

The idea behind the conference

The soundscape of many European cities was undergoing dynamic and dramatic changes in 1945. It was overwhelmed with the sounds of air raids and bombings, siege and fight, the silence of ruins and empty spaces, it resonated with the joy of Victory Day, it signalled the return to normality, the beginning of post-war reconstruction and the struggle for a new political deal.

In 1945 many cities of Central and Eastern Europe witnessed a nearly complete population exchange which resulted in the process of formation of new societies – hence it is worth asking if sound was a factor that integrated or differentiated and even antagonised the societies, and whether we can see the formation of distinctive acoustic communities within them.

Autobiographical documents, literary sources, newsreels and audio recordings provide numerous testimonies of auditory experience of city dwellers, demonstrate the role of sound in the process of returning to normality, taming new places of habitation, formation of urban communities, and the use of sound in political spectacles and propaganda.

We would like to focus on three key issues: the sonic aspect of cityscapes, the way it is experienced, interpreted and valorised by various subjects, and its representations in literature, autobiographical texts and film. The year of 1945 is not limited by chronology here; we rather assume it to be a turning point, a time of breakthrough – the end of the war and the beginning of a new period ‘just after the war’. We believe that the conference will give us an opportunity to analyze the soundscapes of cities and the auditory experience of their inhabitants in different countries, which will enable us to make comparisons and work out a methodology for research on historical soundscapes.

The goal of the conference is to bring together researchers from Poland and other European countries and to ponder over the urban soundscape of 1945 with a special focus on issues like:

- the soundscape of air raids and bombings;
- sound and trauma;
- silence and noise in the sound environment of ruins and empty spaces;
- “attentive listening” in cities fraught with danger;

- musical creativity in the soundscape of 1945;
- the sonic aspect of Victory Day celebrations;
- deurbanisation and rusticalisation of the soundscape of destroyed cities;
- the sound environment of the post-war reconstruction;
- the sonic indications of return to normality;
- the durability of and changes in the sounds of propaganda – from Nazi to Communist propaganda;
- sound technologies in the soundscape of 1945 (radio, broadcasting centre, loudhailer);
- transformations of national acoustic communities;
- adaptation of unfamiliar urban spaces through sounds;
- representations of the soundscape of 1945 in literature, autobiographies, feature films and documentaries, exhibitions, musical creativity.