**Transcript Ep. 63: Russian Academia and Urban Activism in Times of War**

[00:00:00] **Intro:** This is the Urban Political, the podcast on urban theory, research, and activism.

[00:00:09] **Markus Kip:** Hello and welcome to this new episode on War, everyday Life, and activism in St. Petersburg, and I'm very pleased to introduce you to our guest, Oleg Pachenkov. Oleg is a researcher who has been working a lot with activists in St. Petersburg and is now living in Berlin and working at the Georg-Simmel-Centre of the Humboldt University. He has been involved previously with the Centre for Independent Social Research as a research director in urban Studies, and until last year, he was a researcher and consultant at the Centre for Urbanism and Participation at the European University in St. Petersburg. So, in the following, we shall speak about both, his academic insights into urban studies in Russia, as well as some personal accounts and experiences with urban life and activism there. Oleg welcome.

[00:01:09] **Oleg Pachenkov:** Thank you. Thank you very much.

[00:01:12] **Markus Kip:** Tell us a little bit about yourself and your relationship with St. Petersburg. I already introduced you with your academic affiliation. Maybe you can tell us a little bit about what that entailed, your work with activists and civic associations and, what other kinds of professional involvements you've been engaged in, in St. Petersburg, and maybe then also what has brought you to Berlin?

[00:01:46] **Oleg Pachenkov:** St. Petersburg is the city I've been living in since childhood. And I graduated there and have been working at the Centre for Independent Social Research, which sounds academic, but in fact it is an NGO. It's not state owned or a big research institute.

It's a small, not private, but kind of private non-profit research institute, which was very typical, representing a particular type of organizations that emerged in Russia after the collapse of Soviet Union. When the big academic institutions were totally state owned, and state run and developing particular agenda.

Also in the science, in social science, and the Centre for Independent Social Research emerged with the aim to develop an alternative agenda, and there were several of such centres related to universities or independent from universities, like ours. We have been working a lot on the qualitative sociology, so to say.

Since the beginning I didn't work a lot with urban studies. I was rather working with migration studies. But then actually I came to Berlin in 2006 and fell in love with the city, and really focused on the urban studies here. And the city became an object of my research.

So, the first city I studied, urban studies research, was Berlin actually. And then I came to St. Petersburg back with lots of ideas about what urban studies can look like because they

basically did not exist in Russia by that time. It was 2006, 2007. And then also I came with a lot of ideas of educational or edutainment programs because I was very much excited by the way that the citizens were involved in urban activities in Berlin.

So, I was kind of dreaming about the same to happen in the city that I loved, the city of St. Petersburg. So, me and my colleague, we initiated first a non-academic educational program introducing interested citizens of St. Petersburg into urban issues. How you can think of the city, how you can act in the city.

It was in collaboration with one art space. We did just a series of lectures during two years, like two times a month, with various speakers, and many speakers we actually brought from Berlin or from other European countries and cities. So, this is how my involvement in urban issues started.

You see, since the beginning I was not just a researcher, but also kind of a person trying to be involved in some, let's say civic activities. Though I never called myself an activist. I worked a lot with activists, but I think my research background or academic background stopped me from calling myself an activist or even being an activist because I think that the difference is that activists are those who know the truth, who know what has to happen.

And the academics are people that are rather asking questions. Never sure. So, I was helping those who were sure, when I thought that what they're sure about, I agree with. And of course, you know that urban studies agenda is very much influenced by the leftist intellectual thought.

For this reason, working with the activists, it was always quite obvious. But then what happened, since the war started. I mean the situation that is more known in the world outside of Russia is the aggression of Russia against the Ukraine.

So, the geopolitical part of the story, but there is also another part of the story of what's going on within the country. And so, the war is, the situation of the war affected a lot the situation within the country. And the main effect is the growth of authoritarianism of the, I mean Russia before was often called a hybrid regime, combining the authoritarian features or qualities with democratic institutions, like typically for democracies, institutions, representative democracy, but also the institutions of direct democracy, of deliberative democracy, all coexisting with quite authoritarian things.

But since the start of the war and the democratic, not institutions themselves, but activity, was kind of cleaned up. It was closed. It was, well, not openly forbidden often, but repressed or suppressed and as a reaction, many people left the country because they just couldn't perform their activities. The situation of repression and fear characterized the inner Russian situation in the last year. So, I was among those who left the country in the spring of the last year when, I mean we have been looking for the situation, the development of the situation for a few weeks.

And we saw what was happening in those few weeks, and we just decided that we, I say "we" because there are dozens of people, my colleagues and friends. We shared that, we talked a lot, we shared that experience, and the feeling was that we could not continue

doing what we were doing or saying what we wanted to say about the situation because we would go get arrested or go to prison as some of our colleagues or friends did. Staying inside the country and keeping silence was impossible, was a terrible feeling of self-censorship. So, we didn't want to experience it.

And going to prison was also not a good option. So, we decided to leave the country and to be open to think as the way we wanted, to talk the way we felt like, and also perhaps to reconsider our activities as citizens, as professionals, because of course it was a very strong feeling of, if not guilt, but at least of responsibility.

So as active people both as researchers, for example, as people from academia and working people who have been working a lot with activism. So, we believed that we were making our input in the building up civil society and public sphere in Russia. But so, when all these things happened, and we've seen that the public sphere has been demolished within two weeks, we said, well something, or perhaps we did something wrong or we didn't do what we had to, or we ignored some things.

Like people said, or we said to ourselves, look, it's impossible that it happens within two weeks. So, we were kind of ignoring things that were happening during the last maybe five or even 10 years, kind of ignoring, trying to do our own things. And that was also a mistake perhaps. So, we needed a distance to make a reflection on what we have been doing. So that was basically the reason to go out of Russia. So, I came to Berlin because that was the city where I worked before and had colleagues and contacts.

[00:10:43] **Markus Kip:** Could you tell me a little bit more about the kind of obstacles that you encountered, the kind of official or authoritarian resistance to the work you were doing in those first weeks after the war?

How did you feel it? How did it become recognizable?

[00:11:12] **Oleg Pachenkov:** There was a wide range of things from the everyday life when you got these terrible signs, the Z letter, which became a symbol of the invasion of Russia to Ukraine. And it appeared all of a sudden everywhere, like posters, like social ads that is controlled by the city government.

So, they sell it, to the business as ad spaces. But instead of selling it in the last spring, they just occupied them all themselves. With all this state propaganda, of that symbol and all the slogans, referring to the war and combining this actual invasion of Russia to Ukraine, this aggression of Russia with the brave history and memory of the second World War. Where Russian or Soviet Union soldiers were like liberators, in a sense. So, it was a total mess up of the meanings and senses and the faking up. So that was like, at the daily lives, it was really, people didn't want to go out of the flats to the streets because they just didn't want to see these signs of militarization.

And also, there were conflicts between people, supporters of the war and those who were against. So, there were clashes and conflicts all around. There was very bad feeling too. But there were also very strong, direct, and political things. Like, several colleagues were fired in universities.

They were fired because they didn't sign the petitions. Because there were two, well there were many actually, but in the academic world, for example, there were famous, like two tries of signing petitions. One was the official one started by the Minister of Education, and it was supposed to be signed by Rectors of all universities.

And rectors, of course, had to push and force their employees to sign it. All the heads of departments and all these people had to sign. And they were supposed to force their employees and colleagues, just professors working the universities, to sign it.

It was supposed to become massive, of course, but there was at the same time a parallel. It was not massive. There were hundreds of people signing it. And it's important to understand that, well in Russia University is not, it's not a tradition of the free academia that you have in Europe. In Russia, university is a state institute.

Director of the university is not elected. Director of the university is assigned by the Minister of Education. He's a bureaucrat, basically. He's a representative of authoritarian, executive power working for the ministry. So, he either fires himself, leaves the position, or does what the ministry says.

So, it's not the decision of universities to sign at the level for rectors, but at the level of heads of departments and lower levels. Of course, that's a personal decision, but people did not understand the consequences, if they sign, or if they don't sign this official petition. So many did sign just because they didn't want to lose their position.

 Some did not sign, and they lost their positions. They were really kicked out, either from the position. So, some colleagues, like close colleagues, friends of mine in St. Petersburg and Moscow universities, they didn't sign, and they were, and of course, they didn't deliver signs of their colleagues from their departments, for example, the heads of departments.

So, they were punished, and they lost their position as heads of departments, became ordinary professor or docent, like lecturer or some were actually fired from the university. And there was also a scandal, accuse of the financial crime in one of the biggest Moscow universities against the people, who we all knew as representatives of the liberal science, like this liberal and western oriented, let's say wing, in the academia.

So, they were accused of financial crime, and the leading person was actually arrested. And the others they had to come to the police and report about their involvement in this activity of this leading person.

So mainly left the country even before. It happened just before the war. So, it was a part of the same move of the repression. It started actually before the war, but with the war it became critical. So especially with the signing petitions. So, people suffered if they didn't sign and also suffered those who signed the alternative petition.

There was a bottom-up initiative to sign petitions of academics against the war. It was much more numerous actually. The people who signed it, and they also were punished. Many of them were punished. It was a decision of director each time in each particular case. Some directors were more harsh, some were more relaxed. But there were consequences.

And just of the last, but not least example, from my experience, we worked with a group of activists who were trying to make a park on the empty land, *Brachland*, in St. Petersburg. We have been working together for a couple of years trying to make a land, transform a land into a park with the government, with the citizens, the events.

There were many festival events to attract attention to the place. But as the war started, of the activists from this group, they just made an anti-war event there at this space. So, they were immediately arrested, both of them. And I was writing and signing, for example, a letter, so-called letter of reference or a recommendation letter because the lawyers said that it could be a reason for the court to make a decision to let these people stay at home. I don't know the proper legal words, but instead of staying, waiting for the court decision in the prison, basically, they can stay at home like a home arrest. So, to be released from the prison at least. And we did these letters, so we signed those letters and it helped. Both of them were released and stayed at home, waiting for the decision of the court.

And one of them, she just left the country the next day, immediately. She went to Georgia and the guy stayed for some reason, I don't know why. And finally, the guy got, I think, 10 years in prison. They are almost teenagers, they're 20 something years old and they made this anti-war protest and now, well she left and he's in prison for 15 years.

This is just an example of what happened. And yes, there are some other examples of our close colleagues, activists got arrested and then another one spent, I think, almost a year in prison. Then finally, I mean the lawyers were trying coming to the court. All this happens before the real court decision for being guilty and got this or that number of years in prison.

So, all this time before the court decision, which can be lasting for months now, and we see these cases, so the guy stayed in prison all this time. So, another example of a colleague and a friend was that the lawyer was constantly pushing and bringing in more and more asks and signatures and reasons to the court to release the guy and to keep him arrested at home, not in the prison.

And finally, she succeeded, and he was released. And of course, he left the country next day too. Somehow. Nobody knows and nobody explains how it happens. But we know that there are NGOs working for illegal evacuation of people under danger outside of Russian boundaries. So, these kinds of things are happening, and you really can feel that you're in absolutely real, not an abstract, danger.

And the most terrible thing, I guess, is the grey zone. It's unclear for what you can be detained or sent to prison for, or not. For which word? For which gesture?

In your social network, if you use the word "war". There were many, many cases when people just used the word "war" in their posts in Facebook or similar social networks. They got fines with saying that if they do that next time they go to prison. All these kinds of things, they really make your life terrible because you don't understand what you can say. What you can't. It's a situation of you're nervous all the time because you don't know what to do, how to behave.

[00:21:58] **Markus Kip:** Thank you Oleg for that description, that very vivid description. We shall talk about the current situation in St. Petersburg, as you experienced it on your last visit in April, in a moment. I'd like to ask you now a little bit about urban studies, as it has been institutionalized in Russia. You said in 2006 when you came back to St. Petersburg, there was virtually no such framework for studies, framework of research, that you then also helped develop in Russia. So, for our listeners, more familiar with the Anglo-Saxon version of urban studies, how would you describe the urban studies, as you have experienced them, or been part of, in Russia?

What kind of trends, questions, and approaches predominate, how has it changed over the last couple of years, and particularly now over the last year with the war?

[00:23:30] **Oleg Pachenkov:** To describe the entire picture would be difficult because the country is huge, and it's also spread.

So, we have big cities across the country and in each big city you have several universities. You still have universities in smaller cities. So, it's very widespread. Actually, the Anglo-Saxon, ironically exactly Anglo-Saxon tradition influenced urban studies in Russia because one of the first departments of urban studies was established in the independent high school in Moscow.

It was also NGO. Private, kind of private/NGO university in Moscow, where they made, it's called Shaninka after the name of the rector and establisher Teodor Shanin, who is a British scholar actually, of Russian origin. And he established this high school in Moscow. And they made a program in urban studies together with the Manchester University.

And it was one of the first, these kinds of programs. And then it's an interesting thing actually. I would say that the urban studies as a field has not been very much developed in Russia. There were several, also local kind of traditions in schools in Ural or Siberian universities, but not that many. But the trend, the trendsetters were always Moscow, to a lesser degree St. Petersburg. Mainly Moscow, because in Moscow there were three big hubs of Education related to the urban issues. But I would say that only one of them was properly urban studies, in a meaning that it has in the Western or scientific vocabulary. It was this program at Shaninka school because there was also a program, even a department called Higher School of Urbanism or Urbanistic in a bigger, one of the biggest universities of Russia, which is Higher School of Economics.

So, within that, it was a department called High School of Urbanistic. But it was more run by urban planners or geographers then, and very much connected to the state government. So, they were training people in the urban governance, let's say, rather than urban status.

And the third big hub and the big actor was the private school, a proper private school for design and urbanism, Strelka, so called. And it was established by businesspeople in a close collaboration with architects. And Rem Koolhaas was one of the first advisors and teachers in this school. And this school was also very much focused actually on urban planning and architecture, applied.

So, it was science, but applied science in the beginning. And also, Strelka Institute had a very strong department called Bureau Strelka, which was basically doing things here that was not educational part but doing urban planning and architecture. And it characterized a lot the situation with urbanism in Russia because it was always very little of research and intellectual debate around it.

There was some, but I would say very little. Actually, many people who were interested in urban studies and were doing kind of urban studies, making research, publishing, getting their PhDs in this field, many of them actually left the country and continued their work in European or American universities.

And within Russia there were very few examples of proper urban studies. There were some examples for the universities in Ural or Siberia or Far East where urban research was very closely connected to the historical department, for example, or ethnography.

So, they worked somewhere at the interdisciplinary edge of urban studies and history, urban studies and ethnography. These kinds of things. Or for example, migration studies somehow where it already existed before the strong school of migration studies, like in Irkutsk. They added urban dimension to their research.

But the overall trend was formulated, for the entire country, was formulated, I would say in Moscow. And in Moscow, as I just described, it was always very much applied oriented science. And I think it determined the situation in this field, in Russia overall. So, it's very little of science actually, and much of applied activity, a lot of applied work, several programs training people, not studying.

Not in studying the cities, but in, even in studying, if in studying, then applied studies, for planning and architecture. So, since the emergence, the urban study field immediately was split and some parts of it developed more than the others. So, I would say academic part developed the least, applied part connected to the governance, developed much more.

Another part related to applied urban planning and architecture for the city, for the state, or for private developers. Parts of the field developed much more, and this is the situation still. And since the beginning of the war, let's say in those two developed parts, little happened. Basically nothing.

Because ironically, life continued. The city still existed. The departments, the ministries, the departments of the city government responsible for city governance, nothing happened to them. They still exist. Somebody has to govern the cities.

Somebody has to plan the cities, somebody has to sign the papers for continuing construction and doing architecture. So, in this field not many things changed. In the applied, like planning architecture work with the developers, the same. Developers still continue working.

They had some financial troubles, but business can always solve the troubles. So, they're solving and architects still are in need. So, there is a construction. They continue building buildings, so why not work with them. So, these two fields are continuing.

I didn't mention actually the fourth part. Which is urban studies connected to the civil society and the urban activism. So apart from the three I mentioned, this was a fourth one also existing and developing. And this one, I think, suffered the most, as well as academia too.

So, in academia it was never easy to do research on the critical things in urban studies. To do works to defend your PhD thesis in the field of abstract theory of urban studies or social theory related to urban issues was fine. Or something in urban governance was also fine, but critical thinking was difficult. I mean, you could do that, you could even publish that. There was no censorship basically.

But there was censorship at the level of defending your PhD thesis, for example. So, there it was not that easy and to be openly critical, even though from the academic point of view or philosophical point of view, would be difficult. While, again, being critical against neoliberalism was possible, being critical against the liberalism or authoritarianism in a particular country at the level of defending your thesis was not, I mean, you would be recommended by your supervisor not to include those theses in your like final thesis.

Like these ideas, openly. Because it can cause troubles, and nobody wants troubles at the defence of the PhD thesis. So, this kind of situation. But there was no censorship. You could publish in journals basically everything, and then people did. But since the war started, we talked to the colleagues who stayed in the country and they said, look, it was not like the open censorship. Again, it's like the grey zone I mentioned in the everyday life. The same in academia, people did not understand what topic they could work on and which topic they couldn't, and it was somehow connected to the situation in the activism. In the first month since the war started last spring and summer, it looked like that the activism, or the activist energy of those who didn't leave the country, they said, we still feel like we can act. We probably cannot act in the fields or topics which are considered to be political by the state, by the government, but we could do, for example, in ecological issues. And there was kind of a boom of the ecological and heritage protection activism in last summer. People felt that they could not go open to the streets, to protest against the war, but they could go to protest against the demolition of the historical building, for a while.

The same with ecological issues. They could go and protest against the cutting of the trees or making another huge dump next to the city or these kinds of things. And people did, and for a while nothing happened. So, the police or all the violent machine was more focused on preventing the political protests.

But then, as it became clear that there would be no political protests anymore because of the cruel violence against the participants. Then slightly the violent machine turned towards any other kind of protest or open public civic movements. And interestingly it became a situation with these ideological, control, and then repression.

It was used by the business because what stayed, usually what stays behind the demolition of cultural heritage buildings or making another harm to the environmental issues, what stays behind that usually is business interest of developers or some other business. I know some things in the environmental field.

So, the business started using or abusing the situation with the violent machine ready to operate. To express its violence against the protestors. The business started using this situation, reporting on the activists, really writing reports or calling to police saying, look this is an activist in cultural heritage protection, for example, famous person organizing lots of events and protests trying to save building from demotions, developers hate him.

So, developers just checked his Facebook webpage, and called the police and said, look what he's publishing on his Facebook page. You really can take this text and send him to prison for 15 years with a new law. Because there were like two new laws published. Exactly aiming at people who use these particular language formulations, the anti-war rhetoric, so to say. So that was anti-war rhetoric on his Facebook page. He was immediately arrested, and they talked to him and released him. So, he was just fined for the first time.

But then they also told that if it happens next time you can go to prison for a few years. So, it was just a try to use the current situation against the activists in different fields. And the same bad things happen to the ecological activities, so they had people just went out to the streets to protest against some ecological issues.

And then the police came. And behaved against them violently as exactly in the same way as they did against the political protesters because they don't make a difference. They see people on the streets protesting. They just do what they do, what they're trained for. So slightly people realized within Russia that actually no public or open protest is now possible because it will be immediately treated as partly political or anyway.

Now this violent machine is behaving as it does, without making differences. I think this enthusiasm about the opportunities to transform your activist activities to another field, and urban issues looked like a kind of neutral field, but not anymore. And on the other hand, activists themselves, I mean, they're responsible and thinking, smart people as they are, they cannot ignore the fact and just pretend there's nothing happening.

There's no war, let's continue business as usual. Let's think of making urban environment comfortable.

Activists don't do that. The people working for the state do that. Architects do that, many. Urban planners do. So, there is a big program, for example, the state run program from the highest level, curated by the ministry of construction. The program of participatory planning and design of urban public spaces.

So, every year the state, the federal government, gives lots of money to the small towns in Russia to fix their public spaces. And the procedure of planning and design is supposed to be done in accordance to the participatory planning mechanisms and with tools of participatory planning.

And it's still going on. It was not restricted. People are called to come. So, you cannot go to protest on the streets or in a park, but you're welcome to come to the office or the architect to plan this park together with citizens. So, it's total nonsense, and collapse, and clash in terms of ideological issues and values, staying behind it.

But not for everyone. For many architects and people even involved in this, moderating these participatory planning sessions for design of public spaces, they continue doing that and they say, why not? Cities are here, citizens are there. People still stay there, they walk, they need parks to go out and the environment better be comfortable than non-comfortable.

Because people don't deserve the bad urban environment, why should we stop doing what we have been doing? And there is no connection. People say, to the war, but, you know, okay, perhaps to the war no connection. But in your professional activity, as a citizen you still cannot ignore it, should not, but as professional, you still cannot ignore the fact of the repressions.

So, what for. You design your public spaces, it's public spaces for public life, but what is public life then if you cannot go and express your opinion publicly and you'll get arrested. But these kind of things people just do not connect often. Some do and they're in trouble or they leave the country, or they stopped doing and now kind of took a break and trying to rethink actually how the professional activity can look like, in this new situation.

What they should do, what they shouldn't do in these new conditions. So that's now a big question mark for a big part of professional community in urban issues, let's say. Not only studies. Studies, you also can continue. You're not sure you can publish it, for sure not in foreign journals.

That's another part of the story. The strange politics of sanctions against Russian scholars who are not allowed to publish now in English speaking journals. Are not invited into research projects anymore. This is an absolutely strange thing, and I guess that it's against the values of academia, basically.

So even though the Russian scholars continue their research, the English-speaking audience will not know anything about that. Because if they publish, they only can publish within Russia. And if they will be censored, then some topics will just disappear because it was possible to publish it outside of the country in an English Journal. But not in Russia, in Russian language. But now with the sanctions, they cannot publish it at all. I think these sanctions will actually affect the urban studies, the critical urban studies. Because there will be no space for critical urban studies results of this research to become publicly accessible.

[00:44:02] **Markus Kip:** How are these sanctions from international journals, how are they formulated or how are they articulated? Is it a straight refusal to publish from scholars who are still at Russian universities?

[00:44:24] **Oleg Pachenkov:** It sounds like there could be no collaboration in any way with people affiliated with Russian institutions, any sort of institutions.

First of all, universities because they're state institutions. But for example, the university where I work, it's the European University, which is a private university. Again, NGO. So, it's not state university. It has always been in troubles with the state, actually. It has been closed a couple of times by the state, but still, it's a Russian institution.

So, it goes under this requirement of no collaboration with Russian institutions. If I only had my affiliation in the European University of St. Petersburg, I could not be published in any journal in Europe or the States. The colleagues who stay and have affiliation in Russia cannot publish, cannot be part of the research projects.

The research projects were frozen or closed. Several projects that I was a part of, for example, the funding has been frozen. So, no money can go to people, scholars affiliated with Russian institutions. Only those who have affiliation in institutions outside of Russia, they can have access to the world, academic public stage.

Like me, because I work here in Berlin. So that's tricky. Perhaps it will change because the level of European Union, actually that's the European requirement. There are some negotiations now going on at the European commission level because for scholars it's quite obvious that these sanctions are insane and that they actually contradict to the academic values, obviously and openly. Because academia should come over the political, national boundaries, and over political agenda or geopolitical agenda imposed to it.

The solidarity of academics is supposed to be about the support of people who suffer the repression in authoritarian regimes not the opposite. I think these debates are now going on and hopefully the situation will change. But I think the problem is you have to be very selective then.

It's much easier to just ban all. Without any details, just all. To let things happen you have to go into details and check which petition, which of two petitions this academic actually signed. Though there are people who signed both. I know that, but very few. But it's still, I mean, for those who have been living under authoritarian regimes, it's quite obvious.

One you sign sincerely, the other one you sign because you don't want to be fired. Because if you are fired, you lose your job, you lose your salary, you lose everything. You lose your professional track basically. So, it can be understood, in a way. But there are many scientists who didn't sign this pro war petition and they signed, and their name are visible, and they're signed the anti-war petition.

Why do you ban those people? That's strange.

[00:48:04] **Markus Kip:** What happened to your colleagues at the Centre for Independent Social Research as well as the European University, particularly in the centre for urbanism and participation? How many of those stayed, or are still in St. Petersburg and how many of those have left the country?

[00:48:28] **Oleg Pachenkov:** From my professional circle, both academic and activists, my feeling is that 80% have left the country. In our centre it was not big. They were just four people working. It's now one, stays in Russia, the director of the centre.

So, he takes care of the business, so to say. And other centres, I also know, they lost most of their employees. In Centre for Independent Social Research, I think, maybe more. Yeah, also 80%. So, I came in this April, so one year after the war started, I came to the Centre for Independent Social Research, and there were, I don't know, maybe ten people or maybe five people.

Because there were also some guests, some colleagues coming from other institutions. Most of the people left. I think, all those who had established relations, international relations with colleagues outside of Russia, they left. Because they speak English, they have established relations, they have colleagues who welcome them.

And this should be actually recognized and stressed that at the personal level, I think, none of us have experienced anything related to the sanctions or something like that. So, at a personal level, all foreign colleagues helped us and then they found money, short-term scholarships, long-term scholarships, any sort of support that helped us to come and stay now for a year, perhaps for a longer time, in European or American or Canadian universities.

For those who had established relations, they left. Still many people stayed, especially those who feel responsibility. Who had administrative positions, like heads of departments, for example, or some other units. Because if they leave then the entire team just lost the leader and then disappears.

So, they kind of feel responsibility for their colleagues, and that's why they stay in key positions to continue doing things. Also, of course, we all share the belief that there should be some science, critical science still developing within the country. Because if all scholars leave, then there will be no academia anymore.

There should be public and civic activity going on. Because if there will be just nothing, and then a hundred percent of this field just cleaned up and taken by the authoritarian state, then there will be no chances for any restoration of normal society. Even after the end of the regime, which we all hope for.

But when it happens, there will be a need for alternative institutions to be developed. But to develop something you should have it. It's much more difficult to develop from scratch, from nothing. Even the Soviet Union, at the moment of the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were, if not institutions, then at least initiatives.

Groups, personalities who became a background and a kind of a key person for the development of democracy after the totalitarianism. So, the same will be needed now. For the time when Putin's regime collapses. We all believe that this kind of work and activity is needed. And from my feeling, maybe 90% of those 80% who left, let's say they all are looking back to Russia and thinking of coming back to Russia as soon as possible, as soon as they can afford it.

What it means, it differs from a person to person. I mean, the expectations, or conditions that they would consider enough for them to come back, differ from one person to another. Some say, just the stop of the war perhaps is enough or stop of the war and stop of the hard reppressions that are taking place now. Some say no, we only come after Putin is gone. No way, we are going to work under this regime. So, it differs. But most of people really think that they need to work, to act, to change their society, the Russian society, that they have been working for and investing so much of intellect, energy and everything, and scholars and activists.

So, they actually want to come and do some good for Russia.

[00:54:07] **Markus Kip:** How do you keep track of the developments in St. Petersburg and beyond, in Russia? How do you get a sense of urban life and the situation there?

[00:54:23] **Oleg Pachenkov:** The overall feeling, it was a mixed feeling. I think the society is split very much now, openly split and into two big parts, so to say.

One part is those who don't care, who either believe that the war Russia is doing is a good thing, I mean, who believe the propaganda and propaganda is saying that Russia is liberating Ukraine from fascists. And many people believe in that and, so they either don't care about the war or support the war, but supporters I think are much fewer.

Most of people just say, well, we are here, the war is there. Perhaps there is some right things staying behind this invasion because Ukrainians did bad things against Russian speaking population, and we are protecting those people. So, there was some good, there is definitely some wrong and bad things about the war. Like any war, killing people is not good. Destroying the cities is not good. But they share this formula, Russia was forced to do it. So, they say, okay, we don't care. We just live our lives and it's possible to continue living your life. You if you just work, you know, manual work or in the office or in a business. You just continue doing your job. And then after work, you go to buy food and go home and watch films on Netflix.

Well, Netflix is not accessible anymore, that's the problem. You can go to McDonald's. You cannot watch Netflix. There are some troubles. You cannot buy some brands, like clothes.

But otherwise, you can eat different food, you can eat Russian burgers, drink Russian beer or Lemonade instead of Coke and watch, not Netflix, but I know some other, well, people still find a way to get access to Western films and entertain themselves in pretty much the same way as they did before. So, this is normal life.

When we came, we were just really shocked because, for us, the life is not normal. For us, the time, particular history of everything, of our lives, of the country life, the history of the country, of the world, has changed drastically in February of the last year.

But for many people it just didn't. And that was a shock. And the other impression was, those who care about what's going on, but could not leave the country for personal reason or financial reason or other reasons. They are very much depressed. This is an obvious feeling.

This is the feeling that we didn't want to experience and left. That's why we left the country. Because you cannot act, you cannot think, you cannot talk in a way you wish. Not not at all. In principle, you can, if you don't touch the political issues, or the war issues, which is difficult if you're a reflective thinking person.

This feeling of self-censorship as I already mentioned, is a terrible feeling. It's really a psychological, if not psychiatric, feeling. It's like somebody is living or kind of invading in your brains, in your mind, in your psychic and behaving instead of you. It's a terrible feeling.

And people still feel it, or they just closed from the rest of the world. The difference with the situation a year ago when the war just started. The similarity is the silence. It's a very

important feeling and action or rather the non-action of talking. The silence is one of the dominant category, I would say, in the Russian society now. It's still there.

So, this is the similarity, for one year it didn't change much. But the difference is that a year ago, the silence was caused by the situation that you didn't understand to whom to talk, without taking a risk of provoking a conflict or even getting arrested. Because there were cases that people just reported on the neighbours or the neighbouring table in the bar where the guys are discussing the anti-war position. Then the people from the next table just called the police to say that they're betrayers, arrest them.

So, this kind of thing, they're happening, but now people understand better whose position is what. They know among their friends, relatives, colleagues, who supports the war, who doesn't support the war. They don't talk about their opinion about the war, the political situation to those who they know don't share the position.

Now, this is institutionalized split of society. So, keep silence with those who don't share your position, or you talk about different things like daily life, routine, nothing more. And with the very few people you can share your opinion, you can talk about that. But anyway, these talks are depressive in a way. Because what can you talk? You can just complain, you can criticize, but you don't see any space for any productive action that can change the situation.

People do not see how they themselves can make an input in changing the situation. Apart from what the activists do. I think they all now invest all the efforts and energy in keeping the networks and keeping the mutual support. So those who stay in the country, they're now in a kind of hibernation regime, so to say.

So, they cannot act properly, but they at least try to keep the safe space for those who are against the war. They even still continued doing some activities, for example, they copied the formats that existed in the Soviet Union, and it was called Kvartirnik. Kvartira is a flat, apartment. People did, for example, all Rock musicians were performing in this format of Kvartirnik in the Soviet Union Times because they were critical towards the regime.

They were not allowed to perform on a stage. So, they were playing for their fans in apartments of friends and so on. That was a very known format. And now it's back again. So, the activists come and talk, discuss the war, the political situation, what they want to discuss, in the format of meetings at apartments of friends, without any, of course, announcements. People just invite each other personally. So, you only invite people who you trust. Social media plays a significant role in that. Social networks and the other apps, they're used for this networking. People continue keeping, it's a very, very small and thin layer, I would say, of this activity compared to how it looked like a year ago, two years ago.

But it still exists, and people are really trying to keep it. Not to let it disappear totally.

[01:03:24] **Markus Kip:** So that was back in April, that you went back to St. Petersburg to visit again. What were your feelings or your expectations when you got there?

[01:03:42] **Oleg Pachenkov:** I didn't have expectations actually.

I had a personal task and a professional interest, I would say. There was one expectation, actually. I expected that from inside it looks not that terrible as from outside, which we all know about anything. When you live in another city than your parents and they watch tv, then they call you sometime and say, what the hell, what terrible things are going on in your city?

It could be even in the same country. If you live abroad, it's even worse. The news are always exaggerating the situation. People who left the country and foreigners obviously, watching TV, watching news, or listening to news, of course know only part of the story that is delivered, and it's delivered for particular reason. With a goal.

To frighten, to keep the awareness, to keep the particular attitude, whatever. Media are serving particular goals. So, if you only know a situation from the media, you have just part of the story. And it is definitely very emotionally charged, so to say. So, I had that guess that when I would come to Russia and from inside, it would look more neutral, so to say.

Not that terrible in, in some sense. Which was partly true, as I said. So, when you just land and you go into the city and you will look around, you will have this strange feeling that nothing has changed.

It's all the same as before. That was the expectation, but the interest was, I actually wanted to understand what's going on.

How does the country and the city continues living? What happened to that split of society, as I said. Because a year ago it was constant clashes with people. So, people just stopped communicating to avoid clashes. Now it's all sad, people understand who is who. So, it's now functioning better. Different, because you don't communicate with many people with who you did.

Now you just stop doing that. But at least now, no conflicts provoking your constant emotional instability, so to say. People cannot live in that situation. And I was looking to learn and understand how it works, the society as such, and how the activist sector actually works, and discover some things.

The personal thing was to come to the feeling that leaving the country is my own choice. Because before it was very bad feeling of being kicked out, which is not good when you feel that somebody pushed you out of your lovely city, not country. I wouldn't call that country my lovely, but the city definitely. I didn't want to leave my city, but I had to, and this feeling of a victim was not good.

Personally, it was very important to come, to look at the situation and make a conscious decision, either to stay or come back soon, or to leave but on your own decision.

So, it also worked, I think. We came, we looked around, we realized that 80% of our professional or personal circles, milieu, just left. We realized we could not continue our life. I mean, when you leave the country, you continue living abroad with a dream of the city and the life that you left behind.

So, when you regret about what you've lost, you always have an image of that dream. And it hurts, especially if you liked that situation, these conditions that you had to leave behind. But then we came now, and we realized, it's just a dream. We would not be able to continue living that way of life that we did before the February 2022. The life now looks different. The city looks different. There are no people, because most of your life is people with who you work, with who you communicate, with who you hang out, with who you talk. None of that is possible now. It's just a few colleagues, depressed relatives who don't care, and that's why you actually cannot communicate with them properly.

It's very reduced, and all the time a very nervous way of communication. You all the time care about not crossing the particular border because you don't want to make conflict in the family. And this is it. All the activities, like my activist part of my professional activity, working with activism is not possible.

Working for the state is absolutely unacceptable for me now. Working in the university is probably the only thing that would make sense because education still is valid, and it's really needed to continue educating people, educating young people. So that probably now is the only type of activity that I would value and would probably come back for to Russia.

But it's also dangerous in a way. Because there were examples of students reporting about their teachers to the police, because teachers and students didn't share the opinion about the political situation and the war. So, it's also a tricky situation.

I think what is needed is actually reconsidering the way I can act as a professional in Russian context, and sooner or later come back and act in this new way, which I should reinvent for myself.

[01:10:35] **Markus Kip:** We shall have, in a couple of weeks or so, a conversation with you and some other colleagues, also expats from Russia, talking about the complications around building transnational networks, including also people in Russia. We shall have a more focused discussion on that.

But maybe could you give us some ideas about, how do you find communicating with your colleagues who stayed behind in Russia? Do you get a good sense of what's going on through this discussion? Is there an open communication possible?

[01:11:25] **Oleg Pachenkov:** Actually, I would say not, and that was one of the reasons why I wanted to come physically to Russia. I didn't feel safe, but I still thought that I had to do that, professionally, in order to understand the real situation. Because well that's a methodological point, I mean, all social scientists know that just interviewing is not enough.

There is lots of information about the situation that you don't get in a talk with a person. You have to feel it somehow, to be there, to behave, to observe and so on. So, I wanted to come, but also I realized, in this past year, that talking to people who stay within Russia is difficult.

I remember my own experience before I left the country. I controlled very much my language. So, when I talked, I didn't use some words. I was actually all the time thinking what situation I am in and didn't use some words that could cause some bad consequences. So

actually, when you talk to people, well we made several tries of Zoom talks with those who stayed in Russia, and it was not satisfying for me neither.

I, all the time, had a feeling that people. Well first, the people who stay in Russia, they actually talk in a different way. They talk in a, we call that Aesopian language, referring to, I don't know the proper pronunciation, the ancient Greek writer Aesop, who was writing these fairytales, actually describing their society and criticizing the weaknesses and the bad things in the society, but in a fairytale form, not direct.

We were all trained very well in this language in the Soviet Union, where people used it a lot, also in culture, in arts, in writings, in cartoons, in many ways. We know that. We have that skill still. Me at least, as a Soviet generation representative.

So, people are learning it. Those who don't have that skill, they're learning it now. How to talk about things without naming them. And this is the way that the people who stay in Russia talk to you when you're here. And it's such a strange feeling. And also, bad feeling of inequality because, and I was actually even kind of blamed for that a little, by colleagues, because at one, it was at a conference, a hybrid format.

Some people stayed within Russia. I was speaking in a Zoom. And I was using terms. Of course, I also control my language and I didn't use the proper sometimes. I didn't speak in an aggressive way or in a way that would cause some troubles for the conference. I mean, it could be closed next day.

It was supposed to last for three days. If on the first talk I use those forbidden formulas, then probably the conference or the section would be just closed next day. And people staying in Russia would be in trouble with the police or intelligence service, listening, or filtering the internet for particular formulas, the other words.

So, I didn't use many of them, but I still, the way I was speaking, it kind of triggered people staying inside Russia. And they were complaining, and blaming me, saying, you shouldn't do that because we stay in Russia and you're outside. And we felt it like expression of inequality because you felt you were allowed to speak in a way that we could not speak.

This is inequality, but that's structural inequality in a way, on the one hand and on the other hand, I think that things, these thoughts, these ideas had to be pronounced. If they're not pronounced, then we just play for regime. We support it without keeping silence, without not saying that. We just support it.

And I understand, and I respect that you cannot say that being inside Russia because you're in danger or risk. But I'm not. So, I have the privilege, but I'm using that privilege not for myself. I'm using that privilege, as I'm making an input in the development of the public debate, so to say, to exist.

You cannot do that. I can, so you kind of delegate it to me. And we both make an input in its development. If I wouldn't do that, it would be equality, equality in what? In being suppressed? That's just an example of how difficult the communication can be now.

And unfortunately, this feeling of a little tension exists between those who left and those who stay. And those who stay, they kind of feel that those who left are guilty for leaving. Guilty for leaving them, those who stay behind, being privileged, which is in many ways not true, because those who left, but those who left also feel they're privileged because they at least could escape this nightmare, in one sense.

But they've experienced lots of troubles and still experience it. Of course, being a migrant is not an easy thing. And in this situation, we all work almost in situation of refugees or forced migrants, at least. People ran out, with hand baggage for absolutely unpredictable time.

And they came with no money, with no working credit cards because Russian credit cards were banned and blocked. People came nowhere, without any stable position yet. People have been establishing it during the year, but when they came, they came to nothing.

So, there were many, many technical troubles and the very decision of leaving all your life behind without preparing any further steps of your life. Which is just unpredictability in front of you. The people jumped in it, so it was brave too. But all, both sides felt that those who left were privileged.

So, it was a bad taste to complain about you being in technical administrative troubles in Germany. To complain and to say to those who stayed, look, we are also not in very good situations. We also kept silence about that. We were trying to support those who stayed, and invested lots of financial, emotional efforts in supporting them.

So, this inequality actually is seen as inequality. I think by both sides. And those who left are seen as privileged. Those who stayed as unprivileged. And it affects the communication in a way.

[01:19:29] **Markus Kip:** I'm very struck by your count of the dramatic turn of events in your personal life, and in the life of your professional networks and circles. And then also your statement that when you came back, it looked like as if the city is operating as before, as if nothing had happened.

And maybe adding onto this, one aspect that I'm wondering about, what effects does the news or the accounts of fallen soldiers in the war, fallen Russian soldiers have in public discourse, in media representations now? What effects does it have for people still living there?

What about the threat of conscription into the war? Particularly for men like you maybe?

[01:20:50] **Oleg Pachenkov:** Yeah, that's an issue. Well, about the victims, I think, it's often underestimated. The propaganda machine is underestimated, often. I think it works properly in Russia now.

This is very efficient, unfortunately. It is included in the propaganda in a very well way, very functional way. It's quite obvious for all scholars familiar with the nationalism status, for example. I think that Benedict Anderson described this in "Imagined Communities" very well.

The idea of the unknown soldier. Unknown soldier is the figure that is very much needed for construction of imagined community. It's just an abstract soldier representing the

community. It's bravest features, so to say, parts. So that's the same with these victims. The propaganda built a direct connection between the memory of the second World war and the current war in Ukraine.

So, the victims of this current war are presented exactly in the same way as the victims of, the heroes who died in the Second World War, for example. Or they were also the other war in between. There always were wars. That Soviet Union, and then Russia was involved in, more or less, obvious way.

So, there was Afghan war, and they were also heroes, properly presented as heroes. And then many of them are actually now officers or instructors or volunteers at the Ukraine war. There was Chechnya war with its own heroes. Saving the country and the residents of the country from terrorists.

So, this narrative of heroes, it has always been existing. So, these are just new heroes in this pantheon, so to say. So, it works for the support of the regime, obviously. And new heroes, you can see these pictures everywhere. Some still alive, some dead, even more honoured. It doesn't provoke any negative effect as some would expect.

You would expect the negative effect in terms of the human life values. Like human lives are sacrificed to the state, but the propaganda is actually presenting it as, confirming, saying yes, the personal life sacrificed, to the bigger community and the bigger, higher value than the personal life, which is a very, in a way, sociological idea.

The society has always been built around that. The society means more than the individual. So, it works. There is a movement of mothers of the soldiers. Of course, this is a critical movement, but as far as I could understand, even not all members of that movement are critical against their regime. In ideological terms. Some just want to take care of their children. It's a very pragmatic or very natural idea without any ideology behind it. I think very few, even mothers, involved in that formulate their position as a political protest against making a war. They rather, I think, to be efficient and the goal is to save the lives of their children or to increase the quality of the conditions that their children are in, at the front line.

This is their main goal, and the rest is just serving it. To be efficient in reaching that goal, they sacrifice the political argumentation. I think I've read comments on that, interviews with the representatives of this mother's movement, saying, we want to save our children.

Even if we are against the war, we would not say that publicly. Because if we say that, then the state representatives wouldn't listen to us. Because they would say we are enemies. Who listens to the enemy? We shouldn't look like enemies, to reach our main goal. So, to be efficient. That's one thing.

The men are very much afraid, and families are afraid, but it's also treated more pragmatically, and nobody would, not nobody, some do. Some really do, like they're so ideologically brainwashed that they're ready to send their children to the war because they believe that this is a right war.

I mean it could be even described and interpreted in the ancient terms of the honour. Like ancient Greek, terms of honour to be citizen means to have an honour and to sacrifice your life to a polis was the highest honour you could get. That's pretty much the same attitude. There are scandals and clashes in the families, when young men left the country to avoid it. They call up. Then the mothers were blaming them for being betrayers of the country. It really happened. Few examples, but they exist.

In most of cases. If we compare the numbers. There was a huge flow of young men, in the last fall. It was September, I think, when they were calling up people to the war. Then it was huge flow to where you can go even without a passport like Armenia or Georgia. The border was open. Families were sending their children out of the country. But it still did not turn into any political claim. It was just a very pragmatic decision. You just want to save your boy from going to the frontline. This is it.

We can actually ask those colleagues living in Georgia, for example. But my feeling was that there was also. Well, I know it from German experience because some also left to Germany or other European countries at that time, not in the spring, but in the fall.

So, there were two waves of refugees from Russia since the war started. And I think that there is a suspicion and tension also, between these two waves. Because the first wave is considered political. The first wave of the spring was the wave of those who disagree with the situation and are not ready to leave, and act, and continue doing whatever under this new regime, because the situation has changed. It's not the same regime as it was in Russia before. Under this regime, they're not ready to live. So that was a political decision and they left.

The second wave in the fall was just pragmatic wave of those who don't want to go to the war. There was a little of, or some, not little, that's not fair. But there was some political statement behind it too. People are saying, those who don't want to go to the war, they didn't want to participate in the war. They didn't want to kill people. What's wrong or strange about it? It's obvious. So, we should support these people because what they do, also has some political implication. Like refusing to kill other people or participate in the war, it is a political claim, so to say. I guess that's true. But I really wonder or even doubt about, that many people who were just trying to escape it, were really thinking in those political terms. I think most of it was rather pragmatic driven. I mean, you want to live your life. You don't want to go to the army, or you definitely don't want to kill people neither. My guess it was more pragmatic. But ironically, for example, in Georgia, the effect was the opposite. The perception from the locals was the opposite, because the first wave of the spring, even though it was political, but it was also a wave of, as we just discussed, more privileged, so to say, economically privileged.

It was also prepared in Georgia by the previous wave before the war, the wave of the IT specialists. Because many companies were already feeling that the situation is moving towards the war or anyway, some bad kind of conflict. And many companies started moving out their personal out of Russia and Georgia was just a very attractive destination point for many reasons, a different story.

But anyway, the perception in Georgia was that the first wave in spring? IT people were also a big portion of it, actually. Because many companies said, we stop working with Russia, that's a part of the sanctions. If you want to continue working for our company, you leave the country, and we prepare a space for you where you can go.

It could be Europe, could be Turkey, could be Caucasus, for Russian citizens easy. It's Russian speaking and so on. Many people came, the IT specialists, well-paid people or many people came from Moscow or St. Petersburg or other big cities, for political reasons, but still they were not the poorest people in the country.

Because if you're poor, you cannot buy tickets to fly, because tickets costed a lot by that time because there was a very high demand. People did it and they looked wealthy for a local population, or they were actually wealthier than the local population.

And so, locals look at them in class terms. And say, what the f, look at them. They call them refugees, but they came with, some came with good cars, some came saving their salaries in IT companies, or some came saving their jobs in Russia, like many architects did. They left the country for political / pragmatic reasons, but they continue working in Russia.

Making sketches or planning or projecting some architectural stuff. And they earn money, they earn the Moscow salaries, for example, which is several times higher than the average Tbilisi salary. In class terms, they're hated because they also cause gentrification obviously. And the second wave looked so, really it was chaos, it was a mess.

The fall, wave of people running out of the call-up, the Army. It was just young people running away without anything prepared at all. Without money, without food, without a place to stay. Just terrible conditions that really looked like refugee situation.

Their attitude of the Georgians, for example, towards these people was better, because they looked like refugees needed help. While the first wave looked like wealthy, rich yuppies, coming to gentrify Tbilisi. That's from two different perspectives. You interpret these two situations differently.

[01:34:09] **Markus Kip:** We shall talk about this, I guess in the next conversation. Moving now into the present, how do you feel about your current situation as scholar, and what are your plans for the future?

[01:34:30] **Oleg Pachenkov:** I'm lucky and privileged because I actually have a stable position now in Berlin for at least two years. And also, some plans in collaboration for the further couple of years. But in terms of topics, I would say, research topic would be for me, I think now I really feel a strong need to reconsider my previous activity and to become a bit more academic than practical. Because for many years I have been more involved in practical activity and as well as my other colleagues did not, you know, underestimated, so to say the significance of the reflexivity of the thought, of analysis, of philosophy, if you wish, of the activity. Because this is how the urban activity looked in Russia. Practice was much, much forward, compared to theory.

I think the development of theory is actually needed, and it's a difficult task for me making my personal / professional activity a research subject for me as a researcher. And it's difficult

to change the optics, so to say, to take this point of view, to look at yourself as a representative of a community, professional community that has been performing the particular activity.

And now I'm trying to make it a research topic, a subject of what this community has been doing, what it has not been doing, what was missing, what was the focus, and so on and so forth. So that's my research topic for now, actually. And I'm still learning how to take this position as a researcher.

And also, it's difficult in terms of building communication with your former colleagues who are, well, they're still colleagues. With whom we have been practicing urbanism, so to say. On one hand, these relations give me very good access to the field. I can talk to most of those people, who are considered to be real establishers of the urbanism or urbanist agenda in Russia.

But on the other hand, we are colleagues, and it's difficult to transform this relation into a researcher expert position, for example. To make an expert interview with them is kind of ridiculous for both of us. So, it's methodological difficulty that I'm struggling with now.

There are also advantages, I think, in this position, and my belief is that in the next years, there will be a real need to think of, to kind of enrich the urban studies, the Russian urban studies with intellectual thought, with lots of analysis of the practice. This is my task for now.

I can see that many people, especially those who left, they share this point of view, and they agree with my critical statements that I've already made several times about this activity and the professional community.

There is also little clash now. Those who stayed, they still believe, what they do makes sense. What they did before also made sense. So, they do not see a need for drastic change in their activity. But those who left, they rather share my point of view that there is a need for drastic change based on the reflexivity and analysis of our own practice.

And also, I think that the issue of political is now the issue. The relations between the urbanism and political. It has always been underestimated. It almost never existed. And most of Russian, post-Soviet Russian urbanism was positioning itself as out of politics. Claiming we are out of politics, we are non-political, we do urban environment. Was a very common position. And I think that was a part of the problem, or a part of the professional responsibility. So, we as professionals could make our input in the development of political. And we almost didn't. Not not at all. That's not true. We did, but to a much lesser degree or extent than we could, if we did it consciously.

I think this is, for example, one of the things that has to be changed. Bringing political, not politics, but political to urbanism. I think this is the next several years of work of the professional communities. And in practical sense, the activist work. It's now lots of things to be done for establishing, reestablishing and keeping networks of activists, keeping connections between those who left and those who stayed. Trying to understand the agenda, the new agenda of those who stay in Russia, trying to help them in all possible ways.

Perhaps in the future, as soon as it will be possible, also establishing their conditions. Well, it really looks like, it can sound as a metaphor, but I really see it like two pieces of fabric cut in two and now you have to sew them together. With these travel trips there and back. With activities, events organized, one in Russia, one outside of Russia, with the same people, bringing them together. Talking about what is important for them, all these kinds of things. Activities aimed at keeping Russian civil society, at least in in some way, in some form, for its further development. Just connecting this point to the previous one, perhaps developing it in the same way as we all did in the last 20, 30 years is not the best way. It would be repeating the same mistake, so to say.

Not all of that was mistake. But definitely it was not the best, not the proper way of developing civil society or public sphere in Russia, because all what we've built within 20 years has been demolished in two weeks. How is it possible? It should say something about the instability or inconsistency, or weakness of those structures built.

Let's say after Putin's regime, to try to rebuild them again in the same way doesn't seem the best option, because there was something weak in that model. Again, we should do analysis, also of the civil society and public sphere development in these kinds of Regimes, countries. Because we see it's a little bit of history repeating. So, it can repeat again, maybe, in 20, 30 years, if we continue doing the same way. We probably should do something different also in this sphere. The first task is to understand, to analyse and understand what exactly could be done differently and then turning to practice, of doing it differently.

[01:43:05] **Markus Kip:** Last open question to you with respect of urban studies outside of Russia. What kind of questions and challenges do you see that the war and the situation of critical scholars and activists in Russia and from Russia raise?

[01:43:30] **Oleg Pachenkov:** One of the things that was discussed a lot.

It's rather connected to Ukraine than Russia. Because what war does to the cities? The demolition and what's going on to the East Ukrainian cities now is terrible. But what can happen after can be as terrible as what's going on now. And this is, what I mean is the leftist critiques of neoliberal development of the cities. Very much like Harvey, ideas and critique.

What can happen to Ukrainian cities is just, their total restoration in a radical, neoliberal way. And the cities will belong to the world financial institutions like World Bank or Monetary Foundation. All these kinds of institutions that will invest in restoration of the cities with all the neoliberal consequences.

Even, for example, as far as I know, the situation in Ukraine with ownership and renting, housing was similar to Russia. So, most people were owners, which prevented gentrification. I guess, if nothing will be done against it, then the situation in Ukraine is going to look like in GDR, like in East European countries with terrible gentrification happening.

Through privatizing, but not privatizing by the people who live, but bigger financial institutions. So now owners are people who live there, used to be, and now the houses are destroyed, new houses will be built for somebody's money. And this somebody will be an owner, I guess.

This model, I think, has very bad consequences for urban way of life in Ukraine. I think that another issue is, well, I guess that the war will provoke another boom of migration refugee studies. Because now, it's a different, it's a new wave, but a different type of the refugee waves, for example, from Ukraine and here, for example, in Germany, it already is discussed also in a very critical way.

The attitude towards Ukrainian refugees and Syrian refugees, the way these two types of refugees are treated, basically being in the same situation of bombed cities and, they had to leave. But they're treated in a very different way. With where Ukrainians look privileged, Syrians unprivileged, so the racism, staying behind it, or ethnoracism or anything.

That looks like a reproduction of particular type of inequality in the urban development, or in the social development. I think this will be also an issue. What else? As I said, the issue of political in urban studies, it's not a Russian issue at all.

It's discussed by French philosophers a lot, for example, or Žižek, that they're the issue of post political. But the combination between the urban politics and the post political is also discussed, but not to that extent, but I think Russia is just a good case provoking this debate.

Look what can happen if you continue the same way we did. This neoliberalism mixed with the populism leading altogether to the authoritarianism, obviously. I mean Russia is just forward. But the same things are going on in Europe.

Look at France and the elections. Look at Italy. Look at Scandinavian countries. Look at Berlin with the last elections. And there are, perhaps you already seen the infographics for the predictions for the next elections, where, I don't know, I just got the picture. It looks terrible with the growth of *CDU* and *AFD*, and losing positions of *die Linke*, almost non-existing anymore, *die Grünen* and *SPD* are going down.

So, it's the same trend. We are just forward. So, what the rest of the world, in Europe first of all, can learn from us is what you shouldn't do, or you shouldn't ignore. Shouldn't be too technological about the urban issues, first of all, like now this big debate about the *last generation* in Berlin.

And complaints that the people stopped traffic. People who glue themselves to the asphalt to attract attention to the global warming, and the big, hot debate about this issue. Again, one side takes political argument about that something should be done, and this is a political argument.

But most of people, of course, say, I'm late again at my job. Because those stupid idiots glued themselves again to the asphalt, and how much money we've all lost because of calling to police that we pay as taxpayers. So, this clash between the technological or technocratic argumentation on the one hand, and political on the other hand, is a very universal thing.

And the example of the situation in Russia just should probably help the rest of the world to be aware about this issue.

[01:50:06] **Markus Kip:** Wow. Thank you, Oleg. I'm really amazed by your openness, and your reflexivity, and your detailed insights. Very concrete examples that I really wish a lot of people will hear, to also understand this perspective that I think we hear far too little about.

Thank you so much for taking your time.

[01:50:47] **Outro:** Thanks to you for listening.

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