

>> Harald Binder (Vienna / Lviv): The Center for Urban History of East Central Europe as a Gift to Lviv for its 750th anniversary

>> Richard Rodger (Leicester): In Praise of Urban History

>> Andreas Kappeler (Vienna): Some Thoughts on Urban History in Ukraine and East Central Europe

Harald Binder:

"The Center for Urban History of East Central Europe as a Gift to Lviv for its 750th anniversary"

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I am standing here in front of you today it is first of all my duty to answer one very simple and quite obvious question: How does a Swiss-Austrian come up with the idea of founding an institute for urban history in Ukraine? We historians are known for our inclination to dig into the past in search of the origin of the structures governing the present. I believe we can apply this principle to our own individual lives. The "Ukrainian history" of my life began twelve years ago when I came to Lviv for the first time with the aim of doing research for my dissertation. My way of experiencing Lviv was certainly influenced by my interest in the legacy of the Habsburg period in this city. However, my relationship with Lviv was never based on nostalgia. What makes a city exciting to experience is indeed not so much the omnipresent physical monuments of the past, but the way urban history is used to construct local identities and how it is transformed in the ongoing process of social and cultural change. In a city like Lviv, not only do different time periods and different perceptions of cultural belonging clash in everyday life. Tensions between tradition and modernity and contrasting loyalties to East and West combine to produce a creative energy characteristic for this city. Among historians, above all the multinational past arouses interest. A growing number of books, articles and conferences give evidence of the fact that in this respect Lviv has come to be a paradigm of an East Central European city. What is clearly missing, however, is a center of research and documentation with a respectable academic profile dedicated to the history of Lviv up to the present day.

"Institutions matter"

Institutions have a great impact on the way a field of interest is being treated and represented in public. Scholars come and go, conferences are open and conclude. Institutions, however, remain. If a research and documentation Center like the one we are planning exists, many sources of information and artefacts which would otherwise be lost will be preserved for the future. Moreover, due to its permanent character, an institution from the day of its creation will write its own history. In the best case scenario, such an institution could develop a new and highly regarded academic school of which Lviv has had several in its past. A center as I imagine our institute should be will create space for people to meet and exchange thoughts and ideas about related questions and topics. When I chose the location for the institute and devised its interior design it was my aim to create such an atmosphere of communication and creativity. I hope that many of you will join us at Bohomoltsia street after this inauguration ceremony.

I would like now to share a second line of thought with you, one that really is self-evident:

A Center for Lviv history must be in Lviv

As is well known to you, due to the complex past of Lviv a number of states and communities have laid claim to the history of this city. Namely, a number of Polish circles and institutions have shown a serious interest in historical research and documentation on the city of Lviv. We should particularly mention the International Cultural Center in Cracow but also a number of semi-academic institutions which focus on Lviv as a symbol of a faded image of the Polish past. It goes without saying that the best websites on the city have been produced in Poland. The history of Lviv, however, first of all belongs to the city itself, and I hope that by creating this institute I can make a contribution in this respect. This hope has nothing to do with nationalism. On the contrary, our center shall be free from ideological borders, open towards all of the cultural forces in history that together contributed to this extraordinary city. Establishing an institute in the place where the history took place demands no further justification.

Urban history transcends internal borders

One idea has been especially important to me from the moment I began working seriously toward the founding of this institute. Cities like Lviv have always been places of encounter between different ethnic groups in various cultural fields. Together these groups created the special cultural mixture of an East Central European city. Once we perceive the city in this way, we must question what has often been defined as "ours" and as the foreign "other" in national discourses. From this perspective, groups or individuals previously labelled as "other" now become part of a common cultural identity as contributors to the city that I love and to which I have

chosen to belong. In this context Jewish history deserves a special mention. The huge impact of the Jews of Lviv on the cultural, political, and economic development of the city has yet to be studied. I do not question the relevance of a national historiography, especially in this country with its tortured recent past; nevertheless, I would like to underline that historical entities like cities, studied with the interdisciplinary approach characteristic for urban history, can open up new ways of thinking and rewarding perspectives on the past and on the present.

Urban history transcends external borders

Every city has its unmistakable individuality and at the same time is part of larger cultural and historical phenomena. Historically, cities have never existed in isolation. They have always been part of a larger network of mobile ideas, people, and goods. The urban way of life and all the problems associated with it is a common European experience. Urban history is European history. In this way too the field of urban history has the potential to expand our perspectives and to transcend artificial borders.. It is a key aim of the newly created Center to work with the many fine institutions focused on urban history in Western Europe and America. We would like to be a research and documentation center not only for Lviv but for the space we call East Central Europe. In the name "Center for the Urban History of East Central Europe" lies a great challenge for the future. At some point we hope to be a place where scholars from Kiev, Warsaw, Vilnius, Prague and Budapest meet to exchange ideas about the city.

The Center shall be part of the institutional network of Lviv and strengthen local academic culture

Despite the international dimension of the institute and the field of research it is engaged in, I would like to stress that the Center will not be an alien body within the structure of academic institutions in Lviv. Rather, it will work closely with other institutions in promoting the field of urban studies. The conditions for such an enterprise are favourable. First of all, the city itself with its impressive architectural fabric will always inspire visitors and locals to think about urban history and culture. Among the academic institutions active in the field I would like to mention the Polytechnic University with its long tradition of studying the history of architecture and urban planning, and certainly the publications and conferences organized by the university and Academy of Science. The seminar program "modern urban culture and identities in 'old' cities", which has been conducted by the Center for MA Studies at the university, further contributed to establishing urban studies in Lviv. Additionally, I would like to mention the publishing house "Centr Europy" and the journal *Ī*, both of which are also part of an active local cultural network focusing on the past and present of the city. Together with these institutions, we

will create an image of Lviv as a city not only of physical beauty but also as a center for urban studies in East Central Europe.

Let me conclude my inaugural speech by returning to the story of my life. Sometimes, one who comes from outside has more freedom to dream than those rooted in the locality and confronted with the hardships of everyday life. The enormous change which I have experienced here during the past 12 years has made me a believer in the future of this city. My contribution to this future is the "Center for Urban History of East Central Europe", which I hereby donate to the city of Lviv for its 750th anniversary. Gifts always affect those who give and those who receive. Gifts are products of imagination and dreams and it is my aim to include you into my dream. I will therefore end with a phrase by the well-known Brazilian theologian Don Hélder Camara:

When one dreams alone it is merely a dream. When people dream together it is the beginning of a new reality.

Thank you.

* * *

Richard Rodger:

"In Praise of Urban History"

Urban History in the 21st C

It would be easy to identify urban issues in the contemporary city and say:

'*This* is the Agenda for urban historians.' Pollution, congestion, crime, inner city decay, riots and concerns about public order, overcrowding, immigration and the development of ethnic ghettos and inner city no-go areas - these assault us on our TV screens and the pages of our daily newspapers.

It would be easy to say, as EU and World organisations do so constantly, '*The world's urban population will grow from 2.86 billion in 2000 to 4.98 billion by 2030.*'

So we should study the cities.

And despite the plagues and malnutrition that affect much of the globe the gap between birth and death rates in all parts of the world contributes to

the rapid rise of urban populations throughout the world, not least in parts of eastern and southern Europe.

'The world's URBAN growth rate is projected at 1.8% p.a.; the rural growth rate is projected at 0.1% p.a.'

The URBAN DIMENSION is omnipresent in our lives.

It would be simple to point out that an urban way of life – we can quarrel about the term 'urban' – is it 2500 people, or 5000, or is it about functionality, as Weber, Wirth and others have claimed – has become the majority experience of world populations.

But this urban population expansion, though less dramatic, is also a European phenomenon, as the countries of eastern and south-eastern Europe become increasingly urbanized. It is not surprising to see Britain on 90% OR Sweden as 83% urbanized, but for Belarus 70%, Ukraine 68%, Bulgaria 67%, Poland 63%, and Ireland 59% the result has been a distribution that has been radically altered in a short space of time.

For a number of European countries the majority experience is soon to become an urban one, with implications for the cultural roots and the construction of a national identity. This rapid influx of rural migrants means urban regulations and procedures are poorly understood, and renegotiated. The conventions by which a society abides and which provides a measure of order and stability, is questioned.

Recently I even had the audacity to suggest that the production of multi-volumed urban histories of Norwegian towns and cities – Bergen, Mandal, Trondheim, Tromsø, not to mention Oslo – was partly a response to the new phenomenon that most Norwegians had been born in towns or cities and had become disconnected with the rural. Urban histories were an understandable response to inform and educate *first generation urban* Norwegians about city life and the historical context of their life and work.

It would be easy to point out the economic contribution of cities, and legitimate the study of the urban as a result.

Urban-based economic activities account for more than 50% of GDP in all countries, and up to 80% in more urbanized countries in Latin America, and more in Europe.

Large US cities suffered most in recent recession

Cities such as Los Angeles, New York and Chicago all lost more than 100,000 jobs between March 2001 and November 2004.

I live in a city that is 30% Asian; it will be 50% Asian by 2020. Leicester is extolled by the city council and the national government as one of multiculturalism. This is a national delusion. The fact that the distribution of the population shows that there is a degree of residential overlap does

not mean integration. The crude statistics of the social scientist miss the subtlety of separatism. The 'pillarisation' that I like to use to describe this process draws on the same religious divides of 16th and 17th C Dutch society and, crudely, means that Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims co-exist in separate – even self-contained - religious, educational, social, and cultural worlds.

Understanding this is critical to the nature of civil society. If voluntary organisations and charities cannot command widespread support amongst the citizenry, and if politicians do not act for the common good but for special interests, this will produce a reaction. It seems unnecessary to expand this point in a country that has witnessed an Orange Revolution.

So there is a contemporary dimension to the legitimate historical study of towns and cities. But since this is more concerned with policy, that is, with the future, it is mainly the arena of the economist, sociologist, and psychologist.

Actually, if I had just one wish it would be that every University based project in medicine, science, technology, and social sciences would have to have at least one historian – and preferably an urban historian - to ensure that they were well informed about the past. There isn't much that is new in policy that historians have not encountered in the past.

This brings me to the 2nd part of what I want to say about Urban History.

Why Study Urban History?

- 1 **Relevance**
- 2 **Towns/Cities as agents of change**
- 3 **Integrates other scholarly studies into a coherent system**
- 4 **Students and the future of the urban past**

1. Can we live without understanding urban history in a modern world that is overwhelmingly urban? I've argued that as our modern world stands we neglect a study of the urban, the contemporary urban and the recent urban, at our peril. There is a policy dimension that is particularly urgent in our contemporary world, and we need a great deal more historical research on towns and cities to inform that.

Ancient, medieval and early modern history are no less important, and not just because they take a longer run view of urban development. Knowing the past informs the present. All knowledge of 'place' enriches the individual, the family, the civil society. Shared knowledge, collective memories, and a sense of the local have been shown to provide the social, political and economic stability on which prosperity and tolerance can be founded. Literally, ignorance is a foundation for friction. And in a world that is increasingly urban, knowledge of shared traditions, origins, and values is a contributory force for social harmony. The study and dissemination of urban history contributes to that process. So, for example, the study of medieval rituals enriches the present, not just for its own sake, but also because it contributes to our 'rootedness' – our sense of place. Our festivals have meaning, pedigree: they are not just contrived and superficial commercial opportunities.

2. What constitutes the 'urban' in urban history? Presumably it is not just a population threshold or density, or fort or market place functions. These may 'define' urban for administrative purposes but they are criteria which convey little of the local character and dynamics of an urban settlement. So *size, density and function* are not sufficient conditions for the term 'urban.'

Settlements, of course, are unique; there is only one Lviv, and in this respect each place is '*sui generis*' - in its own category. However, the uniqueness of place is not a sufficient condition in explaining the character of a town or city. So while there are particular *physical features* which distinguish a town, this, too, is an *insufficient condition*.

Presumably, then, *what is distinctive* about an 'urban' place has something to do with the *interaction of different variables*, in different concentrations, and in differing temporal and spatial contexts. This must

be the case otherwise cities would be *homogenised, mass produced, standardised*, save for their unique physical features. Birmingham in the UK would be like Birmingham, Alabama. Even where the *ideology was universal* and the physical setting virtually identical, as in the Soviet system, or the plains states of the American Mid-west, then standardised plans on a geometric basis with functionalist architecture and very similar materials could not eliminate hierarchies of social status, housing, and consumption patterns. *Urban development could not be cloned.*

In medieval Europe, with its Italian and Hanseatic city states, the nature of urban settlement was self-contained and self-determined even though these cities were heavily reliant on external trading relations. Transport costs insulated settlements on the European periphery rendering them, too, *de facto* independent states, even though they formed part of larger political confederations. Royal charters and trading privileges conveyed a distinctive urban status to highly specific areas within essentially agrarian communities. Not surprisingly chroniclers and later historians of these urban settlements focused on the town or city as the principal unit of their descriptive accounts. The particular place was attractive as a unit of study; the generic was not. Town rivalries and boosterism together legitimated the study of a specific place; the quest for an identity, both individual and civic, concentrated attention on urban settlements, as though they each were the *centre of the universe* - which it was for local inhabitants.

However, towns and cities were *not the benign receptacle* of urban change; often, they were its initiator. More precisely, 'Towns and cities function as a prism which refracts or 'bends' the constituent beams of art, science, technology, markets, and social relationships' (R. Rodger, 'Urban history: prospect and retrospect', *Urban History*, 19, 1992, 7). I have used this scientific analogy elsewhere of towns as *information superhighways* = the high frequency fibre optic cables of earlier centuries that facilitated commerce, technological development, and were the locus of a European enlightenment that broke out of restrictive systems of authority and belief; *magic* gave way to rational thought mostly through the agency of the town.

Or to use *Braudel's scientific* metaphor, 'Towns are like electrical transformers. They increase tension, accelerate the rhythm of exchange and ceaselessly stir up men's lives.' Towns were 'agents of modernization' and disproportionately expanded markets within their immediate orbit. In southern Europe, particularly, but also with references to the territories bordering the North Sea, one reason for the *seismic impact of Braudel's work* (*Capitalism and Material Life 1400-1800*) was that it rendered formerly disparate accounts of rural communities, villages and adjacent towns into a coherent economic and social system. Braudel's conclusion that 'Toute ville est, se veut un monde à part' (Every town is and wishes

to be a separate world) is a powerful statement of the independent, if somewhat indefinite, urban variable.

This has also been presented in relation to a Marxist analysis of British industrial cities. Koditschek

'... acknowledges the inadequacy of reducing the (urban) dimension of modernization to a mere by-product of capitalist relationships ... and recognizes a more complex historical process in which urbanization operates, *at least partly independently*, through an environmental logic of its own.' (T. Koditschek, *Class Formation and Urban Industrial Society: Bradford 1750-1850* (Cambridge 1990), 80-1, n.4)

In this sense, towns were and *remain the hot-house of modernity*. Ideas, inventions, and the human imagination prospered largely in such places and contributed to the modern world.

According to Aristotle: 'Civilisation advances through the cities and through trade.'

To know the modern world of towns and cities, we have to understand the previous world of towns and cities. This may seem very obvious, and you may wonder if this is not what all historians do. But to be concerned with this complicated amalgam of economic, social, cultural, spatial, political and religious variables, each one of which is mutating, none of which is necessarily constant, is both difficult and frustrating.

3. What is 'urban history'?

My predecessor as Professor of Urban History at the University of Leicester, H J Dyos, tried to get to the essence of the 'what is urban history' question in the following way:

'... the authentic measure of urban history is the degree to which it is concerned directly and generically with cities themselves and not with the historical events and tendencies that have been *purely incidental* to them (H. J. Dyos 1974)

... it is the study of the characteristically symbiotic relationships of their (cities') different characteristics, of the ways in which their components fitted together or impinged on other things that distinguishes urban historians from those who may be said merely to be passing through their territory

So, urban history,

'...differs from local history to the extent that it is concerned with a more pervasive historical process, and from municipal history in being concerned with vastly more than certain types of local government; it differs from social history in its quite specific

commitment to explaining the development of both the urban milieu and its uses, and from sociology in its dominant concern with explaining the urban past; (differences with economic history, geography and other areas - business history, transport, town planning - in not being concerned with specific forms of activity."

The danger with this approach is that it implies that all fields of human endeavour are relevant, and since the urban is the majority experience of us all then everything and anything goes. Urban historians, it would seem, will be congenitally promiscuous. They are bound, by their very nature, to lack focus, drawn as they are to multi-disciplinary explanations of urban phenomena.

Recently in a study of population growth in 200 20th C Scottish towns and cities, I discovered some 10 or so major patterns, within which there were quite wide variants.

These trajectories of urban growth show that even within a society with common legal, education, religious, cultural, and administrative structures there are immense variations. Explaining them has to be based on a number of shared characteristics, and others that are more specific. Unravelling that isn't straightforward, however; not to do so is to over simplify the urban process.

The future of the urban past:

Urban History and Local History

I need to be very careful here. I know how treasured local history is here, as in many countries. Yet we must avoid the obsessive particularities of place, and the acquisition of ever more details. Collection is an important first step – but it is *only* a first step.

If the study and teaching of urban history is to advance, then it must build out of local studies of towns and cities *to embrace comparative urban history*. Upon the particular, the general needs to be constructed. Indeed, this is the only way to make progress, for the purely local study is unlikely to have meaning beyond the immediate orbit of local people and a *deeper understanding of the fundamental processes* that have shaped town and city development will stall.

This is not to say that there is a single unifying theory of urban development, but that in researching and teaching on such topics as resources, markets, privileges and jurisdictions, power and authority, symbol and representation, mobility and migration, inclusiveness concerning gender, race and systems of belief, public policy, and relations between public spheres and private ones, urban principles and relationships, networks, styles of living and household structures are

explored in ways that subsequently inform comparisons between towns and cities throughout Europe from classical times to the modern day.

The future of the urban past:

4. connecting history

(i) to younger generations whose major focus is that of an urban mentality – it is what they have grown up with. Historical studies cannot neglect foreign policy and domestic issues at a national level; but connecting history with youth culture through urban issues that resonate with them directly will rekindle interest in history.

(ii) to the general public. There is a public history that is fascinated with local history, neighbourhoods, identities and the town. TV programmes, internet sites, and personal computing have created a new opportunity. City history can respond to and feed off this groundswell on interest. This public history provides many opportunities – to write copy for historic sites, tourist walking routes, individual buildings and points of historical interest. Connecting the citizens – who by definition are urban – to their history is in itself worthwhile and academic historians can demonstrate best practice and enrich the leisure time generally. I'm not saying that this alone will reverse the descent noted by Robert Putnam's into today's TV couch potatoes and resurrect civil society on its own – but nor will any single policy do that.

To summarise

There are a number of reasons why we should focus on urban history as an area of study.

1. The world is increasingly urban; urban history helps us understand contemporary issues
2. Historical studies of towns and cities enable us to understand where we have been, and how our urban problems have developed.
3. The urban is not only a legitimate unit of analysis – it is an essential one since urban settlements in all periods have been the major locus of new ideas. How tradition adapts to modernity can best be studied in an urban setting; how conservative and radical are mediated is located overwhelmingly in an urban setting.
4. Urban history offers new ways of connecting to students, developing projects and theses that excite them and are relevant to their interests.

But at its core, is a view that the urban – that is the town or city – itself contributes independently to the way a place evolves. Like a team captain, the sum of the whole can be greater than the individual parts. So with the urban, the individual factors may be the subject of the labour, social, cultural, economic, political, family, legal, demographic, architectural, business, and other adjectival historian, but without the *context of the urban these can be studies conducted in a vacuum. Knowing how and when to blend these different elements in different combinations in different locations is what urban historians do, and do well.*

* * *

Andreas Kappeler:

“Some Thoughts on Urban History in Ukraine and East Central Europe”

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues

I bring you best wishes from the University of Vienna on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of Lviv. These wishes reflect the long-time connection between Vienna and Lviv and the universities of the two cities. The *Center for Urban History of East Central Europe*, which is being inaugurated today, should also be seen as a part of this connection.

The Swiss historian Dr. Harald Binder, who lives in Vienna, is financing and directing the Center. He has long specialized in Galician history and is the author of the seminal work, *Galizien in Wien. Parteien, Wahlen,*

Fraktionen und Abgeordnete im Übergang zur Massenpolitik, which was published last year by the Austrian Academy of Science.

Dr. Binder's creation of this private foundation to fund the Center is unique. By my willingness to serve as a member of the foundation's board, I have signalled that the Viennese academic institutions of which I am part—the Institute for Eastern European History of the University and the Historical Commission of the Austrian Academy of Science—also support the Center.

Lviv is the ideal location for a research center on the urban history of East Central Europe. As a city that has for centuries been a cultural, economic, and political hub for different regions of Europe, it continues to play an important role as mediator between Central and Eastern Europe.

Ukrainian and Polish historians have produced numerous valuable volumes on the urban history of Galicia and Ukraine. This city's history has again become the subject of academic research. However, over the last six decades there have been hindrances standing in the way of an all-encompassing urban history. During the Soviet era, emphasis was placed on economics and class struggle. In the post-Soviet period the dominant national historiography has not always paid enough attention to the multi-ethnic character of Ukrainian cities.

The *Center for Urban History of East Central Europe* in Lviv will initially focus on this city's history taking advantage of the archives and libraries here as well as researchers who are already working on the topic. There is popular interest here in the history of the local built environment. The Center will not, however, limit its activities to Lviv.

I will name five key words for possible directions in research at the Center. They are applicable both for Lviv and for other cities in East Central Europe.

1. Polyethnicity

Until the Second World War, different ethnic and religious groups lived next to each other and with one another in the cities of East Central Europe. Their interactions were mostly those of good neighbours who influenced one another although sometimes there was also conflict. Lviv where Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, Germans, Armenians, Greeks, Italians, and other ethnic religious groups lived is really a model for poly-ethnicity and multi-religiosity in the history of East Central Europe, indeed of all Europe. An important peculiarity in the cities not only of Galicia and Ukraine but also all of East Central Europe is that together with the dominant ethno-religious groups, the Jews played a significant role in the cultural and economic life of the city until the Second World War. I would welcome if the Center were to give new impulse to the study of Jewish history in Ukraine.

2. Transnationalism

I believe that urban history research should not be limited just to the multi-religious or poly-ethnic character of the city but should also take a trans-national perspective. This means that not only specific ethno-religious groups and their changing relations but also the city as public space, as economic organism, as legal body and as representation of urban life should be of primary interest. This perspective will expand the ethnic and religious identity of the urban dweller as Ukrainian, Pole and Jew through his identity as "Lemberger", "Cracower", etc. for whom the common good of the city is more important than the particular interest of the individual groups. Here we can raise the issue of an urban middle class and an urban civil society.

In this way methodological directions like collective memory and sites of memory could be employed to incorporate both competing memories of ethno-religious groups as well as the collective memory of the urban residents as a whole. Finally it would be useful to pay more attention to the history of urban women

3. Internationalism

Each city is part of a broad network through which economic and cultural exchange occurs. These connections cross political borders and are expression of the fact that urban history need not be seen only in a national historical framework but is also an important part of a new European history. It can make a contribution to the unification of Europe. This is particularly important because the idea of European history and a collective European memory is still relatively weak.

The internationalization of the academic approach has to reflect the international world-view of the researchers. That means collaboration among urban historians from different countries, in the case of Lviv, not only Ukrainians, Poles, Israelis, and Austrians but also Hungarians, Romanians, Germans, Armenians and others. The *Center for Urban History of East Central Europe* has the possibility of becoming a forum for international collaboration.

4. Comparison

The comparative approach is closely connected to the international approach to urban history. Comparisons allow us to recognize similarities and special characteristics of a city so we are better able to locate the history of a city like Lviv within the history of East Central Europe and Europe. The thesis that a specific type of East Central European city exists is implicit in the name *Center for Urban History of East Central Europe*. The Center should take the opportunity to develop this thesis in its future comparative projects.

5. Cooperation

The new founded Center for Urban History of East Central Europe can only be successful if it cooperates closely with people and institutions in Lviv in

particular and Ukraine in general. I hope that the Center finds a place in the academic landscape of Lviv and Ukraine and that it is accepted by local institution as a partner. Thus I appeal to all of you to support Dr. Binder and the *Center for Urban History of East Central Europe*.