

Iryna Starovoyt

associate professor, Ivan Franko National University of Lviv

Not only our understanding and practice of culture but its institutional potentialities as well become more diverse. Main players on the cultural scene are changing. The whole metaphor of cultural heritage and cultural regeneration newly introduced in Ukraine is trying to grasp this change. Culture takes place not necessarily in the Opera houses, public museums produced by and maintained for the sake of Enlightenment, underfunded national art galleries and theatres. High culture loses its monopoly. Television channels, FM radio stations and worldwide web turned to be more than just interfaces between cultural 'producers' and cultural 'consumers'. The notion of culture becomes more open, complex and inclusive, it absorbs the everyday, it subverts the sublime, it varies the decision-making, it implies development and regeneration, it invites participation of teams and communities and accepts initiatives from individuals. The rhetoric on culture involves the idea of care and the figure of curator. This change is both rapid and underconceptualised and, if to success in the public interest, needs further reflection and public discussion. But first of all it needs human resources; it needs people representing particular outlook and expertise.

Small Center for the Humanities at Ivan Franko National University of Lviv established 10 years ago has gradually evolved in the key site for cultural studies in the region and a hothouse for the cultivation of cross-disciplinary research-based teaching maintaining vibrant linkage with the city of Lviv and making an intellectual contribution into its cultural self-discovery and self-development.

First of all, we discovered that existing pedagogies and disciplinary approaches on Western urban experiences (e.g., multiculturalism) didn't work for Eastern European cities, which have undergone dramatic ideological and population shifts, selective memory regarding histories and place names, economic and political migrations, and shifting borders, to name just a few. In addition, cities in the post-Soviet space have become genealogical destinations, as people return in greater numbers to search for their roots and cultural histories.

As we shared perspectives and engaged in scholarly debate, we concluded that, in order to understand cities in which we live and teach, it was also necessary to rethink the basis of our teaching and learning. We realized it was key to re-negotiate and re-conceptualize how the notion of the Eastern European city and its cultures could be explored across curricula in and from the perspective of both social and cultural studies, a dramatic shift, actually, for professors in eastern European universities. We wanted students to understand how research in respective disciplines produced knowledge; what's

more, we wanted them to move from reproducing knowledge to creating their own.

Inspired with the success of an experimental MA program in Cultural Studies prepared and launched at Ivan Franko University in 2003/04 under the OSI support Center for the Humanities has initiated a regional university network **“Modern Urban Cultures and Identities of the ‘Old’ Cities”**.

Lviv project brought together a multidisciplinary international team from Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Austria and Belarus to think about and study urban cultures and identities of Eastern Europe’s historical middle-sized cities, and the array of contrasting meanings that people attach to these surroundings. Since 2004/05 over 20 university teachers and their younger colleagues have used the “city” for both its learning environment and object of study. One important aspiration was to attend to the particular cultural messages of the “city,” as well as its historical continuities in this part of the world.

In content, project was aimed to develop fresh and incisive perspective how to teach on the East European cities with histories - cities which juxtapose and alter competing identities; cities which are connected to or disconnected from selective memories. Cities with changing names, with remote access to their own pasts, with shrinking middle of contemporary moment, with moving monuments and many times refined city icons. The goal was to impact intellectual agenda of the teaching in social and cultural studies.

In concept, it was intended to enlarge the frame, to supplant the traditional disciplinary perspective used predominantly by post-communist university, and embrace multi-disciplinary perspectives that better served the complexity of the study of cities. It deepened course content and student learning beyond reproduction of knowledge from a single disciplinary lens, as well as brought the respective city environment into the classroom.

It was also our concern to develop conceptual language and to broaden the method, to imagine what method is if not caught in an obsession with ‘clarity’ and with the ‘definite’, if understood as the synchronized enactment of presence and absence. In research practice this suggests that some things are present but at the same time their important aspects are being rendered absent and these lapses, as identified, could lead to eureka moment. This was immediately noticed already in the first contact session fieldwork in Lviv, followed on in the city on foot projects undertaken in Chernivtsi/Czernowitz, and then taken to the depth in Wroclaw/Breslau, Petersburg/Leningrad, Donetsk and Odessa. We have built up along the way an original research-into-teaching assemblage which involves change mapping, participant observations, tracing flows and footprints, conversations, and then visual and discourse analysis.

While everyone came to the network with their own view and geographical

perspective, it was apparent that all our cities shared cultures and identities that had been erased, over-emphasized, co-opted, and shifted. The process of cultural inheritance has been violently interrupted. “Official” historical accounts had supplanted actual events. Newcomers and different regimes had taken history as their own. And state institutions called to examine, support and expose local cultural memory and to translate it into contemporary turned to be almost not capable to cope with their own tasks. Little has changed in this since independence from the Soviet Union. Unhealed traumas of history and political oppression, unresolved cultural dilemmas that for decades had simmered below the surface of the everyday consciousness still are missing in mental mapping, museum narratives, schoolbooks, university programs and tourist guides. We allowed ourselves time and space to reflect on them. Group co-inquiry, research-based teaching and discussion upon these topics was deep. Often, we found the unexpected.

The periodic contact/distant collaboration we were engaged in encouraged reflective thinking, practice in home classrooms, and refinement and feedback from ongoing curricular and program improvement. This discursive community has grown into the living regional laboratory on the East European urban cultures. Summing up 3 years of dedicated work it prepared a conference for both faculty and graduate students which joined 55 presenters from 7 countries. Presenters described their research and changes in outlook that come about as part of their studies. **“Modern Urban Cultures and Identities of the ‘Old’ Cities”** project has generated significant interest in the media and in public. Part of the conference has been hosted by Lviv City Hall.

Participation in the network turned to be academically and personally transformative. Through this network we have explored and introduced that particular way of situated learning on culture which comes out of an organic ongoing projects – of actual case studies, of intellectual conversation and of the comparative dimensions which we constitute and develop altogether as virtual institution, as an academy on the borders.