

Kateřina Liřková will present the project “ExpertTurn” together with her team members Natalia Jarska, Annina Gagyoiva, Jos Luis Aguilar Lpez-Barajas, Theo Finsterschott and Vjaeslav Glazov.

While postwar Western expertise has garnered significant attention, notable gaps exist in the scholarly understanding of socialist countries behind the “Iron Curtain.” ExpertTurn seeks to redress this imbalance by placing expertise at the forefront and scrutinizing its role in state-socialist governance, focusing on Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and East Germany. By examining the dynamics of human science expertise (medicine, psychology, sociology, demography, pedagogy), particularly in maternal health and child normalcy, our project sheds light on how experts communicated with one another, the state, and ordinary citizens. Importantly, we compare the developments across countries and disciplines, emphasizing transnational knowledge circulation.

Our findings highlight strong and relatively uninterrupted socialist expert connections to the West and a marginal Soviet influence, especially on medicine; a shared post-Stalinist rise and subsequent strong influence of psychology in all our countries; lively debates and even disputes between experts within our region; divergences in the developments in social sciences shaped by specific national political contexts; and strong emancipatory accents on women’s work and equal marriage in socialist medical expertise. Overall, making this “expert turn” brings a novel understanding of governance in modern, yet authoritarian societies.

More information about the project: <https://ExpertTurn.hiu.cas.cz/>

Doc. Kateřina Liřková, Ph.D. is a Research Associate at the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague and Principal Investigator of ExpertTurn. Her research focuses on gender, sexuality, expertise, and the social organization of intimacy, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. She is also affiliated as a guest researcher with the Department of History and Art History of Utrecht University. In 2021, she was a Senior Fellow at the Descartes Center for the History and Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities. As a Marie Curie fellow, she was affiliated with Columbia University and Technische Universitt in Berlin. Previously, she was at the New School for Social Research as a Fulbright Scholar; a Visiting Scholar with New York University; and a Fellow with the Imre Kertsz Kolleg in Jena, Germany. Cambridge University Press published her previous research in a monograph titled Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire, 1945–89, which won the 2019 Barbara Heldt Prize for the Best Book and received an honorable mention for the 2019 Adele E. Clarke Book Award.

The project presentation is part of the research colloquium “History and Social Anthropology of Southeast and Eastern Europe”. The colloquium is organised by the Chair of History of Southeast and Eastern Europe at the University of Regensburg and the Leibniz Institute of East and Southeast European Studies (IOS).

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