Challenges of Modernity: Spatial Integration and Industrialisation in the 20th Century and Eastern Europe

Veranstalter: Imre Kertész Kolleg, Friedrich Schiller University of Jena; Charles University of Prague
Datum, Ort: 15.06.2012-16.06.2012, Prague
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The annual conference of the Imre Kertész Kolleg at the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena, in collaboration with the Charles University of Prague, was this year generously hosted at the Czech Academy of Sciences on June 15 and 16. The fourteen presentations of the two days ranged from very general overviews to specific case studies, all devoted to the characteristics of the challenges of modernity in Eastern Europe, especially concerning infrastructure and urban environments. The first panel provided general and theoretical insights into this question, whereas the other four panels each covered specific time periods.

The three panellists of the first panel, moderated by FERENC LACZÓ (Jena), approached the question from radically different angles. ANDREW C. JANOS (Berkeley) presented a theoretical framework of modernity, where modernisation was conceptualised as the attempt to 'catch up with the West.' For Janos, the political challenge of modernity in the West was to create and uphold a local and global order, whereas the periphery had two options: imitate the West and modernise or overthrow the existing order, resulting in revolution. The bi-polar world order was a result of this challenge, but the advent of postmodernity – a new quantum leap in bio-medical and communication technology – has questioned the very possibility of ordering the world. MICHAL PULLMAN (Prague) then turned to a more specific case study of the economic liberalisation of late socialist Czechoslovakia. For Pullman, State Socialism was a highly modern political system. However, it had inherent self-destructing tendencies, leading to its demise in 1989/1990, after popular complaints had inspired an expert discourse in the economic sphere, which could not properly be articulated, since the old socialist vocabulary had not yet been replaced by a neo-liberal one. The most concise presentation of this panel was the one by JOACHIM VON PUTTKAMER (Jena), who conceptualised modernity as the 'mastery of space.' While emphasising that whatever is described as modernity is never a coherent theoretical construct, but is always pointing simultaneously in many directions, von Puttkamer combined the idea of a spatial turn in cultural studies with the concept of a mastery of space to argue that Eastern Europe does not currently lag behind the West in terms of infrastructure and communication.

The second panel, moderated by WŁODZIMIERZ BORODZIEJ (Jena), focussed on the nineteenth century until the First World War. However, the presentation by ANNA VERONIKA WENDLAND (Marburg) covered a much broader chronological period. Wendland combined her original topic, the urbanisation of Lviv and Vilnius at the turn of the twentieth century with her current research project on the Post-Soviet *atomograd*y, the 'Atomic Cities,' showing how urbanity can be considered a marker of modernity. For rural immigrants to urban environments at the end of the nineteenth century, the urban mindscape was different and promising, where electricity and density of communication as well as administrative innovation characterised everyday life. Urban planning, which at that time was governed by local initiatives had been replaced by state-controlled plans after the Second World War, although it contained a strong element of transnational and diachronic continuity. The presentations by IVAN JAKUBEC (Prague) and IOSIF MARIN BALOG (Cluj Napoca) both turned to planning and construction of infrastructure in the nineteenth century. Jakubec emphasised the centralising tendencies in the Austria-Hungarian Empire, which could be seen in the fan-like construction of railway lines from Vienna in all directions, while regional connections were left rather unattended to. Balog's presentation centred on the concrete planning and construction of railway lines in Transylvania. While the two main lines were state owned and state run, the many local lines were financed by private capital and

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their planning depended on local agents.

As the previous two speakers had pointed out, the new states emerging after the First World War had to somehow cope with the infrastructure they inherited from the Empires they had previously been a part of. The third panel on the period between the two world wars and moderated by JOACHIM VON PUTTKAMER (Jena), showed three examples of how this inheritance was to be overcome. MARKUS KRZOSKA (Gießen) provided the most direct answer to this question. He turned the attention to industrialisation in Poland, and especially to the projected creation of a 'Central Industrial Area,' meant to help integrate the formerly Russian, Prussian and Habsburg parts of Poland. The project was never fully realised because of the Second World War, and Poland did not manage to become the industrial country it wanted to become, primarily because of financial constraints. GÁBOR GYÁNI (Budapest) tried to overcome the traditional portrayal of Hungarian interwar society as one of incomplete modernisation, where feudal elements had survived. For Gyáni, the years between 1918 and 1940 in Hungary were characterised by a struggle between rural and urban elements, where the 'rural' populists portrayed the only real urban landscape in the country, Budapest, as a 'sinful' and 'alien' city, thus glorifying the Magyar countryside. STANISLAV HOLUBEC (Jena) turned to the integration of Subcarpathian Rus in Czechoslovakia. This region, very far away from Prague, was to become part of the country, but the portrayal of its inhabitants in the Czech discourse displayed most facets of Orientalism. The Rusyns were 'backward', 'rural' and 'childish,' while the Czechs were portrayed as rational, urban and civilised.

The fourth panel was devoted to the communist period following the Second World War and moderated by BOGDAN MURGESCU (Bucarest). All three speakers tried to relate their presentation to the panel title: 'Urbanising the village, ruralising the city', but all three had problems with its second half. The question of how to 'ruralise a city' was differently answered by each of them. BLAŻEJ BRZOSTEK (Warsaw) compared the development in Warsaw and Bucharest. While there were important differences, the two cities, which both had been called 'little Paris' in the nineteenth century, should become modern urban capitals after 1949/1952. To that effect, the elites encouraged mass immigration to these cities and planned modern infrastructures. The main difference was that Warsaw had been totally ruined in the Second World War, and therefore had a weak urban culture, while an independent urban culture had survived in Bucharest, which the communist authorities controlled and suppressed. Another international comparison was presented by DAGMARA JAJEŚNIAK-QUAST (Leipzig/Frankfurt(Oder)), who compared the socialist steelwork cities of Nowa Huta (Poland), Eisenhüttenstadt (GDR) and Kunčice (Czechoslovakia). These three cities are on first sight very similar, but Jajeśniak-Quast listed a number of very important differences. The main difference was the different social and geographic origin of the construction workers that built each of the three cities and steelworks. SÁNDOR HORVÁTH (Budapest) presented an inner-Hungarian comparison, between Budapest and Sztálinváros (Stalintown, since 1961 Dunaújváros). His presentation most concisely contextualised the panel title, noting that the official discourse in much of Eastern Europe in the 1970s emphasised the wish to 'ruralise' and 'de-stalinise' the cities, overcoming the negative impacts of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation.

The final panel on the time after 1989 was moderated by BÉLA TOMKA (Jena/Szeged). The first presenter of this panel, the economist MARTIN MYANT (Paisley), asked whether the developments in the post-1989 Eastern European economic and political sphere could be called neo-liberal. His conclusion was that many policies and frameworks were indeed adopted from the neo-liberal West, but the communist experience of the implementers made them unwilling to be as generous as their Western colleagues, especially in relation to issues like unemployment benefits. JACEK KOCHANOWICZ (Warsaw) finally compared two periods of rapid modernisation and globalisation in Eastern Europe, between 1890 and 1914 and from 1980 to

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the present. His argument was that both periods displayed very similar features in terms of the utopian goal of 'catching up with the West.' The main difference between them lay in the political contexts in which they occurred. While the turn of the twentieth century was a time when the struggle between the ideologies of capitalism and socialism, complemented by nationalism, raged, contemporary society lacks ideological movements and is characterised by ever increasing flexibility and instability.

The various presentations of this conference showed the vast wealth of yet unexplored aspects of the modernisation processes in Eastern Europe. They highlighted the importance of international comparisons and of looking below the surface. The official discourse and what lurks behind can differ widely. Another interesting aspect of the conference was the repeated questioning of the East-West differentiation, which in many cases is just a result of communist and post-communist distortion of realities. International comparison not only within, but also beyond Eastern Europe may bring hitherto neglected aspects to the fore. The success of the conference lay not last in the ability of the moderators and the audience from the Imre-Kertész-Kolleg Jena to draw relevant additional information from the presenters in the discussions, without which their presentation at times remained incomprehensible. The Imre-Kertész-Kolleg remains an institution worth to follow in the academic discourse on the twentieth century history of Eastern Europe.

Conference Overview:

Panel I: Concepts of Modernity

Andrew C. Janos: „Social Change and History: A Journey from Pre- to Postmodernity."

Michal Pullman: „State Socialism as a Specific Modernity? Stabilizing and Self-Destructive Tendencies."

Joachim v. Puttkamer: „Mastering Space and the Crises of Modernity in Eastern Europe."

Panel II: Integration of Empires? Transport and Communication before World War I

Anna Veronika Wendland: „East Central European Modernity and the Urban Experience."

Ivan Jakubec: „The Building of Railway Network and Network of River Channels in Habsburg Monarchy: Integration or Disintegration."

Iosif Marin Balog: „Regionalism, Economic Integration and/or Modernization? The Role of Infrastructure for Transport and Communications in the Case of Transylvania 1850-1914."

Panel III: Widening Gaps? Rural and Urban Spaces in the Interwar Period

Gábor Gyáni: „Image and Reality of a Splitting Country: The Case of Hungary."

Markus Krzoska: „Discourses of Modernization in the Second Polish Republic and the Attempts to Form a New Regional Development Planning."

Stanislav Holubec: „The Attempted and Failed Discursive Integration of Subcarpathian Rus to Czechoslovakia"

Panel IV: Urbanizing the Village – Ruralizing the Cities? Spatial Development under Socialism

Blażej Brzostek: „The Ruralizing of Bucharest and Warsaw in the First Postwar Decade."

Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast: „Nowa Huta, Eisenhüttenstadt and Kunčice in the First Decade of State Socialism. Between Proletarianization and Ruralization of the New Cities."

Sándor Horváth: „Urban Villagers and Patterns of Migration in Hungarian 'Socialist Cities' (Budapest, Stalintown.)"

Panel V: Disintegration and Integration: Eastern Europe after 1989

Martin Myant: „Has Neo-Liberalism Triumphed in Eastern Europe?"

Jacek Kochanowicz: „A Moving Target or a Lost Illusion? East Central Europe in the Pursuit of the West."

Tagungsbericht *Challenges of Modernity: Spatial Integration and Industrialisation in the 20th Century and Eastern Europe*. 15.06.2012-16.06.2012, Prague, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 04.08.2012.

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