Public Hygiene in Central and Eastern Europe, 1800 – 1940

Veranstalter: Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen, Universität Gießen; Andreas Renner, Universität Tübingen
Datum, Ort: 13.01.2012-14.01.2012, Gießen
Bericht von: Justyna A. Turkowska, Herder Institut, Marburg; Lenka Fehrenbach, Department of History, University of Basel

'Public hygiene' as a social concept with a long tradition, various historical understandings, developments, practices and its social, national or racial connotations is an increasingly common research field. While researchers have previously focused on Western or colonial cases, which they understood as a link between colony and empire and therefore as an extension of Western European discussions about hygiene, the 'Central' and 'Eastern' European cases have received less attention thus far. This workshop – organised by Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen (Gießen) and Andreas Renner (Tübingen), held at the University of Gießen – gathered scholars from various countries (Germany, Austria, France, Russia, Switzerland) and disciplines (history of medicine, general history, public health and sociology) and offered them a forum for mutual exchange and joined analysis of various aspects of hygienic concepts and practices in these less analysed regions. The discussions were structured alongside four main themes: imperial hygiene; state and nation building; transfer and insemination of knowledge; eugenics and moral.

Hygiene, as KATHARINA KREUDER-SONNEN (Gießen) and ANDREAS RENNER (Tübingen) pointed out in their introduction, can be read as a 'travelling concept' and transformation factor for the culture of knowledge as well as for notions of the human being, state, nation or gender. In this manner 'Western' patterns were often pathbreaking but when viewed against common beliefs, not always hegemonic. The encounter with local medical conditions challenged them and unveiled the multi-directional character of transmission and circulation of medical knowledge: as circulation among experts, as circulation from experts to their audience and from the people to experts. Both, top-bottom and bottom-top routes have to be considered. The diversity of the papers demonstrated that practices with the aim of disciplining the people, popularisation and central regulation of hygienic habits must be regarded in addition to the practical transfer and the introduction of medical knowledge to every single village and to local conditions, while seeking an explanation for differences or similarities in concepts of public hygiene and its significance for social and political transformations.

The first panel focussed on the question of „Hygiene in the Tsarist Empire (Imperial Hygiene)". In his talk CHRISTIAN PROMITZER (Graz) examined travelogues from French, German and English scientists who travelled in the 19th century through the Ottoman Empire. Taking account of the social and cultural background of the authors, Promitzer argued that these sources reveal not only a great deal of information about the hygienic situation in the travellers' country of arrival but also about their medical training, knowledge and about the relation between Central and Western Europe and the „Oriental other". ANNA AFANAS'EVA (Iaroslavl') discussed in her presentation the question of quarantine in the Kazakh steppe on the occasion of the cholera epidemics of 1829 – 1831 and 1892 – 1893. Focussing upon the relationship between the Russian authorities and Kazakh nomads, she showed how the Russian perception of the indigenous population shifted from being suspicious and rebellious to being seen as loyal and trustworthy. REINHARD NACHTIGAL (Freiburg i. Br.) also examined the practice of quarantine in the Tsarist Empire. He put his emphasis on the function of quarantine lines and on the question of why quarantine lost its importance towards the end of the 19th century. As he pointed out, some of the main reasons for this decline were the negative effects on commerce, the frequent failure of these measurements and the changing scientific knowledge of contemporaries. Based upon the idea that scientific knowledge forms the basis of preventative strategies in modern states, MATTHIAS BRAUN (Berlin) analysed the changing research practices and the image of malaria in the eastern part of Transcaucasia in the late 19th and early 20th

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

centuries. Braun described that before 1917 malaria was considered to be caused by a lack of culture. After the triumphal march of bacteriology physicians tried to act against the disease by focusing on landscapes, drawing maps of its breeding grounds which were perceived as being within national borders, and finally becoming racial maps in the 1930s with the increasing importance of laboratory blood examinations.

The second panel (Building States and Nations) offered deep insights into the (re)definition and contextualisation of medical discourses due to national and political changes, primarily after World War I. It was opened with NATALIA CHERNIAEVA's (Ekaterinburg) paper addressing the civilising discourse in Russian and Soviet health propaganda for mothers, especially in rural areas, from the 1880s till the 1920s. These discourses were initiated by charitable grassroot movements in the 1880s and became a governmental project under the Soviets. This change of strategic focus and political priorities caused a cultural shift in the (re)coding of motherhood: from the image as exotic and to-be-civilised the village mothers evolved into Socialist fellows. Subsequently, LENKA FEHRENBACH's (Tübingen) paper displayed the Soviet anti-tuberculosis campaigns in the 1920s pointing out their ideological character as a part of the Soviet political agenda for strengthening the new Bolshevik system and constructing a sense of togetherness as an antipole to capitalistic atomisation and imperialism. Social stratification and hygienisation of common practices were closely associated with the redefinition of new Soviet human beings. GREGORY DUFAUD (Paris) then gave us a glimpse of psychiatric care in the Soviet Union: after a short-live primacy of psychiatric care in the 1920s, primarily in the time of New Economic Policy when the psychiatry was inspired by 'Western' debates and linked to mental hygiene the late 1920s and 1930s brought a profound redefinition. The concept of (preventive) care was replaced by a concept of provisional help, understood as a tool for social subjection and social engineering. KATRIN STEFFEN's (Lüneburg) paper in turn explored the interweaving between public hygiene and modern visions for state revival, focussing on Poland in the period of national transition after World War I. It stressed the innovative character of the newly established public hygiene demonstrating the significance of the 'homecoming' of experts with internal migration background in addition to the international interrelations and its challenging role for the conceptualisation of public hygiene. A strong national framing and entanglement emerged as a result of deterioration of politics in the 1930s.

The third panel (Travel, Public, Popularisation) focused on different ways of transferring medical knowledge. ANGELIKA STROBEL (Zurich) presented the two „All-Russian" Hygiene Exhibitions in St Petersburg in 1893 and 1913 in her talk. Strobel mainly focused on the analysis of newspaper reports and showed that contemporaries linked the exhibitions with the notion of „future" and „civilisation" and with hopes to improve Russia's health. But, as Strobel pointed out, the communication between experts and the lower class didn't work successfully. AXEL HÜNTELMANN (Mainz) examined the fluctuation of knowledge between experts and looked at the relation between the Institute for Experimental Therapy in Frankfurt and its partners in Eastern Europe. He described how knowledge about serum standards and its medical applications were spread from Germany eastwards via scientific, technical and personal networks. Analysing the German point of view Hüntelmann described how the relationship developed from 1900 onwards and how the situation changed in the 1920s after World War I. THOMAS STELLER (Bielefeld/Baltimore) also looked at the activities of German institutions in Eastern Europe, presenting the German Hygiene-Museum in Dresden and its activities in the 1920s. Steller showed that exhibitions not only reflected concepts of the individual as part of the social body or as simple bio-political instruments. Instead he demonstrated that they contained knowledge which represented Germany further as a civilised and progressive national state. JUSTYNA A. TURKOWSKA (Marburg) examined in her paper the history of the Hygiene Institute in Posen from its foundation in 1899 till the end of the World War I. She pointed out how political interests and goals

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

such as the attempt of Prussia to impose German citizens in the province were mixed with attempts to improve the hygienic situation and showed how the Hygiene Institute not only became a meeting point for German and Polish physicians but also a centre of the creation and transfer of knowledge.

The final panel (Eugenics and Moral) was opened with a paper from NIKOLAY KAMENOV (Zurich) who outlined the origin of global anti-alcohol movements, particularly the Bulgarian case from the 1880s until 1940. Kamenov, stressing the close links to religious activism, pointed out some of the most crucial aspects of the sobriety movement: its significant role for the formation of a transregional and transnational linkage and development of a 'humanity concept', and for the Bulgarian case the striking closeness to the development patterns of the Soviet Union – a reason for the sceptical absorption of eugenic trends in the 1930s in Bulgaria. BJÖRN M. FELDER (Göttingen) followed this aspect in his paper about eugenic debates from the late Tsarist Empire to early Soviet Union, underscoring that eugenic was, against the common thesis, not a simple 'grass root' movement but a part of bio-political concepts included in the program of national social hygiene, though medical eugenics was despised till the late 1940s and later on officially banned under Stalin. Eugenics still became an applied science in Russia and was quite influential and guided by 'Western' debates. The gender and ethnical hierarchisation by the Soviet eugenic debates were in turn demonstrated by BIRTE KOHTZ (Gießen): the idea of an ethnically defined 'genofond' and the curtailing of the power of procreation to selected donors being seen as central for creating 'new' human beings was consistent with socialist re-conceptualisation of family/sexual life and provided a common ground for several apparently contradictory eugenic concepts. Thus, the significance of eugenics as an applied branch of anthropogenetics and of men as a crucial factor in the state bio-politics was strengthened and fixed. In the final presentation EKATERINA BOROZDINA (St. Petersburg) explored the discursive practices and debates about moral order and ethics of Soviet medicine from the 1920s pointing towards the negation of medical ethics as a separate discipline by medical authorities in the 1920s and the vanish of ethical topics from medical discourses in the 1930s-1940s as a result of political and (Soviet) ideological allocation of medicine. Medical deontology as a compromise between different, often politically involved actors started to be negotiated in the 1940s and became a teaching subject in the 1990s.

Science, hereby exemplified on public hygiene, is not politically neutral. This well-known truth was stressed by all papers indicating the colonial and civilizing context of the hygienic discourses and the dichotomy between them and the 'Western' positioning as well as between the professional or experts' level and different gender and political rhetoric. Each case seized different aspects of these medical discourses but the basic paradigms demonstrating the role of hygiene by reinvigoration of a new community/state, their identity-establishing significance or their power of (re)coding by shaping an image of hetero and self-identification acted as a common ground for further consideration. In the final discussion as well as in the closing discussions after each panel – the latter having been lead by DMITRII MIKHEL' (Saratov), DANIELA SECHEL (Wien) and IRINA SIROTKINA (Moscow) – topics such as hygiene as a field of ideological exploitation and projection screen for danger concepts and political perceptions or conceptualization of enemies as well as a reflection of political and cultural instability or the geopolitical situation were seized and debated among others. The local, political, cultural or religious limitation of hygienic discourses was deliberated as well as the multi-dimensional and the multi-latent obstacle of hygienic implementation. The discussions showed that different types of hygienic communication and knowledge circulation or/and the lack thereof are to be regarded as translation difficulties and challenges. Furthermore, among the results of the meeting was the foundation of a Russian Society for the History of Social Medicine to create a network for continuative research.

The conference unveiled the need of further and deeper systematization and categorization of Eastern Medicine. In this context it offered a first mutual exchange forum to present

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.

the newest approaches on public hygiene and case studies concerning different topics and regions in Central and Eastern Europe.

Conference Overview:

Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen and Andreas Renner: Introduction

Panel I – Imperial hygiene

Christian Promitzer (Graz): Miasmas unbound: the impact of Western health intelligence on „Turkey of Europe" in the prebacteriological era (1800-1878)

Anna Afanas'eva (Jaroslavl'): A Challenge for the Imperial Authorities: Epidemics in the Kazakh steppe in the Nineteenth Century

Reinhard Nachtigal (Freiburg): Quarantine as the main means of medical prevention in Russia (1800-1860s)

Matthias Braun (Berlin): From Colonial Bodies to National Landscapes: Imagining Malaria in a Peripheral Theatre

Dmitrii Mikhel' (Saratov): Commentary

Panel II – Building States and Nations

Natalia Cherniaeva (Ekaterinburg): Teaching Mothercraft to Village Women: Civilizing Discourse in Russian and Soviet Health Propaganda for Mothers

Lenka Fehrenbach (Tübingen): „Tuberculosis, the Workers' Enemy". The Political Exploitation of Soviet Anti-Tuberculosis Campaigns in the 1920s

Grégory Dufaud (Paris): Towards local psychiatric services? Psychiatry and mental health in the Soviet Union during the interwar years

Katrin Steffen (Lüneburg): Public hygiene in Poland in the first half of the 20th century as a stage for debates on modernization of the nation

Panel III – Travel, Public, Popularization

Angelika Strobel (Zurich): Improving Russia's Health: The „All-Russian" Hygiene Exhibitions in St Petersburg in 1893 and 1913

Axel Hüntelmann (Mainz): Multiple relations. Regulations and research, cooperation and connections: the Institute for Experimental Therapy 'in' Eastern Europe 1899-1933

Thomas Steller (Bielefeld/Baltimore): The public body – The exhibitions on hygiene by the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum in the 1920s

Justyna A. Turkowska (Marburg): In the name of hygiene: The Hygiene Institute in Posen between political expectations and scientific standards

Daniela Sechel (Wien/Budapest): Commentary

Panel IV – Eugenics and Morals

Nikolay Kamenov (Zurich): Anti-Alcoholism and Social Hygiene in Bulgaria 1890-1940

Björn M. Felder (Göttingen): Racial hygiene as a new mean of public hygiene to „clean" society. Eugenic debates from late Tsarist Empire to early Soviet Union 1910-1930

Birte Kohtz (Gießen): „New men" from Head to Toe – Russian/Soviet Eugenics between Gender and Ethnicity

Ekaterina Borozdina (St. Petersburg): Soviet Medical Deontology: Genealogy of Moral Order of Soviet Healthcare

Irina Sirotkina (Moscow): Commentary

Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Public Hygiene in Central and Eastern Europe, 1800 – 1940*. 13.01.2012-14.01.2012, Gießen, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 01.06.2012.

© H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved.