

The History of European Academies in the 20th Century: State of the Art and Institutional Issues

Veranstalter: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Commissione per la Storia dell'Accademia dei Lincei

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The international conference, held in late May, was the first workshop of the „European History of Academies Research Initiative“, launched in 2019. Pooling and exchanging the expertise of previously separate research endeavours by individual scientific institutions, the project aims to promote and examine the history of academies in Europe and beyond from a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective. It is run by an association of seven national academies. The initiative builds on the collaborations established through a precursory project on „European Academies during the First World War 1914–1924.“ It included three symposia, organized in Halle (2014), Metz (2017), and London (2018) as well as the resulting volumes „Krieg der Gelehrten‘ und die Welt der Akademien 1914–1924“ (Eckart / Godel, 2016), „Akademien im Kriege. Académies en Guerre. Academies in War“ (Debru, 2019), and „Blockades of the Mind – Science, Academies, and the Aftermath of the Great War“ (Eckart / Fox, 2021).

The current workshop was inspired by the idea to provide a thematic and methodological groundwork for future ventures on the initiative's main topic „Academies and politics. Cold War and beyond“. The lectures thus dealt with the current state of research, challenges, and new approaches to a history of academies of sciences. They asked about institutional transformations and resilience, the relationship between state patronage and autonomy, or about strategies of action of individual academy members, who became mediators at the intersection of science and diplomacy. As GIORGIO PARISI (Rome), ALBERTO QUADRIO CURZIO (Rome), and WOLFGANG U. ECKART (Heidelberg) un-

derlined in their welcoming addresses, this initiative is not about institutional navelgazing, but about developing an interacademy framework for a wider European commitment to the diversity of academies and their changing role for scholarship and society. Over centuries, academies have provided a powerful infrastructure for transnational exchange and collaboration, but have also been or become agents of national interests. All the more important is a joint perspective on the world of academies and its political, social, and scientific contexts that go beyond a traditional institutional history.

In Panel I, RAINER GODEL (Halle) reported on the aforementioned development of the joint research initiative, previous tasks and possible challenges in the future. Of the many potential research topics raised, the studies on the role of women in academies, the underrepresentation of certain social groups, and the impact of academies on international politics, with specific regard on the exchange of scholars and technologies between East and West during the Cold War stand out particularly.

The following lecture by MARTIN FRANC (Prague) and ADAM HUDEK (Bratislava) provided a state of the art report on the history of the academies in Czechoslovakia. They highlighted the extensive publication projects of the Department for the History of the Academy of Sciences, including the biannual journal „Práce z dějin Akademie věd“ (Studies in the History of the Academy of Sciences). They paid special attention to the multifaceted development process of the Czech and Slovak Academies of Sciences, which underwent numerous political reorganizations, clustered various research institutes and formed a learned society.

Referring to the political upheavals of 1914/18, 1938/45, 1955 and 1995, JOHANNES FEICHTINGER (Vienna) traced the transformation of the Austrian Academy of Sciences from a transnational imperial learned society to the largest extramural institution for basic research in Austria in the twentieth century. The talk concluded with a report on ongoing projects on the history of the academy, the results of which will be published in a volume and a prosopographical

database in 2022 on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of the academy.

In Panel II, PASCAL GRISET (Paris) recounted the challenges faced by the Académie des sciences in the second half of the 20th century due to a change in science communication, disciplinary specialization, and growing competition with other scientific institutions. Through reforms that affected the academy's relationship with the public and its advisory function, the institution redefined itself as a place of participatory science that communicated its expertise to policymakers and society.

In the second part of the panel, Paul Griset and MARIA PAULA DIOGO (Lisbon) presented the Horizon 2020 funded project „InSciDE“. This program aims at developing a common science diplomacy in Europe. It explores its history by highlighting the contribution of academies to the expertise, formal and informal networks and practise of science diplomacy. A conference to be held in March 2022, hosted by the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, will historicize European academies in international relations and science diplomacy.

Panel III started with a presentation by Maria Paula Diogo on the naturalist and co-founder of the Lisbon Academy of Sciences, Abbé José Francisco Correia da Serra (1750–1823), who used his status as a scholarly leader for diplomacy issues. Serving as a Portuguese diplomat in America, Correia da Serra's career was built on both scientific prestige and his academic and mason affiliation, using the Lisbon Academy as a hub to participate in the Republic of letters.

The presentation by JENS THIEL (Berlin) examined the self-image and internal structure of the Leopoldina in the political upheavals of the long twentieth century, which, because of its status, did not become a member of the national and international academy associations founded around 1900. Thiel paid special attention to the role of the Leopoldina and its adaptation strategies during the National Socialist and the Communist regimes and its consistent claim to be an all-German academy.

GIOVANNI PAOLONI (Rome) dealt with the role of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei during the First World War and the fas-

cist regime. Due to the different political positionings of its members and the foundation of the Accademia d'Italia by the government, the academy came under increasing pressure and was forced to exclude politically dissenting and Jewish-defined members in 1933/38.

The concluding lecture by SVEN WIDMALM (Uppsala) recounted the development of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, which, apart from awarding the Nobel Prizes, largely lost its influence on national science in the second half of the twentieth century. As a semi-public institution, the academy did not fit the research policy of the Swedish government, which prioritized political, economic, and social needs and gave preference to university research.

In the concluding discussion, it was emphasized that the joint initiative is only at the doorstep of a transnational and inter-academy reappraisal of the history of science academies, despite all the significant contributions on the history of individual institutions over the last decades. In contrast to university history, which was able to professionalize and institutionalize itself to a large extent in the course of the 1990s, this development is still pending for the history of academies. In the long term, it would be desirable if academies were not only studied comparatively, but if crossacademy exchange, networking, and reform processes were given greater attention. The same applies to the label „academy“ and the diversity of its members. As the various models of science academies show today, their organizational form is remarkably flexible and the definition of an academy changed considerably over centuries. Thus, the study of collaborations and boundary work within and between different levels of learned institutions such as governmental / industrial research facilities or (popular) scientific societies and their members would be of great interest.

Conference overview:

Giorgio Parisi (Rome) / Alberto Quadrio Curzio (Rome) / Wolfgang U. Eckart (Heidelberg): Welcome address

Panel I

Chair: Karl Grandin (Stockholm)

Rainer Godel (Halle (Saale)): The European History of Academies Research Initiative

Martin Franc (Prague) / Adam Hudek (Bratislava): The State of Research in the History of Academies of Sciences in Czechoslovakia

Johannes Feichtinger (Vienna): The Austrian Academy of Science 1914–2000. Institutional Turning Points and Historical Reappraisal

Panel II

Chair: Giovanni Paoloni (Rome)

Pascal Griset (Paris): Between communication and expertise: the French Academy of Sciences facing contemporary challenges

Maria Paula Diogo (Liboa) / Pascal Griset (Paris): An informal presentation and open discussion of The InSciDE Program: Historians in Search of an Identity for Science Diplomats

Panel III

Chair: Wolfgang U. Eckart (Heidelberg)

Maria Paula Diogo (Lisboa): The Abbé Correia da Serra: Using the Lisbon Academy of Sciences as a Tool for Science-Diplomacy

Jens Thiel (Wuppertal): A Scientific Academy at Institutional Margin? The Leopoldina in the 20th Century

Giovanni Paoloni (Rome): Defining the Past to Discover the Future. The Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei in the 20th Century: Historical Research, Sources and Institutional Challenges

Sven Widmalm (Uppsala): Eyes on the Prize: The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences after 1900

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