

## **Integrating the Rural World. Economy, Society and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe, 1848-1939**

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### **Call for Papers**

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#### ***Integrating the Rural World. Economy, Society and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe, 1848-1939***

**Sibiu, 2-5 November 2023**

**Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation**

**“Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu**

**Central European University Vienna**

**“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași**

**University of Bucharest**

Central and Eastern Europe has a strong rural tradition, with peasants playing - oftentimes just ‘discursively’ - an important role in the economic, social, political and cultural life of local but also national communities. The constant concern of intellectuals to define the peasantry as a social actor and to understand the socio-economic or family relations within the rural world, regarded as a cultural universe in itself, has generated an extremely diverse literature, scientific and fictional alike. Superimposed on the development of modern urban-bourgeois societies, the process of nation-building led to the ‘rediscovery’ of the peasant by the political, cultural and academic elites. From a marginal and dismissive character of the process of social transformation, the peasant became in the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries the epicenter of research, a subject to be 'examined' and 'mapped.' However, approaches to the village were almost invariably ideologized: analyzed from a conservative perspective, the peasantry was placed outside modernity, in an idyllic socio-cultural universe, governed by traditions and customs; in the critical reading grid of progressive, liberal or socialist 'realism,' rural life was marked by an irrational resistance to the 'new' and by material and educational 'backwardness,' which allegedly condemned the village to chronic underdevelopment.

Our conference aims to open a forum of reflection and debate on how national elites in Central and Eastern Europe have related to the peasantry in the process of building the modern state and a democratic political system, and the way political integration took place, by transforming peasants from subjects of different public actors into active *citizens*. The politicization of the rural world, in the sense of increasing the participation of peasants in public affairs and their identification with certain ideas concerning the 'common good,' was an integral part of the phenomenon of modern transformation of societies in these regions. We wish to document the approach to the peasantry and the action of central and local state institutions (such as the school and the army). of associations of all kinds, and of different social actors (intellectuals, teachers, local notables, priests representing the local authority), focusing on the channels of communication of their modernizing agenda (such as the church or the press), circumscribed to the large register of modernization. Our aim is to also explore the impact of the penetration of modernity in the village world, such as the migration of labor to the cities as a result of industrialization, the secularization of the village, the spread of political radicalism, etc.

The conveners of the conference encourage contributions that focus on the social, cultural and political dimension of the rural world and, especially, on the practices associated with the process of integrating peasants into state projects in the region. We call for new interdisciplinary approaches that reveals the specificity of the peasantry in this part of Europe, that will hopefully lead to a critical reconsideration of the topic, enabling us to overcome the common places that still dominate discourses on the peasantry, the rural world and their role and place in society and history.

The conference promotes interdisciplinary and comparative approaches to the issue of political integration of peasants within the various societies of the Austro-

Hungarian Empire and the nation states of Central and Eastern Europe. We encourage submissions tackling the following major research themes and questions:

- Narratives about the rural world. What is meant by the concept of political integration of the peasants?
- Concepts, research methods and sources of documentation of the rural world.
- Projects by political and intellectual elites regarding the political integration of the peasants and their transformation into citizens.
- Agrarian political ideologies.
- Political leaders and local notables: solidarity networks and clientele.
- How the rural world was transformed under the impact of legislating agrarian reforms and universal suffrage.
- What did the birth and development of political activism, self-government and political sociability mean in the rural world? What were the signs of civil society in the rural world?
- How political parties were organized in the rural world and what peasants thought about parties and their leaders and what they meant by “politics;”
- The state, center-periphery relationship, and the monopoly of “legitimate violence” in the countryside.
- ‘What moves the peasants?’ How were peasants mobilized in their villages? Were they receptive to ethnic politics or were they totally indifferent to it? Is there a ‘voice of the peasants?’

The official language of the conference is **English**. Please send us your proposals by March 31, 2023 (title and summary of up to 300 words) to [andrei.sora@unibuc.ro](mailto:andrei.sora@unibuc.ro). Acceptance decisions will be communicated by **15 April 2023**.

The organizers will provide accommodation and meals. They also plan to publish the conference proceedings. The final essays, written in English, must not exceed 12,000 words and should be submitted by **December 15, 2023**. All

contributions will be subject to peer-review and, in case of acceptance, will be published in a collective volume at a prestigious international publishing house.

We look forward to your contributions. Do not hesitate to contact us for additional information and clarifications.

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