

Call for conference proposals

Volunteering and Civic Engagement in Co-Transformation. Perspectives from Eastern and Western Europe, 1970-2000

Organised by the Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies, TU Dresden (Thomas Lindenberger, Ana Kladnik, Steffi Unger) and the University of Vienna (Philipp Ther and Mojmír Stránský)

In co-operation with: University of Frankfurt (Nicole Kramer) and University of Giessen (Christine Krüger)

Dresden, January 9-10, 2020

Historical research on participation, civic associations and their volunteer activities has recently developed into a lively discussed field of investigation. Until now, the research on voluntary action has been more or less divided in two different strands of investigation. On the one hand, in the context of communist regimes after 1945, it is conventionally considered that volunteerism as such ceased to exist and that the activities of traditional charities and associations were fully replaced by state- and party-controlled mass organisations. After the downfall of communism, studies of transformation research usually come forward with the diagnosis of consistently lower levels of volunteering when compared with Western societies. However, some scholars have shown that communist authorities did not abolish organised volunteerism altogether, but, on the contrary, used it as one among other institutional bases on which to construct a socialist society and to bind less committed sections of the population to the system. With regard to Western democracies, on the other hand, scholarly interest in volunteering has resurged considerably in view of its 'structural transformation' observed since the late 1980s: new types of organisations (NGOs, self-help groups), new forms of activism and, more recently, the virtualisation of participation through electronic networking, have generated a new type of engaged citizen (or 'volunteer'), allegedly motivated by individualist needs of self-realisation and post-materialist values rather than merely by traditional values of solidarity and the longing for community. Initially perceived as a general crisis of civic engagement and associational life by political and economic elites alike, this observation triggered a broad interest by governments in reassessing the role and transformation of volunteering under the conditions of deregulated markets, globalised economies and shrinking welfare budgets. This conference aims at bringing together scholars working on voluntary action history in different regimes and at shedding light on the transformative phase of voluntary action in a comparative and transnational perspective. There is a particular interest in papers that address the following topics and questions:

- The role and transformation of volunteering and voluntary work under different economic and political systems (material and human resources etc.)
- The role of voluntary associations as agents of political and social change
- Biographical perspectives: what did it mean to be a volunteer before, during and after transformation?

- Structural changes to voluntary associations (the legal framework, leadership structures, subordination and relative autonomy)
- The position of “old” associations vs. new types of organisations and new forms of activism
- The role of volunteering in transforming local governance and community problem solving
- Participation in fund-raising, e.g. for charity; volunteering and financing under state socialism, liberal democracies and transformational regimes
- Social practices, gender, generation and ethnic identities: voluntary associations and their role as spaces of inclusion or exclusion
- The importance of volunteering in global, (trans)national and (multi)regional exchanges; grass-root diplomacy (e.g. twin towns, festivals, summer camps, alternative tourism)

We encourage papers from a range of different disciplines, including history, social anthropology, sociology, gender or intersectional studies, political science and governance studies. Please email an abstract of your paper of maximum 400 words along with a brief biography including main publications (1 page) to ana.kladnik@mailbox.tu-dresden.de by 30th June 2019. Notification of acceptance will be announced by 15th July 2019.

In order to facilitate deeper discussion, participants will be asked to submit their papers (maximum 3,000 words) before the conference, by 20th December 2019. The presentation at the conference should be no longer than 20 minutes. Travel and accommodation costs of the participants will be covered by the organisers.

The conference is part of the project *Volunteering in Local Communities between Late Socialism and Liberal Capitalism: The History of Volunteer Fire Departments in Germany and East Central Europe, 1980-2000*, which is supported by the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, DFG) and the Austrian Science Fund (*Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung*, FWF).



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