

Call for papers for the annual symposium of Collegium Carolinum in 2008, Nov. 20-23

Scientific self-description by socialist societies: social science and ethnology/ethnography in East Central and Southeast Europe, 1945-1989

Ulf Brunnbauer, Claudia Kraft, Martin Schulze Wessel

In the state socialist countries of Eastern Europe, social science and ethnology/ethnography were of eminent importance for political reasons: they were repositories of knowledge for the self-description of the respective societies; by making available social and cultural analyses they served the purpose of exerting political control and prescribing directions of development; they were among the most important scientific instruments of state socialism for rationalizing its own existence. Ethnography was often given the task of visualizing a popular “socialist culture,” whereas sociologists were to detect “deviant” behavior. In some countries however, these disciplines also offered a vehicle for professional criticism of certain developments in the socialist societies, such as the goal of social equality remaining unattained. The relationship between social sciences and the communist regimes was therefore ambivalent, not least because unbiased examination of social and cultural life could not fail to point out striking differences between political pretension and social reality. By generating relevant data using methods such as ethnological field research, large-scale interviewing and recollection-compiling projects, and opinion polls which documented not only societal structures and professional strata, but in a growing proportion also changes in attitudes and values, these disciplines were of great importance not only for describing societal reality, but also for exerting influence on it.

This year’s annual symposium of the Collegium Carolinum will be devoted to the history of social science and ethnology/ethnography throughout East Central and Southeast European nations for the period 1945-1989. Comparative approaches and analyses of international interactions, which may also include the history of these scientific disciplines in the Soviet Union, are welcome.

The symposium is planned to predominantly address the following questions:

- What scientific cultures did emerge in these two disciplines during the period of state socialism?
- Which pre-revolutionary traditions did the disciplines continue?
- In what measure did international scholarly communication both among East European nations themselves and between East and West exist?
- How and to what extent were the disciplines controlled politically?
- What was the relationship between theoretical and empirical approaches?

- What attention did sociological and ethnographical/ethnological research enjoy beyond the specific, informed public of their own disciplines?

The following thematic fields of the two scientific disciplines are to be thoroughly discussed at the symposium:

- Labor / Labor force
- Social inequality, Societal differentiation
- Inner security / Crime/ “Deviant” behavior
- Generations / Youth / Family / Sexuality
- Migration (both within a given nation and cross-border)
- Interethnic/interdenominational relations
- Gender

What we want to learn more about are traditions of thinking or concepts and methods developed with regard to the thematic fields mentioned above. We want to be able to make statements regarding similarities or dissimilarities in the history of social science and ethnology/ethnography across the whole range of East Central and Southeast European nations, even in comparison with the Soviet Union. Another question to be tackled is the role of intellectual contacts and exchanges across national borders and even between the two blocs , fitting examples being the support extended to scholars from state socialist countries by Western funding institutions (such as the Ford Foundation) as early as the 1950s, or transnational scientific communication established in the framework of international symposiums, international learned societies or by way of contacts with the respective exile communities.

The final question we shall try to answer concerns the stance of social and cultural sciences in East Central and Southeast Europe regarding the communist past of their own disciplines. Are there paradigms that appear worth maintaining, regardless of the fact that before 1989 the disciplines were politically controlled? What importance do data accumulated by social sciences and ethnology/ethnography in the past have for social and cultural research today?

Since social and cultural sciences accumulated knowledge in a nationally-controlled environment with the aim of controlling society and making the communist dream come true, the projected symposium will act as a complement to the one organized by Collegium Carolinum in 2007 under the heading “Concepts about Future Developments and National Planning under Socialism: Czechoslovakia 1945-1989 in an East Central European perspective”.

Travel and hotel expenses will be refunded by Collegium Carolinum. Papers presented will be published in the book series “Bad Wiesseer Tagungen des Collegium Carolinum”. Conference languages will be German and English,

projects for papers, however, may be submitted in Czech or Slovak as well.
Proposals – preferably not longer than a single page – must be submitted by June 15, 2008 to:

Christiane Brenner
Collegium Carolinum
Hochstraße 8
81669 München
Germany

Christiane.Brenner@extern.lrz-muenchen.de
www.collegium-carolinum.de