



COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH CENTRE

STRUCTURAL CHANGE OF PROPERTY

Call for Papers

Local self-governance and urban property relations: Historical and present perspectives

International Workshop, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, 26-27 October 2023

Urban property relations have recently gained increased attention throughout Europe. After decades dominated by a paradigm of privatisation of public goods and services, the question of *Who owns the City?* has sparked new debates and struggles. Ownership in urban housing, public space, and local infrastructure has re-emerged as a key field of political contestation. In the academic field, this results in a renewed attention to the complex interactions in the production of urban space. The established understanding of property as clearly delineated and unambiguously assignable is being challenged here.

At the same time, claims for urban ownership draw on an intensified discourse on self-governance. While municipal governments face new expectations for providing accessible public services to citizens, they are also confronted with new calls for participation and self-organisation from below. Self-governance ideas do not relate to the level of municipalities alone, but are also realised on smaller scales, such as housing communities, cooperatives, or district committees.

Both, practices of claiming ownership and experiments in self-governance, refer to a broad range of historical traditions. Yet, the relation of self-governance discourses to property issues has been all but straightforward over time: While claims for self-governance have been vigorously made by advocates of socialisation, they have also been a key argument of those who preferred private over public property. Conceptually, the workshop thus brings together diverse experiences ranging from struggles over state-owned infrastructure just after the end of state socialism in Eastern Europe to present efforts aimed at expropriating and socializing privatized housing estates in Berlin.

We start out from the hypothesis that claims for self-governance grow strongest in times of accelerated social transformation, when property relations are disembedded from social needs and movements raise demands for participation, efficiency, and local provision of basic services. In this light, the fall of state socialism in Eastern Europe in 1989 was crucial for the depreciation of state ownership and the general breakthrough of the privatisation paradigm. In turn, the global financial and economic crises since 2008 and subsequent policies of austerity and social cuts have fuelled social movements to contest the privatisation paradigm of the neoliberal model and provoked a growing importance of alternative models of care and provision. Therefore, we are especially interested in contributions exploring urban property relations in both Western and Eastern European cases, with their diverging paths and traditions of ownership.

We aim to spark academic debate by re-assessing historical endeavours to self-governance of urban property and contrast them with new insights from research on ongoing struggles for the city. Should we understand the rise of *New Municipalism* as a countermovement to waves of privatisation that swept over much of Eastern and Western Europe in recent decades? Where does the renewed interest in experiences of communal ownership in interwar *Red Vienna* come from? What does „claiming ownership” mean in practice and what

are the reactions of municipal governments to claims for self-governance as alternatives to private and centralized public property?

We invite empirical and theoretical contributions from sociological, geographical, anthropological, and historical perspectives. Topics might include:

- Path dependencies and ruptures in urban property relations
- Debates over private vs. collective vs. municipal property
- Struggles for participation in urban settings and their link to property
- Room for manoeuvre for municipal governments regarding property issues
- Conflicts and tensions between property- and democracy-related claims
- Perspectives on economic democracy on the urban level
- Self-governance as a (neo-)liberal or anti-liberal concept

If you are interested in contributing to this workshop, please send an abstract of max. 300 words and a short CV by March 31st, 2023 to florian.peters@uni-jena.de. The workshop takes place at Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena. Funding for covering the costs of travel and accommodation for active participants is secured.

The **Collaborative Research Centre “Structural Change of Property”** investigates the structural change of property that can be observed since 1989 at the latest. While private property has gained in importance worldwide under conditions of increasing concentration and deregulation, the resulting property regime has proved to be both crisis-prone and highly controversial in the face of new economic, political and technological challenges. It isn't challenged only by the global financial and economic crises, but also by political conflicts over the appropriation, distribution and containment of private property, as well as by the dynamics of the knowledge and bio-economies, which are linked to alternative concepts of common property, shared use and free access to resources. The Collaborative Research Centre tackles these issues in 23 subprojects from sociology, historical sciences, philosophy, economics, legal studies and anthropology.

The workshop is collaboratively hosted by the historical subproject “Property concepts and conflicts in the process of privatisation: Communal self-government and communal property in Eastern Europe since 1990” (Joachim von Puttkamer and Florian Peters) and the sociological subproject “Debating the public sphere and the future of the commons: Property relations in the context of welfare state transformation” (Silke van Dyk, Markus Kip, Luzie Gerstenhöfer).

For more information see: <https://sfb294-eigentum.de/en/>