Knowing Eastern Europe and the Baltics

11th CBEES Annual Conference

Conference Abstracts

4-5 December 2025
Södertörn University
Stockholm, Sweden

sh.se/cbeesannual2025

SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY | STOCKHOLM
sh.se

ÖSTERSJÖ-STIFTELSEN
THE FOUNDATION FOR BALTIC AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

CBEES
CENTRE FOR BALTIC AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES

Contents

Panels and roundtable abstracts 3

Conference paper abstracts 13

Panels and roundtable abstracts

(***Sorted by the name of the panel/roundtable***)

Panel: Belarus in Flux: Authoritarian Adaptation, Exiled Opposition, and Regional Perceptions

Participants:

- **Chulitskaya, Tatsiana** (Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University)
  Promoting Good Governance in Authoritarian Belarus: Who Learns From Whom?
- **Pierson, Ekaterina** (Université libre de Bruxelles
  Intra-Oppositional Alliances in Exile: Resource Mobilisation, Agency, and Bridge-Building in the Belarusian Opposition.
- **Saifullayeu, Anton** (University of Warsaw)
  The Belarusian Question in Polish Politics: Strategies and Consequences.

This panel examines the dynamic linkages between gender, knowledge, and policy-making in the field of migration and integration, building on the conceptual reflections known as the reflexive turn. Within the increasingly broad scholarship on research-policy relations, studies on migration remain limited (Entzinger and Scholten 2019). While research on migration from a gender perspective abounds, few studies focus on the interrelationships between gender, knowledge production, and political processes. This panel bridges that gap by connecting scholars working on this topic in the Baltic Sea Region. This geographical decentering enables us to explore the different temporalities of migration. Various European states have experienced East-West and South-North migration, reoriented by the recent forced migration from Ukraine. Yet, their historical paths and policy developments differ considerably. The influence of the gender/migration nexus on knowledge production and policymaking varies among countries and shifts over time. Recognition of feminist knowledge as politically relevant “gender expertise” is relatively new and highly contested (Cavaghan and Kulawik 2020).

In this session, we discuss 1) country-specific configurations of knowledge-policy relations shaped by gendered understandings and framings of migration policy in Poland, Germany, and Sweden, 2) the positionality and impact of feminist expertise in the contestation and authorisation of political knowledge claims, and 3) the usefulness of intersectionality for studying the governance of different European and non-European migrant groups. Incorporating feminist scholarship, we analyse how gender affects political knowledge and contribute innovatively to migration research and reflexive governance (Lutz and Amelina 2021).

Panel: Bosniak Experiences of Genocide Denial in a Post-Truth Landscape

Participants

- **Emina Zoletić** (University of Warsaw)
  Second-Generation Memory Activism as a Counter-Narrative to Genocide Denial
- **Ibrahim Fevzi Güven** (Karabük University)
  They Wrote So the World Would Know: War Diaries and Memoirs Against Denial

Abstract:

Three decades after the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, Bosniak survivors and their communities continue to face persistent denial of the crimes committed against them. In the current post-truth era—marked by the blurring of fact and opinion, the amplification of misinformation through digital platforms, and the politicization of historical narratives—this denial has taken on new forms and intensities. It is not merely a distortion of history but a deliberate political strategy that draws strength from the allure of ignorance: the comfort of simplified narratives that absolve responsibility, preserve group identities, and shield perpetrators from accountability.

Denial manifests both from the top down, through official rhetoric, legislative acts, and institutional silence, and from the bottom up, in everyday discourse, media commentary, and online spaces.

The roundtable will examine how genocide denial operates not only as a political tool but also as a mechanism of psychological harm and social exclusion. Participants will explore the lived experiences of Bosniaks confronting denial in domestic and international contexts, including its impact on interethnic relations and reconciliation processes. By bringing together scholars, and activists, and, the discussion will examine the intersections of memory politics, historical revisionism, and digital disinformation.This roundtable aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how post-truth dynamics exacerbate the wounds of genocide by continuous violation of human rights of survivors. At the same time, it will examine ways in which local actors preserve collective and intergenerational memory and counter the corrosive effects of post-truth politics.

Panel: Decentering Gender, Knowledge Production, and Migration Policy making in the Baltic Sea region

Participants:

- **Teresa Kulawik** (Södertörn University)
  Policy Knowledge and Gender: The Case of Family Migration in Germany
- **Martin Joormann** *(Karlstad University/Södertörn University)*
  Family Migration and Gender Expertise in Swedish Migration and Integration Policies Since the 1990s.
- **Karolina Łukasiewicz** and **Marta Kindler** (University of Warsaw)
  Gender, Knowledge Production and Integration Policy Making in Poland
- **Sarian Jarosz** (Migration Consortium/NOHA)
  Queer Without Borders. Double Standards at the Polish Borders with Ukraine and Belarus.

Abstract:

This panel examines the dynamic linkages between gender, knowledge, and policy-making in the field of migration and integration, building on the conceptual reflections known as the reflexive turn. Within the increasingly broad scholarship on research-policy relations, studies on migration remain limited (Entzinger and Scholten 2019). While research on migration from a gender perspective abounds, few studies focus on the interrelationships between gender, knowledge production, and political processes. This panel bridges that gap by connecting scholars working on this topic in the Baltic Sea Region.. This geographical decentering enables us to explore the different temporalities of migration. Various European states have experienced East-West and South-North migration, reoriented by the recent forced migration from Ukraine. Yet, their historical paths and policy developments differ considerably. The influence of the gender/migration nexus on knowledge production and policymaking varies among countries and shifts over time. Recognition of feminist knowledge as politically relevant “gender expertise” is relatively new and highly contested (Cavaghan and Kulawik 2020).

In this session, we discuss 1) country-specific configurations of knowledge-policy relations shaped by gendered understandings and framings of migration policy in Poland, Germany, and Sweden, 2) the positionality and impact of feminist expertise in the contestation and authorisation of political knowledge claims, and 3) the usefulness of intersectionality for studying the governance of different European and non-European migrant groups. Incorporating feminist scholarship, we analyse how gender affects political knowledge and contribute innovatively to migration research and reflexive governance (Lutz and Amelina 2021).

Panel: Dynamics of Russification and Cultural Amnesia in Soviet Ukraine

Participants:

- **Susanna Witt** (Stockholm University/Södertörn University)
  The Ukrainian Journal Vsesvit as Cultural Mediator During the Late Soviet Era
- **Valentyna Savchyn** (Lund University/Södertörn University
  Shadow Dictionaries: The Silent Battle for Ukrainian Synonyms.
- **Lada Kolomiyets** (Dartmouth College/Södertörn University)
  The Roles of Pseudo -Editors and Pseudo -Translators in The Soviet Ukrainian Book Market.

Abstract:

This panel deals with the topic of Russification in Soviet Ukraine in terms of cultural amnesia. The papers are related to a recently launched research project, “De/colonizing Ukraine: Practices of Russification and Modes of Resistance 1922–1991,” which targets contexts of cultural production: the making of dictionaries, the translation of foreign literature, and the publishing process. These areas are seen as open to both Russification and actions directed at negotiating and countering it, thus forming what may be called “spaces of de/colonization.” Adopting an interdisciplinary approach and drawing on both print and archival sources, the project aims at throwing new light on the cultural dynamics of Russification in Soviet Ukraine with a focus on cumulative workings and synergy effects of Russification policies on culture as a whole.

Each of the three papers of the panel is devoted to one of the above-mentioned cultural contexts: Valentyna Savchyn's paper "Shadow Dictionaries: The Silent Battle for Ukrainian Synonyms" explores the lexicographical treatment of synonyms in Soviet Ukraine, focusing on the deliberate suppression of lexical diversity as a tool of linguistic and cultural control as well as the efforts to reclaim lost words, compile alternative dictionaries, and preserve the linguistic heritage erased by state policies that were simultaneously going on beyond official lexicography. Focusing on the 1930s, Lada Kolomiyets' paper "The Roles of Pseudo-Editors and Pseudo-Translators in the Soviet Ukrainian Book Market" introduces the concepts of pseudo-editor and censor-editor and extends the concept of pseudo-translator, arguing for and demonstrating the operation of these terms in the study of Soviet translation history through a postcolonial lens. Susanna Witt's paper "The Ukrainian Journal 'Vsesvit' as Cultural Mediator During the Late Soviet Era" compares the influential Ukrainian journal for translated literature with its Russian counterpart "Inostrannaia literatura", arguing that the functions fulfilled by Vsesvit differed in significant ways from the ones fulfilled by the Russian journal. The Ukrainian journal, it is maintained, played an important role in countering Russification policies of the time.

Panel: Encounters between Catholic Humanitarians and Displaced Persons after the Second World War as Sites of Knowledge Production

Participants:

- **Viktoriia Serhiienko** (German Historical Institute Warsaw)
  Escaping "the Motherland's Call": Ukrainian Refugees in Postwar Germany and the Vatican, 1945–1952
- **Jessica Stroja** (Griffith University)
  Australian Catholic Faith-Based Humanitarianism and Displaced Persons: Intersections Between Australian Humanitarianism, Catholic Relief, Policy, and Religion in the Post-War World
- **Francesco Zavatti** (Södertörn University)
  Seeking Refuge and Alliances: Microhistories of Romanian Displaced Fascists' Postwar Encounters with Roman Catholicism

Abstract:

In the aftermath of the Second World War, millions of displaced persons from Eastern Europe wished to resettle in the West. Many had experienced communism; others feared it. Their encounters with Roman Catholic humanitarians, operating through the Vatican's relief networks, became key sites where knowledge of East European politics and religious affairs was produced.

This panel explores those encounters as dynamic processes of knowing, in which clerical rescuers and displaced persons mediated narratives about communization and the fate of Christianity in Eastern Europe, while searching for a common minimal denominator.

Drawing on newly opened collections from the Vatican archives and other ecclesiastical archives, we interrogate the epistemic work carried out in refugee camps, parish offices, and transnational correspondence networks. By focusing on postwar humanitarian encounters as spaces of mutual information exchange and negotiation, and reflecting on the precariousness of such mediation in contexts where agency was limited, agendas diverged, and survival depended on both testimony and discretion, this panel aims to show, on the one hand, the interplay of religion, politics, and religious politics in the construction and establishment of accounts about Eastern Europe, and, on the other hand, the kinds of relationships this knowledge created between rescuers and the rescued. It also aims to assess whether, and in what ways, such knowledge contributed to the Vatican's understanding of East European matters and religious persecution in Eastern Europe, and whether it ultimately influenced Vatican diplomatic strategies towards the USSR and Warsaw Pact countries.

Through this focus, the panel contributes to broader discussions on displaced persons as both subjects and producers of knowledge, and on the role of organized religion in shaping Cold War epistemologies.

Roundtable: Finding a Voice from the Periphery: Young Scholars in Central and Eastern Europe

Participants:

- **Karolína Hájková** (Charles University)
- **Zuzana Jarolímková** (Charles University)
- **Martina Kolská** (Charles University)
- **Hana Řičicová** (Charles University

Abstract:

This roundtable brings together four PhD candidates from Charles University Prague, Czechia – an ex-socialist country in the CEE Region – who share the experience of researching "from the periphery" while working within predominantly Western, often Anglo-American, theoretical frameworks. How do our geographical, gendered, and professional positionalities shape our choice of topics, methods, and sources? Is de-Westernizing academia possible, desirable, or even achievable in our contexts? In this dialogue, we will explore how to draw on Western theories while searching for our own epistemological foundations, the compromises we make when publishing in the global academic field, and the blind spots revealed through mutual critique. Our aim is not to present definitive answers, but to show how early-career researchers from the CEE region research while being researched and how they can challenge knowledge hierarchies while seeking a voice that resonates both at the centre and the periphery.

Our research focuses on photojournalism through the lens of memory studies, journalists' perception of precaritization, the history of media representation of queer people in relation to HIV, and nation branding as a tool used to enhance the position of countries in conflicts and security crises. Addressing these topics within the context of a small ex-Eastern Bloc state, we aim to offer insights into how its historical legacy continues to shape contemporary media practices and influence not only researchers, who are the first generation growing up outside the soviet regime, but also their researched targets. The challenge of situating post-socialist countries can also be seen in the ambiguity surrounding their placement within established media system typologies, such as those proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004).

Panel: Postcolonial and Decolonial Approaches in Writing History of Eastern Europe

Participants:

- **Hanna Mazheika** (University of Turku)
  '...the part of Russia under the control of the King of Poland': Ruthenians of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in Early Modern Foreign Accounts
- **Alesia Mankouskaya** (SSEES, University College London)
  Forgotten Influence: Jesuit Colleges of the Eastern Part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Theatre, Education and Connection with European Culture.
- **Marta Grzechnik** (University of Gdansk)
  Conquerors of Seas and Oceans, Mosquitos and Malaria. Colonial Knowledge Production and Global Positioning - The Case of Poland.

Abstract:

In recent years, and particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there has been a growing tendency to apply postcolonial perspectives within Eastern European studies. However, scholarly attention has largely centred on the Kingdom of Poland or ethnic Lithuania, while the Belarusian lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania has remained comparatively neglected. This omission, partly shaped by current political circumstances, contributes to a new wave of intellectual colonisation within Polish–Lithuanian studies. Framed by the enduring yet contested dichotomy between "Eastern" and "Western" Europe, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is frequently categorised in scholarship as an Eastern European state – a classification that arguably fails to capture the full complexity of its political, cultural, and geopolitical affiliations. Western scholarship has, in turn, reinforced the region's marginalisation through recurring patterns of orientalisation, othering, and oversimplification. Such frameworks not only obscure the extent to which the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was integrated into pan-European networks of political thought, education, and cultural exchange, but also perpetuate anachronistic geopolitical binaries rooted in nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiographical traditions.

Such frameworks not only obscure the extent to which the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was integrated into pan-European networks of political thought, education, and cultural exchange, but also perpetuate anachronistic territorial and ideological binaries rooted in nineteenth- and twentieth-century historiographical traditions. Addressing these limitations requires a reassessment of the Grand Duchy's position that foregrounds transnational flows of ideas, the circulation of cultural practices, and the multiplicity of its institutional connections across the continent. The panel will therefore seek to challenge this imbalance by bringing the overlooked history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania into sharper focus. Papers examining the relationship between theatrical education in the eastern territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and European cultural traditions, as well as the perceptions of the Grand Duchy's Ruthenian population by foreign observers, will reconsider prevailing contemporary conceptions of the Grand Duchy's separation from Western Europe.

Roundtable: Teaching Eastern Europe in Sweden Amid War and Geopolitical Upheaval

Participants:

- **Julia Malitska** (Södertörn University)
- **Andrej Kotljarchuk** (Uppsala University)
- **Thomas Rosén** (University of Gothenburg)
- **Yuliya Yurchuk** (Södertörn University)

Abstract:

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 did not merely shift the geopolitical priorities of many countries or raise urgent security concerns—it also exposed the limited understanding of Eastern Europe, particularly within Western academic and public discourse. The war revealed numerous misconceptions about the countries of Eastern Europe—misconceptions that might have been avoided with a more interdisciplinary and empirically grounded approach to teaching and research. In particular, greater attention to the humanities and historically informed perspectives on the region is urgently needed. While international relations (IR) scholarship often relies on abstract concepts like "hostility" or "resolve" to analyze the will to wage war or resist aggression, such concepts cannot be fully understood without insights from the humanities and social sciences (Oksamytna, 2023).

This panel examines the state of Eastern European expertise in Sweden. Where does knowledge about Eastern Europe come from? Why is it important to teach about Eastern Europe in Sweden?

This panel brings together scholars who both study and teach the region at Swedish universities. Together, we ask: What challenges do we face in conveying complex regional realities? Has the teaching of Eastern Europe changed since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine? What kinds of knowledge emerge in moments of historical rupture? And what forms of expertise are necessary to engage meaningfully in current public discussions about Russia, Ukraine, and the broader region?Finally, we reflect on a critical question: How can we prevent epistemic injustices from manifesting in educational and research settings?

Panel: The Importance of and Need for Marginalized Voices in University Research and Teaching

Participants:

- **Liaisan Şahin** (Marmara University)
  Who are Crimean Tatars? A Note on Late Discussions in Turkish Turcology.
- **Ella Rossman** (University College London)
  Feminist Knowledge and Contemporary Slavic Studies: A Missing Chapter.
- **Yulia Gradskova** (Södertörn University)
  Soviet History from an Intersectional Perspective: Reviewing What Do We Know and How Do We Teach

Abstract:

The panel is addressing the production and diffusion of knowledge in the university. We look specifically on research and teaching about Soviet history and culture and in the context of the current need for re-evaluation of what do we know and how do we transfer knowledge about Soviet history in the context of the 3,5 years of Russian war against Ukraine. What shall be done to review the Soviet models and schemes still dominating the scholarship on Soviet history in academia? Although discussions in the field are burgeoning, their impact on teaching remains to be fully understood. To what extent have previously marginalized voices been incorporated, and what further measures can be taken to enhance their inclusion

The panel addresses several aspects of knowledge production and transmission. Liaisan Şahin is analyzing discussions on the origin and specifics of the Crimean Tatars among turcologists in Turkiye. The presentation criticizes prevalent Soviet approaches to the history of the Crimean Tatars and draws attention to the voices of the Crimean Tatar historians. Scholarly discussions in the field of Turcology play a crucial role in deepening our understanding of the Soviet and post-Soviet history of Turkic-speaking people. Ella Rossman is analyzing how the Soviet history is taught at East-European and Slavic Studies focusing specifically on feminist and queer-optics that is often missing on several levels. As an example, Rossman will look at the contemporary discussion on Soviet and post-Soviet temporalities that mainly continues to be gender-blind. Finally, Yulia Gradskova in her presentation takes up current discussions on need to decolonize history of the Soviet Union and of the Russian Federation through use of intersectionality. She shares her experience of introducing intersectionality into teaching history for the online course of one of the exile universities and focuses, in particular, on importance of attention to Central Asian events, biographies and cultural artefacts as well as paying attention to marginalization and racialization in Soviet history.

Conference paper abstracts

(***Sorted by the last name of the author***)

Name: Ābelkina, Ilga Vālodze
Affiliation: PhD candidate

Title: Latvian Folklore Ensembles and Their Initiatives Against Russia's War in Ukraine

Abstract:
Following the establishment of the Soviet Union, the inhabitants of the occupied territories in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States were subject to its ideology in all areas of life. Naturally, this included culture, where a certain amount of propaganda and censorship were implemented in education, performances, publications, and so on. In response to the attempts by the ruling powers to devalue local traditional culture and the ongoing Russification, a folklore revival movement (Estonian 'folklooriliikumine', Latvian 'folkloras kustība', Lithuanian 'folkloro judėjimas') emerged in the Baltic states in the 1960s, reaching Latvia in the 1970s, and culminating in the Awakening with the restoration of independent republics in the early 1990s.

Today, more than 50 years since the movement began in Latvia, there are over 200 active folklore ensembles in the country, practicing traditional music, dances, and uncountable crafts. Many of these groups involve the descendants of leaders or active participants in the movement. More than ten are led by the second-generation revivalists, who either continue their parents' musical traditions or create new expressions of the intangible culture that was passed down to them. This paper will examine cases in which Latvian folklore has become an inherited revived tradition, forming a new type of preserved knowledge. The primary emphasis will be placed on the active folklore repertoire of tradition barriers.

Moreover, the current re-emergence of the context of the 20th Century folklore revitalization movement will be explored, examining how Latvian folklore groups have addressed the war in their creative work following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Name: Avdić Küsmüş, Adisa
Affiliation: Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University

Title: Grassroots Memory Politics: How the Srebrenica Mothers Reframed Bosnia's Post-Genocide Discourse

Abstract:
This paper examines Bosnia and Herzegovina as a critical case for understanding how education policies shape the production of knowledge in deeply divided societies. Drawing on policy analysis and curriculum reviews, it explores how post-war reforms have both reproduced and challenged ethno-national divisions.

The paper argues that classroom spaces in Bosnia and Herzegovina operate as battlegrounds in which competing narratives of history, culture, and belonging are transmitted, contested, and institutionalized. Education policies—particularly those governing curricula, language of instruction, and textbook content—are shown to reflect broader political struggles over the interpretation of the 1992–1995 war and the vision of the country's future.

By situating Bosnia and Herzegovina's experience within the broader field of post-conflict knowledge production, the study highlights the paradoxes of education reform in fragile peace settings: while schooling can promote reconciliation and critical thinking, it can also entrench division and selective memory. The findings underscore the need for policies that foster inclusive narratives, encourage critical engagement with the past, and enable education to serve as a bridge rather than a fault line in post-conflict reconstruction.

Name: Balazs, Anna
Affiliation: CBEES, Södertörn University

Title: Russians Go Home? Geopolitical Epistemologies on the Hungarian Right

Abstract:
One of the symbolic endpoints of Hungarian state socialism was Viktor Orban's 1989 speech in which he demanded that Soviet troops leave the country, allowing the restoration of political sovereignty.

Although anti-Soviet resistance, the legacy of both 1956 and 1989, has been a foundational element in the self-identification of Hungarian conservatives in the last three decades, the Russian war in Ukraine elicited a range of unexpected and contradictory reactions both on the level of government communication and among the electorate.

Addressing the underlying contradiction between historical attitudes towards Soviet/Russian imperialism and current evaluations of the Russian invasion, my paper explores the evolution of geopolitical imaginaries on the Hungarian right since the 1990s. Using interview data and media analysis from 2024 autumn, I will present the arguments used by government officials and conservative intellectuals to justify their varying stances of support or criticism of Ukraine's fight for independence, and analyse how these arguments are embedded in their broader political worldview.

Specifically, I will show how the collective memory of the 1956 revolution is reinterpreted in the context of the current war in government media and the explanations used by conservative intellectuals to rationalize such narratives.

The paper argues that the seemingly contradictory attitudes towards Russian imperialism in the Hungarian versus the Ukrainian contexts reflect a broader process of changing geopolitical epistemologies, where previous forms of knowledge about "East" and "West" produced in the Cold War period are challenged and reinterpreted according to a combination of newly emerging socio-historical paradigms, new infrastructures of communication, and momentary political interests.

Name: Balinchenko, Svitlana
Affiliation: H. Skovoroda Institute of Philosophy, NAS of Ukraine; the Department of History of Foreign Philosophy

Title: Propositional Adaptability of Scenarios Through Knowledge-Related Filters: Present-for-Future and Future-for-Present Modeling During the War

Abstract:
Scenarios of social processes created under the uncertain conditions, as a result of the post-conflict future modeling attempts during the war, rely on several knowledge-related filters, among which we can mention not only the (im)possibility to predict the duration of the war and post-war recovery, and assumptions about changes in the economic and political spheres, but also a set of value-oriented concepts relevant to the implementation of scenarios: justice, cohesion, compliance with the state and global goals, security, and other ones.

A social-philosophical review of practical (normative) discourses that affect modeling the future implies present-for-future and future-for-present vectors of knowing, prediction, and ignoring. As the main criterion for evaluating scenarios, propositional adaptability can be considered through the range close to Peircean "belief-doubt" scale. The propositional adaptability (shortcoming) of scenarios implies the flexibility of defining the phenomena of reality in conditions of uncertainty, when the representation (description) of reality is inferior to practical construction and is clarified in the altered context.

For instance, during the war, there are changes in the semantics and predicates of the description of migration in the scenarios, depending on how the scale and political context of migration change, as well as on the impact of migrants on host communities, before and after full-scale invasion of Russia in 2022.

The study is methodologically based on a secondary analysis of survey data and open-source statistical data for the period of armed aggression, since 2014, as well as on a review of scientific publications, official documents, and reports on constructing present-for-future or future-for-present scenarios for Ukraine.

Name: Barchuk-Halyk, Mariana
Affiliation: Center for Civilians in Conflict CIVIC

Title: When Language Becomes a Checkpoint: Why Ukrainian Is a Matter of Security in Wartime Ukraine

Abstract:
In this paper I examined the securitization of language in Ukraine, arguing that language is not only a cultural marker but also an operational instrument of human security during wartime. Drawing on critical security studies, language policy analysis, and the concept of hybrid warfare, it considers how linguistic practices have shifted from symbolic identity markers to practical checkpoints for recognition and protection.

One of the most striking examples is the “palianytsia” test used by Ukrainian Armed Forces to detect enemy infiltrators – a single word functioning as a linguistic password, merging sociolinguistics with field-level security measures. In such moments, language becomes a literal line of defence, a means of distinguishing friend from foe under existential threat. The Russian Federation’s sustained weaponization of the Russian language — from invoking the need to “protect Russian speakers” and falsely using the Responsibility to Protect concept as a pretext for the annexation of Crimea, to banning Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar languages in occupied territories — demonstrates how language policy can be instrumentalized as part of long-term information warfare.

In Ukraine, an entrenched pattern of asymmetric bilingualism has persisted for decades: while the Constitution names Ukrainian as the sole state language since Ukraine regained independens in1991, Russian has retained significant dominance in many spheres. The absence of a coherent strategic language policy before 2014 left Ukraine vulnerable to manipulation in the information domain.

Grassroots movements such as the #KyivNotKiev campaign and “Perekhod na ukrainsku!” initiative reflect attempts to reclaim linguistic space and strengthen national identity thougt shaping new language policy.

However, the wartime context has transformed language from a tool of cultural revival into a matter of immediate security — influencing how soldiers operate, how communities interact, and how the state defines itself in the face of aggression. By situating the Ukrainian case within a broader Eastern European and Baltic framework, the paper engages with the conference theme of “knowing” in moments of rupture. It explores how the geopolitics of language reshape knowledge production, identity boundaries, and security practices. Ultimately, it asks how language policy functions as both an implicit factor in political conflict and a tangible element of human security in war, challenging us to reconsider the role of language in the contemporary security landscape of Europe.

Name: Brenner Music, Virginia
Affiliation: PhD Candidate, Department of Environment, Development, and Sustainability Studies, Södertörn University

Title: Rivers of Resistance. Transnational Environmental Movements and New Epistemologies From the Western Balkans Challenging Epistemic Hierarchies

Abstract:
This paper, based on my dissertation research project, presents selected aspects of the study that investigate alternative epistemologies that contest dominant paradigms of sustainability and local (authoritarian) governance as well as external neoliberal frameworks, within the context of the Western Balkans, a region long framed as Europe´s liminal, conflict-prone periphery. Subjects of the dissertation research project are transnational, contemporary (post-2000) environmental movements in the Western Balkans, exemplified by those movements resisting hydropower (and other extractive) projects in the region.
Rooted in shared ecological, cultural and religious-spiritual ties, these movements contest intensifying exploitation of natural resources in the region, and through sustained praxis of resistance, they construct and enact reimagines of governance, sustainability, and regional cooperation.
Framed through the Western Balkans region´s distinctive condition of geopolitical in-betweenness, the analysis engages with geopolitical hierarchies on environmental governance within the legacies of historical conflicts, and amid ongoing global crises showing how peripheral regions generate novel, context-specific, localised, yet transnationally and globally relevant insights into the modalities of collective action, thereby challenging dominant epistemologies in environmental politics.
Through framed analysis of the evolution of grassroots environmental movements into transnational alliances, through transnational lens, the paper frames resistance of these contemporary environmental movements as a form of knowledge practice that emerges not only from the lived (environmental) experiences, but also from the reenactment of (post) war trauma linked to a dispossession and degradation of natural resources.
Activists in these contemporary environmental movements frame their struggle as protecting not only the natural environment but also the social fabric and historical identity of communities long affected by conflict and marginalisation. Their actions, which include public protests, transnational advocacy networking, community led monitoring, all reflect embodied knowledge that is shaped by their lived experiences, trauma, and demands for socio-environmental justice in a neoliberal context that prioritizes extractive development. Selected aspects of the dissertation study presented in this paper highlight how these actors resist extractivist logic while simultaneously engaging in the processes of post-conflict healing. Through their struggles, they produce new epistemologies and modalities of governing nature.
The paper argues that these localized forms of knowledge offer a critical reconfiguration of how sustainability, governance, justice, and citizenship are understood and practised in conflict affected, marginalized, and geopolitically peripheral contexts.

Name: **Bródy, Luca Sára**
Affiliation: Södertörn University & ELTE KRTK

Title: Infrastructures of care: Women's everyday food practices in rural Hungary

Abstract:

In rural Hungary, women support local food systems by carrying out informal, gendered and often unseen forms of care-based labour. This paper explores how everyday food self-provisioning, such as gardening, preserving, saving seeds, sharing surplus produce and passing on practical knowledge, constitutes a quiet infrastructure of care and a situated mode of knowledge production. In the face of overlapping social and ecological crises, these practices foster community resilience and challenge dominant sustainability and development paradigms that prioritise scale, productivity, and formal expertise.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with rural women from an ongoing research project, I examine how food-related care practices produce practical, context-specific knowledge that challenges epistemic hierarchies and extractivist logics. These practices transcend the domestic/private realm and blur the boundaries between subsistence, activism, and livelihood.

Examples include organising seed exchanges and workshops, tending others' gardens, and maintaining shared knowledge infrastructures – forms of 'uneventful activism' that resist through endurance rather than confrontation.

The paper argues that these practices offer critical insights into how knowledge emerges from the margins. Not as static expertise, but as an ongoing, relational process embedded in place, gendered labour and social reproduction.

By foregrounding these experiences, I consider whose knowledge is valued in sustainability discourse and how the geopolitical positioning of Eastern Europe as a semi-periphery has influenced which forms of knowledge are recognised as valid. This contribution engages with debates on gender, rurality, and the geopolitics of knowledge. It considers how alternative epistemologies, which are often excluded from dominant frameworks, can reconfigure our understanding of resilience, sustainability, and value.

Ultimately, I advocate paying more attention to care as a framework and practice, and the interdependent ways of knowing that are rooted in the everyday lives of people in post-socialist rural areas.

Name: **Çakır, Cansu**
Affiliation: Södertörn University

Title: Decolonizing Medical History: Ottoman Medical Professionalization and the Legacy of Dr. Besim Ömer Pasha

Abstract:
The historiography of medicine has traditionally privileged ancient Italian and Greek medical developments, philosophy, and literature. Not only have these Western-centric narratives dominated the profession, but they have also frequently depicted Western medical traditions as universal rather than culturally unique, thereby establishing them as the foundational framework for the history of medicine. Consequently, non-Western medical traditions have been systematically marginalized, frequently appearing only as brief chapters under the umbrella of global history. This structure has maintained Western hegemony over medical knowledge production, thereby reinforcing epistemological hierarchies within the discipline. In spite of this, recently published research in the fields of decolonial and trans-imperial studies has resulted in a great deal of criticism directed on the social history of medicine.

The purpose of this study is to examine the medical education in the late Ottoman Empire, which was significantly influenced by Western practices through missionary activities and physicians who received training in Europe. The formation was characterized by a sense of astonishment and apprehension about remaining behind, as well as the necessity of establishing itself despite the sultanate, particularly in the context of women's health.

In this paper, I will adhere to Dr. Besim Ömer Pasha's publications and speeches in an effort to establish a professionalized Ottoman medical profession.

Additionally, this paper will examine the tensions between British colonial medical practices in broader West Asia and North Africa, including former Ottoman provinces such as Egypt and Palestine, while also taking into account the early Ottoman medicine in the palace as the marker for the Ottomans.

Name: Chen, Paris Pin-Yu
Affiliation: University of Birmingham

Title: The Politics of Land Restitution and Estonian Diaspora Subjectivity, 1980s-2000s

Abstract:
During Estonia's post-socialist land reform, Estonian refugees and their descendants in the West became a major group of beneficiaries. With the restitution of nationalised properties, the newly restored republic aimed to rally the support of influential Estonian diaspora organisations and to attract return migration of Western citizens with Estonian background. But land restitution also helped foster an imagination of landownership that was highly connected to ethnicity and citizenship. Consequently, the radical land redistribution contributed to the simmering tensions between the so-called 'homeland Estonians' and the Estonian diaspora.

This paper argues that advocacy for – and involvement in – the restitution of nationalised land reshaped Estonian diaspora subjectivity from the late 1980s to early 2000s. The Estonian diaspora experienced the process of land reform as an opportunity to renew ties with the homeland and to strengthen kinship bonds. Historical memory and ethnic belonging reinforced their sense of entitlement to property. But they also had to defend their claim to landownership against challenges from homeland Estonians who questioned their identity and loyalty to Estonia. Estonia's post-socialist land reform produced a distinct Estonian diaspora landowning subjectivity that emerged through intersubjective encounters with bureaucrats, homeland Estonian land claimants, their new neighbours and distant relatives.

This paper is based on previously unused archival materials and oral history interviews. I focus on one family's quest for land restitution. Meanwhile, I seek to make sense of it within the broader context of the Estonian diaspora's reactions and experiences with reclaiming properties from the late 1980s to the early 2000s.

Name: Cherepakhin, Roman
Affiliation: Vytautas Magnus University

Title: How Generative AI Narrates the Past of Eastern Europe and the Baltics

Abstract:
At a time when large language models, LLMs, are increasingly consulted as authoritative sources of information, the question arises: What version of history do they tell? While AI models, particularly, LLMs, GenAI, are used as sources of information, their outputs reflect the data they are trained on, raising questions about accuracy, bias and epistemic reliability. Misrepresentation or selective framing by AI can influence public knowledge, historical understanding and the epistemic authority of digital tools, making it important to investigate how LLMs represent complex, contested historical events in Eastern Europe and the Baltics.

This research investigates LLMs' responses to prompts about historical events with political, social or symbolic significance. Using a set of open-ended prompts — one factual and one interpretive — responses were used in multiple LLMs under identical conditions. Qualitative thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns in narrative structure, attribution of responsibility, choice of terminology, contextual depth and the presence or absence of contested perspectives. Preliminary findings indicate that LLMs differ in how they present these events: some models reproduced dominant or official narratives, others incorporated multiple interpretations, some displayed evidence of selective omission, cautious phrasing or simplification of complex political contexts, while a few avoided politically sensitive questions entirely.

These variations have implications for how AI systems shape "digital historical memory" and for their role as de facto knowledge producers, influencing public understanding, potentially reinforcing certain interpretations. The research contributes to the study of AI and epistemology by demonstrating the importance of critical evaluation of AI-generated content for public understanding. It provides insights into how LLMs shape access to historical knowledge, particularly in geopolitically sensitive contexts, and highlights the need for careful examination when using AI to explore contested events.

Name: **Davidović, Maja**
Affiliation: Cardiff University

Title: 'Neither Honor nor Vital Interests': The "East" as a Site of Experimentation for International Fact-Finding

Abstract:
This paper positions Eastern Europe – broadly defined – as a site of experimentation for international fact-finding in the early 20th century with the view of investigating how specific commissions of inquiry set to investigate incidents committed by, to and in Eastern European states helped shape international governance of knowledge about war.

More specifically, the paper analyses three fact-finding commissions established to investigate the 1904 Dogger Bank incident between Britain and Russia; the 1913 Second Balkan War, and the 1915 Ottoman genocide against Armenians for their impacts on shaping 'common sense views' of war, notably, how war's atrocities are to be identified, addressed, and repaired. This analysis reveals that the tools and mechanisms of identification, 'dealing with' and repairing atrocities pioneered by these commissions have directly shaped contemporary standards of justice, truth and reparation in international law. Having traced the development of this process, the paper proceeds with an analysis of its political consequences. Underpinned by post- and decolonial theorizing on epistemic violence, the paper pays attention to the range of tactics – such as epistemic extractivism and objectification – that were employed by the commissions to create and secure distinct, hierarchically positioned epistemic subjects of the West versus the East. All three commissions departed from the fact-finding regulations enshrined in the 1899 Hague Convention by creating inquiries into matters concerning 'honour' and 'vital interests' of the othered Eastern subjects, whose sensitive political, diplomatic, and economic matters became subject to international scrutiny by bodies presented as neutral, objective and scientific, while the same standards did not extend to the West.

In addition to seeking to challenge some of the common sense views of how war is to be known in contemporary politics by identifying their epistemically violent roots, this paper also contributes to scholarly understandings of commissions of inquiry as key subjects and Eastern European entities as key objects of the global governance of knowledge about war and its atrocities.

Name: Dudás, Barbara
Affiliation: Independent researcher

Title: From Socialist Monumentality to Retro Backdrop: Epistemic Shifts in the Afterlife of Gyula Hincz's Murals and Tapestries

Abstract:
What happens to the knowledge embedded in socialist public art when the political order that created it collapses?

The proposed paper examines the epistemic trajectories of monumental socialist modernist art in Hungary during and after the Kádár era (1957–1989), using the oeuvre of state-supported artist Gyula Hincz (1904–1986) as a lens. Hincz's murals, stained glass windows, and tapestries – created for universities, cultural houses, and hotels – once embodied a state-sanctioned vision of progress, education, and collective identity. In the socialist period, such works were central to the visual language of public space, serving both aesthetic and ideological functions.

After the 1989 regime change, these works were largely excluded from art-historical canons, dismissed as ideological relics rather than autonomous cultural artefacts. Today, many survive in a precarious "grey zone" of heritage, lacking clear legal protection and vulnerable to loss during urban redevelopment. Yet paradoxically, they have acquired new cultural capital in unexpected arenas: as retro-chic backdrops in fashion photography, stage design, and even international film production.

Through site visits, archival research, and analysis of media uses, this paper explores how the shifting reception of Hincz's works illuminates broader post-socialist knowledge politics. Who has the authority to define the value of these artworks? Under which epistemic frameworks do they move from propaganda to heritage, or from art to mere décor?

By situating this Hungarian case within wider Eastern European debates on contested heritage, politics of memory, and the decolonization of art history, the paper argues that the afterlife of socialist monumental art offers a critical vantage point for understanding how knowledge about the region's past is produced, silenced, and reimagined in the wake of political rupture.

Name: Grondelaers, Hannah
Affiliation: PhD fellow at Ghent University's Social Work and Social Pedagogy Department, affiliated to UNU-CRIS' Migration and Social Policy Cluster in Bruges

Title: 'Witnessing' through photovoice in multi-scalar ethnography with Ukrainian women traveling back and forth between Belgium and Ukraine

Abstract:
As an exceptional measure activated in March 2022 following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Temporary Protection has offered protection throughout the EU to Ukrainians displaced by the war in their country. At the same time, the measure's explicit temporality has laid bare how questions of protection have turned into expectations of return over the last three years. Although Temporary Protection was prolonged until 4 March 2027, in a press release of June 4th the European Commission simultaneously announced a 'coordinated transition out of temporary protection' after this date (European Commission, 2025). While deadly Russian attacks still ravage Ukrainian cities daily and heavy fighting continues along the frontlines, EU Member States talk of reconstruction – and their own potential share in it – at Ukraine Recovery Conferences, while the EU has announced it is time 'to pave the way for a gradual return and sustainable reintegration in Ukraine' (European Commission, 2025).

Amidst discussions of return and reconstruction on different policy scales, millions of Ukrainians across the EU continue to live in uncertainty, their daily realities marked by the ongoing war, destruction and loss.

A recent poll has shown that almost 80% of Ukrainians have relatives or friends who have been wounded or killed by Russia's war (Hrushetskyi, 2023). For my PhD project, I conduct longitudinal photovoice research with ten Ukrainian women as they travel back and forth between Belgium and Ukraine during the war. In line with multi-scalar ethnography (Xiang, 2013), I seek to gain a better understanding of the women's trajectories, while also exploring how they simultaneously have to navigate a complex geopolitical landscape shaped by policy scales with different temporalities. In this context, Ukrainian researcher and writer Asia Bazdyrieva has called for 'staying with' and 'attending to' the damage (Bazdyrieva, 2023), as moving on from the destruction too quickly plays into the erasure through which (Russian) imperialism operates (Tsymbalyuk, 2022). During my presentation, I will delve into the potential of photovoice – as a form of embodied knowledge production – to 'stay with' and 'attend to' the everydayness of war. I will reflect on my own positionality while exploring ethnography as a form of 'second degree witnessing' (Sieber, 2025), and how the knowledge produced by photovoice could be understood once framed as such.

Name: Hackmann, Jörg
Affiliation: University of Szczecin, Institute of History and International Center for Interdisciplinary Studies

Title: Between Scylla and Charybdis: (Neo-)imperialism and Methodological Nationalism as Pitfalls of Contemporary Discourses on Baltic and East European History

Abstract:
As a reaction to Russia's full invasion in Ukraine, claims were brought forward of decolonizing and decentralizing the research on Eastern Europe and in particular Russia. From the perspective of the Baltic and East Central European regions, however, such approaches are hardly novel, as they emerged already before 1989 and had a major impact on historical research in the last decades. Against this background, the recent calls for decolonizing cannot fully solve a crucial problem of history writing on Eastern Europe (and in particular on the Russian empire) of the last decades. For many historians, it was quite comfortable to continue applying the framework of the tsarist / Soviet empire even after 1991, with partly relabeling this approach as "critical". Only in the aftermath of February 24, 2022, the disruption became more visible, for instance, when addressing the epistemic injustice of ignoring Ukraine's agency at the 2024 ASEEES conference.

As a contrast to these imperial perspectives a methodological nationalism has been identified, which is criticized for ignoring the multidimensional diversity of the region and relying on a container model of nation-state spaces. From a historian's perspective such a national focus can be explained with revived nation-building processes, which are closely connected to strategies of writing the nation. In addition, area studies are partly seen in the context of methodological nationalism, as they rely on the knowledge of national languages and cultures. Nevertheless, there are also significant epistemic shortcomings connected to such nationally centered perspectives, for instance in ignoring transnational entanglements and misinterpreting premodern histories when applying modern national perspectives.

Both epistemic approaches find their political counterpart in exclusive memory politics shaped, for instance, by national heroic narratives as well as victimhood nationalism, which seem to be highly successful for many societies, as could be explained when looking at the public memory of World War II in Russia, the Baltic region and East Central Europe.

These observations lead to the question: How can scholars navigate between these pitfalls? An analysis of historical debates in the Baltic and East-Central European societies will show that relevant answers to the current debate on decentralizing East European history have already been offered among the small nations of the region. So, there is no need to reinvent them, but to uncover them from the rubble of recent political disruption.

Name: Hagelin, Sandra
Affiliation: University of Tartu

Title: Entangled Borders as a Discursive Practice in Governmental Communication

Abstract:
Governmental communication on borders often fails to distinguish the various borders existing in their vicinity, which contributes to the notion of entangled borders.

This lack of distinction hinders the examination of how different types of borders are conceptualized and operated. This paper presents findings from my dissertation titled Speaking borders, speaking Europe: Entangled Borders the Nordic-Baltic Space. The dissertation addresses the following research questions: 1) How are borders and bordering processes discursively re/represented in governmental border communication during border-related crises in the EU? 2) What image of EUrope is inferred by these discursive representations?

Sharing evidence of entangled borders in governmental communication from Sweden, Finland, Estonia, and Lithuania, the paper reflects on the link between discursive representations of borders, border-making processes in the Nordic-Baltic region, and the envisioned trajectories of the EU. It emphasizes the existence of various types of borders, which are rarely distinguished in border discourse. Yet, different border types are discursively invoked to emphasize the significance of borders.

While this pattern is most evident where borders physically overlap, the findings suggest it also applies when national borders do not overlap the external Schengen border. Notably, combinations of entangled borders appear to be employed to promote certain visions of Europe over others.

Overall, discourse on national and EU external borders presents multi-layered and at times conflicting visions of EUrope, shaped by border type, national context, and shifting crisis conditions. Yet, Europe is predominantly envisioned as a fortified and protected space.

Name: Halász, Katalin
Affiliation: Brunel University of London

Title: The Bell Rings film/Affective Atmospheres of Nationalism: Embodied Knowledge and Aesthetic Interventions in Eastern Europe

Abstract:
This paper engages THE BELL RINGS (dir. Katalin Halász and Andreas Landeck), an essay film shot at the 2023 Tusványos Festival, as a site for exploring how national identity is not only narrated but felt, performed, and contested through affective and embodied registers. Situated in a Romanian region home to a large Hungarian minority, the Tusványos Festival has, under Viktor Orbán's leadership, evolved into a key platform for enacting and amplifying Hungary's ethnonationalist politics. Rather than analyzing this event solely through ideological discourse, the film—our making and our reading of it—foregrounds the textures of feeling, sensory experience, and everyday gestures that sediment and unsettle dominant forms of national belonging.

Drawing on affect theory and theories of embodied and situated knowledge, this paper approaches the film as a form of artistic epistemology: one that reveals how knowledge emerges not just through what is said, but through what is sensed, repeated, disrupted, and remembered. The film resists linear narrative, instead weaving together fragments of space, voice, and movement to expose the affective atmospheres and silences that shape political subjectivities. In a time of epistemic uncertainty—when knowledge feels fractured, contested, and entangled with denial—THE BELL RINGS opens up aesthetic and affective modalities of knowing that both document and disturb the logics of state-sanctioned memory and identity.

This paper argues that such artistic expressions create openings for reimagining what counts as knowledge, who produces it, and how it circulates across geopolitical and affective terrains. In doing so, it speaks to the need for aesthetic epistemic practices that account for the felt and the embodied practices that challenge hierarchies of reason and offer new ways of engaging with the political.

We propose submitting the film for a screening (19 mins), and to engage in a discussion with the participants of the conference, and/or a paper presentation.

Screener: https://vimeo.com/amvis/thebellrings?share=copy

password: BELL@2025

More on the film can be found here:https://www.katalinhalasz.com/the-bell-rings

Recent publication on the film (Chapter 3) in in the 2025 collection Capacities To: Affect Up Against Fascism

https://imbricate.press/book/capacities-to-affect-up-against-fascism/?fbclid=IwY2xjawH7VZxleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHRxI38oFEYYkJ5AQAGx2RYkL966e_vXEAy-Riyyjo5HtuPg2MdtUzIjH4g_aem_8gytIXCHavnU-IXatQMzWA

Name: Hall, Dorota
Affiliation: Polish Academy of Sciences

Title: Counter-Histories and the Limits of Epistemic Resistance Among Poland's Minority Christian Churches

Abstract:
This paper draws on material published in the media of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Poland (SDA) and the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC), as well as interviews with SDA and PAOC media specialists, to examine the counter-histories produced by these churches. Both organizations make considerable efforts to position themselves as important actors in Polish national history and highlight that their contributions have not been recognized by the Polish mainstream. By demonstrating their historical importance and alignment with national values, the churches seek to challenge the dominant Pole-Catholic identity model and the structural ignorance (Alcoff 2007) that blocks recognition of knowledge produced from their own perspectives. Simultaneously, they resist epistemic injustice rooted in geopolitical imaginaries that obscure how these churches position themselves on their own terms.

The SDA church struggles against the label of an 'American church'—a designation that triggered oppression during communist times and continues to harm the church today through its association with the notion of a 'sect'. PAOC contends with being labeled a 'Russian church' and the nesting orientalism (Bakić-Hayden 1995) that draws on the church's geographical location in eastern Poland to imply PAOC's and its believers' inferiority and civilizational backwardness. Beyond highlighting the narrative strategies these churches employ in response to such misreadings, this paper examines the limits of resistance to structural ignorance and epistemic injustice faced by these organizations. In particular, it demonstrates that the churches themselves produce ignorance targeting those situated lower in Poland's religious hierarchy, and more broadly it asks about the possibility of establishing an epistemic community of resistance (Medina 2013) from a religious position.

Name: Hosaka, Sanshiro
Affiliation: International Centre for Defence and Security

Title: “Intermediate Targets” in Soviet Intelligence Operations: The KGB, Détente, and US Arms Controllers

Abstract:
Scholars, think tank experts, and intellectuals in democratic societies play a critical role in shaping policy makers’ knowledge and informing the broader public about international politics, making them essential targets for authoritarian states seeking to disseminate strategic narratives.

Drawing on the concept of strategic narrative, this paper examines the role of “intermediate targets” in Soviet influence operations, focusing on the KGB’s targeting of American advocates of détente and arms reductions in the 1970s. Using the Mitrokhin documents and KGB training manuals, this study demonstrates Soviet intelligence approaches to foreign scholars as “intermediate targets.”

After Jimmy Carter’s victory in the 1976 presidential election, KGB Chairman Yuri Andropov approved measures to activate existing connections, employ them for informational purposes, and convey through them narratives favorable to the USSR to the new US leadership. While Soviet operations identified primary targets in the United States—the White House, Congress, business circles, and special services— their strong counterintelligence protection led the KGB to shift its focus toward intermediate targets where defenses were weaker, including scholars and think tank experts.

The KGB observed that Americans approached US-Soviet relations primarily through the imperative of avoiding nuclear confrontation with the USSR. Legislators and their aides supportive of détente were therefore seen as particularly susceptible to Soviet influence. To exploit this, Soviet intelligence even considered creating a “disarmament lobby.”

Whereas Western scholarship has described transnational networks of scientists, especially in the field of the US-Soviet arms control, as epistemic communities—united by shared principles and policy enterprises—the Soviets approached them exclusively through an intelligence lens, aiming to collect information and exert influence on target political leadership. These findings contribute to our understanding of the nuanced mechanisms through which authoritarian strategic narratives are disseminated among target political circles

Name: Hurkivska, Alyona
Affiliation: Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

Title: Competing Epistemic Paradigms and the Russo-Ukrainian War: Realist, Liberal and Constructivist Interpretations (2014–2022)

Abstract:

The Russian war in Ukraine since 2014 has become one of the most consequential and expository international crises in the 21st century. It has shown the fragility of the international order and catalysed debates over rethinking collective security, attitudes toward sovereignty, political responsibility, and deterrence. Political science and international relations (IR) scholars have argued diverse and even competing geopolitical narratives regarding the origins of the war and the security responsibilities of the collective West. At the same time, this leads to rethinking the “collectivity” of the West itself, primarily through the lens of the support and attitudes of several states toward modern conflicts.

This study is a part of a broader research project, being conducted at the Kuras Institute of Political and Ethnic Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. This chapter analyses the interpretations of the Russo-Ukrainian war by several epistemic communities in the West from 2014 to 2025. The study investigates the main arguments of the three dominant paradigms in IR, including realism, liberalism and constructivism, how scholars argue the causes of the war, the agency of Ukraine and what solutions for the lasting peace they do propose.

The chapter critically examines, deconstructs and disputes recurring arguments advanced by realist scholars. These include: (1) the claim that NATO expansion provoked Russia to attack Ukraine; (2) the perception of Russia as a strategically advanced actor; (3) the argument that Ukraine must serve as a buffer between Russia and the West; (4) the argument that Western engagement and aid lads to the conflict’s escalation; (5) the assumption that sustainable peace requires Ukraine to surrender. These claims are disputed in the paper, offering a broader lens which involves the agency of smaller states, the normative foundations of the international order, and the principle of sovereignty.

At the same time, the liberal perspective, which appeals to norms, international orders, and values, has been criticised by realists for lacking empirical roots and strategic clarity. The chapter examines the liberal emphasis on international law, state and democracy sovereignty, and institutional accountability, specifically how these principles challenge realist arguments that normalise spheres of influence or sacrifice less powerful states.

The chapter builds on the concept of epistemic communities developed by Adler and Haas (1992), analysing how knowledge networks influence the

framing of the war. It draws upon a qualitative content analysis of 191 sources, including academic articles and published analyses by recognised media outlets such as Foreign Policy.

The research contributes to critical security studies, epistemology in IR and political science, and Ukraine-related studies. The study discusses the competing interpretations of international order, the roles of states, normativity, and political agency in the context of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War. It raises broader questions about the responsibilities of epistemic communities in shaping responses to the war and the defence of democratic values.

Name: Japaridze, Margalita
Affiliation: Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI), Tampere University

Title: Critical Reflections on Knowledge Production – Youth and Peace in Georgia

Abstract:
Georgia's youth aged 15-29 represent 18.5% of the population and are confronted with significant socioeconomic challenges and structural inequalities. Many express frustrations with the political elite; in fact, 63% assert their interests are either not represented or poorly represented in national politics. Many young people report feeling demotivated, left out, and excluded from crucial discussions, which are typically dominated by adults who create agendas and make decisions on their behalf, even regarding issues that directly affect their lives.

The piece of research I would like to present is the part of my doctoral dissertation (Understanding Everyday Mobilization for Peace Among Post-Rose Revolution Youth in Georgia) which tackles multiple forms of discrimination and social injustice that young people face in Georgia in their daily lives. It aims to explore how Post-Rose Revolution youth mobilize for peace and navigate complex surroundings heavily influenced by the context of protracted conflict, state violence, and insecurity.

For the CBEES conference, I will present conclusions derived from background research, a literature review, and methodological aspects of my dissertation, encompassing the following questions: Who is interested in the discourse around youth and peace in Georgia, and who gets invited to speak or write on this topic? Furthermore, how do they speak about young adults? These include different stakeholders, institutions and civil society organizations. I will explore discursive framings, power hierarchies, and the positions that adults, institutions and organizations adopt and cement to protect their privileged position in society, especially in light of the rising authoritarianism and electoral autocracy in Georgia. I will analyse how stereotypes, stigma, ageism and adultism restrict youth's capacity to advocate for social causes and hinder their participation in public discussions in the context of Georgia.

Furthermore, in the second part of my presentation, I would like to share my experience of how I modified my research design after deriving insights from a literature review, engaging in deep reflection on the process of knowledge production, power dynamics, and researcher’s positionality, and considering possible epistemic violence(s). That is, how I transitioned from conventional research methods, such as conducting semi-structured interviews independently, to a more collaborative approach in which I emphasize co-constructing knowledge with youth and engaging them throughout the research process.

Name: Khachaturov, Arnold
Affiliation: School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS)

Counting the Dead: The Micropolitics of Casualty Measurement in the Russia-Ukraine War

Title: Counting the Dead: The Micropolitics of Casualty Measurement in the Russia-Ukraine War

Abstract:
At the heart of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine lies one of the most politically charged and empirically elusive questions: how many people have died? Despite the centrality of casualty figures in shaping public perception and policy, these numbers remain highly uncertain, contested, and fragmented. This paper investigates the socio-technical and political processes through which knowledge about war deaths is produced, circulated, and stabilized in the absence of transparent official data.

Since early 2022, the Russian government has released only two official casualty estimates. Instead of regular updates, a regime of silence has taken hold—punctuated by selective leaks and repression of those who attempt to reveal the scale of losses. Into this vacuum step journalists, human rights groups, OSINT communities, and foreign intelligence, each using distinct epistemic frameworks, infrastructures, and assumptions to count the dead.

This paper contributes to the social studies of quantification by focusing on measurement as practice, exploring how numbers emerge not just from conventions or usage, but through micropolitical negotiations on the ground. It builds on work in infrastructure and data studies to highlight how new forms of wartime knowledge emerge in moments of rupture and uncertainty.

We analyze in particular the bottom-up infrastructure developed by Mediazona and BBC Russian Service, who have compiled a database of over 100,000 individually verified Russian military deaths. Their approach—based on open-source intelligence, volunteer labor, and cross-referencing of obituaries, photos, and social media posts—operates outside state institutions, yet constructs an authoritative and widely cited dataset. Through ethnographic interviews, we explore how volunteers and journalists navigate dilemmas of verification, ambiguity, and ethical responsibility, revealing the tensions between speed, precision, and care.

Our analysis unfolds in three parts:

Mapping the discourse: Using NLP and media analysis, we trace how casualty numbers circulate across Russian-language media ecosystems—independent, oppositional, and pro-government—and how different actors frame the legitimacy of counting efforts.

Typology of measurement regimes: We classify and compare methods used by state and non-state actors, from grave counting and budget analysis to forensic

and satellite-based approaches, revealing embedded assumptions about visibility, trust, and authority.

Ethnography of counting: We foreground the lived, embodied labor of quantification—how evidence is judged, how uncertainty is negotiated, and how numbers are made to matter.

By examining casualty statistics not as static facts but as fragile, situated constructions, the paper contributes to broader debates on epistemic authority, ignorance, and the geopolitics of knowledge in wartime Eastern Europe.

Name: Kirey-Sitnikova, Yana
Affiliation: Independent researcher

Title: Lack of Accomplishment, Barriers in Access, or Epistemic Injustice? The Underrecognition of the Contributions of Tsarist/Soviet Researchers to Intersex and Transsexual Medicine

Abstract:
When reading Soviet/Russian histories of science, one cannot avoid noticing the number of inventions claimed to be made by Tsarist/Soviet scientists and the sense of offense at the lack of their appraisal by the world scientific community.

In “Lonely Ideas: Can Russia Compete?”, US historian Loren Graham attributed this misrecognition to the Tsarist/Soviet inventors' inability to commercialize their ideas due to the restrictive political environment and lack of commercial mindset.

While not questioning these explanations, one might ask whether bias-led underrecognition on the Western side could be partly to blame. This presentation will explore this question on the example of the history of intersex and transsexual medicine, a field almost exclusively focused on the North American and Western-Central European contexts. Although most intersex conditions were first described by Western and Central European doctors and justly named after them (e.g., Klinefelter syndrome, Swyer syndrome, Mayer-Rokitansky-Küster-Hauser), one condition (X0) stands out because it was described by Soviet endocrinologist Nikolai Schereschewsky in 1925 (in Russian) and in 1926 (in French); however, in the Western literature, it is named after US-based Henry Turner, who observed it only in 1938. When it comes to the treatment of intersex and transsexual patients, Tsarist and Soviet surgeons (Karl Heppner, Semen Shalita, Vladimir Snegirev, Dmitry Popov) pioneered in developing several techniques of vaginoplasty, and Nikolai Bogoraz–phalloplasty.

Whereas the contributions of Karl Heppner and Nikolai Bogoraz have been recognized in the international literature, other authors received only occasional if any citation, even when they concurrently published in German, French, or English. For example, a method developed by Popov in 1909, is known as Schubert's in the West, even though the latter researcher first proposed it in 1911. Even Bogoraz' role has recently been questioned by an UK researcher, who misread II (February) for 11 (November) to claim that UK-based Harold Gillies performed phalloplasty a few months earlier.

To sum up, the Tsarist/Soviet researchers' contributions to the intersex and (by extension) transsexual medicine were profound. The language barrier and inaccessibility of sources does not fully explain their underrecognition, since these authors purposefully published in foreign journals. Therefore, bias cannot be ruled out as an alternative explanation.

Name: Kleberg, Lars
Affiliation: Södertörn University

Title: Chekhov as Explorer: The Journey to Sakhalin

Abstract:
Anton Chekhov's unexpected travel in 1890 to Sakhalin, the penal colony on the North East coast of Siberia, resulted in a book, Sakhalin Island (published in 1893–94). This much-discussed work is a mixture of documentary prose and essay where the author's own authority, as a Russian from the center of the Empire, is put to test.

Already on his way through Siberia–a journey which took eighty-one days with train, boat, horse and sleigh–Chekhov noted that without any police surveillance and "nowhere to be exiled further", people talked and behaved more freely than in central Russia.

Possibly, one source of inspiration for the expedition was the American journalist George Kennan's travelogue Siberia and the Exile System (1891), much discussed but forbidden by the censorship in tsarist Russia.

On Sakhalin, Chekhov made ambitious statistic research and in his book, in a seemingly neutral tone, described the atrocities of prisons, forced labor, general starvation, violence, poverty, and prostitution. Chekhov saw what not many Russians had seen.

Much of the author' subdued tone and understatements in the Sakhalin book can be explained by the fact that he was writing under censorship.

But the question remains: what could the contemporary audience actually read between the lines in Chekhov's text, to which extent could it follow the limits of censored discourse by a writer who was known for his all-encompassing irony?

Name: Korablyova, Valeria
Affiliation: Charles University, Institute of International Studies

Title: Beyond “great cultures” and “world music”: decentering musicology through the case of Ukraine

Abstract:
Taking the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine as an epistemological breaking point urging for revisions of adjacent knowledge-production, we would critically examine the residual influence of the three world epistemology (Pletsch 1981). As we argue elsewhere (Korablyova 2023), the dominant division of labor between allegedly “universal” social sciences and “descriptive” humanities and area studies must be rectified to accommodate insights coming from the region.

The latter must be reassessed from “a space, a trope, and a scholarly origin” (Mälksoo 2021: 1) and a site of fieldwork to the place of theory-making (Melnykovska 2022). Various academic domains were disproportionately responsive to this plea for “decolonisation”. While Slavic Studies and Eastern European history started gradually decentering and pluralizing since 2014 and 2020, IR and security studies kicked in resonantly in 2022. Other fields, though, remained hugely Western-centric and guarded from the regional influences.

The presentation builds on participant observation of the author as a co-PI in the joint Czech-French project on musical diplomacy in wartime Ukraine. Coming from the background of Ukrainian studies, decolonial theory, and critical epistemology, we got engaged with the musicological community, which has attempted to incorporate the Russo-Ukrainian war as an urgent topic. Disentangling the perpetuating Western-centricism in theory-building and conditional inclusion of peculiar cases of “world music”, we challenged the dominant notions and patterns of interpretations, where the very concept of musical diplomacy would be the prime case. Special positionality of Russian cultural production vis-à-vis neighboring states, as is present in the perception of Western scholars, will be critically examined in the context. Subversive strategies of Ukrainian cultural managers, extracted from the interviews conducted by the author, will complement the analysis.

Name: Korolczuk, Elżbieta
Affiliation: Södertörn University

Title: A Pathway Toward Democratic Decline: the Anti-Gender Politics of Knowledge Production

Abstract:
Donald Trump's obsession with "biological sex" and trans rights is just one example of autocratic political leaders mobilizing the electorate with calls to defend children and the traditional family against the onslaught of "gender ideology" and "wokism." There is a growing literature examining the links between anti-gender campaigns and democratic decline (Graff & Korolczuk 2021; Krizsán & Roggeband 2019; Kuhar & Paternotte 2017; Pető 2023; Verloo 2018). Scholars show that anti-gender actors - religious fundamentalists, ultra-conservative organizations, and right-wing politicians - challenge democratic ideals, norms, and institutions by promoting exclusionary visions of societies rooted in patriarchal, racist, and nativist ideologies.

An important element of this process involves interventions in the field of knowledge production and dissemination, which includes various levels of education and academia, as well as media and cultural institutions. Based on the outcomes of a comparative project analyzing anti-gender campaigns in seven European countries (Belgium, Great Britain, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden) and the EU level, the presentation will focus on the developments in the field of knowledge production, highlighting the links between anti-gender politics of knowledge production and democratic decline. The results of the comparative analysis shows that anti-gender initiatives effectively limit the space for public debate and silence dissenting voices by violent attacks or by administrative decisions. Secondly, these actors produce various forms of misinformation (e.g. counter-science and pseudo-science) on topics related not only to gender but also race and ethnicity, migration or religion, which results in growing polarization and opens a pathway to violence.

Finally, one of the main strategies of anti-gender movement involves blurring or reversing the meaning of key concepts and terms, such as equality and human rights, leading to epistemic chaos. Such a state of disorder in knowledge and belief systems incites skepticism, mistrust, or even the breakdown of communication between individuals or groups with differing perspectives (polarization). Thus, anti-gender interventions should be seen as part of a broader anti-democratic project of undermining trust in experts, academics, state institutions and educational systems.

Name: Kovtun, Nataliia
Affiliation: University of Bern

Title: Narratives, Contexts, Actors: How the Swiss Media Report on the Language Situation in Ukraine

Abstract:
In the international discourse on the language situation in Ukraine, various narratives often emerge, whose formation and dissemination are largely influenced by media. The role of media narratives is crucial in shaping the social context and public opinion as their selection determines how the Swiss audience interpret and understand the language question in Ukraine. This work-in-progress examines how the language situation and language policy in Ukraine are presented in the Swiss media landscape.

The study is based on textual data such as reports, interviews, reportage, commentaries, letters etc. published up to July 2025 in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ), one of Switzerland's leading newspapers. The selected texts either focus directly on the language question in Ukraine or address it within a broader context related to Ukrainian history, politics, legislation, culture, identity, and regional diversity. The articles were accessed through the Swissdox database using specific search strings, with no time restrictions applied and the source limited to NZZ. All retrieved articles were then manually reviewed to select the most relevant ones. In total, around 70 articles were analyzed.

This study aims to answer three research questions: (1) What narratives dominate the Swiss media coverage of the language situation in Ukraine? (2) In which thematic contexts does the issue appear (e.g., language policy, identity, bilingualism, war, minority rights)? (3) What actors play a significant role in shaping language-related media coverage?

To address these research questions, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were applied— specifically, qualitative content analysis and named entity recognition. The data were systematically organized, manually coded by a single coder, analyzed, and examined to identify narratives and thematic frames. The software MAXQDA was used to support coding, analysis, and visualization of results. As the analysis also considered a range of actors, including individuals, social groups, and organizations, an automated named entity recognition (NER) technique was employed to detect these entities within the texts.

Our analysis reveals that NZZ coverage of language-related issues in Ukraine often contains references to language use, regional diversity, and multilingualism in Ukraine, as well as the status and perception of languages, primarily Ukrainian and Russian. The language question is also often portrayed in connection with Ukrainian history, particularly nation- and state-building, the Soviet period, the Russian-Ukrainian war, language policy and legal regulation, propaganda, and stereotypes.

Name: Kulpa, Roberto
Affiliation: Edinburgh Napier University

Title: Queer Epistemics in/of the Central and Eastern Europe: Geopolitics of Knowledge, Science and Legitimacy in the Struggles over Gender & Sexuality

Abstract:

In this presentation I would like to reflect on the role of 'knowledge', 'science' and 'legitimacy' as tools, objects, and frameworks underpinning and constituting contemporary struggles over gender and sexuality and the meaning of 'Central and Eastern Europe' (CEE).

Firstly, I will present on various uses and abuses of 'knowledge' and 'science' by the 'anti-gender' actors in their populist fight against gender and sexual equalities.

I will also present how queer-feminist struggles have historically and geopolitically been invested in knowledge production as self-legitimising practice of resistance and resilience.

This will draw from the findings of the EU Horizon Europe grant "RESIST Project: Fostering Queer Feminist Intersectional Resistances against Transnational Anti-Gender Politics" (https://theresistproject.eu/).

Secondly, folding into this empirical overview a layer of my earlier incursions into thinking about geotemporality of 'Post-Enlightenment' and possibility of thinking decoloniality with Central-Eastern Europe (Kulpa 2021, 2025), I want to open the perspective globally to capture and situate the discussion in the ongoing 'Post-Truth' debates. This presentation is an additional voice in building queer epistemics of resistances.

Name: Kuzemska, Lidia
Affiliation: Forum Transregionale Studien

Title: Politicization of Migration Data during Russia-Ukraine War

Abstract:
My presentation connects to the proposed topic of “Numbers and data. Knowledge production through quantitative research”. In particular, I aim to analyse the political role of migration data during Russia-Ukraine war. I will focus on the speculations about the number of war-displaced Ukrainians in Russia during 2022-2024 based on Russian, Ukrainian and international sources, and on interpretations of what these numbers might mean for each side using them.

Official information about the number of war-displaced Ukrainians in Russia and in the Temporary Occupied Territories and their needs is scarce. By the end of 2022, UNHCR reported 1.27mln Ukrainian ‘refugees’ in Russia. Now, it reports 7050 ‘refugees’ as of December 2024. Russian statistical data on population movement and socio-demographic changes are considered unreliable; it is also increasingly hidden from the public for security reasons during wartime. However, in 2022-early 2023, Russia used to report more than 5mln “refugees” from Ukraine, but since then stopped the circulation of these purposefully amplified numbers.

I argue that migration data is yet another instrument of war used by Russia for several purposes. First, Kremlin argued the inability of the Ukrainian government to protect and evacuate its citizens in contrast to the Russian ‘evacuation’ [read – ‘deportation’] for domestic and international audiences. Second, it blurred the distinction between individual persons crossing the border and border-crossings per se to create an image of a mass exodus of Ukrainians from the occupied territories, a pretext for further demographic reordering of the area. Finally, the lack of clarity about the numbers and destinations of the displaced was also a useful pretext for covering war crimes (detentions, disappearances) on the occupied territories.

Name: Larsson, Camilla
Affiliation: Södertörn University

Title: The Green Lesson. Magdalena Abakanowicz’s Fiber Art in Sweden circa 1970

Abstract:
The Polish artist Magdalena Abakanowicz (1930–2017) participated in solo and group exhibitions, as well as creating site-specific artworks in Sweden early in her career. Her art was once described in the press as Polish “world art” (Arbetet, 12 December 1966). Her presence contradicts the long-standing idea of a Cold War divide in many ways. In fact, she was part of what recent quantitative studies refer to as a “rich stream” of artists who participated in international exhibitions in Sweden during the post-war period (1945–1980) (MacLeod, Edling & Myrstener, 2022). The study shows that Sweden's cultural field, located in the north-eastern part of Europe, was characterised by horizontal relations between many different geographical axes crisscrossing the presumed closed borders. This complicates previous attempts to depict Swedish exhibition history as a westward-directed phenomenon.

Since the 1940s, the Polish United Workers' Party had developed a well-functioning propaganda machine that launched exhibitions of art and cultural goods to demonstrate its liberal and progressive attitude. In this sense, Abakanowicz, a Polish artist who took part in controlled bilateral exchanges, can be seen as a pawn used by the Communist Party, but also as a bridge-builder who connected people through art. Moving beyond this geopolitical framework and examining how Swedish art critics received Abakanowicz's fibre art and communicated their experiences to a wider audience in the daily press, we learn a “green” lesson: the artist's holistic approach opened many people's eyes to ecological issues.

In contributing to the critical reception of Abakanowicz's art, I propose that we can understand her immersive, materially charged installations in light of contemporary new materialist theories, which emphasise the materiality of artwork from a more-than-human perspective. Using the concept of “natureculture” coined by Donna Haraway, this theoretical approach will examine how the intellectual 'unknown' of bodily experiences with fibre material can reveal the world anew. The presentation will focus on three solo projects that Abakanowicz realised in the wider Stockholm area between 1970 and 1971: the exhibitions 'Magdalena Abakanowicz / Textil skulptur / Textile environment' at Södertälje Konsthall (1970), 'Abakanowicz – A Confrontation' at the National Museum in Stockholm (1970), and the public commission 'Black-Brown' at Huddinge Hospital (1971).

Name: Lawrence, Nicholas
Affiliation: Södertörn University

Title: Knowing the Human Through Salomon Maimon's Journey from "the Woods of Lithuania"

Abstract:
Born within the borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the 18th Century philosopher Salomon Maimon was to leave the shtetl which was his home in search of the kind of science and learning proscribed by the tradition to which he belonged.

Finally arriving in Berlin, following a series of digressions and misadventures, Maimon was able to make an approach towards German intellectual society though ultimately denied true access to it.

Despite enjoying the maximum degree of philosophical notoriety that the generally pervading prejudices against his background and way of life was to allow, his writings would come to be largely overlooked by the subsequent historiography of philosophy — as an already marginal voice was to become further marginalised. The colourful and genre-defying autobiographical account of the very same life which had him ostracised by his contemporaries, for what they perceived as the vulgarity and uncouthness of his ways, would go on to overshadow his various other written endeavours to become that work for which he was best remembered.

While this Lebensgeschichte which Maimon penned has been appreciated as a historical document, an early example of auto-ethnography, and even a picaresque novel, it has never — despite the author himself being a philosopher — been considered as being a work of philosophy.

By in fact treating it as such, this talk presents a reading of Maimon's written account of his own life which would have it being an attempt to arrive at knowledge of the human being through the digressive and regressive path taken by a particular individual of the species.

By paying close attention to Maimon's pioneering writings within the science of empirical psychology as well his reading of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären this presentation argues that the meandering path which his life took, one which he himself understood as encompassing both fanaticism and enlightenment, was what allowed Maimon to propose an ideal of human perfection towards which he believed science and philosophy tended.

Precisely because his life had taken him from "the woods of Lithuania" (as he described it) towards philosophical knowledge and understanding, rather than following the same uniform course as his supposedly more enlightened German counterparts, the written history of Maimon's life was able to act as a guide in the search for genuine knowledge of what the human being is or, at least, what it should be.

Name: Mamedova, Roiala
Affiliation: University of Pardubice

Title: Emancipation from Above: Gendered Knowledge, Ideological Violence, and Women's Agency in Stalinist Azerbaijan

Abstract:
This paper explores the transformation of gendered knowledge and social identity in Soviet Azerbaijan during the 1920s–1930s, a period marked by radical ideological restructuring under Stalinism. Focusing on the experiences of Azerbaijani (Turkic-Muslim) women, it examines how the Soviet regime deployed policies, propaganda, and institutional mechanisms—such as the Zhenotdel and the Ali Bayramov Club—to recast traditional Islamic gender roles into models of secular, emancipated Soviet womanhood. Through archival research conducted in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, this study investigates how unveiling campaigns, legal reforms, and visual-cultural narratives operated as tools of epistemic violence and socio-political engineering.

In dialogue with feminist theory, Soviet historiography, and postcolonial critiques, the paper interrogates how knowledge about women's liberation was constructed, legitimized, and imposed by state actors, while also tracing moments of resistance, negotiation, and cultural memory. The South Caucasus, situated at the crossroads of empire, Islam, and communism, offers a compelling case for analyzing how geopolitical peripheries become experimental spaces of modernity and ideological contestation.

By foregrounding women's agency and lived experiences, this paper contributes to broader discussions on authoritarian modernization, the geopolitics of knowledge, and the instrumentalization of gender in state-building projects. It highlights the layered and often contradictory processes through which knowledge—about women, tradition, and progress—was both produced and resisted in the Soviet periphery.

Name: Melgalve, Ieva
Affiliation: University of Latvia

Title: Palimpsestic Knowledge: Science and Mythology in the Case of Laimdota Malle

Abstract:
Latvian artist Laimdota Malle's exhibition "Horrify me, soothe me, horrify me" (2025), created during residence at Riga Stradins University Anatomy Museum, serves as a case study for the intertwining of several modes of knowledge and their artistic embodiment in fragile matter.

The initial impulse for the exhibition comes from the collection of the Anatomy Museum, a scientifically coded and annotated archive of miscellaneous body parts, mostly harvested after death and anonymized. The artistic research and curatorial interpretation by Aleksejs Beļeckis are based on mythological knowledge from Latvian and other Indo-European folklores.

The artist works through her memory of caregiving to a dying body and the grieving process. Her artistic process itself employs another aspect of embodied knowledge, working with fragile and shifting materialities of silicone, wax, thread and paraffin, translucence and light.

I propose that in her artistic work, the different types of knowledge are not contrasted or juxtapositioned, they are not complete or hierarchically ordered; instead, they form a palimpsestic mode of interaction with the world where knowledge is welcomed as fragmented and incomplete, and its shifts are registered within aesthetic axis instead of binary values of truth or validity.

Posthumanist approach to researching art creation allows to discuss human scientific or mythological knowledge—often transmitted through text and perceived as abstract—as translated and transformed through more-than-human materialities. This approach allows also to enrich the understanding of "storied matter", unpacking the questions of transmission of knowledge through different materialities and the shapes it takes, acknowledging the fragility of the matter and the longevity of its impressions.

Name: Melnyk, Roman
Affiliation: Ukrainian Catholic University

Title: Contesting by Renaming the Region: Eastern Galicia Between Poland and Ukraine After the Collapse of the Habsburg Empire

Abstract:
Galicia was a multinational region created by the Habsburg Empire, for which two national movements fought since the 19th century. After the fall of the empire and the birth of nation-states, both national movements – Ukrainian and Polish – attempted to establish control over that territory, including on a symbolic level. This competition, inter alia, was manifested in the naming of the region.

After 1918, five alternative names for former Galicia operated in the public space from both national discourses. In addition to Galicia itself, these were Western Ukraine, Eastern Lesser Poland, Red Ruthenia, and Cherven Land. Each of these names was highly controversial, and their use corresponded to different visions of the region, its national character, its past, present, and future.

Various actors participated in creating these discourses and promoting these names – from external state bodies to local politicians, historians, and publicists. Some of these names could coexist, while others were completely mutually exclusive. Various arguments were used in favor of one or another name: its national interpretation, historical roots, and even alleged civilizational superiority.

At the same time, the former Galicia was, on the one hand, divided into four separate administrative units (voivodeships), and on the other hand, it was imagined as part of a wider political space (Western Ukraine). Thus, not only the name of this region became uncertain, but also its borders as well as its very existence.

In my paper, I will try to show how, at the moment of rupture – the transition from a multinational empire to a new nation-state, national discourses tried to appropriate a symbolic right to the disputed region through the use of its different names, the construction of different narratives around these names, and at the same time how they defined this region itself. I will also seek what role state and public discourses played in this, and the difference in how this region was seen by external and local environments.

Name: Monsportová, Daniela
Affiliation: Charles University

Title: Constructing “The East” in Times of War: Czech and Slovak Discursive Identity-Making After 2022

Abstract:
Despite the shared historical contexts and geographic proximity, zooming in on specific European countries reveals that the political-elite discursive responses to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 differ greatly. This is especially striking in the case of countries that share a large part of their cultures, history, borders, and more. This paper zooms in on two cases—Czechia and Slovakia—and their political elite discursive responses to the invasion. The paper argues that the elite discourses differ significantly in ways that go far beyond the mere factors of political positioning. An important element in this differentiation is the varied perception and active use of the “East–West” continuum, a crucial block of the countries' identity construction.

This paper therefore focuses on how political elites in Czechia and Slovakia post-2022 invoked geographic, historical, and cultural signifiers vis-a-vis the “East–West” delimitation to produce particular self-images and interpretations of the conflict. This encompasses links to NATO and EU membership, discussions on pan-Slavism, Cold War legacies, narratives of victimhood, pragmatic neutrality, and more. Part of the paper will also delve into tracking the relationality between these identities.

The relevance of this paper lies in its real-time tracking of knowledge production, as the “East” and “West” dimensions are themselves factors in knowledge production, actively reproduced and/or contested in political discourse. Moreover, the paper has broader implications for the epistemic act of constructing and naming a region (such as understanding the meaning of CEE during wartime crisis). This paper works with a primary body of collected statements (about 300) from Czech and Slovak political elites (representatives of both politicians in power and in opposition) in the period between February 2022 and December 2024. It employs qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis.

Conceptually, the paper stems from constructivist logic and utilizes the conceptual framework of ontological (in)security. This enables better traction of the social construction of knowledge as well as a better understanding of how knowledge and its production are shaped by context and values.

Name: Nikolić, Mirko
Affiliation: Södertörn University

Title: Witnessing and Documenting Environmental Injustice in the Western Balkans: The Quandaries of Artistic Research in the Context of Evolving Extractivism

Abstract:
The presentation traces the likings of extractivism - a political economy of violence against communities and natural environment for the sake of profit – as it is currently shaping in the extra-EU part of the Balkans, with specific focus on Serbia, through the expansion of mining industry, and discusses questions around modalities of knowledge production in such milieu. Supported by the narratives of 'growth' and 'development,' increasingly under the guise of the 'green transition,' across the (semi-)peripheries of Europe, large-scale 'nature resource' projects are implemented without adequate community involvement, consultation and access to information.

The outcomes are striking. A mountain top is removed, rivers are visibly scarred, toxic dust falls on crops and houses, yet, none of this is visible to the government apparatus, or to the legal system, or represented by the mainstream media.

In this context of such epistemic (and legal) injustices, supported by systemic corruption and nepotism, complicated by multinational companies' 'social responsibility' and PR activities and exposed to broader geostrategic interests, what are the tools available to citizens to produce independent knowledge regarding ongoing and potential socio-environmental impacts of these industrial developments? How can they make sure that legislation regarding nature protection and human rights are observed? Considering the power inequalities involved, what kind of knowledge of public interest can researchers generate about the extractivist processes?

The presentation presents some of the results from a VR-funded artistic research project water is (non)life: de-extractivist poetics in the semi-periphery (2020-23), with the focus on the related publication published in spring 2025. The project aimed to document and reflect on the specific wave of environmental justice organising in Serbia from an international perspective of studies and discourses on anti- and post-extractivism. Artistic research is reflected upon as a potentially meaningful multi-modal approach of methods, capacious to take on the conflict-laden reality and seek knowledge supporting efforts for environmental justice.

Access the book: https://tofriendsupstreamdown.stream/

Name: Ousmanova, Almira
Affiliation: European Humanities University (Vilnius, Lithuania)

Title: Under the Scopic Regime of Invisibility: Producing Knowledge in the Conditions of Exile, Migration and Political Repression (The Case of Belarus)

Abstract:
The political crisis in Belarus, which began in 2020 after the rigged elections and the beginning of mass repression, has resulted into a large-scale migration. Among more than half a million Belarusians, who were forced to leave the country not by their own choice, there are hundreds of Belarusian scholars, including the prominent ones. Most of them cannot return to Belarus due to the risks of political persecution and now they have to seek opportunities for professional self-realization in other countries, while facing with the problems of legalization, economic survival, and the lack of institutional affiliation. Over the past hundred years, this has been certainly not unique case of a mass exodus of intellectuals from their home country, but the case of Belarusian scholars in exile has its peculiar features and deserves to be thoroughly studied.

Meanwhile, many scholars still remain in Belarus, living in the conditions of an increasing isolation of a pariah state, facing the consequences of a new digital iron curtain, and yet trying to survive as researchers under the conditions of total censorship, constant threat of detention, firing and other factors, including the ongoing militarization and ideologization of the entire academic sphere. Many of them were forced to switch to the mode of silence, invisibility and anonymity in order to continue to work and to maintain connections with the outer academic world, escaping the 'Eye of Power', in Foucauldian sense.

Thus, in this paper I would like to discuss a range of issues related to the production of knowledge on Belarus in a situation that I define as a “scopic mode of invisibility”. Within this conceptual framework, I propose to reflect on how the production and dissemination of knowledge is possible in the conditions of political persecution, compelled anonymity and inaccessibility of the "field", but also I will consider the reasons that cause the "invisibility" of the Belarusian case in a broader context of the institutional organization of the global refugee knowledge production.

Name: Ozoliņš, Gatis
Affiliation: Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia (ILFA)

Title: Unfinished Past: Reflecting on the City

Abstract:
A contemporary city is a space where new communities (and identities) develop along with the previous ones, new traditions are established and culture texts created, including, for instance, such as city legends, memories and narratives. In a city, any person can engage in creative activities and create a dynamic coverage about the time and place (photos, graffiti, life stories), can study the urban environment, degraded industrial territories, participate in everyday life of the city, enhance the sense of identity and ethical norms of living together. At the same time, anyone can also tell it and reflect on this. Texts narrating about a city (verbal, art, pop-culture, commercial a. o.) are valuable sources informing about the urban lifestyle, about what is peculiar and characteristic of it. A city and life in it have become a natural and documentable environment giving new humanitarian knowledge.

The paper focuses on the analysis of data obtained in a field study carried out in Riga Pārdaugava (Latvia), 2021–2023. Texts obtained from qualitative interviews are considered an important part of the heritage of urban culture, history and everyday life. Stories told by the narrators/respondents about the life in a city, being narratives about urban everyday life, provide an insight into the habitual and natural urban environment with its multi-apartment buildings, sandy courtyards and streets, with its shops, and trams, with overgrown, deserted and degraded god-forsaken corners of the urban environment, old warehouses, shelters for cats in the streets, graffiti, as well as with urban noises, movement and acceleration, various smells and stinks etc. They are one of the ways how to document changes in the city, as well as to show what transformations the local architecture, means of transport and habits of movement have undergone from generation to generation, what factors have determined migration of the population, and how the importance of some place (a meadow, park, caffe, manor, factory, etc.) or a section of a city has changed over time.

At the present stage of research, interviews conducted in the region of Riga Pārdaugava allow concluding that they do not only contain data important for the research on history, but also offer a fascinating material (observations, emotions, assessments and the like) on everyday life, festivities in the city (in the suburbs), on the specific things in the vicinity from the viewpoint of a “small” man. Memories and narratives are often a “joint property” of the kin/family which a narrator has told the researcher.

Name: Papa, Iryna
Affiliation: Ukrainian Catholic University

Title: «En by med mange navne»: What the Danes Learned About Lviv After Reading Danish Newspapers in 1914–1915

Abstract:
Like other Scandinavian countries, Denmark was neutral and did not actively participate in World War I. However, the approach of Russian troops to Lviv provoked various publications in the Danish press, some with maps of the region and even photos of Lviv. Of course, most of the publications were reprints of telegrams and various reports on the advance of the Russian army and changes in the front line. However, among these newspaper publications, to our surprise, one can also find articles containing historical information about the city in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was threatened with occupation by the Russian army. For instance, the articles written by Henry Hellssen, a prominent Danish reporter, depicted Lviv as a historic city within the Austro-Hungarian Empire that had come under Russian occupation.

The aim of reading and analyzing these publications was to find answers to specific questions. Why did the Danish journalists write about the cities on the front line and their history? Was World War I, like most wars in history, one of the triggers for mental mapping and the dissemination of knowledge? How did the Danes imagine Lviv in 1914–1915 after reading these newspaper articles?

Our primary sources included articles from Danish newspapers, offering a captivating view into the period. Thus, our content analysis was structured around the timeline of World War I events, particularly focusing on Lviv's challenging period—from September 3, 1914, through June 22, 1915, when the city was under Russian occupation. It was important for us to trace references to Lviv from the onset of the war in August 1914 up to its liberation in June 1915. This presentation aims to show how Danish newspapers shared the knowledge about Lviv among the average Danes at the onset of the 20th century.

Name: Pidoprygora, Svitlana
Affiliation: University of Innsbruck

Title: Ukraine Before 1991 in International Comics: Silences, Stereotypes, and Shifts

Abstract:
This paper explores the systematic absence, distortion, and symbolic appropriation of Ukraine in international comics before 1991, analysing how visual narratives reinforced Ukraine's position as an unacknowledged periphery. Prior 1991 Ukraine was rarely represented as a distinct cultural or geopolitical entity; instead, it was consistently conflated with a generalized Soviet or Russian space, erasing its historical and cultural specificity.

The study focuses on a selected corpus that reveals how Ukraine appeared only through omission, substitution, or stereotypical framing. These include: Tintin in the Land of the Soviets (1930) by Hergé; Nestor Makhno (1976) by Spain Rodriguez; the French adventure series Ivan Karine (1963–1980s); and selected examples from DC and Marvel Comics.

Methodologically, the paper applies visual, discursive, and narratological analysis in a comparative postcolonial framework, with particular attention to spatial framing, iconographic codes, and narrative positioning. By tracing representational silences, recurring stereotypes, and gradual shifts in depiction, the paper reveals how comics functioned as carriers of geopolitical assumptions and epistemic asymmetries. The Ukrainian case provides a lens for interrogating the visual geopolitics of Eastern Europe and understanding how cultural erasure in transnational storytelling shaped what was visible, and what remained systematically unknown, in global popular imagination.

Name: Pierzynska, Justyna
Affiliation: University of Vaasa

Title: The Politics and Effects of New Technologies in the Museum: Historical Knowledge Mediation Through VR and Hologram Technology

Abstract:
This paper explores the systematic absence, distortion, and symbolic appropriation of Ukraine in international comics before 1991, analysing how visual narratives reinforced Ukraine's position as an unacknowledged periphery. Prior 1991 Ukraine was rarely represented as a distinct cultural or geopolitical entity; instead, it was consistently conflated with a generalized Soviet or Russian space, erasing its historical and cultural specificity.

The study focuses on a selected corpus that reveals how Ukraine appeared only through omission, substitution, or stereotypical framing. These include: Tintin in the Land of the Soviets (1930) by Hergé; Nestor Makhno (1976) by Spain Rodriguez; the French adventure series Ivan Karine (1963–1980s); and selected examples from DC and Marvel Comics.

Methodologically, the paper applies visual, discursive, and narratological analysis in a comparative postcolonial framework, with particular attention to spatial framing, iconographic codes, and narrative positioning. By tracing representational silences, recurring stereotypes, and gradual shifts in depiction, the paper reveals how comics functioned as carriers of geopolitical assumptions and epistemic asymmetries. The Ukrainian case provides a lens for interrogating the visual geopolitics of Eastern Europe and understanding how cultural erasure in transnational storytelling shaped what was visible, and what remained systematically unknown, in global popular imagination.

Name: Radecka, Aniela
Affiliation: Jagiellonian University

Title: The Fragile Everyday: War, Womanhood, and Resistance in Contemporary Ukrainian Literature

Abstract:
In her well-known essay Krzątactwo (Bustling About), Polish pioneer of feminist new materialism Jolanta Brach-Czaina turns her attention to the minor, self-evident activities that are essential to daily life yet often stripped of meaning - repetitive tasks that quietly sustain our existence. While these actions remain largely invisible in times of peace, under the conditions of war they emerge as deeply valued, even longed-for, elements of normalcy. Everyday bustling about is abruptly disrupted by the presence of violence and death. War interrupts these ordinary gestures, exposing their fragility and revealing how deeply they anchor one's sense of continuity and belonging.

Drawing on Brach-Czaina's concept of Bustling About, the aim of this paper is to identify and analyse moments in women's wartime writing where the continuation of ordinary activities becomes a form of quiet resistance and a way of reclaiming agency.

In the novel Katananhe, Ukrainian writer Sophia Andrukhovych presents a narrative in which the existential fissures are experienced not only through direct confrontation with violence but also through the strain placed on relationships, the instability of familial roles, and the emotional labour of sustaining fragile routines. The novel's fragmented structure and introspective tone mirror the instability of the world it depicts, while its focus on interiority and corporeality underscores the embodied experience of war. The everyday is neither idealized nor romanticized but presented as a terrain where the resilience is negotiated in quiet, repetitive ways.

The transformations brought about by war extend beyond material destruction and death. In the context of trauma and post-trauma, these shifts manifest not only as immediate psychological responses but also as long-term changes in identity, memory, interpersonal relationships, and collective values. War fractures previously stable frameworks of meaning and belonging, compelling individuals and communities to renegotiate their place in a world marked by loss, rupture, and uncertainty. As a result, trauma becomes not only a personal experience but a social condition - one that influences cultural narratives, familial structures, and modes of everyday survival.

Name: Rudnik, Alesia
Affiliation: Center for New Ideas

Title: Telegram for Autocrats: Mapping Belarusian Propaganda's Content, Infrastructure, and Audience Engagement

Abstract:
This study examines how the Belarusian regime has co-opted Telegram, a platform once central to protest coordination, as a tool of state-aligned propaganda. Focusing on the 25 most prominent pro-state Telegram channels, the study investigates three key dimensions of authoritarian digital communication: content, infrastructure, and audience engagement.

Through qualitative and quantitative content analysis of publications posted during February and March 2025, the study assesses thematic patterns, sentiment, and the presence of hate speech and toxic language. Social network analysis, covering a longer timeframe, explores how channels are interconnected through reposting practices and how they draw on Russian pro-government sources, revealing infrastructural co-dependence. Finally, automated text analysis of comments and emoji reactions evaluates how audiences interact with regime content and what emotional signals these engagements convey.

The study contributes to broader understanding of how authoritarian regimes instrumentalize Telegram to shape discourse, increase legitimacy, and subtly manipulate public affect under conditions of repression and censorship.

Name: Saric, Josipa
Affiliation: Kent Law School, University of Kent

Title: Remembering a Feminist Legal History in Croatia and the Post-Yugoslav Space

Abstract:
In the context of resurgent nationalist rhetoric, transnational anti-gender mobilisations, and legal reforms that increasingly undermine human rights protections, this paper examines how feminist legal history can serves as an epistemological tool of knowledge production that can challenge how collective memory has been shaped by legal and political landscapes. Drawing inspiration from the work of feminist legal scholars Rackley and Auchmuty (2020), the paper positions Croatia's 2015 Law on the Rights of Victims of Sexual Violence during the Armed Aggression against the Republic of Croatia in the Homeland War as a key moment for feminist legal history in Croatia and the post-Yugoslav space. Through a feminist socio-legal analysis, the paper interrogates the law's dual role: as a gender-sensitive reparation mechanism and as a reinforcement of dominant nationalist narratives (myths) surrounding the Homeland War.

Using qualitative research and literature from feminist legal theory, gendered nationalism, and anti-gender movements, the paper offers a nuanced reading of the law's drafting and adoption. It highlights the strategic interventions of women in shaping the legislation through the lens of feminist and gender continuities and ruptures and assesses the extent to which these efforts challenged entrenched gender hierarchies and raised awareness of the continuum of violence against women. The paper argues that the 'remembering' of this law reveals the growing relevance of feminist legal history in Croatia and the post-Yugoslav space and its role in shaping collective memory and challenging entrenched gender roles.

Name: Savic, Jelena
Affiliation: Center for Gender Research, Uppsala University

Title: Gypsy ex Machina: Search Engines as Ignorant Data Governing Epistemic Agents

Abstract:
Roma, the largest ethnic minority across many Eastern European countries, have for centuries been subjected to entrenched forms of epistemic injustice. Their history, culture, and lived experiences have been mainly documented by outsiders, while Roma voices and knowledge systems have been systematically excluded from the production of recognized knowledge. This marginalization has taken different forms. From racialized pseudoscience and state surveillance, policy-oriented knowledge extraction, to epistemic devouring of Roma signifier among Eastern European anti-colonial authors using it to talk about “not quite white” Eastern European positionality, each reinforces the perception of Roma as objects rather than subjects of knowledge. These patterns are not erased but reconfigured in the digital era through data governance and corporate data infrastructures.

In the contemporary data economy, advertising platforms motivated by profit, such as Google Search, operate as epistemic infrastructures governing ideas of knowable and credible reality. Based on the datafication of existing material, these systems collect, classify, algorithmically rank, and circulate information, thereby shaping public information about Roma identity, life, and subjectivity. Using the comparative example of image and metadata search results for “Roma women” and “Eastern European women,” the paper demonstrates how algorithmic outputs produce the idea of Eastern Europeans reproducing Roma as European Others through entrenched racialized and gendered stereotypes, lacking any critical social and historical contexts. By framing search engines as powerful epistemic agents, the analysis situates digital data governance as a question of epistemic injustice, revealing how digital technologies augment older forms of ignorance and normalize them through seemingly neutral automated processes.

Name: Seits, Irina
Affiliation: Södertörn University

Title: The Pasts that Fuel the Futures: Instrumentalising Petro-Legacy at the VDNH “Russia” Forum-Exhibition 2023–2024

Abstract:
This paper examines the VDNH “Rossija” forum-exhibition (Moscow, Nov. 2023–Jul. 2024) as a site of knowledge-production that reframes oil-legacy to legitimise contemporary state ideology, propagating a vision of an alternative petro-future based on fossil-fuels. With over 18 million visitors, the exhibition was both an entertainment spectacle and a powerful epistemic platform shaping public understandings of Russia’s past, present, and imagined future in various spheres from education to space technologies. The paper thus investigates how state-organised exhibitions operate as knowledge-producing institutions that construct political imaginaries while marginalising alternative epistemologies.

Following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, sanctions, and shifting geopolitical alignments, the exhibition mobilised Russian Imperial and Soviet oil legacies — particularly those tied to the Swedish-dominated South Caucasus oil industry since the 1870s, to present fossil-fuels as guarantors of national sovereignty, security, and prosperity. This propagates a counter-discourse to Western decarbonisation agendas, embedding neo-extractivist ideology into a celebratory narrative of the Soviet "Prazdnik"of technological progress and regional cohesion.

By situating VDNH as an epistemic space, the paper addresses the conference’s overarching concern with how knowledge is produced, by whom, and to what ends. The paper speaks to the conference’s focus on propaganda, epistemic hierarchies, denial, and rewriting of the past, offering insights into region's cultural politics of energy. The analysis contributes to debates on how authoritarian regimes shape public knowledge under conditions of war, sanctions, and environmental crisis. It examines the geopolitics of knowledge in an authoritarian petrostate context, where curated exhibitions construct a “petro-future” as resembling an alternative to the environmentalist knowledge.

Research questions:

1. How does the “Rossija” exhibition produce, curate, and disseminate knowledge about Russia’s Imperial and Soviet oil legacies (focusing on the Swedish-dominated oil-industry in the South Caucasus)?

2. In what ways are these historical narratives instrumentalised to challenge global environmental paradigms and legitimise neo-extractivist policies?

3. How does the exhibition's spatial, visual, and discursive design invite public participation in a state-scripted petro-identity, and what forms of ignorance or denial does it cultivate?

The paper draws on concepts of weaponisation of culture (LeQuesne 2018; Krieg 2023), Noopolitik (Ronfeldt & Arquilla 1997), petroculture (Szeman & Boyer 2017), and petroaesthetics (Welling 2020). It employs visual analysis of pavilions design and iconography, discourse analysis of official texts and media coverage, and historical contextualisation of Soviet prazdnik traditions. Materials include my July 2024 field documentation, 3D tours and digital archives (vdnh.ru, russia.ru), and prior research on Imperial oil legacies.

Name: Semeryn, Khrystyna
Affiliation: Aalto University

Title: Mapping the Invented: Epistemologies and Entanglements of Ukrainian Geographical Imagination in the Late 19th and the Early 20th Centuries

Abstract:
In my presentation which will be further turned into a scholarly paper, I would like to focus on how imaginary (cultural) geographies were produced and politicized mainly in western lands of modern Ukraine in the 19th – early 20th century. The intellectual linkages and cultural exchanges with other parts of Ukraine will be considered as well. I will also supplement my analysis with a case study on history of the Ukrainian region's name of "Galicia" which was constructed as a product of imaginary geographies and as an influential concept still affects local cultural memory.

On a broad selection of writings and archival documents, Ukrainian geographer's oeuvres as well as prominent travelogues and literary pieces, I will critically examine how the concept of imaginary geography emerged, by which drivers it was shaped and in what ways was primarily developed in modern understanding. I will identify and look at legacies of the prominent figures who were engaged in this process. By investigating the epistemologies and entanglements of this process, I will offer scholarly insight on how questions of center and periphery, colonial and imperial as well as "East" and "West" impacted on and made a backbone of the Ukrainian geographical imagination. I will also address gender tensions that followed geographical knowledge production at epistemic and everyday levels.

In addition, my paper will interrogate cultural exchanges and knowledge production in colonial settings, geography as resistance, and the development of travel writings. It will also address making the others as constitutive part of imaginative geographies and existing stereotypes and conventions that underpinned it. Situating the concept of "Galicia" in this imagined map, I will contribute to critical debates on naming and decolonization.

Name: Shchyttsova, Tatiana
Affiliation: European Humanities University, Vilnius

Title: Revisiting the Narratives of “In-Betweenness” in Times of the New Imperial War in (Eastern) Europe: A Belarusian Perspective

Abstract:
In the aftermath of the mass protests in Belarus in 2020 and Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, independent Belarusian scholars have(re)invoked postcolonial theory and the decolonial approach to develop strategies for cultural and epistemic liberation. One widely used theoretical tool in this context is the narrative of "in-betweenness" (borderland, inter-imperiality), which aims to conceptualize the distinctiveness of the Belarusian situation.

This paper calls into question the relevance of interpreting Belarusian cultural identity in terms of its position "between East and West." The first systematic elaboration of this interpretation in the Belarusian intellectual tradition was outlined by Ignat Abdziralovich (Kanchewski) in his philosophical essay "Eternal Way: Study of the Belarusian Worldview" (1921). This essay played a pivotal role in developing national consciousness in post-Soviet Belarus, which is traditionally perceived as an Eastern European country. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war has prompted a significant reevaluation of Europeans' mental maps, leading to a reexamination of the concept of Eastern Europe as an ideological construct. Throughout different historical periods, this construct has obtained varied (quasi-)colonial characteristics (Laczó 2023). The notion of Belarus's "in-betweenness" is part of this historical context.

In order to reveal the interrelation between the concept of Eastern Europe and the question of positioning Belarus in the European context, in the first part of the paper I will compare two narratives about "in-betweenness": Ignat Abdiralovich's and Czeslaw Milosz's. The second part will be dedicated to a critical apology of the epistemology of the borderland, as articulated by Abdziralovich and contemporary Belarusian thinker Ihar Babkou. In the third part, a critical analysis of the mental pattern of “in-betweenness” will be carried out from the perspective of the distinction between geocultural and geopolitical dimensions that was introduced by Kundera in his renowned essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe." The paper will be concluded with a few practical recommendations that build upon the author’s general claim that for decolonization of Belarus to be effective, it is necessary to transcend the mental pattern of its “in-between" positionality.

Name: Shlikhta, Natalia
Affiliation: National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

Title: How to Learn About Religious Persecutions in the USSR During the Cold War: A Story of One Meeting that Changed Everything

Abstract:
In 1969, Keston College was established in Oxford, UK, with the goal "to respond to the needs of millions of suffering Christians" behind the Iron Curtain. As revealed by its founder, Michael Bourdeaux, the main motivation was a letter from two Ukrainian Orthodox women defending the Pochaiv Laura, addressed to the "Eastern Patriarchs and the UN." Written in 1964, this appeal is one of many similar letters urging various Western international institutions to intervene on behalf of Soviet citizens' religious rights before Soviet authorities. Mainly written in defense of churches, monasteries, and convents closed during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign and covering various genres (complaints, appeals for help, suggestions, etc.), these letters form an important source for Soviet public-writing practices (according to Sheila Fitzpatrick) that has been largely overlooked by scholars.

My paper has two main parts. In the first, I will use Bourdeaux's personal testimonies to reconstruct his meeting with Ukrainian Orthodox women in Moscow, which greatly influenced how the West understood religious persecutions in the USSR during the 1960s–1980s. In the second part, I will analyze the letter these women wrote and gave to Bourdeaux within a broader context of Soviet believers' appeals in defense of their religious rights and freedoms.

While focusing on this specific issue, my paper contributes to the overall theme of the conference on knowledge production – specifically, what the West knew about life behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. The paper will explore various aspects of knowledge production, including: actors and sources, methods of transmitting information, shaping understanding, and knowledge as a motivation for action.

Name: Shmydkaya, Ksenia
Affiliation: Tallinn University, School of Humanities

Title: Theorizing Epistemic Defeat: Stanisława Przybyszewska as a Failed Knowledge Actor

Abstract:
The questions of individual and collective agency in the production and circulation of knowledge, as well as the limitations and obstacles resulting from the potential knowledge actors' socio-historical circumstances, have attracted substantial scholarly interest in recent years. What the ongoing research into the global histories of knowledge makes evident, is that the failure of a person to become a knowledge actor is just as valuable, if not more so, for our understanding of how epistemic power structures operated in specific historical contexts.

In this paper, I investigate three failed attempts of Polish playwright Stanisława Przybyszewska (1901–1935) to make consequential public epistemic claims. In 1928, she tried to intervene in the debate about gender and creativity. From 1929 onwards, she promoted a radical interpretation of the French Revolution through her play Sprawa Dantona and the accompanying articles explaining the central conflict. Finally, in 1933, she took a public stance in relation to the infamous murder trial of Rita Gorgon. By looking at these cases, I strive to answer the broad theoretical question – what does it mean to fail as a knowledge actor? – and to contextualise it within the cultural and intellectual milieu of interwar Poland.

Each of the instances calls attention not only to the specific issues that preoccupied public consciousness but also to the acceptable modes of thinking and writing about them, which Przybyszewska clearly did not align with. Furthermore, each of them sheds light on Przybyszewska's ex-centric position vis-à-vis the established spatial and social hierarchies of knowledge production. Last but not least, the case of Przybyszewska allows to consider the epistemic function of correspondence – the specificity of a letter as a medium for communication of knowledge.

Name: Stoenescu, Arina
Affiliation: Södertörn University, Media Technology & Lund University, Book History

Title: Typography: A (Printed) Matter for Propaganda in Communist Romania 1948–1989

Abstract:
This paper examines typography in Communist Romania (1948–1989) as an active agent in the production of propaganda and the manipulation of historical memory. Through a book history and media technology lens centred on the materiality of text, it considers how typography shapes truth and lies – not only transmitting ideological content but also embedding it in the visual qualities of print. In post-war Romania, Soviet-imposed ideological and industrial standards – along with the formation of a new professional elite – transformed typography into a controlled instrument for political messaging. Design decisions were subordinated to propaganda imperatives, narrowing expressive possibilities and giving printed matter a deceptive appearance of neutrality while embedding the regime's narrative.

The study analyses four interconnected aspects of typographic practice under Communism: the ideological framing of typographic education; the use of state-produced type specimen books as vehicles for propaganda; exaggerated typographic hierarchies in newspapers that elevated certain content while visually diminishing or omitting other information; and the role of the tehnoredactor, a Soviet-imported technical-editorial function ensuring alignment with political directives. These mechanisms did not simply present information but actively constructed a selective present, erasing and rewriting aspects of the past in service of the regime's vision.
This paper challenges official histories that foreground institutional narratives while neglecting the lived experiences of practitioners – tehnoredactors, typographers, printers, and editors – whose work enacted both remembering and forgetting. Recovering these micro-histories reveals the complex ways in which material practices of design and production became tools for manufacturing collective memory and controlling the boundaries of the sayable.

Recent developments in material culture and design history invite us to reconsider typography as more than a passive reflection of political language. Its hierarchies, omissions, and emphases mediated public access to truth, codified lies into the printed record, and, in some cases, inadvertently preserved traces of dissent. By foregrounding typography's dual role as both a mechanism of propaganda and an archival witness, this study offers a layered understanding of how authoritarian regimes construct the present through selective memory and strategic forgetting – insights that remain urgent in the analysis of contemporary political communication.

Name: Szlaużys, Piotr
Affiliation: Independent Researcher

Title: Erasing and Remembering: Competing Historical Narratives in the U.S. Recognition of Lithuania, 1918–1922

Abstract:
The struggle for U.S. recognition of Lithuania after World War I unfolded not only as a diplomatic negotiation but as an intense contest over historical memory. Between 1918 and 1922, Lithuanian representatives and diaspora activists were compelled to define, defend, and promote a version of the past that legitimized Lithuania's independence in the eyes of American policymakers. This battle over recognition was inseparable from the politics of remembering and forgetting: it was a struggle to determine whose history counted, which episodes would be emphasized, and which would be consigned to obscurity.

Lithuanian advocates emphasized narratives of medieval statehood, cultural resilience, and political continuity, presenting independence as the restoration of a historically sovereign nation rather than the creation of a new or unstable political entity. They emphasized democratic aspirations and national self-determination in ways designed to resonate with Wilsonian ideals and American values. At the same time, this selective remembering consciously marginalized histories that could undermine sovereignty claims — such as Lithuania's long periods under foreign rule or internal political divisions.

Competing actors, notably Poland and Soviet Russia, advanced counter-narratives aimed at erasing or diminishing Lithuania's historical legitimacy, portraying it as a transient political construct, a contested province, or a mere byproduct of postwar instability. These rival narratives were not peripheral but directly shaped diplomatic perceptions in Washington D.C.

Drawing on archival research in the Lithuanian Central State Archives, this paper situates the Lithuanian case within the broader geopolitics of knowledge, showing that recognition of states is never purely a legal or political decision; it is also a judgment about which histories to affirm and which to silence. By connecting this interwar episode to contemporary debates over historical revisionism, denial, and national identity, the study underscores how contested pasts continue to influence present diplomatic realities in Eastern Europe. In moments of geopolitical rupture, the ability to control historical narratives can determine not only a nation's memory but its very place in the international order.

Name: Sörbom, Adrienne and Mellquist, Joanna
Affiliation: Sörbom: Södertörn University; Mellquist: Malmö University

Title: Informing and Influencing the European Union Climate Change Agenda: Resources and Practices of Central and Eastern European Non-State Actors in Brussels

Abstract:
This paper investigates the role of non-state actors (NSAs) from the Visegrád Four (V4) countries — Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary in shaping climate change policies within the European Union (EU). The EU partly relies on NSAs for policy advice, which opens EU policy-making for organizations such as think tanks, research institutes and business associations. Still, research on the role of such transnational NSAs in relation to EU climate change policies is scarce.

Theoretically, the paper draws on Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, focusing on the concepts of capital, agency and legitimacy to analyze how NSAs from V4 countries, in a time of geopolitical urgency and increasing post-factual and populist communication, inform and influence EU climate change policymaking. Three questions are posed: What key resources are capitalized in the interest of shaping agency for informing and influencing EU institutions; How are these resources strategically put into practice for generating trust and legitimacy as a knowledge producer in a polarized climate change debate; When and in relation to what other types of actors in the field of climate change policy can these resources be put into practice? Empirically, the paper draws on a combination of register data, text analyses and ethnographic field-work in Brussels.

Name: Tayyib, Muhammad
Affiliation: Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania

Title: Situated AI and Epistemic Sovereignty in Data Governance and Knowledge Production in the Baltics and Eastern Europe

Abstract:
Recent advancements in artificial intelligence are reshaping the contours of knowledge production, particularly in regions like the Baltics and Eastern Europe, where digital innovation unfolds amidst ongoing geopolitical tensions. This paper investigates how AI-driven data governance models ranging from predictive policing systems to tools for disinformation detection, not only reflect existing epistemic hierarchies but also contribute to their reconfiguration.

Through case studies of Estonia's pioneering e-governance infrastructure and Poland's AI-powered media monitoring initiatives, the paper argues that AI serves a dual function: it challenges Western-centric paradigms of knowledge while simultaneously entrenching new forms of epistemic dependency.

Methodologically, the study integrates qualitative analysis of regional policy frameworks, with particular attention to EU AI Act compliance, and a longitudinal quantitative assessment of AI applications in public administration from 2015 to 2025. The findings highlight three key dynamics. First, the rise of decentralized knowledge systems, as seen in the Baltic states, marks an effort to assert epistemic sovereignty and reduce dependence on external technological expertise. Second, algorithmic systems frequently encode Cold War-era biases, perpetuating forms of structural ignorance that marginalize minority communities. Third, the use of generative AI in reconstructing and mediating historical narratives particularly those surrounding Soviet occupation reveals a tension between techno-optimism and the unresolved politics of memory.

This paper contributes to the broader discourse on the geopolitics of AI by proposing a framework for "situated AI" that accounts for regional histories and sociotechnical contexts. In doing so, it focuses on the "embodied knowledge" and "paradigm shifts," offering a critical lens through which to examine the role of emerging technologies in shaping the epistemic futures of post-socialist Europe.

Name: Tubnonghee, Thapanee
Affiliation: Independent Researcher

Title: First Written Representation of Siam in the Eye of an Austro-Hungarian Expeditor in János Xántus' Úti Jegyzetek Sziámból (1877)

Abstract:
This paper is an ongoing, unpublished study that investigates the Orientalist influence in János Xántus' Úti jegyzetek Sziámból (Travel Notes from Siam, 1869), produced in the context of the Austro-Hungarian East Asia Expedition (1868-1871). It uses this case to explore how knowledge about the non-European world was produced from a Central European, semi-peripheral position within global imperial networks.

János Xántus (1825-1894), a zoologist, ethnographer, and political exile after the 1848-1849 Hungarian Revolution, travelled to Siam (present-day Thailand) to take part in diplomatic negotiations leading to the 1869 Treaty of Commerce between Siam and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The resulting travelogue represents Asia through colonial stereotypes and a distinctly Austro-Hungarian imperial lens. Using postcolonial theory and Edward Said's framework of Orientalism, I examine how Xántus' travelogue reveals the Habsburg Monarchy's ambivalent imperial identity: marginal within Western European imperial hierarchies, while being capable of reproducing Orientalist and “civilizing” tropes when engaging with non-European societies. His representations of Siam's monarchy, feudal system, society, and natural environment reproduce many Orientalist stereotypes, emphasising “exotic” customs, hierarchical social orders, and the “otherness” of the tropical landscape, while also embodying tensions between alignment with "Western" modernity and the articulation of a separate Hungarian imperial identity. This hybrid perspective makes Xántus' work a valuable case for interrogating epistemic hierarchies, the centre-periphery dynamic, and the historical construction of regions as epistemic entities. His narrative illustrates how knowledge from Central Europe could simultaneously reinforce and subtly unsettle dominant colonial discourses, participating in creating “the Orient” abroad while contributing to the self-definition of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy at home. This study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions in Central European studies on the decolonial turn, the persistence of imperial epistemologies, and the role of artistic and scientific travel writing in shaping both global imaginaries and regional identities.

Name: Ūdre-Lielbārde, Digne
Affiliation: Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia

Title: Folklore Studies in Exile: Baltic Scholarship and the AABS During the Cold War Era

Abstract:
Folklore studies in the Baltic States emerged as a significant field of research during the national awakenings of the nineteenth century. In the interwar period, it developed into a fully institutionalized academic discipline; however, its progress was abruptly interrupted by the onset of the Second World War. The subsequent Soviet occupation divided Baltic folklorists into two groups: those who remained in their homelands and adapted their work to the ideological framework of Marxist–Leninist scholarship, and those who continued their careers in exile, benefiting from the freedoms of democratic societies.

The establishment of the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS) in 1968 by exiled scholars created new opportunities for international networking and scholarly exchange. On the one hand, for exiled folklorists, research was often conducted without direct access to original source materials and was intertwined with the broader aim of preserving cultural identity. On the other hand, the conditions of exile offered an unprecedented platform for transnational collaboration, especially in the context of AABS.

This paper examines the knowledge production in Baltic folklore studies under conditions of exile by analysing presentations on folklore and mythology delivered at AABS conferences during the Cold War era. Focusing on the period from the inaugural AABS conference in 1968 to the restoration of Baltic independence in 1991, the study addresses the following research questions: To what extent were folklore and mythology represented in AABS conference programs? How did the legacy of interwar Baltic folkloristics shaped scholarly work in exile? In what ways were international trends, particularly those in American folklore scholarship, reflected in the thematic focus, methodological approaches, and theoretical frameworks of Baltic folklorists in exile?

Name: Umland, Andreas and Kragh, Martin
Affiliation: SCEEUS, UI

Title: How Russian Security Thinking Previewed Aggression Against Ukraine: A Quantitative Text Analysis of Sentiments in Periodicals of Russia's Military-Industrial Complex in 2009–21

Abstract:

This paper explores the discourse before and during Russia's invasion of Ukraine since 2014, in three influential Russian security policy journals - Voennaia mysl' (Military Thought), Problemy natsional'noi strategii (Problems of National Strategy), and Voenno-promyshlennyi kur'er (Military-Industrial Courier). The purpose of the quantitative text analysis was to see how sentiments for all contents of the three outlets compare to the sentiments that contain Ukraine-related contents. We found not only that sentiments in Ukraine-related contents were relatively more negative but also that the amount of these negative sentiments rose sharply in the years 2013 and 2021, i.e. just before the two invasions of 2014 and 2022. We illustrate these negative sentiments with numerous quotes. Our paper has larger implications for security studies in that it illustrates that intellectual discourse can help to predict military conflict.

Name: Vazyanau, Andrei
Affiliation: European Humanities University, Vilnius, Lithuania

Title: Researchers and the Making of the New Iron Curtain: Case of Studying Everyday Life in Belarus

Abstract:
Ethnography of life in repressive, violent, and totalitarian contexts has long been complicated by both epistemic challenges and security concerns (Bourgois 2007; Jauregui 2013;). It was discussed which strategies a researcher should pursue when physical access to the field becomes risky (van der Borgh et al 2019); how trustworthy, or not, is the speech of the one living in non-freedom [Gaborit 2019]; which techniques of remote ethnography work (Postill 2017) etc. In many cases, researchers opted for withdrawal from such fields, talking about ethnographic eclipse (Wacquant 2002) and impossibility of conducting research in compliance with academic standards. Historically, this meant absence of expertise on life behind multiple barriers in different regions of the world. Recently, as „the New Iron Curtain“ in Europe has become a working concept of think-tank discourses, the epistemic and political effects of researchers‘ engagements with this Curtain remain largely undiscussed. How do we reflect the relationship between our analytical choices and the practices of Curtain-making by more powerful actors (primarily, politicians and large transnational businesses)? What does the affirmation of the Iron Curtain do to our understanding of people in hard-to-access fields? And how do we evaluate the meaning of such understanding?
My presentation seeks to reflect the practice of studying societies splitted by mass repressions, involuntary emigration, and visa regimes, using the case of Belarus after 2020. By reviewing current scholarship on Belarus, I demonstrate the dominance of geopolitical look at the country. The studies involving human participants almost exclusively focus on Belarusian diasporas in the EU. Lives inside Belarus remain at the remote periphery of research agenda. So do the crossborder connections of Belarusians, both to their compatriots and to the rest. Drawing on my remote ethnographies of dating, music-making, and Schengen visa seeking in Belarus after 2020, I criticize the idea that this state of art can only be explained by access- and security-related challenges. Instead, the tendency to analytically separate citizens inside and outside the country, can be an echo of the discourses outside academy mobilized for the Curtain-making. For study participants in Belarus, this adds another dimension to their already growing experience of the Iron Curtain, mediated by visa restrictions, Tinder and Spotify withdrawal, expansion of Russian businesses into Belarusian economy etc. Also, this is a thought-provoking context to reflect on how the new Curtain can oscilate between being registered by researchers and constructed by them.

Name: Vilenica, Ana
Affiliation: University of Belgrade, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory

Title: East–West Knowledge Hierarchies in the Case of Lithium Mining in Serbia

Abstract:
This paper explores how neocolonial and decolonial knowledge production intersect in the struggle over planned lithium extraction in Serbia, with particular attention to East–West dynamics and the geopolitics of center and periphery. Focusing on the Jadar project, I analyse official Serbian state discourses, EU policy frameworks, and Rio Tinto's public communications. These narratives frame lithium mining as an essential contribution to Europe's "green transition," positioning Serbia as a responsible partner in sustainable development.

Yet beneath this language lies a reproduction of dependency: the East is cast as a raw material supplier for the West's technological and economic ambitions. This asymmetry is not only material but epistemic. Policy documents and corporate reports privilege Western-centered scientific and technical expertise while marginalising or dismissing locally grounded knowledge about environmental risks, cultural heritage, and community livelihoods. The green transition narrative thus becomes a tool for consolidating the authority of the "center" over the "periphery," naturalising extractive relationships and silencing dissent. In contrast, grassroots movements in Serbia challenge these hierarchies through practices of decolonial knowledge production. Drawing on protest ethnography and analysis of digital campaigns, I show how local residents, environmental activists, and allied groups articulate counter-narratives rooted in situated experience, collective memory, and direct ecological observation. These practices—road blockades, village assemblies, legal interventions, and online storytelling—reposition peripheral knowledge as a legitimate and vital basis for decision-making. The Serbian case highlights how, at the EU's eastern periphery, the global green economy is entangled with older imperial geographies. It raises urgent questions about who gets to define sustainability, whose knowledge counts, and how East–West relations in knowledge production shape both the possibilities and the limits of resistance. Ultimately, the movement against lithium mining is not only a fight over land and resources, but also over epistemic justice and the right to imagine futures beyond extractivism.

Name: Vilkova, Daria
Affiliation: Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

Title: Decolonial Knowledge in the Shadow of War: Ukraine as Epistemic Actor in Reimagining Eastern Europe

Abstract:
Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has not only reshaped the geopolitical world scene and the international security system. It has also catalyzed an epistemic rupture in how "Eastern Europe" as a region and a cognitive construct is known, narrated, and positioned in global knowledge hierarchies. This paper examines Ukraine's emerging role as an epistemic actor. The state in war is described and studied as the one challenging inherited spatial imaginaries, gaining discursive agency, and contributing to the decolonization of regional knowledge production.

Long positioned as a testimonial victim or passive object within both Russian imperial narratives and Western liberal frameworks, Ukraine is increasingly reclaiming its place as a producer of knowledge. Drawing on decolonial theory and critical international relations, this paper explores how Ukrainian scholars, institutions, and civil society actors are mobilizing counter-narratives that unsettle canonical interpretations of statehood, legitimacy, fragility and regional belonging.

The paper advances three arguments. First, it shows how the war has accelerated a shift away from Russo-centric and transitional framings of the region toward situated, pluralistic epistemologies grounded in local experience and resistance. Second, it traces how Ukraine's assertion of epistemic agency reveals the instability of categories often assumed to be universal in both regional and global discourses. Third, it interrogates the challenges of speaking from within a war zone: how the conditions of violence both constrain and amplify Ukraine's role in reshaping knowledge orders.

The paper reflects on Ukraine's current epistemic interventions as a site of methodological innovation and decolonial critique. RQ amounts to the following: what does it mean to know Eastern Europe through the lens of a state at war, actively resisting both military occupation and epistemic marginalization?

By placing Ukraine as a site of epistemic transformation and resistance, the paper contributes to broader discussions about positionality, authority, and the politics of knowledge in a region long caught between imposed identities and silenced histories.

Name: Weaver, Ieva and Daugavietis, Jānis
Affiliation: University of Latvia

Title: Historians and the Digital Turn: A Latvian Case Study on Digital Literacy, Methods, and Knowledge-Making

Abstract:
This paper examines the digital practices of historians in Latvia as shaping not only their research workflows but also the epistemological foundations of historical knowledge. Our analysis draws on three complementary sources: (1) a survey exploring the use of digital tools and practices among Latvian academic historians, amateur historians, and history students; (2) in-depth interviews with professional historians, probing their workflows, attitudes, and challenges in engaging with digital methods; and (3) insights from a panel discussion held after the 7th Baltic Summer School of Digital Humanities, dedicated to history studies.

Through these lenses, we reflect on the role of digital methods in the humanities, situating Latvian historians' experiences within broader debates about historical epistemology in the digital age (Berry & Fagerjord 2017; Lässig 2021; Milligan 2022). We examine how the digital turn – or the decision to remain largely "analog" – influences source discovery, data acquisition, critical evaluation, interpretation, and dissemination of historical narratives. The paper also addresses the institutional and infrastructural contexts that shape the uptake of digital methods in Latvia, including the availability of digitised archives and relevant education.

We pose the following questions for discussion: How, and to what extent, do digital practices reshape the epistemology of historical studies? What institutional, infrastructural, and methodological obstacles hinder the integration of digital methods into historical research in Latvia? Given the available sources and the research topics of Latvian historians, how necessary is a greater "digitisation" of historical studies?

By situating our Latvian case study within a broader discursive framework, we aim to provide a balanced analytical perspective that considers both the positivistic promotion of the digital turn and arguments advocating for the enduring value of classical methodologies, grounded in historians' unique expertise in the wider context of the humanities.

Name: Zara, Rita
Affiliation: Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia

Title: Knowing the Other Side: Latvian Folklore Studies Divided by the Iron Curtain

Abstract:
During the interwar period of the 20th century, folklore studies in Latvia established itself as an autonomous academic discipline. Folkloristics gained an institutional foundation both with the creation of the Archives of Latvian Folklore (1924) and with its inclusion in philology study programmes at the University of Latvia (1919). After World War II, the Soviet occupation split the Latvian folklorists into two groups: those who stayed in the Latvian SSR and those who went into exile. Accordingly, Latvian folklore research developed separately in the West and occupied Latvia.

This paper aims to analyse what opportunities there were to acquire knowledge about the 'other side' under the conditions of the Iron Curtain, i.e., until the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the end of the Cold War era. How much did folklorists in Western exile countries (Sweden, Germany, the US, Canada, Australia) and occupied Latvia know about each other? How was information obtained about ongoing folklore research projects and publications of folklore materials by peers? How was this knowledge produced? What role did ideological filters and prejudices play in the perceptions? Was there also any informal exchange between the professionals on both sides of the Iron Curtain possible?

The research for this paper is based mainly on published press sources, selected archival documents, and life story interviews. Initial research shows that there was a very uneven distribution of knowledge. While Latvian SSR folklorists' knowledge of what was happening in the West was significantly limited, Latvians in exile were able to follow Latvian folklore research and developments in Riga in general reasonably well (and partly this was a result of the activities of the Committee for Cultural Relations, a subsidiary body of the USSR State Security Committee). Exile publications, such as the North American Latvian magazine "Jaunā Gaita", regularly published reviews and even extensive critiques of the work of Soviet folklorists. Humour and sarcastic depictions of 'Soviet folklore' also found their place in exile periodicals.