

Полная программа конференции

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SOC-06: Navigating Social, Political, and Economic Dynamics of the Religious Infrastructure in the Eurasia region.

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Презентации

Navigating Social, Political, and Economic Dynamics of the Religious Infrastructure

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The Soviet anti-religious campaigns of the 20th century sought to eliminate religious practices, symbols, and authorities from public life across the whole Soviet Union. Numerous places of worship were confiscated and repurposed by the communist regime, often converted into secular spaces such as warehouses, museums, and sports halls. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, some religious buildings have been returned to their communities, and new ones have been erected. Religious infrastructure holds cultural, historical, and social significance, serving as symbols of identity, cultural memories and religiosity. Many religious sites serve as multifaceted spaces, merging roles as places of worship, cultural heritage sites, and community centers. These developments reflect not only the changing religious landscape but also the broader political dynamics in different countries of the region, affecting interethnic relations and highlighting the evolving roles of religious infrastructure in post-Soviet space. Embracing the 'material turn' concept, this panel delves into how material 'things' such as religious infrastructure are shaped by the socio-political circumstances in post-Soviet contexts, emphasizing the religious sides in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. The main questions of this panel are as follows:

How has religious buildings' restoration (or lack thereof) since 1991 influenced the cultural and social dynamics in Central Asia and the South Caucasus?

How have material aspects of religious sites—architecture, artefacts, and spatial usage been repurposed to align with new political or cultural narratives?

How do religious sites function as 'living' objects, merging their historical significance with contemporary social and political roles?

To what extent does preserving or neglecting religious infrastructure reflect broader socio-political priorities, including nation-building, interethnic relations, and state control of religion?

How do political regimes in Central Asia and the South Caucasus navigate the dual role of religious sites as symbols of cultural heritage and active places of worship?

The presentations in this panel primarily focus on Muslim communities in Dagestan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan. However, the concepts explored extend to the broader post-Soviet context, where religious infrastructure plays a key role in shaping and facilitating the exchange of religious ideas and different forms of activism across the region.

Religion infrastructure of Shia Muslims in Derbent, Dagestan

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The Religious Infrastructure of Shia Muslims in Derbent (South Dagestan): Between Local Mosques, Cyberspace, and Translocal Holy Shrine Pilgrimage. The Shia Muslims in Dagestan represent a small community among most of this Northern Caucasian republic. Nowadays, the primary area where Shia Muslims have been mostly concentrated historically is Derbent. The local Shia community consists predominantly of Azerbaijanians (fewer than 40,000, according to official data) and inhabits the old historical part of Derbent, known as Magals. This local community has been influenced by various actors and historical events: Soviet anti-religious propaganda, the post-Soviet religious revival, Iranian influence, and trans-local Shia connections inside and outside Russia. Thanks to their activity, the Shias of Derbent have become one of the most significant and noticeable Shia communities within the post-Soviet area. First, they have their own Shia mosques and religious organisations, which are relatively independent of the official Dagestani Muslim structures but are controlled by republican officials and maintain strong ties with them. This situation gives the local Shia community greater opportunities to pursue their internal policies while engaging with the broader Russian political context and realities. A significant part of the local Shia religious infrastructure in the town includes the oldest Juma mosque in Russia, located in the old city of Derbent, as well as smaller mosques and old cemeteries. In addition, some charitable foundations and grassroots religious activists organise lessons on the Quran and pilgrimages to holy Shia shrines in Iraq and Iran. Some clergymen have also studied in Iranian religious institutions and work actively not only within their own religious community but also in the virtual sphere, creating appealing religious content in Russian. In this presentation, I intend to address the following questions: How does the religious infrastructure in Derbent impact the local Shia community, considering their identity as "Shia Muslims," "Russian citizens," and "Azerbaijanians" simultaneously? How does it affect the collective memory of local Shia Muslims and contribute to their self-perception as an "autochthonous" ethnic group in the "foreign" Dagestani environment? What resources does this infrastructure operate on?

Power and the Sacred Space Production in Modern Uzbekistan

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Sacred pilgrimage sites constitute a space for representing religious discourse. This is most clearly evident when political ideologies and regimes change. Appropriation and dominance over space allow the winner to manage the organization and production of this space. According to P. Bourdieu, the organization of spatial structure structures not only the representation of the world of a certain group, but also this group itself, which organizes itself in accordance with this representation. If for Soviet Uzbeks shrines largely served as collective "memory spaces", in which the past was mobilized in the present in the narrative of saints and their miracles (P. Sartori 2024). Since independence in the Republic of Uzbekistan, the struggle between the authorities and traditional institutions of management of shrines for dominance in the sacred sphere flared up with particular force. Popular regional pilgrimage site (ziyaratgoh/pir/mazar/maqam) turned into the scene of a desperate battle. In the end, the Hanafi orthodoxy, supported by the authorities, won. Thus, the authorities consolidated their monopoly on the production of sacred space - standard architecture and standardization of ritual reflected the triumph of state power.

The lecture, using the Khorezm mazar Ullu-pir's case of the spatial dynamics, will demonstrate the change in the state's attitude to local religious traditions with the gradual appropriation and disposal of space as a source of social power. Conceptually, the production and organization of space is considered in the categories of Henri Lefebvre's theory, as revealed in his book "The Production of Space" and the works of social geographer David Harvey.

Islam in (Post-)Soviet Museum of Natural History and Local Lore: The Akhty Case in Southern Dagestan, 1937-2024

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The object of study is the largest district branch of the Alibek Tahoe-Godi National Museum situated in the village of Akhty in Southern Dagestan. It was established on the basis of the school collection in 1937 and affiliated with the Local Lore Museum in Makhachkala in 1977. The museum collection includes more than 12000 items dating between the 14th and the 21st centuries: Islamic manuscripts and documents, mosque, madrasa and shrine utensils, prayer carpets, clothes, charms, rosaries, anti-Islamic layouts, painting, posters, and other material objects, only a part of which is exhibited. In 1937-1991 the museum was housed in Friday mosque. In 1996 it was reopened in the former building of the district committee of the Communist Party. It is noteworthy that the museum was created and is still managed by the three generations of Daglarov family of school teachers. From the 1990s it is involved in the district and republican Islamic infrastructure. To date this and other Dagestani museums were never examined as distinct social actors who took part in re-Islamization. The focus of my case study is on social infrastructure of this museum and its relationship with diverse religious and state actors at the district and republican levels in Southern Dagestan in the 1990s-2020-s. In it I examine connections of people, texts, and other exhibits of the museum, dynamics of images of Islam in its changing expositions, as well as competing projects of local history museum collectors. I rely on data of field work and participant observation carried out in the Akhty museum in the summer-autumn fall of 2024. I will also use results of two more seasons of archeographic work I conducted in the collection of the Akhty museum with Shamil Shikhaliev and Ilona Chmylevskaja in 2022-2023.