Urban Studies Seminar 2017–2018
Annual Theme:
Urban Spaces of Leisure, Arts and Sports

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Sport and Youth Centres as Sites of Self-Governance and Local Participation in the West Bank

Lecture by Dorota Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska (University of Lodz)

For decades preceding the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994, sport and youth centres were amongst the very few community organizations in which Palestinians living in the West Bank could openly and legally participate. Other than providing sport, cultural and social activities to local populations, they often developed into main platforms for community organizing, political activism and self-government. Many community leaders and future politicians gained the organizational experience, social position and social networks in the centres. The establishment of the PNA, and the state-building process it triggered, brought significant changes to the Palestinian civil society. On the one hand it offered greater freedom of association and opened new possibilities, e.g. for foreign cooperation and funding. On the other, however, it induced professionalization and NGO-ization of the Palestinian civil society, as well as formalization and commercialization of the sport sector.

Based on ten months of fieldwork and sixteen case studies, this paper investigates the character, dynamics and consequences of this transformation through the lens of sport and youth centres from urban, rural and camp communities across the West Bank. While the majority of studies focuses on macro-analysis of the Palestinian state-building and tend to adopt an evaluative approach, this paper combines historical perspective with anthropological methodology to offer a bottom-up view of how this process has played out on the local level.

Dorota Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Middle East and North Africa, University of Lodz/PL. She received her PhD in social sciences from the Polish Academy of Sciences and a BA in Arabic linguistic and culture from the University of Warsaw. She held visiting positions at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, Birzeit University, Palestine and ZMO. Her recent publications include The right to the camp: Spatial politics of protracted encampment in the West Bank (Political Geography, 2017), ‘Refugee Camp as Mediating Locality: Memory and Place in Protracted Exile’ in M. Palmberger and J. Tosic (eds.) Memories on the Move: Experiencing Mobility, Rethinking the Past (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), and (with Nika Palaguta) Internally Displaced Persons and Elections under Military Conflict in Ukraine (Journal of Refugee Studies, 2016).