

Call for Papers: The Watchful Society: Sexuality, Society, and Vigilance in East-Central and Southeast Europe 1945–1989

Fischbachau/Bayern, 17–20 November 2022

Submission deadline: 15 April 2022

Annual conference by Collegium Carolinum in cooperation with the Collaborative Research Centre 1369 “Cultures of Vigilance” at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich

Sexuality is probably the most private area of human life. Yet modern states interfere with this sphere in various ways, beginning with the legislative frameworks for gender relations and extending to the definition of legitimate sexual desire and the legal regulation of reproductive decisions. The realization of such norms determined by laws always requires the participation of many individuals, however. Without people dedicating their attention and activity to the enforcement of a norm – be it of an ethical-moral, legal, or societal kind – that norm has no effect.

When the communist parties in East-Central and Southeast Europe came into power following the Second World War, they offered a promise of comprehensive renewal extending all the way down to the individual private sphere. Among other things, socialism was expected to establish a new gender order and liberate the people from repressive “bourgeois” and church-dictated sexual morals. As research in recent years has shown, this project delivered conflicting outcomes. A relatively progressive legislation compared to many Western European countries on the one hand was accompanied by considerable pressure to conform as well as limited and strictly defined individual latitude for decision-making – especially with regard to sex and the body – on the other. This has been described as a typical result of a reform “from above”.

Our goal is to discuss the sexual orders of the socialist states of East-Central and Southeast Europe from a broader perspective. While top-down processes are relatively well researched, the horizontal negotiation, control, and enforcement of norms has hitherto not been the focus of much scholarly attention. The interaction between these two axes has only been examined sporadically as well. We are therefore particularly interested in forms of monitoring sexuality that occurred below the governmental level.

The conference targets firstly the institutions, professions, and individuals who implemented or were tasked with implementing sexual policies – by way of education and information, monitoring, and/or corrective action. Beyond experts and persons acting on behalf of the

state, we are explicitly interested in informal vigilance in the area of sexual behaviour occurring in the immediate social surroundings of citizens of the respective socialist countries.

Our second area of concern are the churches as institutions the socialist regimes wanted to eliminate as conveyors of values. Possible questions in this context are: To what degree did the new socialist sexual morals depart from norms established by religion; what conflicts arose from this situation; and where did potential intersections exist or processes of reconciliation between religious and socialist sexual morals take place? Finally, what did this mean for the enforcement of the “socialist morals” as a whole?

Thirdly, we wish to investigate and discuss the regimes of observation and disciplining applied to persons whose behaviour did not conform to the dominant sexual norms. Who and what was policed, tabooed, discriminated, or characterized as a threat to socialist society? Was (alleged) cultural, social, political, or religious deviance of individuals and groups from the socialist framework of norms sexualized, and if so, how? Lastly, what consequences could such exclusion processes have for the sexual and reproductive rights of affected persons?

Our fourth focus is to examine the representation of sexuality in terms of how the boundaries of what could be said and depicted in the areas of sexuality, eroticism, and corporality changed over the years. Which taboos disappeared, what remained improper or scandalous, and what conclusions can be drawn regarding the official conceptions of proper/acceptable sexuality? What were the impacts on the images of femininity and masculinity?

The conference aims to explore the regimes of East-Central and Southeast Europe as a field in which – even under the conditions of authoritarian rule – key rules of human coexistence were continuously negotiated and “made”. The underlying scholarly interest is the question of the connection between vigilance in the area of sexuality and the cohesion of socialist societies. In other words: What role did the watchfulness of the many with regard to “correct” sexual behaviour, gender roles, relationships, and family models play in the development of state socialisms, and what became of the ideals propagated during the early years?

The study period is specified as the years between 1945 and 1989. Comparative contributions extending beyond the area of the former Eastern Bloc are also welcome.

You are invited to submit papers for lectures with a length of 20 minutes. The conference language is English. We plan to publish all contributions in the Collegium Carolinum publication series. The organizers will assume all travel and accommodation costs.

Conception: Dr. Christiane Brenner, Prof. Dr. Martin Schulze Wessel, Collegium Carolinum / CRC 1369 “Cultures of Vigilance” at LMU Munich

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