

THURSDAY, 21 April

9.00 - 10.20 Parallel Sessions

Representations of tram closures (part 1)

[Metro — La cave]

Convenors

Adam Borch (Åbo Akademi University)

Silja Laine (Åbo Akademi University)

Jason Finch (Åbo Akademi University)

Wladimir Sgibnev, Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography

Lela Rekhviashvili, Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography

Last trams of post-Soviet cities: how narratives of trams closures shape activists' political engagement

In this article we discuss the extensive documentation and commemoration of tram closures in various post-Soviet cities by transport activists and enthusiasts, and how narrations of tram closures are intertwined with activists' positioning and propositions about public transport politics in post-Soviet cities. We primarily focus on the in-depth case study of Tbilisi, showing how relatively apolitical PT activists can grow into politicised actors starting from their interest with tram closures. While the tram system decayed through the 1990s, and was eliminated by 2006, Tbilisian PT activists picked on collecting and sharing visual and narrative material of tram closures, explicitly tying their well argued sadness over the closure to their advocacy for introduction of new tram lines in the city. Interestingly, at the same time, Tbilisi city hall picked on the idea and was planning to announce a tender for a modern tram line through the city center. While seemingly noble, the activists' support for the plan illustrated their lack of sensibility towards averse socio-spatial consequences that the implementation of such an expensive system with low coverage would trigger in the city. It also illustrated the activists' overemphasis on the need to revive transport they normatively associated with modernity, their contempt for pre- or out-of- modern, yet crucial flexible mini-bus systems in the city, and their overall insensitivity to questions of mobility justice. Yet, the actual hands-on experience of engaging with the city hall in planning a new tram line for Tbilisi, pushed activists and enthusiasts to learn more about costs, efficiency and the necessary planning vocabulary and toolbox. The same small circle of people not only supported the city hall with their new competencies, but also took a stance against planning a new tram line, later becoming defenders of a lower-cost Bus Rapid Transport solution implemented by the city hall. Overall, the case illustrates how initial fascination with Soviet or new capitalist modernity can for one, blind actors to ongoing mobility injustices, yet also, how such fascination can lead a-political enthusiasts to politicised action that favours sensitive PT solutions rooted in socio-political needs of the present. As further cases show, PT activism can also lead to forms of broader engagement with social rights, e.g. in defence of vulnerable and elderly populations (e.g. in the Russian cities of Dzerzhinsk and Volgograd).

Lyubomir Pozharliev, Leibniz-Institute for Regional Geography

Tensions on tracks: The closure of the old tramline routes in the course of the opening of the Subway in Sofia, Bulgaria

The proposed paper will show based on original historical sources and maps and contemporary short interviews the parallel development and possible tensions between two urban transport systems – the tramway and the subway one. The possible tensions can be

traced in the nature of the different Technological systems, in their historical developments in the course of the 20th century and their most recent developments, which lead to the closure of at least 10 tram routes in the capital of Bulgaria. Furthermore, the example of Sofia is even richer, due to the ongoing active expansion of the subway system, which is among the only two still developing metro projects in the EU.

Several new interviews with urbanists, architects, planners and activists on municipality level in Sofia, will give insights if there are technological as well as social historical tensions between the subway (speed, inter-neighborhood mobility, beneath the ground) and the fin de siècle project of the tramway (Flâneur mobility in the center, neighborhood-oriented service, integrated in the ground transportation system)? The paper will provide conclusions to another Sofia-specific tension, where the tramways were produced until 1991 locally and are still maintained in the tramway's depots of the city, while the subway is entirely imported technology and expertise, both in the tunnel and station construction, as well as in subway-cars delivered from abroad.

Silja Laine, Åbo Akademi University

History, Memory and the Travelling Images of the Turku Tram closures

The last tram in Turku run in 1972. The first decision leading to its closure was made already in 1965, but the closing was a gradual one so that some of the lines had already closed in precedent years. The first political decisions were made in unison, without many protests, as there was no doubt of the future, which would inevitably belong to motorised traffic, buses and private cars. However, in the beginning of the 1970's, a new kind of activism started to show, and in the light of new concepts of environmentalism and urban activism, keeping and developing the tram become an option worth pursuing. The political decisions had already been made and so the tramline was closed down. The activism of the 1970's connected urban preservation with environmental issues, city planning and anti-corruption. The last tram rides became an urban event, which was celebrated and recorded by local and national media, but also by private citizens. Plans for a tram museum came up already at the time, but even today, the city does not have a museum where the history or the future of the tram could be represented or discussed. The local history groups and enthusiasts are mainly responsible for remembering the past. The emergence of social media in 2010's have made it possible for these private collections of photographs, videos and memories of the tram closure in Turku to become publicly available and shared. In the current political debate of a new light rail tram, these images are being recontextualised and are now part of a debate where urban memory is being politised and negotiated.

Laura Kemmer, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Present in absence: The collectivizing force of Rio de Janeiro's last tramway

This presentation explores how an event of tram closure led to new formations of urban collectivity in central Rio de Janeiro. While Rio's 'tramway century' ended with the closure of the last downtown lines in the 1970s, there has been one survivor to this trend. The bonde (Portuguese: tramway) of Santa Teresa lasted for over 120 years until in 2011 a major accident led to the temporary suspension of the system. Since that date, and curiously even after the promised overhaul and re-installation of the system was completed in 2015, residents of Rio center have engaged in a yearly 'funeral march' to commemorate their bonde. Drawing from participant observations of the protests, including interviews and audiovisual material, I further explore the power of presence and absence, that is, how the physically absent tramway could be 'felt into being' throughout the first years of protests, and how despite its comeback, protesters have enacted the tram as absent. I argue that the

protest movement points to formations of public transport as collective that rely on forces beyond subjective experience, as theorized in more recent approaches to affect or material agency. In the second part of the presentation, I will draw from archival material, including private documents and media outlets (cartoons, poems, tram-advertisements), to develop a temporal perspective on the formation of urban collectivity by pointing out how the 'cultural legacy' of this particular transport type resurface in urban imaginaries, bodily movements, sensory perceptions, and experiences of contemporary Rio de Janeiro. Arguing that the case of tramways is particularly revealing for urban settings, I will show how its living legacy continues to shape not only structural, socio-spatial inequalities (between asphalt and tram-track, rich and poor parts of the city), but importantly also those everyday formations that bear the power to contradict such structures