

CALL for PAPERS

Life Reform Movements in the Baltics and East Central Europe: Local and Global Perspectives, c. 1860–1930

A joint conference organized by
the Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) at Södertörn University,
the Herder Institute for Historical Research on East Central Europe,
the Institute for the Culture and History of the Germans in Northeast Europe (IKGN e.V.),
and the Martin Opitz Library

Venue: Södertörn University (Stockholm, Sweden)

Date: February 18–19, 2027

In the last decades of the 19th century, a wave of issue-driven life reform movements emerged across Europe and America, particularly in the areas of nutrition, clothing, consumption, housing, healthcare and moral reform. These movements both accompanied and critiqued processes of industrialization, urbanization, mass communication, and broader societal change. The rapidly evolving modern ways of life, especially in large cities, were often perceived as flawed or problematic. In response, life reform movements promoted alternative ways of living. Campaigns for animal welfare and temperance, as well as tobacco abstinence and vegetarianism, combined countercultural agendas with a strong commitment to social reform. Abolitionist movements, meanwhile, criticized bourgeois double standards and condemned trafficking and prostitution as consequences of poverty and wider social inequalities. More broadly, life reform movements responded to the environmental challenges posed by industrialization and urban growth by advocating a return to nature.

This conference approaches these developments as transimperial, translocal, and transnational—if not global—phenomena. While they emerged in multiethnic and multicultural societies of Eastern and Central Europe, they were also shaped by regional and local particularities. We understand life reform movements as responses to political, socioeconomic, and cultural transformations, while at the same time reflecting the specific trajectories of modernity in Eastern Europe. They were closely intertwined with processes of imperial decline and nation-building that accompanied the collapse of the German, Habsburg, and Romanov Empires. As a result, national modes of thinking both influenced these movements and were, in turn,

reshaped by them, alongside the impact of Soviet ideology.

The conference examines these movements in their horizontal entanglements and their transnational and transimperial dimensions, viewing them as social and cultural phenomena shaped by the specific contexts of different societies and communities. Through the lens of life reform movements, it also focuses on people, non-human actors, ideas, practices, infrastructures and materialities, including art, literature and media. We aim to explore the circulation, transfer, and fusion of life reform ideas and practices across boundaries—whether national, cultural, impe-

rial, ideological, social, physical, or environmental. We also want to highlight interactions and (dis)connections, as well as tensions and conflicts, between different life reform movements, paying particular attention to their broader societal effects and to the ways in which they were shaped by specific spatial and contextual settings.

Moreover, the conference aims to advance the discussion on the epistemological dimensions of knowledge production about life reform movements by reflecting on conflicting interpretations of sources, silences in the archives, and the challenges posed by overlooked or marginalized historical sources and phenomena.

We warmly welcome proposals on these and other topics closely related to the conference's themes, and invite contributions drawing on a wide range of disciplines, theories, methodologies, and primary sources.

Topics and fields

-) gender / sexual / moral reform
-) social conditions and hygiene
-) youth / education
-) environment (housing, interiors, including living conditions)
-) animal welfare, anti-vivisection
-) consumption: temperance, dietary reform, vegetarianism
-) garden cities and their aesthetics
-) life reform and science, religion, vernacular knowledge, beliefs.

Please send your abstract of max. 500 words and a brief CV of 300 words until July 30, 2026 to: forum@herder-institut.de

The organizers will cover the travel and accommodation expenses (3 nights) of the speakers.

We will inform the selected participants until September 1, 2026.

To facilitate discussion, we kindly ask participants to submit an extended abstract (5-10 pages) outlining their main arguments until February 1, 2027.

Participants are invited to submit a chapter up to 9000 words including references and annotations following the conference until July 30, 2027.

Deadlines:

-) Abstract of max. 500 words: July 30, 2026
-) Extended abstract: February 1, 2027
-) Book chapter: July 30, 2027

Concept of the conference: Dr. Julia Malitska, Prof. Heidi Hein-Kircher

Organizing committee: Prof. Heidi Hein-Kircher, Dr. Julia Malitska, Dr. Antje Johanning-Radžienė, Prof. Kirsten Bönker

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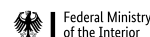
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German Bundestag



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