

"Smart tourism. Consuming and preserving urban heritage and culture in an age of ubiquitous mediation"

Panel organized by the ECREA TWG Media & the City at the conference
Visuality 2017: Tourism vs Urban Heritage in a Creative City
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Panel Description: The panel seeks to bring together a range of perspectives and approaches to studying the intersection of tourism and cultural heritage in mediated urban environments.

Chair: Seija Ridell, University of Tampere

Panelists: Elena Trubina, Ural Federal University - Ekaterinburg, Russia; Zlatan Krajina, University of Zagreb; Tetyana Lokot, Dublin city University; Valentina Turrini & Simone Tosoni, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – Milan, Italy.

Abstracts

Scales of place-promotion and remembrance tourism: capitalizing on the past (Elena Trubina)

In this presentation, I draw upon recent work in the sociology of mobility, the anthropology of cultural change, and human geography to analyze the ways in which particular attempts of place-promotion on the part of urban authorities relate to the aggregate processes of socio-cultural change in the enlarged European Union. I examine this by looking at how the municipal workers, the locals and the tourists in Latvia discuss these processes, and how they interpret and articulate them. I am specifically interested in how these articulations are 'scaled', and whether European influences, urban development agendas and individual identities are in harmony or in conflict with one another. Furthermore, I explore how a growing popularity of the "best practices" of neoliberalized urban development affects both the EU's common framework of meaning and development policies and understanding of the present and the future of the localities. By drawing on forty interviews with the visitors and the locals in Kuldiga conducted in July 2016 in Kuldiga and analysis of media materials, I unpack those factors, which emerge as particularly important for supplying the localities and their boosters with a sense of distinctiveness.

Placing the urban: the use of urban imagery in Balkanist representations of Croatia in International Guidebooks (Zlatan Krajina)

The paper, as part of an ongoing larger project on politics of representation in tourism industry, addresses the ways in which images of the city were used in select guidebooks, produced for international audiences, on Croatia, during 2003-2013, a decade marking the start of the country's EU membership negotiation process and its EU entry. Drawing from cultural geography, urban and cultural studies, this paper looks at discursive

attempts by these guidebooks to locate Croatia on the Euro-centric map, where Europe's West remains encoded as the origin of the modern and civilised world and the Balkans (an ambiguous space in-between West and East) continues to be imagined as a society in permanent transition, the outcome of which is assessed by the West. Focusing on how the representation of Croatia, itself consisting of former Austro-Habsburg, borderline Ottoman, and Venetian/Italian territories and heritage, changed during the ten-year period, I demonstrate that the semiotic mapping of the country in international guidebooks matched the country's 'path' from the messy, war-torn Balkans into the 'united Europe'. References to war and familiar (unvaried) Balkan lawlessness were gradually replaced with references to street smart lifestyles and Central European architectural heritage. During that transformation, as Croatia discursively 'travelled' from the Balkan peninsula into Central Europe, whilst remaining in its place, images of cities were given a central function, to invoke a classical contrast to rural spaces and cultures, and thus to emphasise Croatia's Europe's orientation (accompanied by images of youngsters in Zagreb's city centre), whereas the countryside remained the site of pristine beauty and pre-modern, Balkan 'ways of life'.

Urban murals as protest tourism attractions: mediated public art in post-Euromaidan Kyiv (Tetyana Lokot)

In the wake of the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, the urban public art scene exploded with new and repurposed signs, symbols and slogans. Many cultural objects, including posters, graffiti, stickers, digital art, were created, circulated and consumed by protest participants and observers (Lishchyns'ka 2015). As in any modern urban environment, such production and consumption of art was heavily mediated – in fact, mediation was often an intrinsic part of the artistic objects themselves, imbuing them with additional meaning and significance.

This paper focuses on the urban murals that started blossoming on the walls of multiple buildings in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, in the post-Euromaidan period. As an urban art form, murals are generally considered less "illicit" than graffiti, as they tend to get the public's and sometimes even the authorities' blessing, and yet they also manage to capture the "hopes and fears, struggles and aspirations" of the communities which create and house them (Rolston 1992, Cockcroft and Barnet-Sánchez 1993, Golden et al. 2002). In Kyiv, the murals began as a spontaneous practice, but post-protest, morphed into a concerted effort to populate blank walls of decaying apartment blocks around the city with meaningful art, reflecting on the turbulent political, social and cultural changes in the country. The mural movement grew to encompass a slew of international artists and drew worldwide fascination, becoming one of Kyiv's main attractions from the "new history" period.

The paper considers how this mediated public art form transforms the visual imaginary of Kyiv for the city's visitors and inhabitants from a "treasury of old European history" or a "post-Soviet shabby chic" into a "modern European post-protest space". It focuses on how the murals attempt to redefine the values and ideas embedded in Kyiv's urban fabric and how they may contest the mainstream media narratives of post-Euromaidan Ukraine with their own themes of rebirth and regeneration (Sharp et al. 2005). Artefacts such as the murals themselves, the stories behind them, their media coverage, interactive online maps aggregating their locations, and the documentation of visits to the murals in visual social media such as Instagram, combine into a compelling narrative of how mediated urban art plays a key role in renegotiating symbolic representations of power, history and citizenship.

The paper also critically examines the emerging concept of "protest tourism" as a cultural phenomenon and reflects on the role urban murals and other mediated public art in the city play in public space consumption (Visconti et al. 2010) as performed by tourists and the city's inhabitants.

Alone in the City: The Solo Female Travel Mediated Experience (Valentina Turrini & Simone Tosoni)

Unlocking the texture of modern tourism is a complex task. It entails the understanding of patterns of behaviour adopted by travellers, movements in mediated urban environments as well as social and personal factors leading to the decisions about which places to visit, how to get there, when and with whom.

Media play a key role in all these aspects: from the process of programming and organizing the travel experience, to the actual fruition of cultural heritage and tourist attractions. Under this regard, ubiquitous mediation leads to the convergence of digital and physical domains, altering the perception of time, place and distance from home (D. Wang, D. R. Fesenmaier, 2013).

Based on a virtual ethnographic approach to online spaces dedicated to solo travelling, and on qualitative interviews of participants, this research explores how online resources, mobile devices, social platforms and location-based apps fit into the tourist practices of solo travellers, and of women in particular.

The study of this specific topic provides an opportunity to understand how media are embedded into the practices performed by tourists in situations where they can't (or don't want) to rely on peer support. This is especially relevant if we zoom in on women's travel experiences, whose mobility may be constrained by their gendered location as females (G. Reynolds, G. Letherby, 2009).

Our approach, inspired by practice theories (E. Shove, M. Pantzar, M. Watson, 2012), will address the specific set of competences and material artefacts required by solo traveling, as well as on the symbolic meaning attributed to the experience.

In particular, we will focus on the technological mediation of the forms of socialization with locals, of the contact (or disconnection) with families or friends at home, and on the recognition of "authenticity" of the tourist experience as a criterion for its valorisation.

As it will be shown, these three focusing points converge in demonstrating how the use of mobile devices and other media within the practices of solo female tourists concur to blur the three stages of

travel experience (pre-travel, on-site, and post-travel) by shortening the first and third stages, and extending the actual phase of cultural heritage and tourist attractions consumption.