

Solidarity and Voluntarism in State-Socialist Societies

Announcement published by George Bodie on Wednesday, January 25, 2023

Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

September 12, 2023 to September 13, 2023

Location:

Austria

Subject Fields:

Colonial and Post-Colonial History / Studies, Eastern Europe History / Studies, German History / Studies, Modern European History / Studies, Social History / Studies

Organisers: University of Graz (Department of Sociology/Sociology of Gender and Centre for Southeast European Studies)

Convenors: George Bodie (Goldsmiths, University of London) and Ana Kladnik (Institute for Contemporary History, Ljubljana / from March 2023 onwards University of Graz)

Recent advances in the field have illuminated the extent and depth to which practices of solidarity defined everyday life in state-socialist societies. Perhaps most clearly, this has emerged in the recent growth of literature which explores practices of socialist internationalism, which carried with them a conception of international solidarity that was distinctly embedded in everyday life. But as the literature on state-socialism continues to develop beyond theories of totalitarianism and simplistic accounts of societies dominated or entirely subsumed by the state, solidarity—whether directed within or beyond national borders—is increasingly becoming a worthwhile object of study as a generalised practice or concept.

A key (and still to this day largely unexplored) element of this focus on solidarity is voluntarism and voluntary organisations. Such organisations have often been dismissed as fronts, existing solely to mobilise populations or serving as disseminators of propaganda. In many cases, these assertions carry some weight. Yet the story of how the concept of solidarity was contested, and how socialist citizens found meaning in it must also involve serious exploration of practices of voluntarism. The existence of voluntary organisations and voluntarism remind us that the relationship between state and society in state-socialism cannot be reduced to a simplistic oppositional binary, but was rather one that was fluid, multidimensional and often ambivalent. Socialist citizens practiced solidarity via voluntarist organisations

through a mixture of coercion (and much more rarely, compulsion), genuine enthusiasm and many other forms of motivation in-between.

Exploring the multifaceted nature of these motivations, this conference will make an important contribution to our understanding of the social history of state socialism. It will explore the ways and means through which the practice of solidarity manifested through voluntarism and voluntary institutions. We are interested in contributions which explore any aspect of voluntarism on a societal, local, or enterprise level. In particular, we are interested in exploring what solidarity meant to socialist citizens, how they sought to manifest it through voluntarism, and the extent to which it existed as a component of everyday life. The state-socialist world, of course, was not uniform, and voluntarism and solidarity carried different connotations and created several forms and practices in different places. We are interested in exploring these differences as well as commonalities across borders. Similarly, we are conscious that voluntarism was not a static object but one that shifted over time, and are interested in exploring both continuity and change in the pre- and post-socialist eras.

We are particularly interested in papers that tackle the following themes:

- In what ways were solidarity and voluntarism integrated into societal infrastructure, local institutions, or enterprises?
- What solidarity and voluntarism meant or how it was understood by the (local) authorities and people who advocated for, experienced and practiced it in their local environment.
- To what extent can we distinguish between practices and understandings of solidarity between 'traditional' voluntary associations (known also in the pre-socialist period), mass organisations, and interests' organisations?
- How practices of domestic solidarity and voluntary work emerged and were supported both from above and below as well as formally and informally.
- How did practices of solidarity and voluntarism relate to the political legitimation of socialist state power, and conversely, how did the politics of solidarity generate conflict between citizen and state?
- In what ways did voluntary work and solidarity shape the debates and forms of socialist economies, political practices, or policies of social welfare?

- Which institutions and agents were involved in implementing solidarity and voluntarism in everyday life, and what practices and events did they produce?
- Through which political and cultural forms was solidarity communicated or reproduced in state socialist societies? How was it depicted and received in media, the arts, or design?
- How did practices of solidarity and voluntarism intersect with other quotidian experiences of life in socialist societies, for example, informed by nationality, class, or gender?
- In what ways did practices of voluntarism and solidarity prevail in the post-Cold War world? To what extent can we see their afterlives in contemporary politics?

Please send proposals (300-400 words) together with a short CV (including reference to 2-3 selected publications) to George Bodie (G.Bodie@gold.ac.uk) and Ana Kladnik (ana.kladnik@inz.si) by 15 March 2023. Proposals should include paper title, the presenter's name, contact information, and institutional affiliation. Accepted speakers will be informed by early April 2023.

Accommodation costs will be covered for all invited participants without institutional funding of their own. We anticipate being able to cover travel costs for a limited amount of participants.

We intend to publish selected papers in a special journal issue or an edited volume.

Contact Email:
g.bodie@gold.ac.uk