



(Re)labelling Queerness after Socialism

Call for Papers

International workshop, Heidelberg University (Germany)

November 25-27, 2026

The workshop *(Re)labelling Queerness after Socialism* aims at bringing together researchers of different disciplines who analyse the representation of non-heteronormative and non-binary concepts of gender and sexuality in the former socialist states of Europe. During the workshop we intend to discuss and enhance approaches of queer studies which take into account the distinct cultural, social, and political characteristics of these countries thereby complementing and potentially challenging prevailing “Western” viewpoints and facilitating a more comprehensive perspective. Such an approach has become even more crucial in light of the increasingly overt politicization of queerness as a symbolic battleground for competing ideological agendas and social orders.

The concept of “queerness” is marked by an inherent tension: on the one hand, it implies a rejection of fixed labels (Degele 2008).¹ On the other hand, it has become a label itself. This tension derives from the indispensability of linguistic and narrative frameworks for negotiating sexuality and gender – whether in academic discourse and art or in broader institutional and cultural contexts. However, these frameworks are constantly evolving in response to historical, cultural, and political changes. The term “(re)labelling” thus refers to the processes of (re)coding and (re)defining queerness both within and outside queer communities. In the post-socialist societies of Eastern, South-Eastern, and Central Eastern Europe, the (re)labelling of non-heteronormative sexuality and non-binary concepts of gender prove to be particularly complex. The countries’ shared yet distinct historical experience of socialism is intertwined with differing political affiliations, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs that reach beyond the socialist era. Moreover, the region’s receptivity to Western discourses on queerness diverges significantly across countries. All these factors have shaped the (re)labelling of queerness after the end of Socialism up to the present day.

Contributions may address the following or related questions regarding a specific country of Eastern, South-Eastern and Central Eastern Europe or several countries in a comparative perspective:

¹ Degele, Nina (2008). *Gender / Queer Studies*. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, p. 12.

- › What **terms and narratives** are used to describe different forms of gender and sexual diversity in post-socialist societies? Are these **representations derogatory, masked or emancipatory**? What are the **diverse cultural, historical, and social contexts, and traditions** that shape the discourse on queerness in post-socialist societies? How do **national, regional, and transregional factors** influence the representation and expression of queerness?
- › Which **actors** (activists, physicians, psychologists, lawyers, political parties, state institutions, church or other religious organizations, media, education system, art/literature, etc.) are involved in the (re)labelling of queerness after the end of socialism? Which actors gain **interpretive authority**, and for what reasons? Do **international communities** exert an influence on the development of queer identities and practices in post-socialist societies, or does a **local understanding** of queer culture emerge independently?
- › How do **different media** such as **literature, film, art, and social media** contribute to the construction and negotiation of queerness? How do these representations reflect or challenge dominant cultural norms?

The workshop will take place on **November 25-27, 2026** at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. It is organized by the Slavic Department and the Chair for Eastern European History. We are in the process of securing funding to reimburse participants' travel and accommodation costs. The workshop will be held in English.

We welcome proposals from various academic disciplines and all career levels. Participants will be asked to share a short paper (2,000-3,000 words) in advance of the workshop and deliver a 15-minute in-person presentation. **Please submit your proposal** (title of the paper, abstract of max. 300 words) and a short CV (max. 150 words) in one document **by February 8, 2026**. Please direct your proposal and any inquiries to the organizing team:

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