

Workshop “Nuclear Heritage in East-Central Europe”



Call for Papers

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“Hidden in the middle of dark forests [is] a unique depot [with] (d)ozens of nuclear warheads capable... [of destroying] half of Western Europe (...) between the years 1968 and 1990 not one citizen of the former Czechoslovakia was able to enter the site.”

Today the former depot has been renovated and renamed the “Atommuzeum Depot Javor 51”, in the hopes of attracting visitors who will explore the daunting history of the site. Further up north in the Czech Republic former uranium mines were added to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites within the Erzgebirge/Krušnohoří mining cultural landscape in 2019. Both examples illustrate an emerging tendency to treat decommissioned or defunct nuclear sites and related industrial and technological complexes as heritage sites. The heritagization trend is not a Czech phenomenon but rather a global one; it has also been ongoing in different parts of East-Central Europe as part of larger political, social and environmental transformations after the end of the Cold War.

Contemporary scholars have termed these processes of re-appropriation, re-use and re-shaping of defunct or decommissioned sites of nuclear production as nuclear cultural heritage (Rindzevičiūtė 2022, 2019). Nuclear heritage sites and landscapes share many commonalities with other post-industrial sites, although the questions of contamination and the "legacy" of pollution have other long-term dimensions and weight (Holtorf and Högberg 2018). With this workshop we would like to contribute to and further develop this emerging field of research by proposing a focus on former nuclear-related facilities in East-Central Europe. This regional focus will help to narrow down the variety of possible research objects which could include both urban and landscape formations as well as institutions and even encompass entire communities inclusive of technological and research institutes, testing grounds, power plants, military or medical facilities, atomic cities and other locales (Rindzevičiūtė, 2019; Wendland, 2015). Focusing on case studies documenting the formation of nuclear cultural heritage sites in East-Central Europe we aim to develop a more coherent empirical base to discuss this newly emerging field and enhance comparisons of heritagization process within the region. We plan to invite contributions employing theoretical, epistemological, and/or methodological perspectives based on the assumptions and developments of critical heritage studies in particular, but with a broad interdisciplinary spectrum including expertise rooted in history, anthropology, sociology or tourism or cultural studies. Potential ideas the workshop will address include, but are not confined to the following broad questions:

- Sites: What are the specific challenges incurred when nuclear heritage is embedded in landscapes, for example former testing grounds, mining areas for uranium, shelters or bunkers? What role does nuclear waste play in this regard? How is nuclear heritage re-interpreted and re-valORIZED in the context of the recent debates on the Anthropocene, sustainability and energy policies?

- Actors: Who are the actors and stakeholders in cultural heritage production and what practices of dealing with the material legacies of the nuclear past can be observed? Do social movements play a role in the decommissioning of sites and how do they influence the afterlife of defunct nuclear production sites? What role do national or transnational legal constraints play in the process of heritagization?
- Narratives: How is the nuclear past narrated, displayed or staged at the sites? How are stories about technological and scientific progress navigated with their potentially disastrous outcomes? How are themes of nuclear techno-scientific innovation entangled with issues of colonialism, forced industrialization or slave labor? Can nuclear heritage be perceived as a specific form of difficult heritage? Does the emergence of nuclear heritage hold subversive potentials that challenge narratives about the past?
- Practices: What practices of historical meaning-making take place at sites of nuclear heritage? How, for example, does touristification change the formation and circulation of knowledge about the past and what effect does tourism have on the knowledge of the local community on site? How does the tendency towards heritagization of nuclear sites meld or conflict with the assumptions of „new heritage regimes” (Smith 2006) where heritage is shaped by various actors, including bottom-up management by local communities, and indigenous groups.
- Media: How is nuclear cultural heritage represented, recreated and reproduced in the media, social media and popular culture? What roles does the mediatization of the nuclear past and nuclear disasters play in series such as “Chernobyl”, a recent release in 2019 on the international cable channel HBO? How is nuclear cultural heritage mediatized using digital technologies, such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and online platforms?
- Epistemology: Is nuclear heritage always a form of cultural heritage (Rindzevičiūtė 2022, 2019)? How does the process of heritagization at former nuclear sites broaden or challenge established heritage concepts and categories like tangible/intangible, natural/cultural, difficult and unwanted heritage?

Organization:

The workshop will take place in Potsdam, Germany, from December 7th to 8th 2023. We intend to provide travel costs and accommodation for chosen speakers as indicated in the official regulations of the Leibniz Research Alliance “Value of the Past”, which provides financial support for the workshop.

We look forward to receiving abstracts of **no more than 350 words** along with short biographical notes by **15th July 2023**.

Please send abstracts and notes to both Juliane Tomann (juliane.tomann@geschichte.uni-regensburg.de) and Magdalena Banaszekiewicz (m.banaszekiewicz@uj.edu.pl).

Speakers will be notified of their acceptance by September 15th 2023. The workshop is organized in cooperation with the Leibniz-Institute for History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) and the Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum, Leibniz Research Museum for Geo-resources.