

Consuming and Advertising – Eastern Europe revisited

Veranstalter: Verband der OsteuropahistorikerInnen Deutschlands; Herder-Institut e.V. Marburg

Datum, Ort: 04.03.2021–05.03.2021, digital (Marburg)

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When it comes to consumption, Eastern Europe is often associated with scarcity and queuing. Inspired by recent studies, the annual meeting of the Association of Historians of Eastern Europe in cooperation with the Herder Institute wanted to dispel this prejudice. Illuminating varied forms of consumption and advertising media, the international conference brought together experts from various disciplines to shed light on Eastern European consumer cultures. The various examples showed that this field of historical research on everyday life is much more extensive than one might initially think. Nevertheless, most contributions focused on developments in the 20th century in the Soviet Union and its satellite states.

The first panel dealt with lifestyles and marketing strategies in imperial contexts of the 19th and early 20th century aiming to highlight the societal and cultural dimensions of consumer practices. CORINNE GEERING (Leipzig) opened the conference by discussing the international sale of domestic industry products from the late Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires to upper-class consumers as well as in the local tourism industries. Based on print media and the writings of national economists, she showed that the value of products handmade by local artisans like the „Russian blouse“ was social and cultural rather than monetary. She concluded that for marketing purposes these products, which would be called fair trade or ethical today, and their sales were connected to ideas of empowerment as well as ideas of heritage and tradition.

Following Bourdieu and his concept of habitus, DARIA SAMBUK (Halle Wittenberg) demonstrated the role tea-drinking played in the construction of social groups and hier-

archies in everyday life. Drawing on ego-documents and journalistic writings, she examined the way in which Imperial-era drinking tea was seen as specifically Russian. Practices like *not* drinking tea, drinking *bad* tea and drinking tea *at the right time* were related to standards of civilisation, measures of development, representation of wealth and overindulgence and defining identities. As tea was used to mark social and ethnic differences, tea drinking had become – what Sambuk calls – a „measure of virtue of everyday life“.

By investigating pre-1914 press advertisements from Jewish periodicals in Polish, Hebrew and Yiddish, AGNIESZKA JAGODZIŃSKA (Wrocław) set out to understand the role of advertisements in shaping the Jewish consumer culture and the modern Jewish identity in Eastern Europe. Using analytical means of deconstruction inspired by cultural, media and gender history, she shed light on the particularity of Jewish consumer culture and styles of advertising (e.g. use of Jewish languages, specific ethnic products and services like kosher food). She concluded that at a time when the „fragmentarization“ of Jewish identity prevailed, consumer culture was particularly suitable for self-fashioning identity.

JULIA MALITSKA (Huddinge) presented her research on vegetarian consumption in the context of broader reform aspirations in the late Russian Empire. Drawing on a variety of sources she asked how new vegetarian consumption patterns were imagined, promoted, legitimized and practiced. The key themes Malitska touched upon included the organization of vegetarians in societies, their means of communication (e.g. *The Vegetarian Review*), the development of infrastructure in the imperial cities (e.g. vegetarian canteens) as well as the huge ideological diversity of vegetarian activism (e.g. endorsing abstinence, moral self-perfection). She concluded that vegetarian activism became an embodiment of the agenda of the urban reformists' milieus in the Russian empire.

Putting the focus back on advertising, LILJA WEDEL (Bielefeld) comparatively examined Imperial and Russian-German advertising, specifically of Central and Southern

Russia, the Volga region and the Caucasus through print media and statutory regulations from the late 19th century to 1914. At the interplay between economic, everyday and mentality history, Wedel showed how advertising drove urbanization and modernization as well as westernization concerning cultural and material values in remote regions, but also became an instrument for cross-border business and intercultural communication.

The second panel assembled two papers on selling modernity and advertising „the New“ in the Interwar Period, focusing on urban consumer cultures. With the example of the commercial enterprise *Studio Maxy*, ALEXANDRA CHIRIAC (Bucharest) showed how commodity culture in Interwar Bucharest embraced new commercial trends through producing hand-crafted furniture and household goods in modern styles. Contrary to the national(istic) drive for reviving older craft traditions, the Academy of Decorative Arts as an initiative of the artistic avant-garde served as a starting point for a new culture of utility and simplicity inspired in part by the Deutscher Werkbund.

Based on the women's magazine *Eva* (1928-1938), MAGDALENA BURGER (Bamberg) examined the role of the new woman as a consumer in Interwar Czechoslovakia, a comparatively progressive young state. Using the differing areas of fashion/beauty as well as mobility/traveling, she illustrated how a superficial way of self-realization was propagated through consumption. However, luxury goods such as cars not only functioned as status symbols and means of enjoyment, but also became symbols of emancipatory ideas. Being a Czechoslovak new woman (of the upper middle class) meant being cosmopolitan, participating in Western consumer cultures, but equally appreciating local traditions.

The second conference day was dedicated to consumer and advertising cultures within the Soviet Union and its satellite states. The third panel revolved around a specific „Soviet Style“ of advertising and consumption. IRYNA SKUBII (Kingston) investigated how the role of ideological critiques of two elite commodities – chocolate and furs – in 1920-1930s public discourse provides new insights into understanding early Soviet consumption.

Considering the shift in consumer ideology in the mid-30s, she concluded that luxury consumption became an example of incorporation of previously criticized bourgeois practices into Soviet everyday life. The fact that most consumers engaged in conspicuous consumption shows that to some extent, the Soviets lost the first stage of the battle against consumerism.

Presenting the case study of a Moscow Cafés and Restaurants Guide from 1958, ALEXANDRA EVDOKIMOVA (Berlin) examined the functions, values and emotions of Soviet commercial advertisement under Khrushchev. By comparing it with interviews about restaurant experiences she stressed that the atmosphere of the restaurants and the promised social experience were visitors' key motives, whereas the abundance of food advertised proved illusory. Overall, according to Evdokimova, restaurants had become objects of individual preference and choice fostering the development of modern consumer culture.

OLHA KORNIENKO (Kharkiv) shed light on the construction of the image of Soviet Ukrainian fashionistas in the context of the formation of Soviet consumer society and ideology. By analyzing the satirical magazine *Perets'* between 1956-1991, she illustrated how the Communist Party of the Soviet Union produced negative images and stereotypes about Western fashion such as the fashion victim, hippie or dandy. External appearance was used to discredit Western values within the Soviet Union including through public derision.

To examine the nature of market research and consumer studies in the Soviet Union, NATALIJA LAAS (Waltham) traced the history of the All-Union Research Institute for the Study of Consumer Demand and Market Trends (VNIKS). Established in 1965, it became the main coordinating center for market research in the Soviet Union. Drawing on a comprehensive collection of primary sources on the Institute's operation at the Russian State Archive of the Economy in Moscow, Laas discussed the Institute's contribution to a computer modelling of consumer demand, sociological studies of consumption, and trade statistics.

ADELINA STEFAN (Esch-sur-Alzette) presented research about the role of food in tourist advertising and eating-out practices of foreign tourists in socialist Romania of the 1960s and 1980s. Among others, she relied on internal Central Committee debates, the *Voyage en Roumanie* magazine (1958-1989) and oral history interviews. By investigating the tension between the advertised possibilities and actual practices in restaurants, she stressed that local cuisine was advertised as a component of cultural heritage within an alluring discourse about food aiming to develop international tourism. However, she concluded that the Romanian state had serious trouble implementing the proposed food policies at grass-root level, including due to centralized economy deficiencies, lacking inter-agency coordination and differing tourist worker agendas.

In the fourth and last panel, the contributions revolved around the legacies of Soviet consumer cultures introducing a new way of life around the idea of rational consumption. Using the example of *Eesti Reklaamfilm* (ERF), AIRI UUNA (Tallinn) discussed the functions of a late Soviet advertising bureau through the lens of business history. Based on archival sources of the organization as well as oral history interviews with former employees, she investigated the success factors of a small organization (e.g. charismatic leader, small size of the country, networking abilities), which nevertheless belonged to the key players on an All-Union level. She concluded that the production company produced not just commercials but executed other (entertainment) projects, which would not have been possible in other (ideologically more controlled) institutional constellations.

Following the olfactory traces of cosmetics and perfumes in the Polish People's Republic, STEPHANIE WEISMAN (Vienna) investigated the images of Poland's place in Europe between Eastern and Western influences through the 1970s and 1980s. Drawing on contemporary women's magazines, the history of Polish cosmetics industry, oral recollections and user discussions in online forums, she illustrated Poland's conflicting position between domestic smell marks, Soviet „exudations“ and Western scents. Generally

used to exude prosperity, perfumes and cosmetic products proved to be highly relevant especially in times of scarcity and political instability, as Weisman concluded.

Two contributions discussed Soviet smoking practices as an act of self-expression combined with experiences of addiction and intoxication. TRICIA STARKS (Fayetteville) shed light on the relationship between tobacco product design, marketing, and smoking uptake, arguing that smoking's growth in the Soviet Union did not follow any of the standard narratives in other parts of the world. Communist ideology changed the course of smoking's rise in the Soviet Union, as ideological resistance to product fetishization tempered the marketing of tobacco. According to Starks, it was the environment of scarcity as well as a more „lackadaisical“ attitude towards industrial design and product engineering that tempered the experience of dependency for the individual consumers.

Using the concept of „Doing Gender“, JULIA OBERTREIS (Erlangen) investigated smoking as a consumption practice regarding masculinities in the Soviet Union in the 1950s-1980s. She showed that different brands not only represented different (gender-specific) social meanings such as sincerity and toughness, but the discourse on the effects of the intoxication experience was also related in different ways to male and female bodies. Following smoking habits in different periods of Soviet history will therefore enable a social mapping of society.

Finally, LEAH VALTIN-ERWIN (Bloomington) discussed her transnational comparative study on the expansion of Western European multinational supermarket retailers in Eastern Germany, Poland and Romania post-1989. Drawing on oral interviews, advertising strategies, news media coverage, and corporate documents, she argued that urban geography, advertising campaigns and varying pace of change illuminate various approaches to FDI in these countries. Changing definitions of staple and luxury goods, evolving discourses surrounding taste, texture and nutrition, and the complex legacies of communist-era consumption, including the phenomenon of nostalgia, offered insight into the introduction of Western-style consumerism and its im-

pact on everyday life in Eastern Europe.

Overall, the conference offered dynamic exchanges and fruitful discussions, where it became clear that consumer practices provide a treasure trove for social and cultural history. In her closing remarks, Julia Obertreis highlighted the processes of social distinction through consumption, the various references to the Western model of consumption as well as the link between consumption, advertising and nation building. Though there was more advertising in the socialist countries than previously assumed, from her point of view the general question about the functions and effects of advertising in Eastern Europe remain. Heidi Hein-Kircher (Marburg) emphasized the chances of locating this field of research at the crossroads between research on the challenges of everyday life, economic achievements, as well as social, political and cultural values. She asked what was omitted in advertising, agreeing with other scholars that future research should further focus on terms of exclusion (e.g. more rural regions, ethnic differences, less appealing products) as well as on transnational perspectives (e.g. issues of transfers and interconnections).

For academic research, it remains important to develop and adopt new methodological approaches for using visual material including advertisements as well as to develop new analytical frameworks considering not just aspects of cultural but also social history (e.g. political and economic dimensions of consumer practices). Consuming and advertising as complex historical phenomena can best be understood within a multi-perspective approach combining disciplines such as cultural, social, economic and visual history with art history and others.

Conference overview:

Introduction: Julia Obertreis (Erlangen) / Heidi Hein-Kircher (Marburg)

Panel I: Marketing and Lifestyles in Imperial Contexts

Chair: Martin Aust (Bonn)

Corinne Geering (Leipzig): Handmade by Local Artisans. Marketing Home Industry Products from the Late Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires

Daria Sambuk (Halle-Wittenberg): „Everyone Drinks Tea, but only Few Know How to Do it“. Marking Social and National Identities in 19th-Century Imperial Russia

Agnieszka Jagodzińska (Wrocław): Advertisement and Identity. Jewish Consumer Culture in Eastern Europe at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Julia Malitska (Huddinge): „We should not Merely Quit Meat but Transform Whole our Life“. Vegetarian Consumption and a Quest for Life-Reform in the Late Russian Empire

Lilija Wedel (Bielefeld): Reichs- und russlanddeutsche Werbung im späten Zarenreich als Spiegel der Konsumpolitik, Konsumkultur und Kommunikationsnetze

Discussant: Kirsten Bönker (Göttingen)

Panel II: Advertising the „New“ in the Interwar Period

Chair: Stefan Rohdewald (Leipzig)

Alexandra Chiriac (Bucharest): Out with the Old, in with the New. Selling Modernity in Interwar Bucharest

Magdalena Burger (Bamberg): The Role of the Czechoslovak New Woman as a Consumer. The Case of the Women's Magazine *Eva* (1928-1938)

Discussant: Denisa Neštáková (Marburg)

Panel III: Advertising and Consumption „Soviet Style“

Chair: Dietmar Neutatz (Freiburg)

Iryna Skubii (Kingston): Early Soviet Consumption as a First Battle on the Cultural Front

Alexandra Evdokimova (Berlin): Soviet Advertisement in the Krushchev Era. Functions, Values and Emotions (A Study of Moscow Cafés and Restaurants Guide from 1958)

Olha Korniienko (Kharkiv): Under the Western Brand. Official Portrayals of Soviet Fashionistas in the Satirical Magazine *Perets'*

Nataliia Laas (Waltham): Market Researchers under the Soviet Command Economy from the 1960s to the Early 1970s

Adelina Stefan (Esch-sur-Alzette): From So-

cialist Scarcity to „Conspicuous Consumption“. Foreign Tourists and Eating-out Practices in Socialist Romania of the 1960 and the 1980

Discussant: Annina Gagyiova (Prague)

Panel IV: Legacies of Soviet Consumer Cultures

Chair: David Feest (Lüneburg)

Airi Uuna (Tallinn): „Jack of all Trades“. The Many Functions of a Late Soviet Advertising Bureau

Stephanie Weisman (Vienna): Smells like Socialism? On Sensory Specificities and the Emotional Branding of Perfumes in Polish People's Republic

Tricia Starks (Fayetteville): Addictive by Design? Tobacco Product Design, Marketing, and Smoking Uptake across the Iron Curtain

Julia Obertreis (Erlangen): Smoking as a Consumption Practice and Masculinities in the Soviet Union, 1950s-1980s

Leah Valtin-Erwin (Bloomington): The Expansion of Western European Multinational Supermarket Retailers into the Post-Communist Region after 1989

Discussant: Alexey Golubev (Houston)

Summarizing Commentary

Julia Obertreis (Erlangen) / Heidi Heinkircher (Marburg)

Tagungsbericht *Consuming and Advertising – Eastern Europe revisited*. 04.03.2021–05.03.2021, digital (Marburg), in: H-Soz-Kult 29.04.2021.