
**International Conference „(Re)thinking Socialism:
Knowledge, Memory and Oblivion of the Socialist Past”
November 7–9, 2019**

The International Conference „(Re)thinking Socialism: Knowledge, Memory and Oblivion of the Socialist Past” took place in Park Hotel Moskva (Sofia), November 7–9, 2019. The conference was funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund (Program for supporting international forums in Bulgaria) and supported by the Schroubek Foundation (Germany).

The scientific forum was prepared by an Organizing Committee composed of the members of the “Ethnology of Socialism and Postsocialism” Department in the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (IEFSEM-BAS). This event marked thirty years after the end of state socialism on the date of November 10, 1989. During the conference senior and junior scholars presented the results of their research and debated the various aspects of understanding and preserving the memory of socialism and its projections in the present.

A total of 105 people attended the forum as lecturers and moderators: the participants from Bulgaria were 56, including colleagues from the IEFSEM-BAS, the Institute of Art Studies (BAS), the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past, and lecturers from the University of Forestry, Sofia University, Southwestern University, American University of Bulgaria, Plovdiv University, University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, New Bulgarian University, Technical University; museum specialists from the Architectural and Ethnographic Complex “Etar”, Regional Museum of History-Stara Zagora and Regional Museum of History-Varna. The event attracted 49 guests from abroad – Germany, Austria, Russia, Romania, USA, Canada, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Serbia, Macedonia, Italy, Croatia, Singapore, Slovakia, Switzerland.

The conference was officially opened by Petko Hristov, Director of the IEFSEM-BAS, and Ana Luleva, the Chair of the Organizing Committee. In the first plenary session Klaus Roth (Institute for Empirical Culture Science and European Ethnology, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Germany) gave the opening keynote speech „Studying Socialist Everyday Culture Right after the End of State

Socialism. Transitions in Villages in Bulgaria and in the GDR". In an autobiographical perspective Prof. Roth presented his first research projects on socialism, carried out in collaboration with Bulgarian and German scholars.

On the first day of the conference (November 7), three consecutive sessions were held, comprising several parallel panels. In four lecture halls papers in Bulgarian and English were presented in the respective thematic panels: "Memory 1"; "Cities, Urban Spaces"; "Narratives, Images, Bodies"; "Socialism Experienced"; "Trans/International Ties and Perspectives"; "Everyday Life, Housing"; "Memory"; "Repressions, Memorialization"; "(Multi) Ethnicity, Nationalism: Theories, Policies, Practices"; "Youth Cultures, Sub/Contra-cultures"; "Feasts, Masquerades, Sports";

The papers in the first session touched upon a wide range of topics that have found their place in the academic discourse on socialism: regimes and cultures of remembrance, the memory of communism, expressed through the monuments of that era, urban planning and architecture of the socialist city, spatial representation, holidays and popular culture (music, movies, and jokes). Particular attention was paid to the issue of nostalgia for socialism (the so-called socialist nostalgia, Ostalgia, Yugo / Tito-nostalgia), which is still a current theme thirty years after the end of state socialism, and the need for its full understanding is still an immediate task before the researchers. The panels dedicated to the culture of memory and the memorialization of the victims of communist repression focused on the fate, life experiences, stories and perspectives of different communities and social groups: anti-fascists, royal families, radio journalists, homosexuals and Roma in socialist Bulgaria. Thirty years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, the politics and memory culture of socialism continue to be a field of tension and controversy among politicians and across social groups.

Lecturers in the second session touched upon aspects of the socialist everyday life by giving examples from Bulgaria, Croatia and Czechoslovakia.

The papers from the first panel of the third concluding session focused on the theoretical constructs of the nation, the national and ethnic during socialism. Other topics that received wide response were related to the lives of young people during socialism, the marginalization of youth; holidays, masquerades and football in the archives of the State Security.

The conference cycle on the first day ended with the second plenary session during which Milena Benovska-Sabkova (South-West University, Blagoevgrad) read the paper "Tserkovnye lyudi" in Russia: On the Survival of the Religious Culture in Soviet Times". Her research is part of a large scale international project and a result of a fieldwork carried out in Russia.

The second conference day (November 8) continued in three sessions and a total of twelve thematic panels: "Gender 1§2"; "Labor/Work, Economics"; "Constructing Dams, Relocating/Flooding Villages in Bulgaria. Presentations of the Research Project "Heritage Under Water"; "Memory, Images"; „Political Culture/Religion"; "Folk-Culture Management & Usages"; "Memory 2§3"; "Material Culture, Museums"; "Religion, Policy of Atheism"; "Elites, Institutions, Control"; "Childhood";

The fourth session combined papers from different thematic fields: gender studies (feminist activists, women's rights movements in Hungary and Yugoslavia, problems of women's emancipation in Bulgaria); studies on labor culture during socialism in examples from Bulgaria, Serbia, the Soviet Union; the memory of socialism represented in images via cinema, pop music, non-fiction literature; the lack of historical knowledge of the era and its representation in the present

The third plenary session began in the middle of the day with a speech by Ulf Brunnbauer (Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, University of Regensburg, Germany): "What is the Large Story? How to Write the History of State Socialism". The speaker emphasized the need for a historical rethinking of the period of socialism and its introduction into a pan-European framework of historical development and social modernization.

In the fifth session the academic interpretation and reflection on the era continued through the themes about women's movements and policies towards women in Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. Developments related to the folk culture, its transformation and uses during socialism, identities and traditions were presented in the second panel. The session ended with the presentations of museum specialists and researchers, who discussed issues of material culture during socialism – these approaches also aroused interest and active discussions.

During the sixth closing session, studies on religion and atheistic politics in Bulgaria were presented, with special attention to icons, liturgical utensils, Orthodox temples and monasteries (material heritage). The second panel of the session featured topics related to political changes and their impact on the elite of the Turkish population in Bulgaria. The presentations on the "comrade court" in the socialist daily life and on the pioneer camp as a mechanism for the formation and education of socialist youth were received with great interest. The session ended with papers on „childhood“ in the context of summer vacations, birthdays and toys for children.

The plenary paper of Ana Luleva (IEFSEM-BAS) opened the last conference day (November 9). In the exposition „Rethinking Privacy in State Socialist Bulgaria“, the lecturer reviewed her many years of research into the manifestations of opposition „private-public“ in the everyday culture of socialism through the discourse on the social construction of gender roles.

The conference program continued in one final seventh session which contained four panels: „Political Turns and Strategies“; „Museums“; „Urban and Rural Spaces, Lifestyles“; „Labor“;

The papers and discussions in the session touched upon contemporary research fields: communist secret police, victimization and its museum representation, personal experiences and life histories as a way of studying socialism, museum interpretations of Bulgarian „folk culture“. The final presentations focused on lifestyles legitimized by the socialist ideology that defined the work life in Bulgaria and Bes-sarabia, student life and the brigade movement, fashion and photography, art in general and in its various applications – sculpture and festive decoration.

The papers read during the three days of the conference presented up-to-date research on socialism based on a variety of source material: fieldwork observations and interviews, biographical stories, archival documents of national and local character, social media, press materials – general and specialized, statistics, art materials. Interdisciplinary approaches were applied to the topics covered, which included a scientific toolbox of disciplines such as ethnology, social anthropology, art history, museology, architecture and urban planning, history, theology, linguistics, cultural studies, political philosophy and sociology. The conference ended with the fifth plenary session, where a joint discussion was held between all participants.

The Organizing Committee envisages the publication of the papers in Bulgarian and English. These volumes will be the final result of the conference, which has recently received a nomination in the “applied science achievement” category in the IEFSEM-BAS for 2019.

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