

Workshop: Incubators of Modernity: Liminal spaces between informal practices and state action

When & Where: 9–10 October 2018, Vilnius, Lithuania

Organization: German Historical Institute Warsaw, Branch Vilnius

Partners: Institute of Lithuanian History, Vilnius; Institute of East European History, University of Vienna; Laboratory of Critical Urbanism Vilnius

Organizers: Felix Ackermann, Warsaw; Matthias Kaltenbrunner, Vienna

Target group: scholars in the fields of geography, sociology, history, criminology, and anthropology

Deadline: Please send your proposal and a short CV no later than March 30

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CfP: Incubators of Modernity

Liminal spaces between informal practices and state action

This workshop will investigate spaces shaped by the dynamics between informal practices and the state's correlating attempts to regulate them. Since the 19th century, border control checkpoints, customs regulations and practices, train stations, city centres, and prisons have become liminal zones of both strict segregation and intense interactions. Among the instituted practices are surveillance, policing and prohibitions. Economic, religious, and political practices that are perceived as new, potentially dangerous, or a threat to the established normative order are limited, legalized or explicitly non-regulated. Whereas many non-state actors easily and quickly adapt to changing legal frameworks, procedures and criminal laws, the competing layers of modern states usually adopt a slower momentum in adjusting to shifting informal practices. As a result of this bi-directional process of adoption and regulation, both, informal practices and the various layers of governance transform themselves. Thus, attempts to adjust criminal justice as a legal tool in order to limit the actions of informal networks create a dynamic of action and re-action.

The workshop will focus on analyzing the spatial dimension of this interplay from the various perspectives of several disciplines including geography, sociology, criminology, history, and social anthropology. A historical comparison will include processes such as the territorial fragmentation of German lands during the 19th century, a process which facilitated the transformation of informal practices as non-harmonized legal systems into a lacuna non-state actors could occupy. A more recent example is the emergence of transnational business networks after the break-up of the Eastern bloc, which eventually led to the internationalization of policing in Europe. Yet, the nation states involved never fully caught up with their more

flexible non-state counterparts. Today, we can observe the changing relationship between existing nation-states and supranational structures of governance as a reaction to new and unregulated global economic practices, which are themselves partly an outcome of the long-term deregulation of markets.

Among spaces discussed, where encounters between the informal and the state occur, the workshop will address the modern prison. The various interpretations of ideal prisons erected during the 19th century were supposed to provide an infrastructure for solitude confinement. The facilities that were built during this time period embody the era's reform discourse, which envisioned individual progress made due to a specific set of religious and labor practices. The modernity of these prisons was twofold. On the one hand, the architecture itself provided a set of new technical solutions; yet on the other hand, they were built as representations of the *progressiveness* of a given state. During the workshop, we wish to go beyond this linear understanding of modernity by looking more closely at incarceration spaces as micro spaces of state failure. Thus, instead of becoming spaces of isolation, prisons continued to host the synapses of informal networks—networks among the inmates themselves in the prison and those connecting the prisoners with the society at large. Prisons, until today, can be described as incubators of various forms of informal networks — economic, religious, and political—networks that are valuable for many prisoners even well after their release. These facilities are modern in that they still promise to actively create “better citizens” through the means of incarceration, yet those involved in the everyday management of these prisons are familiar with their ability to function as spaces of exchange and communication.

Beyond serving as hotspots of social interaction, we ask how spaces such as border control and customs checkpoints, train stations, airports, prisons, and city centers have, throughout the 19th and 20th century, transformed into laboratories of modern state practices. This query also acknowledges earlier forms of segregation based on social status, gender, age, and ethnicity. Furthermore, we will tackle the question of how these liminal spaces become places where discourses on health and hygiene evolved into systematic state practices regulating citizens' bodies. Finally, in order to go beyond a black-and-white picture of the relationship between the state and its citizens, the workshop will address the roles and statuses of guards, police officers, medical workers, and the clergy in formally acting on behalf of the state while having to negotiate practically between legal institutions' formal regulations and the informal practices taking place in prisons.