

IS THERE A EUROPEAN INTERWAR INTELLECTUAL HISTORY?

School of Humanities, Tallinn University
7-8 June 2019

The European interwar period was an age overflowing with controversies and contradictions. With the fall of empires in continental Europe, it began with the unprecedented promise of democracy for the new sovereign nation states, yet ended with an equally unprecedented wave of authoritarian regimes. Artistic, intellectual and cultural life saw bursts of extraordinary creativity, leaving a lasting and rich legacy, yet many of its most innovative waves supported or shared the frenzied ideologies of their time. The period, in many ways, gave rise to optimistic social utopias and boldly ultra-modern visions of the future of social life, yet it was also an age overwhelmed with a sense of decline and catastrophe.

The scholarship of the interwar period is similarly ridden with controversies, or at the very least profound disagreements: methodological, historiographical, and ideological, to name just a few. Intellectual history, thus far successful in rethinking and resignifying ideas in other centuries, has only recently begun approaching the 20th century. As this task starts to unfold, the number of questions raised exceeds those answered.

In the workshop, "Is there a European interwar intellectual history?" we seek to map and address some of these disagreements, by questioning and problematizing each term of our title. We are especially interested in case studies which - in dealing with different aspects of intellectual and cultural life in this period of European history - can offer wider considerations on any of the following aspects: chronology and periodization, spatial dimensions, and wider methodological issues concerning the distinction between intellectual history and its sister disciplines (cultural and political history, social history, history of science, history of art). We thus invite papers from historians in any of these fields relating to any of these wider issues:

Chronology and periodization. Does it make sense to speak of "interwar" intellectual history? If so, what are the continuities and the ruptures which mark this period when compared either to the *belle époque* or to the aftermath of World War II? At what level do ruptures and continuities operate? Are they predominantly conceptual, or do they have more to do with changes (or lack thereof) in sensitivities, imaginaries, or even merely political vocabulary?

Space. Is it possible to speak of a "European" intellectual history in the interwar? To what extent is it possible to identify dynamics of intellectual production – at a conceptual, rhetorical, as well as material level – which are truly trans-national? What risks does this search for spatially extended intellectual phenomena contain? Conversely, what are the advantages and shortcomings of an approach based on a more canonical national or regional divisions of the European space? In what ways can the methodologies of comparative and transnational history help us explore more in depth this issue of space?



Method. Is there any merit or intellectual rationale for separating or combining intellectual history with a number of other established approaches to the study of intellectual life? Do the sources warrant or invalidate these methodological distinctions? What – if anything – distinguishes interwar intellectual history from the period’s cultural history, history of art, history of science, mentalities, humanities and social thought, and so on?

The workshop is organised by the “Between the Times”: Embattled temporalities and political imagination in interwar Europe project (ERC Starting grant - <https://betweenthetimes.tlu.ee/en/home/>) team. We are looking forward to receiving the abstracts (max 500 words) of proposed papers latest by 30 January 2019.

Please send your abstracts, as well as any request for clarification or further information to: tomaso.giordani@tlu.ee