Call for papers

Moving beyond the center-periphery dynamics: Central and Eastern Europe from the mid-19th century to the present

April 5-6, 2024 | University of Ottawa, Canada
May 30-31, 2024 | University of Lille, France

The University of Ottawa (Canada) and the University de Lille (France) invite to participate in the conference *Moving beyond the center-periphery dynamic: Central and Eastern Europe from the mid-19th century to the present*.

This conference will run on April 5-6, 2024, at the University of Ottawa (Canada), and on May 30-31, 2024, at Université de Lille (France).

All abstracts are due by January 7, 2024.

Since the 18th century, the discourse on modernization—understood as a process aiming to align social organization with the expectations and needs of societies and carrying a promise of emancipation—identifies the Western form of modernity, in its political (democracy) and economic (market capitalism) dimensions, as a model to follow. In the multicultural empires of Central and Eastern Europe, divergences in the paths and rhythms of political, economic, and social modernization engraved in collective imaginaries the idea of a structural delay of these societies compared to the rest of Europe, relegating them to the periphery—or semi-periphery—of the Western world (Ivan T. Berend). Since the works of Larry Wolf and Maria Todorova, this sort of intra-European orientalism has been deconstructed. Nevertheless, the discourse of structural delay in this part of Europe compared to the core of the western world has been influential in the Austrian, Russian, and Ottoman empires and in the countries that succeeded them, from the end of the First World War to today. This discourse justified structural reforms and enabled the rise of social groups interested in and useful for these reforms. It also fueled dissenting discourses and contributed to the production of alternative models, in a relationship of interdependence and exchange with countries situated in the core of the Western world (Claudia Kraft).

This conference aims to examine the experience of Central and Eastern European countries with the modernization process from the late 18th century to the present, beyond the center-periphery dynamics.

The conference will take place in two sessions, one in Ottawa (Canada) and the other in Lille (France). The organizers seek proposals that engage these questions. Proposals may focus on any time period and may draw from any discipline, including but not limited to history, political science, sociology, anthropology, economics, and law. The presentations of 15-20 minutes should fit into at least one of the following themes:

1. Modernization Strategies

It is customary to consider that faced with the challenges of following the Western model of modernization ("double revolution," Eric Hobsbawm) in the same form and at the same pace, countries of Central and Eastern Europe gradually turned towards alternative models, more rooted in the local context. These ranged from the Enlightened absolutism of 18th and 19th century to physiocratic movements, agrarianism, fascism, communism, and illiberal democracies today. Some of these alternative modernization strategies reinforced the power of the State and its authoritarian

tendencies at the expense of individual and collective freedoms. Most of them challenge the Western model in terms of its effectiveness, universality, and adaptability to a different context from the one for which it was created.

From this perspective, it would be possible to examine the causes of the emergence of these models, their logics and operational mechanisms, their relationships with the Western model and with other counter-models developed in other spaces located at the periphery of the Western world (Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, etc.), and the factors that facilitated or hindered their adoption.

2. Actors and Spaces of Modernization

The study of the actors involved in the process of modernization, their particular interests, and potential synergies sheds light on their capacity to define the norms of their own existence. It can be approached by examining debates about the advantages and disadvantages of adopting the Western model or even its feasibility, considering the nature of local societies. It can also be explored by studying the ways knowledge and know-how circulated within this region, between this region and the core of the Western world, or other (semi-)peripheral regions—ranging from multicultural empires in the 19th century to global illiberal regimes today, to the Eastern, Western, and Southern blocs during the Cold War era. Another possible way is to examine various arenas where these debates took place: the media, salons, scholarly circles, economic networks, Masonic lodges, corporations, or party universities. From diffusionist models to polycentric phenomena, various interconnected experiences and forms of modernity emerged, constantly influenced by the international context.

Several spaces assume the roles of showcases and laboratories for modernization. In the 19th century, cities like Trieste, Sarajevo, Timisoara, or Lviv played this role for the Habsburg Empire, just as Saint Petersburg or Odessa did for the Romanovs, Thessaloniki for the Ottoman Empire, or Essen for the Hohenzollerns. Between the wars, innovative modernization projects emerged, such as the districts of Red Vienna or the worker city of Baťa in Zlín. Under socialism, these "laboratories of modernity" were embodied by new cities like Stalinvaros, Nowa Huta, Dimitrovgrad, or Stalinstadt. Simultaneously, these spaces of intensive modernization existed alongside areas experiencing chronic developmental delays.

3. The Chronology of Modernization

Another way to study the modernization process is by examining its chronology. It is often claimed that Central and Eastern European countries experienced a delayed modernization, lagging behind the economic and political core of the continent. This modernization accelerated from the 1860s-1870s, prompted by the confrontation with a more developed West, before slowing down between the wars due to unfavorable economic and political factors. It then experienced a new acceleration after 1945, thanks to socialist-style modernization, which itself faced a crisis in the 1970s, before witnessing a new surge since the 1980s, as these countries progressively aligned with capitalism and democracy.

This overall periodization could be subject to debate when considering its rhythms of modernisation of this region, its moments of acceleration and deceleration, discrepancies concerning the adopted models, or the breaks and continuities in the long term, well before the 19th century, and taking into account the political changes, revolutions, and wars that this region has experienced, along with the contexts, scales, and models of modernization deployed.

4. The Impact of Modernization Strategies

What is the impact of the various modernization strategies implemented in Central and Eastern European countries on their social structures and political communities, economies and technological development, and cultural identities? How did these modernization strategies affect social hierarchies and mobility, ethnic and class divisions, relations between urban and rural areas, between the capital and provincial centers, and among regions? Last but not least, what is their legacy today?

Submission Guidelines

Please submit a 250-300 word abstract in French or in English outlining the topic and approach of your work by January 7, 2024, to boris.vinogradov@univ-lille.fr.

The authors of the submissions will be notified of the selections by January 20, 2024, at the latest.

Financial assistance will be available to support panelists' travel and lodging expenses. Selected papers will be published as a collective volume.

Please reach out to the conference organizers with any questions: Roman Krakovsky (roman.krakovsky@uottawa.ca) and Boris Vinogradov (boris.vinogradov@univ-lille.fr).

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