

Centering the Periphery: Creative Marginality and Radical Activism in Neoliberal Cities Budapest, May 2-3



What chance does the cultural and social periphery stand facing the power of the hegemonic center? This international workshop addresses a series of questions that have preoccupied revolutionary, anarchistic, postcolonial and radical thought and praxis through the lens of urban grassroots initiatives operating to redefine the place of the margins. A recurring theme in urban activism and political sociology considers the convoluted relations between center and periphery in dualistic terms. However, center-periphery dynamics do not necessarily adhere to one predetermined scenario. The major dilemma regarding such dynamics can be stated as follows: Does the center dictate agendas that pattern peripheral reaction, or could the periphery successfully set its own goals against the violence of centrality?

Organized by students and faculty from the CEU Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology in cooperation with Golya Cooperative Pub and Community House the workshop focuses on the day-to-day practices of social and cultural activists within marginalized communities and peripheral cultures from 11 cities in Europe and the Middle East. We will look into unique social projects designed as communal, political and artistic endeavors, in which fundamental ideological inconsistencies and organizational conflicts require prompt and concrete solutions. The discussion will be structured as a comparative survey of urban interventions engaging refugees, ethnic and gender minorities, housing projects, anarcho-feminism, and environmentalism.

WORKSHOP PROGRAM

MAY 1:

19.00 Informal get-together. Meeting at [Golya](#) Cooperative Pub and Community House (1083 Budapest, Bókay János street 34.)

MAY 2:

[CEU](#) (1051, Budapest, Nádor street 9. Monument Building, 1st floor, room 102 Popper room)

This day consists of fifteen-minute presentations by the invited organizations. We kindly ask you to bring some visual material. Tell us briefly about the history of your place/organization; the organizational structure (distribution of work/profit/responsibility); political ideologies and visions, which are important in your everyday activity; the discrepancies you encounter between your existing structures and between your political visions. Please also try to reflect on the themes given in the titles of your sections.

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- 9.30** Coffee and snacks
- 10.00** Introduction and opening remarks by Daniel Monterescu (CEU)
Keynote speaker Saul Newman (Goldsmiths, University of London)
“Postanarchism and Space: Revolutionary Fantasies and Autonomous Zones”
- 11.45** Coffee break and snacks
- 12.00** Participant Presentations 1: *Radical place-making in the city*
Chair: Prem Kumar Rajaram (CEU)
- Michaela Pixová ([Klinika](#))
Viktor Kis ([Gólya](#))
Tatjana Maksimovic ([Social Center Octobar](#))
Adrián Despoisse ([Cyclonomia](#))
Fanya Haybach ([Gagarin:Nova](#))
- 13.30** Lunch
- 14.45** Participant Presentations 2: *Infrastructures of urban activism*
Chair: Ágnes Gagyí (New Europe College)
- Carlos López Sánchez ([Calafou, Colonia Ecoindustrial Postcapitalista](#))
- Lisa Rochlitzer ([Mietshauser Syndikat](#))
Vincent Liegey ([Cargonomia](#))
Katarzyna Czarnota ([Rozbrat](#))
Monica Basbous ([Beirut Madinati](#))
- 16.30** Coffee Break
- 16.45** Participant Presentations 3: *Art and cultural resistance* (Chair: Saul Newman)
Márton Gosztonyi, Lulu Schnee ([Auróra](#))
Csaba Mata ([Labor](#))
Roy Fabian ([Zimmer](#))
Taiseer Khatib ([Freedom Theater](#))
- 19.00** Dinner in [Castro](#) (1083 Budapest, Madach Imre Square 3.)

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MAY 3:

[Gólya](#) Cooperative Pub and Community House (1083 Budapest, Bókay János street 34)

This day consists of three different workshop sessions, which are focusing on three different challenges of the everyday work of cooperatives and social enterprises. For every session the participants are divided into three groups, which are discussing for 45 minutes. It is followed by a 45 minutes moderated plenary, where the groups share their results with the others. In every session the participants are working together with different organizations than in the previous session. The main goal is to find similarities and differences between the organizations in terms of dilemmas, solutions and visions.

(Feel free to deviate from the questions if your own organizational logic overwrites them, try to present your proven methods and principles, or your most pressing dilemmas, prepare for comparing yourself to other participants, and try to think about these topics both in the present state, and also how you want to do things in the future, or how you would do things if there were no constraints or set-backs - and please reflect to the differences between the two states.)

For external participants [registration](#) is required.

9.30 Coffee and snacks

10.00 Opening remarks by Jean-Louis Fabiani (CEU)
Keynote speaker Agnes Gagy (New Europe College)
“External Integration as Internal Force: Peripheral Projects of Emancipation in a Holistic Perspective”

11.45 Coffee break snacks

12.00 *Ideology, Theory and Practice* – Timeline, milestones in external and internal dynamics of the organizations.
Moderator: Viktor Kis (Gólya)

Questions:

How the politics of your organization changed in line time and space?

What are the main political, economic changes which you think influenced your organization?

Every group will draw a timeline, on which the history of the groups will be represented, during the plenary these histories will be compared.

13.30 Lunch

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14.45 *Division of Labour, Organizational Strategies and Mobilization* – Funding, membership, co-operative decision making
Moderator: Gergő Birtalan (Gólya)

Questions:

How does one become a member (what is the official process), what are the duties and responsibilities (required work, availability, responsibility for the common property, other members, loyalty, etc.) and rights/benefits of a member?

How the organization is funded financially, what are the principles taken into consideration in this question (private, state sponsorship, contribution of members from other sources, products or services sold to the market, etc.)?

What is the basis and method for distributing income within the organization (how does one receive payments)?

What are the bodies and structures for organizing work, how is work categorized, recognized & rewarded (for example: physical and intellectual work, etc.)?

What is the main body for making decisions, how does it operate (voting system, leadership, the way a member of the organization can influence decisions)?

Is there a long- or mid-term strategy for the organization, what are its key elements (how does the organization plan to make their goals come true)?

16.15 Coffee Break

16.30 *Embeddedness in the City*
Moderators: Janka Hrckova (CEU), Márton Szarvas (CEU)

Questions:

How do you see your position in the local community and the urban space (do you engage in community organizing, cover the issues of gentrification, affordable housing, deal with any neighborhood conflicts)? How do you cooperate with other activist initiatives and other actors and how do you negotiate your differences?

18.00 Concluding plenary with Alexandra Kowalski (CEU)

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Keynote Speeches

Postanarchism and Space: revolutionary fantasies and autonomous zones

Saul Newman (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Social theory has in recent times taken a spatial turn. In the case of political theory, discussions about the spatial dimensions and imaginaries of politics have drawn on political geography in order to investigate the contours of pluralism, the public space, democratic agonism, social movements, and the post-national spaces of globalisation. Here the question of planning – the planning of cities, urban landscapes, autonomous spaces, aesthetic communities and so on – inevitably arises. Indeed, politics and urban planning have always been intimately connected, whether we think of utopian imaginaries of Fourier or Saint-Simon, with their rationally planned communities, or the way that the planning of modern cities and metropolises has always been haunted by the spectre of insurrection and dissent. Planning practices and discourses may be seen as a sublimation of politics, as well as a crystallization of conflict. However, if space is seen as a framework for dominant political and economic interests, my aim here is to explore the ways in which this hegemonic space is challenged, contested and reconfigured, as well as the fantasies and desires invested in political spaces. It is in this context that I would like to consider the question of space for radical politics, and, in particular, for that most heretical of all radical political traditions - anarchism. After showing that anarchism is more than simply the anarchic disruption of space – indeed, anarchist thought and politics suggests an alternative construction of space - I will go on to explore the way in which social and political spaces are imagined in revolutionary discourse. Taking a psychoanalytic approach as a critical point of departure here, I will go on to develop – via Castoriadis and others – a distinctly postanarchist conception of political space based around the project of autonomy. This will have direct consequences, as I will show, for an alternative conception of planning practice.

Saul Newman (*PhD UNSW 1998*) is a Professor of Political Theory at Goldsmiths, University of London. His research is in continental political thought and contemporary radical political theory. He is the author of: *From Bakunin to Lacan* (Lexington Books 2001); *Power and Politics in Poststructuralist Thought* (Routledge 2005); *Unstable Universalities* (MUP 2007); *Politics Most Unusual: Violence, Sovereignty and Democracy in the War on Terror* (Palgrave 2008); *The Politics of Postanarchism* (EUP 2010); *Max Stirner* (Palgrave 2011); *Agamben and the Politics of Human Rights* (with John Lechte; EUP 2013); *Postanarchism* (Polity Press 2015).

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External integration as internal force: peripheral projects of emancipation in a holistic perspective

Agnes Gagyi (Eszterházy Károly College and New Europe College)

The talk draws on examples from Hungarian and Romanian activist groups' experience from before and after the regime change, to discuss how symbolic, economic and political relations between "center" and "periphery" are constitutive to their formation. I approach the question of autonomous agency/potential of the periphery from a holistic perspective characteristic to the world-systems tradition, which conceives of center and periphery as complementary positions within the same systemic interaction. From that background, I conceive effects of "domination" or "co-optation" not vis-à-vis actions or paradigms of the center, but relative to the systemic logic that produces centers and peripheries. The talk offers that context for discussing recent attention to Europe's peripheries in the context of present crises, as well as the recent wave of reproductive and subsistence activism, struggling with daily aspects of systemic dependence and emancipative efforts.

Agnes Gagyi is a social movement researcher, looking at social movements in East Central Europe in a long-term, global historical perspective. She is adjunct professor at Eszterházy Károly College, Eger, Hungary, and member of the Budapest-based Working Group for Public Sociology "Helyzet". Presently she works on a postdoctoral project at New Europe College, Bucharest, entitled "Waves of economic crisis and political mobilization for democracy in dependent economies: A comparative historical analysis of contemporary Hungarian and Romanian movements in global context".