

# THE POLITICS OF HERITAGES AND KRAKÓW'S CITYSCAPE

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## THE POLITICS OF HERITAGES AND KRAKÓW'S CITYSCAPE: INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL SECTION<sup>1</sup>

“Uses of the past” – a theme of the 2016–2019 research program launched by the HERA network (Humanities in the European Research Area) – encouraged deeper reflection on how “pasts” are present, formed, and applied in today’s discussions on “identity, integration, political legitimacy, creativity, and cultural dynamics across Europe” (see the HERA network website). Within this framework, the HERILIGION international consortium focused on anthropological studies of the *heritagization of religion* and *sacralization of heritage* in five European countries: Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. The main research question concerned the interplay between two domains defined as “heritage” and “religion” and how these domains function in five different European societies, creating various “religious heritage” assemblages or complexes. Using an anthropological lens and an ethnographic methodological approach, national HERILIGION teams explored when, where, by whom, and in which circumstances “heritages”, “religions”, and “religious heritages” are being defined, made, celebrated, exhibited, and performed, as well as disputed or contested.

Whereas a European background is assumed as a shared research context, studies conducted by five national teams have indicated that focus on the *heritagization of religion* and *sacralization of heritage* also requires analysis embedded in local, national, or regional settings. Western European societies often approach their heritage debates from a postcolonial perspective. These debates are based on the experiences of societies that need to redefine themselves in relation not only to their conte-

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sted pasts but also to their present embrace of new citizens, often of non-European descent and often from former colonies. At the same time, East-Central Europeans tend to shape their discourse around the post-Communist transformation. In this part of the continent, the most frequent historical reference points in heritage debates are related to the Second World War and its aftermath, which led to the creation of the Eastern Bloc. This division of European histories and memories is mirrored in splits in contemporary discourse on heritages, religions, and uses of the past in various countries belonging to the EU. Seemingly, inter-European migrations and settling of numerous “new” Europeans in the “old” European states have not buried these divisions. Recent political shifts and tensions within the EU – e.g. Brexit and radical populist turns in some European countries, including Hungary and Poland in East-Central Europe – suggest that the “past” can be used skillfully in disintegration processes, rather than in the formation of shared European identities and heritages. Additionally, while discourse on religions, secularization, and the relations between Christianity, Islam, “European identity”, and “European heritage” appears in similar forms throughout Europe, it is applied in different political, social, and cultural national circumstances shaping local meanings.

Keeping in mind the broader European picture proposed by the HERILIGION consortium outline, this Special Section aims to highlight several specific aspects of the research carried out in Poland. The Polish project has researched how religious heritages are perceived and constructed *within* and *through* one selected urban space. Our focus was on Kraków, as this Polish historic capital is probably one of the most “heritagized” urban spaces in the country. This is due to not only the UNESCO labeling (the city’s historic center was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1978), but also the historicizing, sacralizing, and nationalizing discourses and practices associated with this city at least since the Romantic period and employed in various political contexts during Communist and post-Communist times.

Members of the Polish HERILIGION team explored contemporary uses of this discourse and these practices and their transformations in ethnological terms. We focused on the anthropological concept of space in relation to “religious heritages”, the performativity of spaces, and their role in commemorative and heritage-making practices. The current political situation in Poland (governmental policy regarding the national past) turned our attention towards tensions between official, mainstream discourses/heritage practices and more bottom-up or marginal activities. These tensions refer directly to the multivocality of heritage spaces, the contextual and dynamic understanding of heritage and identity, and the variety of usages of the “past”.

The collection of five papers published here explores the question of interactions between heritage and politics. Examining the problem from different angles – of state and local policies and of national and transnational patterns of creating and acknowledging heritages – the authors analyze various forms of the politics of heritage and deconstruct processes which enhance the building of heritage hierarchies. The collected material and its interpretations enable a closer look at heritage-making strategies transcending official policies, and show how heritage is actually produced

in social practice. As demonstrated by many scholars, heritage is not a democratic domain; its creation involves practices of inclusion and exclusion, often deriving from state or local policies. This means that its creation not only is a selective practice as such, but also may be used in order to marginalize certain groups or certain “pasts”. In response to this situation, heritage studies researchers have crafted various tools to deconstruct such mechanisms. Their application is necessary, since there is a risk that relationships of power and dominance involved in the building of heritages render the processes of selection and exclusion transparent to heritage audiences. Mainstream heritages, frequently reliant on state projects of national heritages, become naturalized. Furthermore, they set norms for the way heritage should talk about the past and which “pasts” should be presented and which forgotten.

Therefore, contesting mainstream visions of heritage and building alternatives is often a feeble and not very successful enterprise. The papers collected in this section tackle these problems, presenting the location of niches for challenging mainstream, normative visions of heritage, or the reasons why challenging of this kind is nearly impossible in certain political, historical, and social circumstances. Moreover, they focus on demonstrating a variety of both heritages and the policies which concern them in a situation characterized by a seemingly homogenous project of national heritage in Poland. What seems established and stable on the surface seethes underneath. These underlying tensions constitute the subject of the five articles presented here. Importantly, the papers look at heritage from a religious perspective, since the dominant discourse on the Roman Catholic presence in Polish culture, history, identity, and state policy offers a background for research on the processes of sacralization and nationalization of heritage.

In treating the cityscape of Kraków as a sort of an ethnographic laboratory to study these processes, the authors of the collected papers observed how the city's history is seen mostly through the prism of Christianity. Interestingly, this religious heritage, although promoted as genuinely local, is institutionalized through transnational processes (e.g. its presence on the UNESCO list or transnational events organized in the city by the Roman Catholic Church itself) and undermined by Pagan or Jewish claims to Kraków's heritage. Consequently, all the papers presented in this Special Section of the journal reveal that the city's heritage is the dynamic and multivocal outcome of complex interactions between various political and institutionalized forces and more grounded grass-roots initiatives.

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The HERA website: <http://heranet.info/>

The HERILIGION consortium website: <http://heriligion.eu/>

The Polish HERILIGION team website: <https://etnologia.uj.edu.pl/kadra/badania/heriligion.poland>