ST4 Urban Villagers: everyday life, leisure and socialist cities

Specialised theme

This specialized theme session examines the official discourses and experiences that shaped the parameters of everyday life and the reactions of ‘socialist citizens’ to the circumstances in which they found themselves in socialist cities during the communist period. Concentrating in particular on the regulation of leisure, the session attempts to address the questions as to how the authorities sought to frame social conflict in terms of a struggle between the civilized and the backward, the urban and the rural. In so doing, it offers insights into the nature of state socialism as a project of cultural transformation.

The session will focus on the following questions: What were the differences in the transformation of city life in different cities and states? How did official discourse represent the “urban villagers” and what was the function of this representation in everyday life?

Rulers have always dreamed of creating cities from nothing or fashioning civilization out of the wilderness. Despite this, socialist cities met the criteria of a city only in a very restricted sense in the eyes of contemporaries. In order to ensure that residents began to consider the settlement in which they lived a city, the very social definition of a city had to be changed. In this process a decisive role was played by official discourse, which privileged a representation of the city’s construction as a struggle between the urban and non-urban, and, using older analogies, as a struggle between the civilized and the wild. This session explores the national and the social differences and similarities of socialist cities such as Nowa Huta (Poland), Stalinstadt (German Federal Republic), Dimitrovgrad (Bulgaria), and Szülinváros (Hungary). Although the session will focus on modern Central and Eastern Europe, the discussion goes beyond the borders of European debates about the representations of urban history, so papers on Asian, African and South-American ways of representing urban life will contribute to the discussion.

Please send an abstract of no more than 500 words and a short biographical sketch; together with a brief biography and selected list of three publications (we do not accept CVs).

Deadline for submission of abstracts: **30 November 2013**. Proposals should be submitted to the organizers by email: sandor.horvath34@gmail.com Sándor Horváth (Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences)