

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

Veranstalter: Columbia University, New York City; Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies, Munich / Regensburg; Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg

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The workshop explored the usefulness of the notion of “(in-)betweenness” in relation to the region of East Central Europe (ECE) for de-centering classic narratives of scientific innovation and dissemination focusing on „the West.“ As KATHERINE LEBOW (Vienna) in her introductory remarks noted, identifying ECE as a locality of knowledge production, the goal of the workshop was twofold. First, to historicize key social science concepts that have structured our understanding of the region’s history. And second, to study how individuals and ideas related to or stemming from the particularities of regional economies and societies (the local) have been linked through social science to the presumed universalities of the human condition (the global).

In his keynote lecture BALÁZS TRENC-SÉNYI (Budapest / Jena) addressed critical turns in the political history of social sciences. He offered positivism and post-positivism as well as anti-positivism as conceptual tools to understand and compare the transfer of notions across different cultural / historical / geographical, etc., contexts between the second half of the 19th century and the interwar period in ECE. Trencsényi analyzed the negotiations and mutations of the positivist framework of historical and social thought and the extent to which it reshaped discourses about the nation and created and / or consolidated „national sciences.“

The papers of the first session, entitled „Cataloguing the Social: Modernity and International Social Science before World War

I” raised numerous questions concerning the origins of the social sciences in the late imperial / pre-nation state contexts of ECE. MIKHAIL ANTONOV (Moscow) discussed parallels in the evolution of legal realism in Russia, the USA and Scandinavian countries in the first decades of the 20th century with a specific focus on how exiled Russian legal philosophers in France (disciples of the Russian-Polish scholar Leon Petrazycki) contributed to the development of realist legal theory, combining characteristic elements of Russian philosophy with the Western legal tradition. CHRISTIAN PROMITZER (Graz) presented the case of Bulgaria as reflecting the unusual path to the development of social scientific knowledge in the Christian Balkan states after 1878. A relative lack of infrastructure and a peripheral position with respect to Western and Central Europe explain why in Bulgaria physicians were among the first to study social problems in the Balkans. ESZTER GANTNER (Marburg) addressed the questions of why sociology was closely tied to politics and why sociology and psychology were attractive in the Hungarian capital at the beginning of the 20th century for a diverse group of intellectuals, who were otherwise divided in the ways how they explored society.

In his comments KRZYSZTOF JASIEWICZ (Lexington, VA) emphasized the importance of regional difference in the origins of sociology (rapid modernization in Western Europe versus the stimulation of the native environment and the diffusion of international ideas in the ECE region) as a common theme emerging from the session presentations. He raised also the question of what explains the emergence of similar ideas in different contexts. EMESE LAFFERTON (Budapest) underlined the importance of life sciences, such as medicine, for our understanding of society and modern sociology and, in turn, the presence of the social in medicine, and called for the exploration of further connections between these two fields. The ensuing discussion addressed, among others, the consequences of the liquid boundaries of social science in the period in the region, the context specific interaction between local conditions and knowledge transfer, and not only the spatial but also the temporal aspects and legacies

of in-betweenness for the region under observation.

The second session of the workshop, „Place, Space and Scale: Locating the Vernacular in Post-Imperial Central Europe“ explored the impact of the geographical location of ECE on the development of social science theories and methodologies. QUINN SLOBODIAN (Wellesley, MA) discussed the importance of the late Habsburg Empire as a laboratory and model for early neoliberal thinkers, focusing particularly on the example of Ludwig von Mises and other German-speaking economists trained in the Habsburg Empire. VEDRAN DUANČIĆ (Florence) examined the perception of the Yugoslav lands as an in-between space in the work of geographers Jovan Cvijić (Serbia), Anton Melik (Slovenia), and Filip Lukas (Croatia). Duančić related this perception to the development of a Yugoslav geography, which ultimately did not emerge as a uniform tradition. ROLAND CLARK (Willimantic, CT) investigated the significance of defining the Romanian countryside as a space which straddles both the sacred and the profane in shaping the evolution of Romanian sociology of religion, in particular examining the approaches of the Traditionalists, the Gândirists', Dimitrie Gusti, and the Rânduiala circle.

The remarks made by the session's commentator JAN SURMAN (Marburg) sought to question the concept of in-betweenness as an analytical category. He considered whether it is possible to conceive of a single in-betweenness or if it is possible to engage multiple understandings of the category, from the social, to the cultural and the geographical. If so, how do these levels of in-betweenness interact? Can we identify different intensities of it and can we say more about the points in time in which individuals begin to consider questions of in-betweenness? Finally, Surman highlighted the fluid and seemingly universal nature of in-betweenness, challenging the exceptionality of in-betweenness in ECE inviting participants to think about how this concept could be translated to the global context. The resulting discussion also focused on questions of scale, location, and competing schools of intellectual thought and the interaction of these elements with the political.

The last session of the workshop, „Reconfiguring Populations: Race, Ethnicity and the Rise of the Global Peasant in the Interwar Era“ focused on the instrumentalization of social sciences for political purposes and social reform. MACIEJ GÓRNY (Warsaw) talked about the link between the professional progress of (racial) anthropology in the region and its use for the legitimization of states and national movements through processes of hierarchy building and exclusion. OLGA LINKIEWICZ (Warsaw) using the case of a debate on ethnicity and nationality among academic experts and the issue of scientific legitimacy associated with claims to objectivity in 1920s and 1930s Poland argued that the period cannot be understood without an exploration of the interconnections between knowledge production in the social sciences, processes of scientific professionalization and politics. RALUCA MUŞAT (London) addressed the Bucharest School of Sociology that played a key role in shaping debates concerning the transformation of the peasantry in interwar Romania. Muşat placed the work of Romanian sociologists in the context of a worldwide effort to negotiate the consequences of modernity in the countryside and find alternative models of rural and national development.

As commentator, CLAUDIA KRAFT (Siegen) noted the absence of gender as a category of analysis from the session presentations that cannot be ignored when talking about the relation of the social sciences with asymmetries of power. She furthermore raised the danger of thinking in dichotomies and called for an examination of the entanglement of the categories of uniqueness and universalism, the fields of politics and science, as well as the historicization of „the normal and logical“ development of the social sciences. She also suggested adding a spatial understanding to the notion of „in-betweenness.“ Quinn Slobodian (Wellesley, MA) finally challenged the evaluation of developments in the social sciences in ECE as late-blooming national variants of their 19th century German and French equivalents and suggested looking at these processes rather as forerunners of 20th century social science. In other words, Slobodian advocated thinking

of the region not as a periphery to but rather as a laboratory, central to the emergence of modern social science.

The final roundtable discussion of the workshop sought to provide some concluding remarks on the broader themes discussed during the previous sessions by focusing on the methodological concerns for the study of knowledge production in East and Central Europe. In particular, the panelists examined the significance of temporal and geographical ruptures, gender, the national and transnational, and post-colonial methodologies for the study of social science in ECE. JOANNA WAWRZYNIAK (Warsaw) urged participants to consider the role of ruptures, such as World War I, as a category of analysis in the study of knowledge production in ECE. In doing so, Wawrzyniak gave examples of how such a rupture could be useful for understanding the spaces that scholars interacted in and how shifts to these spaces may have impacted knowledge transfer. MAŁGORZATA MAZUREK (New York) also addressed the importance of historical ruptures in investigating circuits of anti-positivist social science in the twentieth century, by, citing the example of 'biographical method' created by Polish social scientists and then '(re)discovered' in the West in the 1970s and 1980s. KATHERINE LEBOW (Vienna) discussed the need for a more systematic approach to the study of epistemology. In particular she noted a tension between compiling an inventory of research contributions and comparing these contributions, and examining the units of research used by scholars in ECE and exploring how these scholars understood their research. Finally, BALÁZS TRENCSENYI (Budapest / Jena) highlighted the importance of examining the transnational component of knowledge production suggesting that it could be useful to reconsider the use of comparative methodologies in order to move away from nationalist projects. Trencsényi also explored the use of hierarchies as a way to avoid the use of the dichotomy of center and periphery in the study of ECE.

The resulting discussion focused on additional categories of analysis which could be useful in re-examining classic narratives of scientific innovation and dissemination in the

region. Specifically, one participant suggested that it may be beneficial to examine the impact of language, in particular German, as a vehicle for the transfer and production of knowledge in the region. The question of how to avoid reinforcing traditional dichotomies such as the East-West trope in the study of the region was also raised. In examining instances of borrowing between East and West, rather than solely focusing on periods of confrontation, scholars may also find ways in which to challenge the traditional historiography of the region. A third point which was raised during the discussion was that of subjectivity. How do the sources being used reflect an understanding of who is a subject and who is not? Lastly, the discussion engaged the value of understanding institutions during the interwar period in the larger context of the 20th century questioning whether the death and rebirth of international institutions during the interwar period was as traumatic as suggested. In conclusion, while the panelists and participants of the workshop agreed that the roundtable had highlighted many omissions in the methodological approach to the study of social science in East and Central Europe from 1890 to 1945 it simultaneously provided an appropriate closure to the discussions of the previous two days.

Conference Overview:

Keynote:

Balázs Trencsényi (Central European University, Budapest), *Sciences of the Nation: Positivist, Post-Positivist and Anti-Positivist Discourses*

Session I: *Cataloguing the Social: Modernity and International Social Science before World War I*

Mikhail Antonov (Higher School of Economics, Moscow), *The Beginnings of a Socio-Psychological Approach to Law: Russian Legal Realism?*

Christian Promitzer (University of Graz), *Studying Society with the Eyes of a Physician: Health, Hygiene and Society in Bulgaria (1878-1912)*

Eszter Gantner (Herder Institut, Marburg), *Sensing the Crisis: The Sociological Society in*

Budapest 1900-1914

Commentators: Emese Lafferton (Central European University, Budapest) / Krzysztof Jasiewicz (Washington and Lee University)

Session II: Place, Space and Scale: Locating the Vernacular in Post-Imperial Central Europe

Quinn Slobodian (Wellesley College), The Habsburg Empire as a Model for the World Economy: Mises in Vienna and the Origins of Neoliberalism

Vedran Duančić (European University Institute, Florence), A Yugoslav Method for Geography of Yugoslavia: Geographical Position of the Land and Methodological Issues in Interwar Yugoslavia

Roland Clark (Eastern Connecticut State University, Willimantic), God Meets Man: Liminal Spaces in Romanian Orthodoxy and the Interwar Sociology of Religion

Commentator: Jan Surman (Herder-Institut, Marburg)

Session III: Reconfiguring Populations: Race, Ethnicity and the Rise of the Global Peasant in the Interwar Era

Maciej Górny (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw), Soul, Skull and Modernity: Racial Anthropology in East Central Europe, 1912 to mid-1920s

Olga Linkiewicz (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw), The Principle of Objectivity: Scientific Ideals and Utilitarian Projects in Polish Social Sciences between the Wars

Raluca Muşat (St. Mary's University, London), The Peasant in Question: The Bucharest School of Sociology and International Networks of Knowledge

Commentators: Claudia Kraft (University of Siegen) / Quinn Slobodian (Wellesley College)

Roundtable and Final Discussion

Discussants: Katherine Lebow (Vienna) / Joanna Wawrzyniak (Warsaw) / Małgorzata Mazurek (New York) / Balázs Trencsényi (Budapest)

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