CALL for PAPERS

Contemporary History as a History of Intervention

In the 20th century, a series of monumental interventions came into effect in many parts of the world. Interventions manifest(ed) themselves in centralized administrative procedures, in social engineering measures, in integration and modernization campaigns directed at indigenous populations, in acts of genocide and asymmetrical warfare, in policies around technology, agriculture, energy, and infrastructure, and also in strategies and measures for coping with the impacts of technology, for example, those put in place in the aftermath of the nuclear catastrophes in Chernobyl and Fukushima. All of these factors radically transformed landscapes and local identities. The individuals and groups who played key roles in this contemporary history (seen here as a history of intervention) operated in local, regional, supra-regional and even transnational capacities and included government authorities, scientific and technical experts, migrants and local populations.

Using the “landscape of intervention” as a conceptual tool, recent Cultural Studies research has endeavored to contribute to an innovative historization of the experiences of transformation in 20th century Eastern Europe. This work aims to transcend the one-sidedness of out-dated spatially oriented or more recent social constructivist approaches and, instead, puts the main emphasis of analysis on the interrelationships between rulership, space, technology and artefacts, and historical actors operating at various levels (see, for example, the project “Polessye as a ‘Landscape of intervention’”, URL: https://www.herder-institut.de/projekte/laufende-projekte/polesien-als-interventionslandschaft-raum-herrschaft-technologie-und-oekologie-an-der-europaeischen-peripherie-1915-2015.html).

Evidence has shown that the landscape of intervention has not evolved exclusively according to a perpetra-victim dynamic, but instead within an ambivalent set of interrelationships with regard to the use of space, the exercise of power, as well as human interventions and appropriations. Seen through this lens, it is often difficult for us to differentiate stories of success from those of failure or to separate victims’ stories from profiteers’ stories in the way that traditional violence and catastrophe-based narratives imply we can do.

The next step is now to test whether the topos of intervention can be further developed into a research concept that extends beyond the current area of investigation of Eastern Europe and enables analysis of a diverse range of transformation experiences. For this purpose, it is necessary to consider, firstly, the spatial scope of interventions: How were/are interventions scaled (from what distance was/is the intervention put into action)? Also, how deeply was/is it able to penetrate into the society or landscape in question? A second point of interest is the time scale of interventions: were/are they holistic designs
One aim of the conference is to provide an opportunity for information to be exchanged on current or recently completed research projects that grapple with interventions of the kind described above. A second aim is to use the findings and insights gained from both empirical and methodological/theoretical papers to inform and enrich our discussion on the topos of intervention as a phenomenon of the modern age and to help us explore a range of methodological approaches to the topic.

This call for papers is aimed at representatives of the fields of History, Sociology, Ethnology, Political Science, the Landscape Sciences etc. Those wishing to apply should either have worked directly on the history of interventions or may have dealt with the topic in the course of other research projects. Proposals to present papers on current qualification projects are particularly welcome.

Proposals for presentations (20-25 minutes) should be sent in the form of an abstract of 350-400 words together with a short CV by 15 January 2019. We will notify you in early February 2019 if your proposal has been chosen.

Travel and accommodation costs for active conference attendees will be covered.