

Tradition and Solidarity in the Visegrád Countries in the Pandemic Moment

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The global pandemic known as COVID-19 has had irreversible effects, increasing the importance of local production and automation while stimulating competition and growth in certain service sectors. The green deal may be accelerating and ever more sophisticated technologies for digital communication are accompanied by the proliferation of fake news and propaganda. The pandemic has had a dramatic impact on economic globalization, including all forms of human mobility.

The Visegrád countries have experienced this pandemic (unprecedented in living memory) in specific ways. Politically the nation-state has made a strong comeback, not only in terms of economic policymaking but also in securing borders. It has had to respond to calls for social protection from the middle classes as well as the working classes, since both feel more threatened by the consequences of this pandemic than they were by the financial crisis a decade earlier. Yet the state and its specialized institutions could not resolve all the emerging problems. Individual civilians and their local communities have come up with their own grassroots initiatives, many of which draw on older forms of solidarity.

We wish to explore diverse appeals to the past and tradition in the present conjuncture, from legacies of state-socialism to the heritage of romantic nationalism, folk Catholicism, and peasantist populism. New emancipatory movements such as cooperativism, local foodways, and alternative community projects may or may not invoke tradition explicitly. The conveners of the workshop are open to papers inspired by historical-structural perspectives on the political economy of the region, but also to more culturalist approaches to economy and politics. Preference will be given to proposals featuring ethnographic research in one or more of the Visegrád countries and their neighbours. Proposals based on data collected before the impact of the pandemic are welcome, but some effort, however oblique, should be made to address the impact of the pandemic of 2020.

Empirical studies of the illiberal turn are still rare, but we suggest that anthropologists are in a good position to illuminate the effects of the global pandemic on the trends of recent decades. We are especially keen to receive proposals that address social resilience and new forms of resistance to seemingly dominant forces. It is our intention to proceed promptly to a publication that would highlight the importance of case studies from East-Central Europe for global debates.

The deadline for submission of abstracts (please no longer than one page) to the conveners is 30 November 2020.