

Call for papers

## **Stepping Back in Time. Living History and Other Performative Approaches to History in Central and South-Eastern Europe**

Organizers: German Historical Institute, Warsaw, & Imre Kertész Kolleg, Jena

Dates: February 20–21, 2017

Location: German Historical Institute, Warsaw

Action, experience and emotion are the focus when it comes to performativity. In cultural studies, the performative turn has shifted the focus away from texts and structures to inquiries into actions performed and the bodily experiences involved in creating collective meaning. In the field of history terms such as “living history,” “doing history” and “reenactment” have been established to characterize the experiential component of various practices of reviving, restaging and appropriating events from the past in the present. The phenomena in question include battle reenactments and reconstructions of the past in museums, computer games and theme-based tourist attractions. Precise definitions and exact terminological distinctions have yet to be established, however.

One reason for the problem of defining these areas might be that the phenomena of living history (used here as a collective term for forms of bodily-sensual references to the past) are often pop-culture practices found at the interface between science, practical applications, and the entertainment industry. (Re)living history is distinct from academic research in its performative and affective elements. These circumstances, as well as the variety of forms living history takes, make describing and analyzing performative approaches to the past a challenge for historiography.

While research into the phenomena of living history has spread beyond the English-speaking world to include Western and Central Europe, it is still in its infancy in East-Central and Southeastern Europe. The planned workshop takes this as its starting point, inquiring into the specific forms of living history in this region. Apart from the description of individual phenomena, the varied analytical approaches to this field used by researchers in various disciplines will be presented and discussed at the workshop. Comparative approaches too, focusing on different regions at once, are more than welcome.

The aim of the workshop is to enable an intensive dialogue between researchers in various disciplines engaged in the description and analysis of living history in East-Central and Southeastern Europe. The advantages and disadvantages of individual analytical approaches will be discussed along with the problems of exact definitions.

Papers can deal with the following aspects and issues:

Regional comparative perspectives:

- *What forms and expressions does living history take in East-Central and Southeastern Europe? Are there differences between individual countries and historical regions in terms of popularity, functions, structures or historical contents? If so, what are the reasons for this?*

Protagonists and structures:

- *Which protagonists, groups and institutions are involved? What motivates them? Are there established structures, and how is living history financed?*

Authentication:

- *Which claims to and strategies of authentication are evident in individual forms of living history? What role does the "originality" of places and objects play here, and which one the confirmation of preconceived notions and the satisfaction of certain expectations? To what extent do the participants reflect on and comment the structural character of their reenactments?*

Historical learning / understanding of history:

- *How does the appropriation of history through emphasizing body-related reenactments differ in comparison to other, more cognitive processes of historical learning? Can living history be understood as a new form of communicating knowledge and participation? Is the establishment of living history accompanied by a democratization of approaches to history? What is the relationship between participants/producers and audience/recipients? To what extent is there a danger of historical performances "failing"?*

Empirics / methodology

- *How can the analytical and research methods from different fields (ethnology, anthropology, theater studies) regarding the performance of history be given a common denominator?*
- *To what extent can historical methods make a contribution to investigating living history?*

### **How to apply:**

Workshop participants will be selected based on their paper dealing with the above-mentioned questions and with other aspects relevant to the topic of the workshop. Please send your paper of no more than 2,000 words as well as a short biography to Sabine Stach and Juliane Tomann by **October 30, 2016**. Travel costs as well as room and board of participants will be arranged and financed by the organizers.

The workshop will take place in English. Please send your papers and biographies in English.

### **Contact:**

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