

INTERNATIONAL ONLINE CONFERENCE - 3rd Edition

Capitalist Transformations in Eastern and Central Europe

Deadline for abstract submission: 31 December 2024

Conference Dates: 19 - 23 May, 2025 (Online)

This is the third edition of the 'Capitalist Transformations' conference, an academic event that aims to create a space for discussion, debate and research of the social, political and economic changes taking place in the region. The conference celebrates the work of Karl Polanyi (1886 - 1964) and György Lukács (1885-1971), two intellectuals and political activists who played a key role in establishing a regional critical tradition analyzing global capitalism. Both of them received their PhD degrees at the University of Cluj / Kolozsvár at the turn of the century, when capitalism was expanding into Eastern and Central Europe and profoundly reshaping social geographies, class-structures and markets.

Conjuring up their names may be timely. One century later, their analyses are still relevant. The region has become a testing ground for radical neo-liberal reforms in the wake of the post-socialist advancement of capitalism, with that shift generating unprecedented recessions in peacetime, uneven development, social divisions and growing inequalities. The rise of right-wing populism, illiberalism, xenophobia and exploitation of racialized surplus populations are direct consequences of policies that maximized the corporate agenda while neglecting dramatic distributive dynamics and inclusive social policies.

Polanyi's double movement and his critical insights into the dynamics of marketization and social protection or Lukács' analysis of class-formation and the contradictions of capitalist societies are today part of a tradition that continues to inform the region's political activism and critical thinking. The conference builds on Polanyian and Lukacsian legacies and invites scholars from the region or working on the region to contribute to sharper critical understandings of capitalism in Eastern and Central Europe.

This event is organized across five different streams. The first two streams focus on understanding regional capitalist transformations both in terms of the impact this had on our societies, labor relations and ways of life **(1)** and in terms of emerging macro political economies and the dynamics of regional macro-financial structures **(2)**. The third stream is dedicated to the growing diversity of the region's anti-capitalist critiques and to mapping out the variety of social movements and political activism that emerged in the region in the last three decades **(3)**. Within this context we invite scholars to look back at the actual-existing socialisms in ECE and analyze both the failures and emancipatory policies of that period. This is important for understanding the uneven economic and social foundations on which capitalism was built in the different countries in ECE, beginning with 1990, but also for a retrospective comparative perspective of how political economies actually work and what they achieve in terms of general social welfare **(4)**. In our engagement with contemporary capitalist transformations we tend to forget that during the XIXth and early XXth century the region was to a great extent incorporated

into global capitalism, albeit with wide national disparities and translations grafting it on feudal social formations. Capitalism is not something new to this region. The fifth stream focuses on early forms of capitalism in ECE and looks at modes of incorporation into European and global capitalism, capital-labor dynamics, economic and social crisis and the political movements growing in this context. With this stream we aim to better understand the region's capitalism in a long-duree framework, but also to ask what critical theories and forms of political activism emerged during that period that enable us to better understand capitalism today (5).

Venue: The conference will take place entirely online. The previous two editions of the CT-ECE Conference (2021 and 2023) were successful in terms of attracting a wide audience that could not otherwise have afforded to travel. The main goal of the conference is to enable a wide dissemination in Eastern and Central Europe of research that is critically interrogating the capitalist transformations taking place in the region and to create networks of scholars, researchers and activists that are focusing their work on this topic.

Registration fee for conference: free for participants and for audience

Publications: One of the main aims of this conference is to enable a series of five edited volumes in order to disseminate critical scholarship focusing on capitalist transformations in ECE.

Retreat and industrial heritage (optional): One week after the conference (29 - 31 May 2025) we will organize a retreat in Reșița / Resicabánya / Reschitz (Romania). Reșița has been one of the most important Romanian industrial centers. Industrial development emerged here already in the 18th Century within the Habsburg Empire. Some of the earliest unions and worker's movements were formed here during the 19th Century that were well connected to the regional progressive political networks. During the post-socialist period the steel and complex-machinery industries collapsed which resulted in vast brownfields. Reșița is now an important site of capitalist urban regeneration and trans-national real-estate enterprises. The city is in the proximity of Timisoara (European Capital of Culture 2023), Anina-Oravița-Baziaș (the first railroad network from Transylvania constructed in 1854) and the beautiful Danube Iron Gate gorge.

Retreat fee: The participation to the optional retreat costs 150 euro. This event is not mandatory and is taking place in the aftermath of the conference. It seeks to create a space for socialization and future collaborative projects. The fee will be used for organizational costs, visits to industrial heritage sites, internal transportation and one collective dinner. The participants are responsible for paying for their trip to Reșița, accommodation and meals. The organizing committee will assist participants with support in finding affordable accommodation and travel directions.

Keynote Speakers: TBA

Who can apply? The conference is open to all scholars working on capitalist transformation in Eastern and Central Europe, regardless if they reside or not in the region. Nevertheless, the main idea is to encourage local-knowledge production and include in the venue as many scholars as possible working and activating in the region. Our goal is to strengthen and disseminate their

valuable dissenting research and encourage others in the region to engage in critical theories of regional capitalism.

Scientific committee: *Oana Mateescu (Babeş-Bolyai University), Don Kalb (University of Bergen), Doro Bohle (University of Vienna), Cornel Ban (Copenhagen Business School), Dana Domsodi (Babeş-Bolyai University), Enikő Vincze (Babeş-Bolyai University), Ovidiu Țichindeleanu (IDEA), Vladimir Simović (Centre for the Politics of Emancipation), Adela Hîncu (Institute of Contemporary History, Ljubljana), Attila Meleg (Corvinus University of Budapest), Adrian Grama (independent researcher), Alexandra Ghiț (RECET Vienna University), Olena Lyubchenko (York University, Toronto), Gareth Dale (Brunel University of London)*

Executive committee: *Sorin Gog (Babeş-Bolyai University), Macrina Moldovan (Babeş-Bolyai University), Dana Domsodi (Babeş-Bolyai University), Oana Mateescu (Babeş-Bolyai University)*

Conveners: The conference is organized by the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work from Babeş-Bolyai University.

Abstracts: Please submit to capitalist.transformations@gmail.com an abstract of maximum 300 words and your institutional affiliation. Please specify for which of the following 5 streams you are applying and if you would like to join us in the retreat taking place in Reșița. Submissions will be evaluated by the scientific committee of the conference. Accepted proposals will be clustered together in panels. The submission of full papers and their dissemination to conference participants is optional for the authors.

Stream 1 - Capitalism and accumulation in ECE: from the ground up

Conveners: Sorin Gog, Oana Mateescu, Don Kalb

This stream focuses on the **sociology and anthropology** of capitalist transformations in Eastern and Central Europe. Over the past three decades, the demise of socialism and the regional insertion into globalizing capitalism has generated immense social inequalities, deep spatial unevenness, exploitation, new regimes of labor, new wealth, deep shifts in urban and rural relations, surplus populations and migrations, and capitalist ideologies and subjectivities. New regimes of accumulation and new spatial fixes, encompassing value and values, have emerged and consolidated. Privatizations and markets have dramatically reconfigured social and cultural spaces, sites, practices and imaginations, all part and parcel of the new dynamic class-formations. How has capitalism penetrated and how has it been appropriated in the region? How has the new cultural political economy shaped our states, societies, social relations, subjectivities, intimacies, and temporalities? How has regional insertion in global value chains produced new (or new-old) social spaces, practices, micro and macro power dynamics, class alliances and antagonisms, and state-crafting? What is the relationship, if any, between capitalist transformation and war-making in the East of the East?

We welcome presentations on the following topics - the list is non-exhaustive: ► *Dynamics of class formations, forms of capital accumulation, middle and upper-class strategies for political and economic power, the political balances between global and domestic accumulation.* ► *Re-industrialization, the geopolitics of investment, the regional restructuring of supply-chains, the (cartography of) new capitalist work-environments/labor-relations.* ► *The politics of infrastructure development and urban regeneration, their impact on the appropriation of urban commons* ► *Social inequalities and uneven development; neo-liberal and neo-nationalist social policies; the new geographies of poverty and inequality and the emergence of variegated welfare-chauvinist and populist agendas.* ► *Migration, remittances, the vernacular politics of migration/migrants/return-migrants, exploitation and precarity of workers, surplus populations, gendered and racialized relations of accumulation.* ► *Offshoring, technological restructuring and automation, AI and re-divisions of labor, digital and platform capitalist relations.* ► *The everyday politics of labor, experiences of work and work sociality, emergent critiques of labor relations and labor market reforms.* ► *Rural/urban divides and ecologies, agricultural transformations and rural labor, rural capital formation, green transitions and green politics on the ground.* ► *Social reproduction and care work, the financialization of households and social reproduction, the politics of financialization and indebtedness.* ► *Everyday cultures and subjectivities of capitalist (dis)engagement, digital cultures of resistance and affirmation, the industry of personal and spiritual development, accumulation and religion, vernacular cultures of entrepreneurialism, meritocracy, hierarchy, and competition.* ► *New political socialities and formations, vernacular political ideologies, the rise of populism and neo-nationalist formations. Europe as a contradictory politico-cultural imagination.* ► *Capital, (failing) hegemony, and the making of war in the East of the East.*

Stream 2 - The Global Political Economy of ECE

Conveners: Doro Bohle, Cornel Ban, Dana Domsodi

Much of the existing scholarship in **political economy and political sciences** on Eastern and Central Europe focuses only to a small extent on cross-regional comparisons or on systematic analysis of the impacts of system-level factors on regional developments. Yet for all its historical specificities, this integrated European semi-periphery should not be turned into an exotic object that does not allow comparative work. This stream aims to deal with this problem by tempting interdisciplinary scholarship to take more seriously the international political economy dimension of ECE's shifting developmental paths during and since state socialism as well as the undertaking of focused comparisons between ECE and other semi-peripheral contexts. The final outcome should be a thematically-organized set of studies that can provide a comprehensive answer to the problems outlined herein.

To this end, we invite contributions that can fit into the following topics: ► *Shifts in global economic development paradigms (embedded liberalism, developmental state, state socialism, neoliberalism) and their translations in ECE and-or other middle-income countries;* ► *Shifts in*

global capitalist macro-financial structures (financial, fiscal, monetary) and their impact on ECE or other middle-income countries in other regions; ► ECE capitalist growth models in comparative perspective with competing regions. ► East European economic transitions versus Chinese economic transition; ► How ECE capitalist diversity deals with the geoeconomics turn in global political economy; ► How ECE capitalist diversity deals in terms of social policies with the climate shock differently from core states or other middle-income states in other semi-peripheries; ► Cross regional perspectives on the politics of distribution in ECE and comparable cases in other regions; ► Autocracy, illiberalism and the political developmental limits of the ECE growth model; ► Cross regional comparative perspectives on feminist political economy. Social reproduction and (the critique) economic growth; ► Beyond national growth models: territorial inequalities, city level growth models, urban-rural cleavages in comparative perspective.

Stream 3 - Political activism and anti-capitalist critique in ECE

Conveners: Enikő Vincze, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, Vladimir Simović

We look for paper proposals that discuss the formation and advancement of **political activism and theories critical of capitalism** in a semi-peripheral region of Europe with a socialist legacy. In our understanding, both political activism, which includes various forms of self-organizing and collective action with political demands (institutionalized or not in political parties), and anti-capitalist theories address the systemic causes of class-based, racialized, and gendered exploitation, dispossession, and injustice in the fields of labor, housing, social reproduction, climate, cultural production, geopolitics, or, generally, in capitalism. This is our way to comprehend capitalist transformations in Eastern and Central Europe during the past three decades: on the one hand, through the lens of how political activism and critical theories problematized the changing realities; and, on the other hand, by analyzing how social movements, spaces of theorizing, institutionalized civic and political organizations and trade unions shaped and manifested their criticism against capitalism, while developing alternative practices. This conference stream invites scholars on critical theories, social, cultural, artistic, and political advocates, and activist academics to use multi- and trans-disciplinary approaches to discuss these topics. We especially appreciate politically engaged scholarship situated in positions critical to capitalism practiced in the region. This is how we imagine contributing to a collective effort that advances Left politics in Eastern and Central Europe and globally at the juncture of anti-capitalist practice and theory.

We invite paper proposals that deal with the following topics, based on which we will define several (up to ten) panels under this stream: ► *The embeddedness of various forms of political activism and theorizing into larger political economy regimes, people's everyday lives, state- and international policy-making landscapes, and networks of transnational movements.* ► *How and why activist practices and critical theories articulated their positions around specific subjects, including socio-economic/redistribution matters, migrant work, identity/recognition-related issues, affairs regarding political representation, or regimes of capital accumulation.* ► *The nature and dynamics of the relationship between critical theories and transformative practices*

within self-organized groups and academia in Eastern and Central Europe. ► Connections and collaborations between social movements and forms of civic-political activism focused on different issues in Eastern and Central Europe and their potential transformation into political parties. ► Debates about the relationship between reforming capitalism and the anticapitalist positions of movements, ways of dealing with internal divisions, and differences in mobilizing/organizing. ► How the leftist agendas are appropriated by right and extreme right movements and parties, and what groups on the left are doing or what they should do around this matter? ► How do liberal-democratic institutions (civil society, party politics, elections, media, etc.) shape leftist demands and create obstacles for radical thinking, acting, and political organizing on the basis of anticapitalism? ► What are the experiences of movements dealing with burnout, including politics of care and forming solidarity for other causes? ► The resources and events, in terms of geographies and political contents, that inspired existing forms of activism and critical theories in Eastern and Central Europe. Did they revisit the socialist legacies of the region, and what is these movements' potential in defining socialist alternatives to contemporary capitalism, or did they look for alternatives embedded in anarchist or other visions?

Stream 4 - Postwar Socialism and Mixed Social Forms in ECE

Conveners: Adela Hîncu, Attila Melegh, Adrian Grama

The transitions to socialism in postwar Eastern and Central Europe took place amidst a plurality of social forms: diverse and divergent property relations, ownership structures, patterns of social reproduction, or cultural logics. Shaped by the economic crisis of the 1980s, transitions from socialism similarly produced a diversity of capitalist social arrangements in the region. But socialism was itself far from a homogenous social formation, and in the present-day context of growing social inequalities, regional uneven development, and class struggle, it is to these mixed socialist social forms that we return in order to understand longer-term historical processes of anti-capitalist organizing and their potentialities in the region. This stream asks how a multiplicity of social forms (e.g., various forms of reciprocities, social exchanges, communal organizing, household and peasant economies, state controlled industries with and without extensive planning, administrative markets in housing, collective entrepreneurship, market oriented cooperatives, private initiatives, and even foreign capital) evolved historically toward a greater diversity and towards mixed economies in a non-capitalist context after initial attempts to introduce strict planning and until the collapse of socialism. We also aim at understanding how the issues of mixture and diversity were discussed, understood, or ignored by diverse social actors. No encompassing notion inherited from the semantic universe of the Cold War, no matter its political pedigree (e.g., totalitarianism, state capitalism, state socialism, actually existing socialism, state patriarchy) can be said to adequately capture the overlapping historical dynamics, at once oppressive and emancipatory, of postwar socialism across Eastern and Central Europe. No wonder that some of the best recent scholarship on the region has found little analytical inspiration in this conceptual vocabulary while exploring empirically (i.e., historicizing) the sheer multiplicity of the socialist lifeworlds and their contradictory evolution across time and space. Methodologically, one of the main achievements of this diverse scholarship has been

exposing the epistemological biases of methodological nationalism and adopting comparative, transnational, transregional, and global perspectives and toolkits. With this volume we aim to both give systematic exposure to the new literature on socialism in Eastern and Central Europe and beyond, as well as to move closer to a shared analytical framework within which theoretical debate and conceptual innovation are again possible. As a resource for present-day anti-capitalist contestation in the region, the historical experience of socialism remains relevant for its progressive achievements as well as for its failures, but also as a site of unexplored diversity, potentialities, and experimentation with mixed social forms.

We welcome contributions spanning a wide variety of topics and approaches, while asking contributors to grant epistemic and empirical priority to uncovering the multifaceted and conflictual dynamic of the socialist lifeworlds. Possible topics include: ► *analyses of the multiplicity of socialist social forms and their historical development*; ► *gender, social reproduction, the history of the family, and the history of sexuality in socialism*; ► *economic and business history, including economic and labor exchanges*; ► *socialist agriculture, industrial relations, work collectives, self-management, socialist democracy*; ► *studies of urban organization and development, communal architecture and design, housing*; ► *studies of social movements, activism, and political organization*; ► *political-economical analyses of cultural production*; ► *sociology of knowledge, intellectual history, and the history of expertise*.

Stream 5 - Genealogies of Capitalism in XIX and XX Century in ECE

Conveners: Alexandra Ghiț, Olena Lyubchenko, Gareth Dale

Eastern and Central Europe has been seen as peripheral to capitalism's "core", largely owing to its agrarian character and so-called 'belated' industrialization. We invite contributions that focus on the period 1848–1948 and challenge simplified accounts. We are especially interested in contributions which critically engage with the region's old (pre-1989/1990) **historiographies** and are grounded in empirical research, whether of archival or print sources. Likewise, we welcome comparative analyses of ECE states in the period under consideration.

We particularly welcome papers which: ► *trace capitalist transformation in Eastern and Central Europe (ECE) from a transnational perspective, with a focus on trade and the circulation of entrepreneurs and capital, commodity chains, inter-imperial links and conflicts, the movement of labour, agitators, and anti-capitalist ideas across borders from around 1848 to around 1948*; ► *study the 'form' of state in ECE as it evolved from empires to nation states and consider the role of state legal frameworks and administrative procedures in mediating as well as modulating capitalist transformation, including citizenship and border regimes*; ► *examine the relationships between land and labour, agrarian change, peasant class constitution, peasant radicalism, and rural proletarianization*; ► *research how gendered and racialized divisions of labour have shaped both exploitation and resistance to capitalism in the region, for instance by looking into the development of home industry as well as factory production, and their effects on working-class*

political demands; ► challenge the boundaries between ‘free’ and ‘unfree’ labour by considering the many facets of coerced work and its role in capitalist transformations in the period under consideration; ► engage in historically-grounded theoretical work that brings scholarship on capitalist transitions in ECE in conversation with theories of: primitive accumulation, uneven and combined development, dependency, social reproduction theory, state capitalism; ► explore the impact of militarism and war on the consolidation of capitalist relations, and anti-capitalist resistance, including anti-militarist and anti-war organizing in the region; ► engage with scholarship on coloniality and colonialism in and beyond ECE, including by inquiring into the distinctive forms of colonial (or colonial-like) extraction and cultural imperialism in the region; critically evaluate the very categorization ‘Eastern’ and ‘Central Europe’, especially in relation to ‘whiteness’ and ‘Europeanness’

For any inquires please contact: capitalist.transformations@gmail.com

For more informations about this event please visit:

<https://capitalist-transformations.com>