

## Call for Papers

# Transformations of Property in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe: Reconfigurations of Ownership and Alternatives to Private Property

Workshop in Jena, 20 October 2022

Submission deadline: 28 February 2022

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Eastern Europe's post-socialist transformation, once a thriving field of research by social scientists, is turning history. As confidence in the intrinsic interrelationship of liberal democracy and liberal market economy evaporates, we are witnessing a rising demand for new historical perspectives on post-socialist transformation. In an endeavour to draft a nuanced and multi-dimensional picture of the transformation age, historians have started to tackle anew issues of political, social, and economic change before and after the decisive years of 1989/91.

This workshop focuses on the profound change of property regimes as one of the key elements of systemic transformation. Its paramount relevance was threefold: on the concrete level of power and control over economic assets on the ground, on the level of institutional frameworks and social meaning attributed to them, and in its relation to the parallel establishment of democracy. The aim of this workshop is to reconsider the role of property-related conflicts and reconfigurations during post-socialist transformations, with an analytic focus on the following dimensions:

## 1. Privatisation processes in local context

Since „people's“ property of the means of production (whatever that meant in practice) had constituted a core principle of state socialism, the property structure in Eastern Europe was highly monopolised in most sectors. This constituted a major obstacle to the establishment of competition-based economic and social orders. But whereas political and macroeconomic reforms could be implemented relatively quickly from above, privatisation of state property necessarily involved complicated processes of identifying, assessing, and transferring single assets on the micro-level. This process took years even in the untypical case of East Germany, where the task was handed over to the “Treuhandanstalt”, a strong government authority relying on West German know-how. Elsewhere between the Baltic and the Black Sea, the privatisation of industry, housing, or agricultural land was the start to fairly more protracted stories.

## 2. Institutional frameworks and ideas of social order based on property

Property metaphysics was no exclusive feature of state socialism – the load of meaning attributed to *private* property, in this case, was no smaller in liberal capitalist mindsets, especially in their neoliberal versions. Therefore, the privatisation of “people’s” property, in spite of its painstakingly technical characteristics, was linked with highly normative assumptions. At the same time, it required the establishment of proper institutional frameworks providing guarantees for and limits of property. Examples include Czech “kupónová privatizace”, which was lauded as a means for empowering citizens as utility-maximising economic actors, but presupposed an elaborated set of institutional requirements, which turned out to be only partly met in practice.

## 3. Workers’ self-management and other alternatives to private property

Privatisation also entailed negotiating details of future power and control structures in the economy (and beyond) and was therefore closely linked to the establishment of new democratic orders, as well as to their boundaries. While liberals argued for private property as a foundation of individual freedom of citizens, others called for democracy and participation inside the economic realm. In Poland, for example, these calls originated from the legacy of the Solidarity movement, which had elevated workers’ self-management to a central principle of its programme. Struggles over proper delineation of the scopes of collective or individual spheres triggered searching for alternatives to both state-centred and liberal property regimes.

We invite papers focussing the transformation of property regimes in post-socialist East Central, South Eastern, and Eastern Europe from multiple disciplinary backgrounds (e.g. history, cultural studies, media studies, sociology).

If you are interested in contributing a paper addressing one of the above-mentioned fields of inquiry, please, send your abstract of max. 300 words and a short CV to [florian.peters@uni-jena.de](mailto:florian.peters@uni-jena.de) until **28.2.2022**. We will notify you about the selection of papers soon afterwards.

The workshop is planned to be held in Jena on **20.10.2022**. Funding for covering the costs of travel and accommodation for active participants is secured.