

## **Imagining Central Europe: (Re-)Shaping a Geopolitical Concept in Literature, Visual Arts, and Popular Culture**

### **Call for Applications for Elevator Pitch Event and Conference Participation**

**When:** 23-25 September 2024 (Conference), 24 September 2024 (Elevator Pitch Event)

**Where:** University of Vienna

**Organizers:** Anna Seidel, M.A. (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), Prof. Dr. Alfrun Kliems (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), Prof. Dr. Paula Wojcik (Universität Wien), Miranda Jakiša (Universität Wien), Stephan Krause (GWZO Leipzig), Josef Šebek (Univerzita Karlova v Praze), Danuta Sosnowska (Uniwersytet Warszawski)

In his 1983 article “The Tragedy of Central Europe,” Czech-French writer Milan Kundera, who passed away recently, points out how the geopolitical shifts after 1945 created a Central Europe that culturally identified itself with the West, but politically was directed toward the East. According to him, this diremption was reflected in the fact that it was the respective countries’ cultural scenes that played an important role in the development of a political opposition—an opposition whose success had not yet materialized at the time of the article’s publication. However, Kundera did not see the tragedy of Central Europe in this lack of political success, but rather stated that the real tragedy was that the Central European countries had “vanished from the map of the West”.

The question of Central Europe’s political and cultural visibility within Europe (and according to Kundera, the two have been intertwined at least since the 20<sup>th</sup> century) is all the more relevant today. The Western European discussion about legitimizing the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 showed, as Polish writer Szczepan Twardoch (2022) polemically yet aptly notes in an article about ‘westsplaining’ that for many Western European intellectuals (East) Central Europe represents a kind of “terra nullius,” an exotic in-between between Europe and Asia, a magical or cursed no-man’s land, always ready to act as a projection space for Western European imaginations. So again and despite proclamations of an “Eastern turn” (Haines 2008), Central Europe seems to be ‘forgotten’ by the West.

**“Imagining Central Europe. (Re-)Shaping a Geopolitical Concept in Literature, Visual Arts, and Popular Culture”** is an international conference, intended to counteract this oblivion and to put Central Europe back on the map, not as an empty void, but as a region with the “greatest variety within the smallest space,” as Kundera puts it. Forty years after the Czech dissident’s article, the conference will be guided by its oft-quoted words: “Central Europe is not a state: it is a culture or a fate. Its borders are imaginary and must be drawn and redrawn with each new historical situation.”

Building on this, the conference which will be held at the **University of Vienna** on **23-25 September 2024** will discuss the following questions:

- How have Central Europe’s destiny, cultural shape and heritage changed?

- How is Central Europe being culturally imagined today and what role do literature, film, music and other pop culture phenomena, like video games or TV/web streaming series, play in it? What regional differences can be identified?
- What impact does contemporary Jewish culture have on imaginative processes—a culture that shaped Central Europe for such a long time? And what role does the increasing digitalization of cultural life play in this process?
- Finally, we also want to ask, what function arts and culture assume in recent protest movements and geopolitical transitions in countries such as Belarus and Ukraine? Is political scientist Jacques Rupnik (2023) right in his recent article on Kundera's essay that the borders of Central Europe are shifting, and if so, where to? And how do contemporary literature, visual arts, and pop-cultural products influence this transformation?

The conference will gather experts from the cultural sciences and humanities and explore old and new perspectives in the studies of Central European arts, culture, and media.

We reserved **10 speaker spots explicitly for PhD students** who work on Central European regions in the fields of cultural, literary, and media studies as well as other humanities. We want to invite them to participate in the conference and be part of a **PhD Elevator Pitch Event**. This event will take place as part of the conference and will give the next generation of Central European experts the opportunity to introduce their projects in short presentations (up to three minutes) to experienced scholars. Participants will present their work in three rounds (each including 3-4 presentations). After each round, senior experts will be invited to ask questions. After each Q&A session there will be a break, where the students can 'mingle' with the senior scholars. The participation in the event (and the whole conference) will help the speakers get detailed feedback to their work and expand their academic network.

The conference will take place in Vienna in person and will be organized jointly by the University of Vienna and Humboldt-University Berlin. We would be very happy to welcome you in Vienna and will cover travel and accommodation costs. However, we also understand the needs of people with care responsibilities or health restrictions who are unable to travel to Vienna. For this reason, we will also enable online participation in individual cases.

If you are interested in attending, please send us a **short abstract (150-180 words, in English)** of the project you would like to present at the Elevator Pitch event and a **bio (100 words)**, **by March 31, 2024** to Anna Seidel ([seidelay@hu-berlin.de](mailto:seidelay@hu-berlin.de)). Notifications of acceptance will be sent to applicants by April 30, 2024.

The conference language is English.