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**Tagungsbericht: Late Soviet Village: People, Institutions, and Objects
between “Rural” and “Urban”**

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Tagungsbericht: *Late Soviet Village: People, Institutions, and Objects between “Rural” and “Urban”*

am 31. Mai bis 2. Juni 2018 am GHI in Moskau

What made the late Soviet village a special historical phenomenon? How did the modernization and urbanization of the USSR in the latter half of the 20th century influence rural areas and their residents? Did the advancement of the socialist life style undermine the border between the Soviet city and countryside? Finally, how was the village imagined, filmed, and represented in late Soviet narratives and visuals? The three-day conference “Late Soviet Village: People, Institutions, and Objects between ‘Rural’ and ‘Urban’” that took place from May 31 – June 2 2018 at the German Historical Institute in Moscow, organized by EKATERINA EMILIANITSEVA KOLLER (Zurich) and NIKOLAUS KATZER (Moscow), examined these and related questions during presentations and panel discussions.

In her introductory remarks, Ekaterina Emeliantseva KOLLER stressed the need to integrate late Soviet rural developments into late Soviet Studies and to take a more complex approach to late Soviet rural transformations than it had been done through a persistent narrative of moral, economic, and cultural decline of the Soviet countryside.

How the late Soviet village was imagined by Soviet elites and intellectuals, and how their imagination influenced late Soviet policies in rural areas, was discussed in the first panel. NIKITA PIVOVAROV (Moscow) examined projects on the institutionalization of Soviet agricultural expertise to introduce scientific forms of management. Some of them were, due to the combination of empiric and hermeneutic elements, a priori unfeasible. ANATOLY PINSKY (St. Petersburg) focused on epistemological challenges that confronted Soviet intellectuals in their efforts to translate the realities of economic and daily life in rural areas into narratives.

In a case study of the diary of Yefim Dorosh, who meticulously observed changes in local communities caused by the permeating influence of the urban life style, ALEKSANDR NIKULIN (Moscow) offered a similar perspective. ALEKSANDR FOKIN (Chelyabinsk) examined letters sent to the magazine *Sel'skaia*

zhizn' (Rural Life), which offer a sight to realities of everyday life in the Soviet countryside.

Epistemology is connected with the question of power, especially in situations of symbolic inequality like the one between the city and the village. Several papers engaged this problem by showing how Soviet intellectuals, tasked with preservation of local heritage objects, traditions, or ways of life, became so invested in this activity that they invented new traditions and essentialized the Soviet village in imaginary forms. ULRIKE HUHNS (Bremen) examined how Ukrainian ethnographers in their quest to Sovietize local rural communities introduced new Soviet rituals that had to disrupt the religious calendar and immerse in a socialist life cycle. ODETTA RUDLING (Greifswald) and ALEXEY GOLUBEV (Houston) discussed authenticity in late Soviet ethnographic and architectural preservation movements. They showed that projects to preserve and revive elements of traditional life style were seen as precondition for the succession between the people's culture of the past and modern socialist society, but had an artificial archaizing of rural communities as a side effect. ERIN HUTCHINSON (Harvard) explicated this logic in her study of Soviet collectors of material objects of the traditional rural life style who became advocates of national development.

Forms of political and social imagination of the late Soviet village became prominently reflected in media. TATIANA DASHKOVA and BORIS STEPANOV (both Moscow) examined how the late socialist rural comedies, which could only superficially engage with real problems and instead engaged in an intertextual dialogue with earlier comedies, declined in its popularity. GÁBOR RITERSPOHN (Paris) focused on the view of the village as a refuge from fast-paced, modernist, and allegedly spiritless urban life and as keepers of the Russian national spirit and religiosity which led to mystical paintings of landscapes and their inhabitants. However, some urban-rural differences such as archaic forms of extended family intimacy that had been lost in urban communities can be seen in presentations of historical photographs, as SVETLANA ADONYEVA (St. Petersburg) argued. At the same time, as GALINA ORLOVA (Vilnius) noted, these particular features of rural photography could as well be a reflection of genre conventions – a property of form, rather than content.

Another key theme of the conference was the question of the border between rural and urban settings, subjectivities, and life styles. Many conference papers argued on the active incursions of urbanity and urbanism into the countryside during the late Soviet period. ALEXANDER OSIPOV (Joensuu) showed that many working settlements built far from traditional urban centers were designed as exemplary company towns and it was only practices of their residents (foraging, hunting, etc.) that connected them with the country-

side. In a similar way, SVETLANA BOLTOVSKAYA (Marburg) discussed how nuclear towns came to dominate local rural landscapes of Ukrainian Polesia that experienced dramatic social changes with the construction of nuclear power plants. CAMILLE ROBERT-BOEUF (Paris) described how dachas (summer cottages) created urban-rural networks through the contact of urban dwellers with surrounding villages. Moldovan weddings increasingly combined urban and rural features, according to LIDIA PRISAC (Chisinau), while in the Crimean Black Sea coast countryside and suburban residents alike used a huge demand for beds to create a de-facto private vacation rental market, as ALEXEI POPOV (Simferopol) examined. KIRSTEN BÖNKER (Bielefeld) examined the revolution in Soviet rural interiors with the appearance of television, which erased the very border between the rural and the urban. NIKOLAI MITROKHIN (Bremen) voiced, largely speculative, the opinion that a huge divide between rural and urban societies remained in terms of literacy, political attitudes, and cultural practices.

Finally, a number of articles discussed specific cultural and social practices of late Soviet rural communities. ANNA SOKOLOVA and TATIANA VORONINA (Zurich) discussed the adoption of communist practices and speech formulas in the paperwork of rural Communist Party committees, DAVID CELETTI (Padua) explored the aftermath of the Soviet recruitment campaign that brought Ukrainian settlers to the Kazakh SSR. On Soviet rural economies focused ALE-CANDRA OBERLÄNDER (Bremen), discussing the circulation of money in the conditions of commodity deficit, ISABELLE OHAYON (Paris), addressing the evolution and functioning of ritual economy in Soviet Kazakhstan, MARIANA ARKHIPOVA (Moscow), showing that the established form of Soviet collective labor was informed by practices of the pre-1917 period, and VADYM STECIUK (Kamyanets-Podilsky), addressing the practice of producing do-it-yourself agricultural equipment and machines fueled by the non-existence of similar equipment in the Soviet retail trade. The resourcefulness of rural communities also stretched into leisure activities. ANDREI TUTORSKII (Moscow) showed how it translated into the persistence of religious and quasi-religious rituals in the late Soviet village, SIMON BELOKOWSKY (Washington, D.C.) discussed the link between drinking and violence.

The concluding discussion mentioned that there is still a need in research on the actual practices, meanings, social relations, and political sentiment that characterized Soviet rural areas during the late Soviet period and on the place of the village in the landscape of late Soviet modernity. Thinking along these lines opens new perspectives on the history of the late Soviet village and improves our understanding of the historical change in the late USSR.

Conference organizers plan to publish the contributions in an edited volume.

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