

CITIES OF MEMORIES: AERIAL ATTACKS OF WWII AS LOCALIZED LIEUX DE MEMOIRE

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During the last decades the popular concept of lieux de memoire has inspired historical research with the knowledge about the broadening consensus of public expectations on how to define historical truth in large communities with few urban centres. If the overwhelming orientation on common values of society and nationhood provided a narrow specter of limited offers of identification with the past, the sudden impulse of catastrophes and national challenges of war and destruction more often reduced it to even less authorized narratives. But on the local level and in the urban sphere of distinctiveness of cities the experience and historicization of aerial attacks in WWII resulted in very different ascriptions of meaning and created a new variety of war and post-war Cities of Memory. Due to national history and its common narratives on friendships, hostilities and heroic bravery of heroes the historical narratives of WWII throughout Europe display astonishing fundamental alignments. The devastated cities, especially those, that were hit by severe aerial attacks, were not the foremost beneficiaries of these narratives of strength. They showed a public and a private space of wounded life-lines of the city, of crippled streets and of cut-off memories in devastated landmarks in what can truly be described the ruins of memory. Up to now urban historical research has fairly neglected the dissonant voices of national and local memories of WWII. We have yet to consider, that there arose thousands upon thousands differing levels of urban memories, split up in the public memory of unexpected destructions and long lasting liberations of the enemy. Even in Germany with its wide range of heavily destroyed cities there can be observed a distinctive imbalance of public memory on devastating aerial attacks between cities of equal regional situation, - none of them aware on how to define their historical distance and more over their alienation from the fascist wartime regime. The history of war in European cities was a multitude of local experiences in very different levels of how to localize a lieux de memoire of devastated urban space aside from those nationalistic and the overall dominating anti-fascist views of WWII. This given, we have the chance to analyze in which ways the processes of identity-construction were based on the experience of destruction and revival, whilst being aware of its impact on the transnational level. It becomes clear, that this is a conceptual problem of European urban history as a whole, raising two major questions: If we are interested to know about the distinction of memory-production, how can we define similarities of local experience throughout the destruction-zone between northern England and southern Ukraine? How to evaluate the interaction of public and elitist memory? Furthermore the public representation and political bargain on these aspects has to be considered. The panel tries to define some of the main sources of qualitative analysis to trace down the process of memory-production and public perception in wartime and post-war urban life. Topics are the perception of local reconstruction-policy in local memory, the results of war-propaganda on the historicization of cultural heritage and City-reconstruction, the changes of urban self-preception, the changing images of integrity and modernity of post-war cities and the boom of urban memory since the 1980s, which is based on a specific relationship and interaction of City-representation and remembrance of aerial attacks. It is planned to widen up the comparative perspective of this main section with a following call of papers.