



Call for papers

First International Conference

Lost Cities: Narrating Displacement through Urban Memory

within the project

**Rethinking Urban Ukraine: City-Identity, Cultural
Memory and Resilience**
(A Transnational Urban Humanities Lab)

Warsaw, 28-29 October 2026

In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, the city has become a central narrative form through which the country is imagined, remembered and projected into the future. Contemporary Ukrainian literature and culture have thus undergone a marked urban turn. Cities such as Kyiv, Dnipro, Odesa or Kharkiv are no longer mere settings, they function as protagonists, trauma sites and symbolic capitals of invincibility.

And yet current research on Ukraine and on cities in wartime is dominated by infrastructure, policy and geopolitical analysis, which produces a major blind spot: urban resilience is narrowly treated as technical recovery, not as a cultural and symbolic process shaped by the competing narratives in literature, public cultural history and media.

This conference will examine how war, exile and internal displacement reshape urban memory in literary and cultural narratives. It will focus on testimonial writing, memory texts, multilingual narratives, and representations of lost or inaccessible cities. It will also situate this wartime urban turn within a longer history of loss: the erased multiethnic and multilingual pasts of cities such as Lviv, Chernivtsi or Odesa, the ruptures of Sovietization and forced industrialization, and the selective memory politics of post-Soviet decommunization. Reading the current war's urban narratives against this deeper record allows the conference to ask whether wartime resilience draws on inherited pre-existing repertoires of urban memory-work or constitutes a genuinely new mode of narrating the city under conditions of destruction and displacement.

The conference will foreground the following conceptual perspectives:

- **The City as Protagonist:** How literary and cultural narratives grant cities agency, voice, and interiority, moving beyond setting or backdrop toward the city as a narrating and narrated subject in its own right.
- **Palimpsestic Memory:** Ukrainian cities as layered texts in which imperial, Soviet, post-Soviet, multiethnic, and wartime pasts are inscribed, erased, and partially recovered, reading current destruction against longer histories of renaming, silencing and reconstruction.
- **Testimony and the Archive of the Present:** Diaries, oral history, citizen journalism, and social media as emergent forms of urban witnessing - the city documented in real time, and the methodological challenges of treating an unfinished war as archive.
- **Multilingual and Multiethnic Repertoires:** Cities such as Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Odesa as sites where urban memories coexist, conflict or are strategically forgotten - and how contemporary narratives negotiate this inherited plurality.
- **Exile, Distance, and the City Remembered from Afar:** Displacement and emigration as a narrative position - how internally displaced and émigré writers reconstruct, idealize, or estrange the cities they can no longer inhabit.
- **Ruin, Reconstruction, and Symbolic Resilience:** Destruction and rebuilding as cultural narrative, not only infrastructural fact - the aesthetics and politics of ruins, reconstruction plans, and competing visions of what a “resilient” city should look like.
- **Cartographies of the Urban Imaginary:** Maps, visual art, digital humanities projects, and urban iconography as alternative registers for narrating the city - where verbal narrative meets spatial and visual representation.

The conference will combine two keynote lectures, research panels, roundtables and moderated discussions aimed at deepening the dialogue across literary studies, cultural anthropology, sociology of literature, cultural linguistics, media studies and other areas in humanities.

Please complete this conference information form <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeYWRliOZ2VfiZesMWNp3WCD33ABdEDJQ0beGU2UL3pSpb9Qg/viewform> by **20 September 2026**.

There is **no conference fee**.

Selection of participants and final programme 30 September 2026.

Given the exceptional circumstances facing colleagues based in Ukraine, a limited number of accommodation grants will be made available to participants travelling from Ukraine. As demand is expected to exceed capacity, these will be allocated according to criteria to be communicated to selected applicants in due course; we regret that we may not be able to offer accommodation support to all Ukraine-based participants who apply.