

Call for Papers

THE PLEASURES OF BACKWARDNESS:
CONSUMER DESIRE AND MODERNITY IN EASTERN EUROPE

Conference
University of California, Berkeley,

April 23-25, 2015

Consumption has recently emerged as a prism through which to view the cultural and social history of Eastern Europe from an exciting new angle. Especially in the study of life under state socialism, the emphasis on consumer practices has led scholars to rethink familiar themes such as human agency and personal autonomy, the grey zone between official and unofficial cultures and the relationship between Western capitalist modernity and the “shortage economies” of the East. Light has also been shed on the many forms of consumption—smoking, drinking, tourism, music, sport and much else—that reflect and drive political change in the region. Whether scrutinizing TV viewing in Czechoslovakia or the enjoyment of tobacco in Bulgaria, hitchhiking through Poland or Budapest nightlife, scholars present consumption as an expression of everyday agency and the creative potential of ordinary people.

This conference will bring together junior and senior scholars to examine the place of consumption, entertainment and leisure in Eastern Europe and to explore the implications of the latest consumer studies for the region’s wider history. Not only in state socialism did consumption lend flexibility and creativity to a system commonly thought of as stagnant and stultified. In what ways can the consumer perspective change our understanding of development, politics and power in the region over the centuries? How does a focus on the lives of consumers illuminate Eastern engagement with the West over the long term, not just during the cold war? Does attention to the rise of consumption in the East problematize Western narratives of consumerism and modernization? Were consumer cultures of the East mere imitations of a more developed West, or were there pleasures of backwardness peculiar to the region?

Participants and a number of senior scholars will be invited to discuss new research and provide expert feedback. Although proposals for single-country projects are welcome, we are especially eager to receive proposals that involve comparison, whose scope transcends national borders, and papers that situate Eastern Europe into a larger European or global context. Those interested in participating should send a short CV and a brief summary (250-500 words) of their papers to event organizer Michael Dean (PhD in History, UC Berkeley) at [michaelwdean\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:michaelwdean(at)gmail.com) by **October 31, 2014**. Invitations will be issued in mid November. While lodging and a portion of travel will be covered by the event’s organizers, participants should try, wherever possible, to obtain funding from their home university.

Sponsored by: U.C. Berkeley Institute of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies; Institute of Interdisciplinary Polish Studies, European University-Viadrina; U.C. Berkeley Townsend Center for the Humanities; Institute of European Studies, U.C. Berkeley, in cooperation with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD); U.C. Berkeley Department of History; U.C. Berkeley East Central Europeanist and Germanist Working Groups, the Kroužek and der Kreis.