



Biopolitics and Mass Gymnastics in the Modern History of East Central Europe

Conference | April 28-30, 2022 | Prague

Organizers

CEFRES, French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences in Prague
Czech Academy of Sciences
Pasts, Inc. Center for Historical Studies

Convenors

Lucija Balikić | CEU, Vienna
Nikola Ludlová | CEU, Budapest and CEFRES, Prague
John Paul Newman | Maynooth University, Ireland
Vojtěch Pojar | CEU, Budapest and CEFRES, Prague

The conference is hybrid. You can join us online by clicking on [this link](#).

Meeting ID: 922 3998 7638

Passcode: 630958

Our Goals

The international conference deals with the links between mass gymnastics and biopolitics in the modern history of East Central Europe. In particular, the event focuses on the Sokol [Falcon], a nationalist mass gymnastics association. Founded in Bohemia in the 1860s, Sokol was modeled after the German nationalist gymnastics association Turnverein. Embracing a discourse about Slavic commonality, Sokol associations were adopted by nationalists in multiple contexts of East Central Europe and were widespread in their diasporas, as well. By the 1930s, Sokol associations had a mass membership in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia. The conference brings together scholars studying Sokol gymnastics in these contexts and encourages them to inquire about the entanglements or even symbiosis between mass gymnastics and biopolitics in interwar East Central Europe as well as about its long-term continuities.

The conference aims to bring new insights on the history of biopolitics and eugenics in East Central Europe. It explores the role of associations, in general, and of mass gymnastics, in particular, in the production and circulation of biopolitical knowledge in this part of the world. The presentations investigate how biopolitics informed the practices of mass gymnastics, and how these practices, in turn, shaped the discourses such as eugenics, biotypology, and race science. Importantly, the Sokol associations in East Central Europe were closely linked, thus proving Anne-Marie Thiesse's point that there are few things as transnational as nationalism. The presentations illuminate not only the circulation of biopolitical knowledge on the local level, but also point out to its transnational dimensions. Conversely, a focus on biopolitics enriches the discussion about associations in interwar East Central Europe, which so far dealt with their involvement in various agendas linked to modernization or language use; our conference, however, investigates the biopolitical goals embraced by these associations, and explores the complex relationship of these associations to the nationalizing states and their biopolitical agendas.

Our conference engages with the recent efforts to rethink the conventional periodization of history in East Central Europe. This emerging body of literature problematizes the events that were traditionally seen as turning points, and that were derived from political history, such as the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918. Instead of interpreting these political events as radical breaks, historians now tease out the continuities of actors, practices, and institutions. Our conference would like to shift the focus of this debate to biopolitics. How much of interwar biopolitics drew on older models and networks formulated within an imperial context? Moreover, can we trace any continuities between biopolitics in the interwar period and in the postwar state socialist regimes in East Central Europe? We argue that to discuss these questions we need to see biopolitical theories as embedded in social practices and institutions. In empirical terms, therefore, mass associations such as the Sokol provide an ideal ground for this analysis.

Conference Program

28 April | 16:00–18:30 | CEFRES, Na Florenci 3, Prague 1

16:00–16:30

Welcoming of the participants

Opening remarks of the Director of CEFRES and the organizers

16:45–17:45

Keynote lecture 1

Balázs Trencsényi (Central European University, Vienna)

Transnational Histories of Nationalism in East Central Europe

Discussion

29 April | 9:00–17:30 | CEFRES, Na Florenci 3, Prague 1

9:00–9:40

Keynote lecture 2

Petr Roubal (Institute of Contemporary History, Prague)

"Can the People Betray?" Continuities and Conflicts in Post-War Mass Gymnastics

Discussion

10:00–11:00 | Coffee Break

11:00–13:00

Biopolitics, Nationalism, Supranationalism. Part 1

Transnational Nationalism: Sokol and the concepts of Slavic commonality

Isidora Grubački (Institute of Contemporary History, Ljubljana)

The Yugoslavist Orientation of Feminism in Interwar Yugoslavia: The Case of Zofka Kveder

Miklós Tömöry (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest)

Serbian Youth Movement, Military Culture in Novi Sad and the Beginnings of Serbian Sokol

Dušan J. Ljuboja (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest)

Pan-Slavism as an Idea. A Brief Overview of its Main Transformations in the 19th and 20th Centuries

13:00–14:00 | Lunch

14:00–15:30

Biopolitics, Nationalism, Supranationalism. Part 2
Dis/continuities Post-1945

Paul Batcabe-Lacoste (ENS Paris-Saclay, Sciences Po, Paris)
The Peace Race, a Tour de France in the Eastern Bloc (1952-1957)?

Fabio Giomi (CNRS, CETOBaC, Paris)
A Radical Youth: Analyzing Catholic Associational Life in Interwar Yugoslavia through the Memoirs of Marica Stanković

15:30–16:00 | Break

16:00–17:30

East Central Europe's Special Issue contributors' presentations. Part 1

Jovana Papović (EHESS, CETOBaC, Paris)
The Sokol and the Shaping of Yugoslav Youth

John Paul Newman (Maynooth University)
The Moravian Sokol in the Interwar Period

30 April | 9:00–14:30 | Czech Academy of Sciences, Národní 3, Prague 1

09:00–10:30

East Central Europe's Special Issue contributors' presentations. Part 2

Vladana Putnik Prica (University in Belgrade)
The Role of Architecture in Shaping the Sokol Visual Identity in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

Ivaylo Nachev (Institute of Balkan Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences)
The Yunak societies in Interwar Bulgaria (1918–1939)

Lucija Balikić & Vojtěch Pojar (CEU, Vienna)
Plastic Nationhood: Eugenic Thought and Initiatives in the Post-Habsburg Sokol

10:30–11:00 | Break



11:00–12:00

East Central Europe's Special Issue contributors' presentations. Part 3

Kamil Ruszała (Jagiellonian University of Cracow)
Sokół in Partitioned Poland and Early Interwar Period

Irina Sirotkina (Institute for the History of Science and Technology)
From Prague to Russia: The Sokol's Turbulent Flight to the East

12:00–13:00 | Lunch

13:00–14:00

Planning for the future project and publication

moderated by John Paul Newman

14:00–14:30 | Closing remarks by the organizers

16:00–18:00 | Strahov Stadium visit (optional) / Check-out, departure for the rest

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