

CfP: The Soviet Steppe – Culture, Environment, Economics and Politics

Date: February 15-16, 2019

Venue: University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Organisers:

Prof. Julia Obertreis, University of Erlangen-Nürnberg

Prof. Christine Bichsel, University of Fribourg

Dr. Ekaterina Filep, University of Fribourg.

The steppe represents a vast ecological space, but also a key symbolic reference for Russian imperial and Soviet history. To date, scholars have explored the cultural, political and ecological history of the steppe for the pre-Soviet period (for example Khodarkovsky 2002, Sunderland 2004, Moon 2013, Piancola/Sartori 2013). For the Soviet period, selected works have addressed issues related to the steppe such as agricultural and economic rural development (McCauley 1976, Abashin 2015), the Virgin Lands Campaign in Kazakhstan (Pohl 2013, Saktaganova 2017), Stalinist compulsory sedentarization of nomads and state building (Ohayon 2009, Pianciola 2009, Kindler 2014), resettlement policies and practice (Pohl 2007), land reclamation and irrigation development (Obertreis 2017, Bichsel 2017), and national and international scientific debates (Elie 2015). However, existing scholarship rarely centers on the steppe itself (for an exception drawing on agricultural and environmental history see Elie/Ferret 2018).

This conference seeks to further explore cultural, environmental, economic and political aspects of the steppe in the Soviet Union (1917-1991). How did the steppe serve as a cultural space for the production of meaning and identity? How did the steppe and its transformation interact with Soviet environmental and economic thinking? How did the steppe provide a geopolitical imaginary for center-periphery relations and Soviet political rule? How did the steppe relate to other ecological spaces, in particular the forest? The conference aims at creating a space for fruitful interdisciplinary discussion. It seeks to explore the interplay between cultural, political, ecological and economic aspects and to make first attempts to characterize the place of the steppe in Soviet and Eurasian history.

We welcome submissions from junior and senior scholars with a background in history, historical geography, literary criticism, cultural studies and related fields working on these themes. The format of the conference will be interactive. Conference papers will be pre-circulated, and participants' commentaries will guide the discussions. We expect participants to submit their full draft conference papers by January 15, 2019. We aim to produce a peer-reviewed special issue from this conference.

Possible themes for contributions include but are not restricted to:

- Territory and borders
- Identity and nationality politics
- Steppe and other ecological spaces
- Agricultural development
- Virgin Lands Campaigns
- Environmental movements and conservation
- Irrigation and waterworks

- Resettlement and settlers
- Steppe in Soviet literature and film
- Urbanity on the steppe
- Semantics and symbols of steppe

The deadline for submission of abstracts is September 14, 2018. Please submit the following details to Christine Bichsel (christine.bichsel@unifr.ch).

- Title
- Abstract of your paper (max. 250 words)
- Brief bio (max. 250 words)
- Contact information (name, affiliation, email address)

We will endeavor to inform applicants about the outcome within four weeks of the submission deadline.

Pending upon funding, travel grants will be available for selected participants.

For more information, please contact Christine Bichsel (christine.bichsel@unifr.ch), Professor in Human Geography, Department of Geosciences, University of Fribourg.

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