

Wintersemester 2023/2024

GIB Lecture Series

„Räume des Krieges“ / “Spaces of War”

Dienstag 12.12.2023 | 16.15–17.45 Uhr | H8 (Geo II)

Refugees and war migrants as actors of urban changes

Valeria Lazarenko

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The role of cities in supporting and addressing local and global challenges has been steadily increasing, highlighting their particular role in defining and developing different futures. Recent debates in urban studies on „who or what owns the future?“ (Urry, 2016) and which actors have the power to decide it, have highlighted the idea that refugees and forced migrants are the new actors of urban change and urban futures. (Collier, 2012; Darling, 2017; Field, Tiwari and Mookherjee, 2020; Huss, 2022). Within the growing role of citizens and civil organisations in developing desirable futures at different scales (Ramos et al., 2019; Peach and Smith, 2022), refugee communities can create new spaces in host cities and for host communities, and thus engage in challenging existing power relations in cities. Herein the experiences of Ukrainian refugees in Germany, with their translocal perspective, can be an exemplary case.

Refugee interventions in public space range from changing the toponymy of host cities (which can be either artistic interventions or official renaming) to creating new spaces of solidarity and claiming public space. Drawing on the concepts of agency and everyday practices that shape non-linear urban futures, I would like to discuss and conceptualise the different ways in which migrants might transform urban spaces in arrival cities. The potential of migrants to become agents of change in urban communities beyond the metropolis will be another point of discussion. The talk will also include personal experiences of Ukrainian refugees and touch on the emotional geographies of displacement.

Valeria Lazarenko holds a PhD in Psychology. She is a Postdoctoral researcher at the Urban Futures at Risk research group at Georg-Simmel Centre for Metropolitan Studies, Humboldt University of Berlin. Former Philipp Schwarz research fellow at Leibniz-Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS).

Dr. Lazarenko studied social psychology at the Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University, and completed her PhD thesis (2020) at the Institute for Social and Political Psychology in Kyiv, Ukraine. In her research she examined the construction of spatial identities of internally displaced people in Ukraine. Former guest researcher at the Arctic University of Norway and the University of Bayreuth. In 2021-2022 she was associated with Kyiv-based independent think tank Cedos, where she led the project on the impact of full-scale war on the civilians in Ukraine.

Her research interests include experiences of forced migration, integration, and transnational relations. Her current research project explores how German migration policies for supporting Ukrainian refugees impact their decision-making, and how refugees' experiences of going through bureaucratic procedures contribute to the feeling of (non-) belonging and permanent temporality.



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