

CALL FOR PAPERS

From Birth To Death:

Age and Ageing in the Postsocialist Transformation

International Conference,
26-28 September 2023 in Dresden



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Up to today the post-1989 transformation has had long-lasting effects on lives and biographies in **postsocialist societies**. The biographical disruptions caused by the postsocialist reconfigurations created many so-called 'losers' of the transformation, who have not had the chance or were unable to create biographical coherence across the systemic divide. Many of these so-called 'losers' tend to, or are judged to, express their anger about the long-term inequalities caused by the reunification process with an increasing skepticism towards democracy and a new openness towards authoritarianism. But who are these so-called 'losers'? Can we determine members within a certain age group as particularly receptive to the authoritarian temptation? What is the connection between individuals' former age during the time of the postsocialist transformation and their political identities today? The proposed conference starts from the observations that there are indeed no uniform experiences of 'the' transformation. Be it in East Germany or the countries of East Central Europe the various age groups experienced and responded differently to the political and social transformation in the past and remember and speak about it today in different ways. Certain ages, such as adolescence – which is in itself a period of rapid physical and mental transformation – are for instance more receptive to experiences of abrupt change than others, which has had implications for their attitude towards this historical event and its long aftermath. Thus, when looking at the various age groups one can detect various degrees of harmony/disharmony of certain biographical stages with the postsocialist transformation. This requires paying special attention to the dimension of age when it comes to understanding the political, social and biographical implications of the postsocialist transformation. So far, much research has been devoted to the separate study of the experiences of either childhood, adolescence, or old age. Yet, these studies have not contrasted the response of the various age groups to the transformation.

Against this backdrop, the proposed interdisciplinary conference seeks to engage with the **question of how the various ages experienced the changing (postsocialist) realities**. To comprehend the specific repercussions of the long transformation on different age groups, we wish to contrast and set into relation their various experiences. Yet, we propose to go beyond the understanding of age as an attribution to a fixed and coherent group; instead we wish to use the notion of 'ageing' to focus on the process of 'becoming older', not only to study the generation of the old, but also to understand how the transformation altered the process of getting older of the young. Furthermore, while some research has been done on the age groups of the young and the old, less is known about the experiences of those who carried the major burden of making the transformation possible: the adults. Members of this age group were the ones whose active and continuous involvement in the labour market was absolutely essential, both for the economic, and social transformation/co-transformation itself and for the successful transformation within their social environments, families and homes. Adults' active and continuous participation versus their often abrupt exclusion from the labour market was decisive in enabling/disabling them to individually cope with the transformation. Here we hope to initiate a comparative study on the one hand of adults as a particularly essential age group for offering care and securing the well-being of those in need and on the other hand of those age groups that were dependent on care, meaning the young and the old. And lastly, we wish to explore how deeply experiences of the transformation affected the political identity of the respective age groups and how they figure in the retrospective recollections of 1989 and the postsocialist period. It was not irrelevant if you were a child, a teenager, a breadwinner, or

found yourself right before your retirement when witnessing the disappearance of state socialism and navigating everyday life during postsocialism. Here we seek to highlight which age groups were more likely to become or identify themselves as so-called 'winners' and 'losers' of the transformation. In most postsocialist countries, breadwinners became victims of the brutal „liquidation“ of state-owned enterprises and found no new employment despite their own ability and willingness to work. Many members of this age group tend(ed) to express their disillusionment through their voting behavior and an increased support for right-wing populist parties. Against this backdrop, we are interested in exploring the connection between age and political identities from the postsocialist transformation until today.

For our conference we encourage contributors to explore social conceptions of age, age-related expectations and experiences towards the transformation and towards postsocialism, opposite and conflicting attitudes within the age groups and relationships, and commonalities between the various age groups.

We encourage interested speakers to tackle the following questions:

- *How did the various age groups experience the post-socialist transformation?*
- *How did the postsocialist transformation enable/discourage specific age groups from realising their very individual aspirations?*
- *How did gender and class impact the ability to successfully incorporate the transformation into one's professional and personal biography?*
- *What social and biographical factors made individuals within a certain age group more vulnerable to becoming winners/losers in the transformation?*
- *What are the long-term implications of age-related experiences during the postsocialist transformation and even up to today?*

The conference will address (but is not limited to) the following topics:

1. **Age & Everyday Life:** disruptions and continuities in life courses, e.g. labour and employment, education, care and welfare, (mental) health and (dis)ability, private lives;
2. **Age & Identities:** experiences during the transformation; loss, failure and disillusionment; resilience and success; the relationship between the individual, society and the state; post-socialist identities;
3. **Age & Remembrance:** life stories; individual & collective recollections; retrospective evaluations; fulfilled/disappointed expectations; current life situation;

Proposals for papers shall be sent to Friederike Kind-Kovács (friederike.kind-kovacs@tu-dresden.de) and Maren Hachmeister (maren.hachmeister@mailbox.tu-dresden.de), including a 250 word abstract and a 150-200 word descriptive CV (including reference to 2-3 selected publications) until **15th February 2023**. Proposals should include paper title, the presenter's name, contact information, and institutional affiliation. We explicitly encourage young doctoral and postdoctoral researchers from the field of history, social anthropology, sociology, and psychology. As we plan to have commentaries for each session, papers of 2000 words are required to be pre-circulated by **September 1st**. Travel and accommodation expenses of successful applicants will be covered. Accepted speakers will be informed by **30th February 2023**.

Host: Hannah Arendt Institute for Totalitarianism Studies at TU Dresden (HAIT)

Organisers: PD Dr. Friederike Kind-Kovács (HAIT), Dr. Maren Hachmeister (HAIT)