

CfP “Academic Authority and the Politics of Science and History in Eastern Europe”
Workshop, March 20-21, 2020 (GWZO Leipzig, Germany)
<https://www.leibniz-gwzo.de/de/transfer/gwzo-kalender>

The scholar is dead – long live the scholar? Over the last couple of decades, the epistemological tectonics of contemporary societies have experienced massive changes – and so has the subject of our workshop, the scholar. Within a highly diverse environment, scholarship has become destabilised as an epistemic authority, due to socio-political processes, economic pressure, internal conflicts, new media techniques etc.

The workshop aims to investigate the historical changes and challenges of (academic) scholarship’s role as the paramount producer of knowledge. Concentrating on (the public perception of) STS scholars, historians, sociologists and philosophers of science, as well as their non-academic counterparts, we aim to analyse concepts of scientific self-reflection and their historical trajectory in Eastern and Central Europe from the 1970s (starting with the Helsinki Declaration) via the transformations of 1989 and the ‘science wars’ of the 1990s up to the alleged rising of the ‘post-truth era’ today. Looking at the immanent or perceived boundaries between different rationalities, between science, politics, and the public, we will map changes in the political configuration of knowledge production by discussing if, when and how these boundaries shifted, were strengthened, weakened or removed and how this affected the epistemic figure of the scholar. We will look at epistemological dynamics between universalism and particularism, the fragmentation of epistemic authority, and the tribalisation of truth, and want to discuss whether they can be regarded as an effect of

...political transformations, processes of re-nationalization, conservative and religious turns,
...a shift in media technologies and the unsettling of classic information media,
...social diversification and the consequent emergence of specific group attitudes towards globalization or modernization.

We will, however, ask as well, whether the observable loss of scholarship’s authority has to be regarded as a new phenomenon, or whether this diagnosis itself follows a narrative of decay? Did scholars in Eastern Europe possess an epistemological hegemony at all and if so – how can it be characterized? Can we consider the present state as a slightly more splintered version of conflicts well known from the Cold War and the ‘science wars’, or do we have to take into account a vast variety of different former epistemological camps in the East? What is the relationship between ‘traditional’ modes of propaganda or disinformation and postmodern relativist philosophies? Do politicized epistemologies have to be regarded as a new phenomenon, informed by these philosophies and generated by the emergence of new technical media?

Tackling these issues, we hope to shed light not only on some crucial developments in the Central and Eastern European history of science and humanities itself, but on some of the most pressing and far-reaching questions about the contemporary status of academia.

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Papers should address one of the three areas:

- (1.) epistemology as a factor of system stabilization and the belief in the objective and trustworthy scientific persona, whose diagnoses and prognoses are of paramount importance for the society / the state, as epitomized in the Science of Science scholar up to 1989;
- (2.) the unbalancing of professional/academic and lay/dissident epistemologies, the post-soviet transformation of the figure of the scholar, and the rewriting of its history in the history of science during the 1990s;
- (3.) the increasing emergence and approval of non-academic producers of knowledge, and the related transformation of scholarly self-conception and master narratives in the field of history (of science and humanities) from the 1990s until today, when the academic scholar has lost more and more ground as a figure of trust.

The workshop continues a series of events held at Erfurt (2017, 2018), Moscow (2018), and St. Petersburg (2019) in the context of the research initiative (East) European Epistemologies. The upcoming meeting will be organised at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO) in Leipzig by

Friedrich Cain (Max Weber Kolleg / University of Erfurt)

Dietlind Hüchtker (GWZO)

Bernhard Kleeberg (Max Weber Kolleg / University of Erfurt)

Karin Reichenbach (University of Leipzig), and

Jan Surman (IGITI, Higher School of Economics Moscow).

Travelling costs and accommodation will be covered in accordance with the travel regulations of Saxony. Please, direct proposals (<500 words) for papers (~ 20 min) and a short cv to dietlind.huechtker@leibniz-gwzo.de by December 13, 2019. We especially welcome proposals by PhD students.