Epistemologies of In-Betweenness:
East Central Europe and the World History of Social Science, 1890-1945

Workshop

Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (Regensburg)
29-30 May, 2015

Call for Papers

Convenors:
Katherine A. Lebow, Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Research
Małgorzata Mazurek, Department of History, Columbia University
Joanna Wawrzyniak, Institute of Sociology, Warsaw University
Ulf Brunnbauer, Institute for East and Southeast European Studies
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The period ca. 1890-1945 saw both the crystallization of modern social scientific disciplines and some of the most profound crises of the social, political, and economic systems they were devised to study. This workshop asks how intellectuals’ sustained engagement with these crises in the “shatterzones” of East Central Europe shaped the development of social science between the end of the nineteenth century and the onset of the Cold War.

Conceived as a follow-up to the workshop “Malinowski’s Children: East Central European ‘Betweenness’ and Twentieth-Century Social Science” (Heyman Center for the Humanities, Columbia University, May 2014), the present workshop aims to consider new approaches to the study of social science history. Besides decentering classic narratives of scientific innovation and dissemination focusing on “the West,” it seeks to historicize key concepts that structure our understanding of the region’s history—concepts that took shape during this period, but remained unstable throughout—that were, themselves, part of that history.

While East Central European social science and social scientists have been widely studied, East Central Europe has rarely been considered as a historical locality in the circulation of social scientific knowledge. We approach the region not only as the birthplace of many authors of the social scientific canon, but as ambiguous terrain in a modern global imaginary characterized and categorized by asymmetries of power. To the extent that social science arose in response to such asymmetries (anthropology vis-à-vis imperialism/colonialism, sociology vis-à-vis capitalism/class, psychology vis-à-vis sexuality/gender, etc.), we are interested in how East Central European scholars problematized their region’s “in-betweenness,” its non-normative status in the modern world. We are interested, too, in how East Central European scholars—confronted with the collapse of empires, the crisis of the global economic system, and the rise of nationalism and racism—understood their disciplines’ human and historical potential.
Would social science serve to naturalize and legitimate authority, or was its purpose to
demystify and liberate?

Papers may address a wide range of topics, including but not limited to the
transnational circulation of people and ideas (biographies on the move; the translation of
concepts from the local to the global, and vice-versa); competing historical frameworks
and chronologies of social science history (Western vs. East Central European;
Eurocentric vs. non-Eurocentric); regionally distinct fields of social research as such
nationalism studies or Jewish social science; shifting deployments of specific concepts,
methods, or epistemologies (“backwardness,” “cosmopolitanism,” “unevenness,”
humanism vs. positivism); as well as dead ends and failures, paths not taken, and
repressed or forgotten disciplinary histories.

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Prospective speakers are invited to submit abstracts of approximately 500 words
and the CV. Submissions should include name, affiliation and contact details. The
deadline for submissions is December 1, 2014. For more information about the
conference, or to submit an abstract, please email the organizing committee at
katherine.lebow@vwi.ac.at, mm4293@columbia.edu or wawrzyniakj@is.uw.edu.pl

Conference participants will be asked to submit original papers (max. 10 000
words) in English no later than May 15, 2015. The papers will be pre-circulated among
all participants to leave room for discussion at the conference.

The conference is supported by The Graduate School for East and Southeast
European Studies (University of Regensburg, LMU Munich), Institute for East- und
Southeast European Studies (Regensburg) and the Department of History, Columbia
University.