

Editorial

# Cultural Values, Heritage and Memories as Assets for Building Urban Territorial Identities

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Urban culture has undergone significant transformations under the impact of globalization in the last decades. These changes have generated differentiated challenges for various territorial identities. Besides new or revived economic activities, the dynamics of socio-economic transformations in urban areas, often in the framework of restructuring and regeneration processes, have meant an effervescence of cultural activities. With more accelerated socioeconomic dynamics, the role of culture in urban development has grown progressively. In most cities, there can be noticed a sedimentation of a cultural sector that has improved creativity, tourism and, eventually, local economy and urban image. For certain urban areas, multiculturalism and intercultural communication has led to surpassing cultural differences and exchanging cultural values and artifacts [1]. In this parcourse, societies are undergoing an identity change or revival and the concept of culture becomes related to material and immaterial heritage, place attachment and identity in urban policies. For instance, the industrial heritage of a place is both a material by-product of the past as well as a social construction [2], with cultural tourism now meaning more than a visit to historic places but also discovering the identity of territories and participation in shaping a positive image of a city on a global scale [3]. On the other side, these developments also include processes such as gentrification and touristification, which in turn change local identities [4]. Culture and identity are never entirely separable in the sense that beliefs, practices, and other components, signifying the respective culture, must also serve as an identity function for those who participate in the culture, and, at the same time, no group can be expected to be culturally homogeneous [5]. The communication revolution introduces new forms in the process of changing faiths, values, and traditions in the modern world [6].

The contributions in this volume reflect these broader themes and underpin their meaning with practical case studies. Overall, the articles collected here have a strong focus on Central and Eastern Europe, including eight articles from this part of the continent, with one additional article from the UK and one from Russia. This Special Issue thereby might reflect the radical changes in this area since 1990 and their impact on relationship between culture, heritage, memories, and urban spaces.

At the center of the articles are people from the cultural sector, inhabitants, tourists, museum curators, and urbanists alike, underlining the diverse groups of people identified by the authors as relevant in the field of culture, memories, and identities. Interconnected, most of the articles follow a qualitative research approach often applying mixed methods, such as stakeholder interviews and questionnaires. Moreover, some of the authors also back up their research with reference to visual arts, mapping, and ethnographic approaches, in that way making this Special Issue rich in the use of different methodological tools and approaches.



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This choice of methods is obviously linked to the different topics selected by the authors. Thematically, this Special Issue spans a wide arc across different fields and aspects connected to the role of culture, heritage, and identities. The vast majority of these contributions address the urban space as a concrete space wherein these subjects are played out, either through more site-specific aspects [7–9] or as whole town ensembles and ‘heritagescapes’ [10–13]. The remaining contributions take a broader perspective on wider cultural aspects [14], the cultural sector itself [15], and specific heritage institutions [16].

Many of these contributions look at the connection of an (often) Soviet/socialist past with a post-Soviet/socialist future, discussing aspects of built environment and especially its interrelation to memory and identities [7,10–13]. All these contributions pose the question of how the material or immaterial elements of a bygone era still resonate in contemporary urban spaces and what kind of relevance these elements have, also in the context of shaping alternative narratives of urban past, present, and future [11]. Additionally, some contributions mark out the present and future potentials of culture, memories, and identities for tourism [8,12,16].

The articles of this Special Issue are part of a larger theoretical discourse on the meanings of place for urban territorial development. Place/territorial identities, with their powerful representations (i.e., in the form of material cultural landscapes themselves or as visual imagery) [17–21], based on heritage and memory [22–25], are manifested through development processes that strongly connect the past to the present [26]. In addition, place meanings are tied to development practices based on people’s place attachments [27,28]. Therefore, both territorial identities and place attachments should become more relevant when reshaping the research agenda and development policies [29,30]. Culture through any of its components is a big player in this context, as the contributions in this Special Issue demonstrate.

Overall, this Special Issue shows the variety of approaches when mapping out the connections between urban spaces and culture, identities, and memories. These questions seem to be especially relevant in times of political, economic, and social changes and therefore need to be re-explored and re-assessed constantly by research.

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