culture: Rijeka and Nova Gorica Compared

Miha Kozorog

The Continual City of the Future and Its Neighbour(s)

DINNER

WEDNESDAY, MAY 10, 2023

9:30–10:30

Keynote

Felix Ringel

Expectations, Endurance, and Entropy: Urban Futures in the Late Capitalist City

Moderator: Tatiana Bajuk Senčar

10:30–11:00

Island futures

Moderator: Miha Kozorog

Jasna Čapo

Co-creating a Destination to Benefit All: How to Deal with Over-Tourism in Hvar?

BREAK

11:15–12:15

Postindustrial futures

Moderator: Jaro Veselinovič

Tihana Rubić

Placing Industrial Futures, Urban Transformations, and (Post)Industrial Stumblings: The Case of Gojlo and Kutina

Nina Vodopivec

Maribor is the Future

BREAK

12:30–13:30

Future after the breaking point

Moderator: Marina Blagaić Bergman

Mirna Tkalčić Simetić

Living among Cracks and Fissures: Partial “Routinization” of Chronic Crisis in the Post-Earthquake Center of the City of Zagreb

Katja Hrobat Virloget

How to Build the Future when Captured by the Past? Collective Identities, Memories, and Traumas along the Slovenian-Italian Border

LUNCH

15:30–17.30

Round Table

Moderators: Valentina Gulin Zrnić and Saša Poljak Istenič

On Methodology and Comparison in Urban Futures Research

17.30

Conference Closing

ABSTRACTS

TATIANA BAJUK SENČAR

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European Dimensions of Urban Future-Making

This discussion will examine how cities became an important site for imagining the future in EU policy and examine the shifting roles attributed to cities in the development of the European Union. With the aid of select EU policy documents, the analysis will briefly map out how cities became objects of policy-making, focusing on the changing significance ascribed to cities and the futures that policymakers have strived to achieve – or avoid. This brief genealogy spans the period from 1997 to the present, including the Ljubljana Agreement approved in 2021 – the latest of a series of EU Urban Agenda documents defining the direction of the urban policy measures coordinated at the EU level. Employing this genealogy as a discursive framework of EU's urban policy for presenting case studies of EU programs in Slovenia, this analysis will depict the extent to which resilience and future-proofing have emerged as key elements of EU urban policy-making at the level of discourse and practice.

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Thinking Future with Energy: The Case Study of the Island Town of Hvar

The energy transition to renewables has become an urgent and explicit goal in many documents, agendas, and guidelines issued by the EU in recent years. This presentation focuses on how this transition plays out locally in Croatia, namely in the town of Hvar. This ancient Mediterranean town, nowadays characterized by massive summer tourism, is situated on the sunniest Croatian island with more than 2700 hours of sun per year, thus making it perfect for solar energy production. Over the past three years, we have ethnographically studied the emergence of narratives, activities, and the official implementation of solar energy use. Our aim has been to understand the contexts in the lives of individuals and communities that have facilitated the evolution of ideas and decisions for actions towards an energy transition – both in the case of private spaces (homes), as well as in professional and public environments (including apartments and streets). Our research has brought to the fore an interplay among local island, inter-island, and European initiatives, highlighting the participation of island inhabitants, communities, associations, and political-administrative bodies in energy transition processes. Two basic argumentations are at play at various levels based on climate neutral and/or economic reasoning. The energy transition is an important framework for envisioning an economically and environmentally sustainable future in the long term as well as a politically potent but contested topic in the context of possible development scenarios for the town of Hvar.

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Co-creating a Destination to Benefit All: How to Deal with Over-Tourism in Hvar?

In the last decade, the little town of Hvar on the eponymous island, one of the “gems” of Croatian tourism, has become notorious for mass party tourism. It exceeds the carrying capacity of the town in summer months and causes numerous problems for the local population. The presentation proposes to analyze efforts to cope with over-tourism and its consequences by institutional and individual stakeholders: the municipal government, the local tourist office, private stakeholders (local hotel chain, individual entrepreneurs in the tourist industry), and residents themselves (most of whom also have economic stakes in the industry). In addition to being inefficient in enforcing the law and regulations, the municipality has not managed tourism in any way. A strategic document on sustainable tourist development until 2030 commissioned in 2019 is ambivalent and has not become the charter for managing tourism. The tourist office attempts to strengthen the cultural tourism sector and market/brand the town as a cultural heritage and outdoor destination. Neither the municipality nor the tourist office sees the residents’ (locals’) well-being as the starting point and goal of whatever tourism direction is taken. As for individual stakeholders (big and small), they pursue the economic growth strategy without worrying about social responsibility. It will be argued that the clash of these different viewpoints and logics and the lack of co-creation of sustainable and responsible tourism by all stakeholders may lead to festering resentment among residents, intra-communal conflicts, and with time to the decline of the only economic activity in the town.

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Care for the Future: Innovation and Maintenance in Urban Gardening

Urban gardening plays a major role in how sustainable futures are imagined and envisaged in many cities. However, focusing on its innovative potential can tend to obscure the logics at play in urban gardening. We draw upon ethnographic fieldwork at the now-dissolving community garden *Onkraj Gradbišča* in Ljubljana. It is an illustrative case of a socially innovative future-making practice that is currently coming to an end after over 13 years of operation marked by precarity, temporariness, affect, and resilience. We found that its founders and organizers initially prioritized the social and symbolic aspects of urban gardening, following the conceptualization of *Onkraj Gradbišča* as primarily a social and cultural innovation. Yet, as a material site as well as the place where human and more-than-human relations evolve, the garden called for maintenance and care practices, which the organizers had to engage in to make it last. We argue that the case of *Onkraj Gradbišča* brings to the fore the importance of maintenance labor for sustainable future-making practices in cities.

KATJA HROBAT VIRLOGET

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How to Build the Future When Captured by the Past? Collective Identities, Memories, and Traumas along the Slovenian-Italian Border

At the Slovenian-Italian border, for decades a contested multi-ethnic space, the past does not pass. More than anywhere else, the words of William Faulkner seem true: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." The unprocessed traumatic past still haunts the present and the future. That is discernible in the contemporary problem of naming the part of Istria in Slovenia, reflecting its unstable, schizophrenic regional identity. It will be argued that one of the strong reasons for this undefined regional identity lies in the "Istrian exodus" after WW II, which drastically changed the ethnic, cultural, and social face of Istria, especially in the towns. The silenced memories of the "Istrian exodus" also indicate who is excluded from the creation of the past, thus also the present and future in Istria. The paper will reflect on new materials gathered in an applied project entitled My Story from Silence. The project presents a challenging interdisciplinary collaboration between ethnology and psychotherapy. Its aim was to collect and process traumatic personal stories connected to the difficult historical periods along the Slovenian-Italian border, such as Fascism, the Istrian exodus, WWII, and Nazism. Five workshops were organized, and people sent their written personal stories. First, reflections from the workshops will be presented. The first observations show how interethnic cohabitation heavily influenced people's life. It is interesting to observe how different ethnic or migrant groups create different traumatic narratives, which form the base of their collective identity – including feelings of foreignness, anger, sadness, victimhood, or competition.

DANIEL KNIGHT

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Thumbelina's Fury: Viable Futures in a World in Polycrisis

I offer some points of entry to thinking about viable futures through three 'scenes' – a classroom of undergraduate students enrolled in the module "Crisis and Rupture," an activist group campaigning for Scottish independence, and Greeks living in chronic crisis a decade after the financial collapse. These scenes provoke critique of temporal depth in imagining viable futures, the technological platforms facilitating the actualization of futures, and the intergenerational psychosocial impacts of life in political, economic, and ecological (poly)crisis. Taking inspiration from Michel Serres' "Thumbelina" and ideas on entropic energy "hot spots," the stories can be read as bifurcating and merging timelines, existential quandaries of captivity/entrapment and escape(ism), and perspectives on the need for immediate or delayed action. In sum, we see how planetary and epochal indeterminacies are engaged through temporalities and technologies of the very small, close, and individual – and what this might mean for rethinking the future of a world in an entangled polycrisis.

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The Continual City of the Future and Its Neighbour(s)

Since its foundation in 1947, the Slovenian town of Nova Gorica has been appointed the role of the city of the future. As a beacon of the future, its privileged focus has been the neighboring town of Gorizia in Italy. In its early days, Nova Gorica was the showroom of the building of Yugoslav socialism; in the newly independent Slovenia, it was a model of capitalist growth designed for entertainment industries for the wealthier neighbor; today, it performs a mission of promoting cultural diversity and green economies as the future of a trans-border conurbation in Europe of regions. One of the most visible contemporary projects in this regard is the European Capital of Culture, which Nova Gorica and Gorizia will host in 2025. This paper will elaborate on this project's future-making agendas, contextualize them with the previous Nova Gorica's forecasting of the future (and related failures), and point at some paradoxes of regionalization that are in some neighboring areas problematized as too narrowly focused on the two towns.

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Bees as Symbols of Sustainable Urban Futures

Beekeeping has long been a traditional practice in Slovenia with deep roots in Slovenia's rural culture, with elements of this practice being accorded the status of intangible cultural heritage. However, in recent years, bees and beekeeping have also been integral to future-looking visions and strategies. This is prevalent primarily in urban areas such as Slovenia's capital city of Ljubljana, a city with an established history of beekeeping as well as a growing, increasingly popular group of urban beekeepers. In this presentation, we trace the links between Slovenias' beekeeping heritage, the rise and popularity of urban beekeeping in Ljubljana, and the ways that the well-being of bees has become the criterion and foundation for green urban policies and projects. To do so, we examine the establishment of Ljubljana's municipal initiative Bee Path / Čebelja *pot* and its expansion within a European framework – both as part of Ljubljana's tenure as the Green Capital of Europe in 2016 as well as the EU URBACT BeePathNet and BeePathNet Reloaded projects. We depict how these green urban initiatives also overlapped with more broad-based efforts to promote the significance of bees for a sustainable future at a global scale, such as Slovenia's successful proposal of World Bee Day at the UN. We portray how promoting the well-being of bees operates as an effective future-proofing strategy that hinges on the role of bees as pollinators and is linked to broader debates on biodiversity, food self-sufficiency, and green (urban) futures.

FELIX RINGEL

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Expectations, Endurance and Entropy: Urban Futures in the Late Capitalist City

There is a contradiction in contemporary relations to the future in the potentially late capitalist city. On the one hand, futures abound. Wherever we look, new ideas of better futures emerge, circulate, and arguably have an effect. On the other hand, these futures neither seem to convince people much nor ever fully materialize. They wither away as quickly as they appear. The lost “handrails,” as Anna Tsing put it, for imagining the city of the future contribute to a sense of crisis that puts into question urban life and its futures more generally. What, indeed, can we expect of the late capitalist city? What about, referring to Tsing one more time, the possibility of life in capitalist – urban – ruins? In this talk, I will focus on the distinct expectations that emerge in my different fieldsites. In each context, specific, though constantly changing, expectations play a role in my interlocutors’ attempts to maintain life in their home cities and keep their cities, if you will, socially, materially, spatially, and temporally together. They variously entail notions of stability, sociality, and sustainability that look at the same time old-fashioned and radically new, conservative and progressive. In each context, these expectations are embedded in specific sets of historical experiences that are deployed when framing the possibility of urban futures as not in crisis. Simultaneously, they are at the core of enduring contemporary urban and other crises. This presentation is an attempt to take them more seriously in our analyses despite their elusive nature.

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Placing Industrial Futures, Urban Transformations, and (Post)Industrial Stumblings: The Case of Gojlo and Kutina

The presentation examines two locations and their spatial, temporal, material, and social transformations throughout the 20th century. Gojlo and Kutina act as two locations close geographically and by “fate” – created as planned cities/settlements for industry needs and by the exhaustion of existing natural resources. After the depletion of resources, in the crisis of raw materials, and in the transformations of political and economic systems, these locations both experience spatial and social stagnation and degradation. The research questions are focused on the problematization of the dynamic relationship between space/place and time and on top-down urban planning. What thoughts about the future(s) shaped those two cities/settlements during their creation, golden age, and decline? As their industrial and postindustrial temporalities are not simultaneous, is there any cause-and-effect relationship that shaped their pre-industrial, industrial, and postindustrial experience of space and time? What might be a potential for their future(s)? The above will be critically observed through concepts and fields of (post)industrial city, place-making, urban anthropology, anthropology of the future, multiple temporalities, and industrial monoculture.

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When the Lights Go Out: Mobilizing for the Blackout

State and private “blackout experts” have recently been mushrooming in Austria. In 2022, the Austrian state of Carinthia launched a blackout preparation campaign asking citizens to prepare for “Day X, when the lights go out.” Other states, the army, the interior and defense ministries, and others have also invented separate blackout campaigns, running simulations and training. A Europe-wide blackout, they warn, will bring society to the brink of collapse within a few days due to failure of supply, communication, or transport. The paper explores how the concept of urgency informs government blackout disaster scenarios and public campaigns. Urgency is an essential element of securitization processes that present imagined threats as imminent. As a political practice, it is crucial to mobilize insecurities and fears. The urgency of a problem is formulated in the present but contains projections for a potentially apocalyptic future scenario. At the same time, the invocation of urgency is linked to the hope of a better future if disaster can be averted in the present. By examining the social imaginary of the blackout and its actors, the paper links the concept of urgency to the study of emotions and temporality. It analyses how Austrian state agencies aim to convince citizens of the blackout preparation’s urgency and how they use urgency to create a shared responsibility between the state and citizens. The paper argues that the state combines state, national, and individual security in emotional politics, engaging citizens in an emotional regime that reifies the citizen-state relationship through securitization.

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Living among Cracks and Fissures: Partial “Routinization” of Chronic Crisis in the Post-Earthquake Center of the City of Zagreb

On March 22, 2020, a strong earthquake hit the city of Zagreb, killing one person and causing great material damage. The ruination of the city center started long before the earthquake, but it manifested through expanding cracks and fissures in the post-earthquake period of a painfully slow recovery process. The goal of the recovery process, which is inherently future-oriented, is articulated as the successful material reconstruction of damaged buildings in the indeterminate future. Following Daniel Knight’s conceptualization of “routinization of crisis” (2021), this presentation aims to point to the tendency of many city center dwellers to establish “permanent ways of dealing with life in perpetual crisis” (ibid.). Based on insights obtained through ethnographic research and analysis of media and social network narratives, I propose that, although this tendency does exist, it is never fully achieved by most of its inhabitants, primarily because it is being interrupted by their encounters with post-earthquake materialities (cracks, fissures, scaffolding, and fences), making them acutely aware of political production of such threatening conditions at the same time. This approach to routinization is based on its conception as an open-ended and changeable process, highly dependent on configurations of post-earthquake materialities as well as the meanings, emotions, and affects derived from encounters with them in the course of a slow and inefficient recovery process. The aim of this presentation is to answer the following question: in which ways do encounters with post-earthquake materialities affect city center dwellers’ abilities to become familiar with the post-earthquake crisis of governance, their evaluations of the risks of living in the city center, their levels of trust in the state-led recovery process, and their relationships towards the future?

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Future-Making in European Capitals of Culture: Rijeka and Nova Gorica Compared

This paper deals with the future-making dimension of the European Capital of Culture initiative based on two case studies: Rijeka, which held the title in 2020, and Nova Gorica/Gorizia, which will be the designated ECOC in 2025. Based on the discourse analysis of relevant documents related to the ECOC projects (bid books, cultural strategies, developmental and urban sustainability strategies), the authors examine different ways in which future imaginaries of the city-to-be are devised, conceptualized, and implemented. That process occurs within the legislative and terminological framework of the EU integration project on the one hand and within the context of local needs, objectives, and limitations on the other. The research focuses on why the city chooses to become an ECOC as well as the goals it aims to achieve through implementing the overall program and the related infrastructural projects. Special emphasis is placed on defining the ECOC legacy and how it addresses different urban temporalities. The paper also highlights the role that notions of Europe and the European futures play in the culture-based and future-oriented transformation of the city. Several topics and concepts are discussed regarding Europe as defined in the ECOCs: European values; the question of European cultures, cultural diversity, and intercultural dialogue; the issue of participation and the formation of European citizens; the concept of the border(les)s; and movement.

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Maribor is the Future

The slogan *Maribor is the future* was coined by two artists shortly before the start of the European Capital of Culture year in Maribor (2012). It was chosen for the title because it reflects well the futures I encountered in the city. The slogan captures ambiguity. It is a provocation that pokes fun at the city grappling with the future as well as a determination that contains emancipatory potential and optimism. The slogan was later adopted for various types of cooperation in the city. In our research on urban futures, Maribor was chosen as a case of a deindustrialized city. It is the second-largest city in Slovenia and the region's administrative capital in search of a new identity and future direction. The city has high unemployment and poverty rates and is also one of Slovenia's fastest-aging cities. Many of its young residents decide to emigrate or find work in Austria, commuting daily. On the other hand, those who choose to stay in Maribor want to, as one cultural producer put it, "do something with the city." I address the concept of the "right to the city" (Lefebvre) to explore collective efforts aimed at creating a different kind of (post-capitalist) future. I am interested in how collective actions and activities construct the future and how the future is imagined differently. The article focuses primarily on the participatory practices of self-organized city assemblies and participatory budgets. The focus on the future is considered a part of multitemporality and – through the political economy perspective – in conjunction with studies of post-socialism and deindustrialization.

