

**Conference “Privacy Outside Its ‘Comfort Zone’:
Late Socialist Eastern and East-Central Europe between the Private and the Public”
December 8-10, 2017
DFG Research Training Group 1681/2 “Privacy and Digitalization”**

University of Passau, Germany

“Privacy” is a well-researched yet highly disputed concept in Western scholarship. While most privacy research comes from and concentrates on Western liberal societies, great potential of privacy studies beyond this traditional framework still remains largely unexplored. The framework of Western liberal societies may therefore be seen not only as a “comfort zone” of privacy studies, but also as a barrier that often limits the potential of the research. This conference aims at elucidating the problems and the perspectives of privacy studies beyond the traditional liberal framework by bringing together scholars and PhD students who work on the concept of “privacy” in the context of Late Socialist Eastern and East-Central Europe.

A common challenge to privacy researchers of non-Western societies, especially if they come from such a society, is to refute the erroneous misconception of the absence of “privacy” in non-liberal societies, and to embrace the constructions of “privacy” that these local societies offer. This conference endeavors to create a dialogue between scholars and PhD students from all fields of humanities and social and political sciences to discuss the challenges of transgressing the borders of liberal frameworks, the strategies to cope with these challenges, and the perspectives for privacy research that such transgressions offer.

The use of this concept in the context of Late Socialist Eastern and East-Central Europe leads to a range of questions that challenge liberal dichotomies and pave the way for alternative visions of “privacy”. These questions are particularly resonant now, in the centennial year of the October Revolution, when its consequences are debated anew. While the liberal concept of “privacy” usually fails in the framework of authoritarian regimes of post-war Europe, the region offers a diversity of other impulses similar to the liberal idea of “privacy”. In the post-war years, Socialist Eastern and East-Central Europe witnessed the expansion of the material as well as immaterial private sphere, which did not only come as a result of the changed world order and subsequent transformations of Socialist societies, but can also be seen as a process that was meticulously planned, carried out, and controlled by the authorities of respective countries in an attempt to stabilize their regimes in the process of de-Stalinization. However, we should also consider whether the private sphere, so benevolently tolerated by Socialist states, continuously developed into an *enfant terrible* that nurtured not

only stability, but also the disruptive forces of dissidence and civil rights movements, which ultimately undermined the Socialist bloc from within. These stabilizing and simultaneously disruptive currents of “privacy” within non-liberal societies are of particular interest, as they elucidate the multifaceted nature of this concept.

Participants are therefore asked to revisit and question the concept of “privacy” in liberal contexts as well as within the frameworks of Late Socialist Eastern and East-Central Europe by renegotiating the underlying categories within a certain society. The conference will specifically examine ways of addressing the concepts of “privacy” and “publicity” in said contexts by debating the applicable frameworks and by challenging existing approaches. It will further explore the potential of “reverse applicability” by discussing how privacy research in liberal contexts can benefit from other frameworks of privacy—the transfer that is of particular interest now, in the “post-privacy age”, when Snowden’s revelations elucidated the approximations of Western liberal states to the authoritarian models of the past and the present. In the light of such developments, the examination of Late Socialist authoritarian societies becomes advantageous for our understanding of contemporary privacy paradigms.

The conference will focus on three aspects of the problematics of the private/public dichotomy in Late Socialist societies of Eastern and Central Europe. Subtopics of interest include (but are not limited to):

Political variations of privacy:

- **Concepts of privacy:** How does the liberal concept of privacy transform when applied beyond liberal societies? Is a proper transfer possible? Do we need renegotiations of the category?
- **(Ab-)use of privacy:** In what ways can privacy become instrumental to the aims of certain regimes?
- **Challenging Western models:** Is the “absence of privacy” to be spoken of only in the non-liberal context? How are non-Western models applicable to the Western world’s continuous failings at privacy in the 21st century?

Art and privacy:

- **Visions of privacy:** How was privacy in Socialist societies portrayed by domestic as well as by international literature and cinema?
- **“Niches of privacy”:** How did the production and reception of art oscillate between the private and the public spheres?

Privacy in Socialist societies:

- **Fluid borders:** Where do borders between the private and the public spheres lie in these societies? Which dichotomous, trichotomous, etc. divisions are imaginable?
- **Functions of privacy:** How do functions of privacy evolve in the Late Socialist societies of Eastern and Central Europe in comparison to the Western model? To what extent are such phenomena as dissidence and *samizdat* private/public?
- **“The private is political”:** In which way did Socialism “respond” to the feminist critique of liberal societies that addressed the reduction of the woman’s role to the private sphere and the depoliticization of the said sphere in the Western liberal states?
- **Legal ambivalence:** How was the private sphere constructed through Socialist laws? How did legal codes of Socialist states simultaneously allow for the invasion of privacy?

Information for applicants:

The conference will take place on December 8-10, 2017 at the University of Passau, Germany. The language of the conference is English. We welcome abstract submissions of individual papers (no more than 300 words) until February 28, 2017. Please include the title of your presentation, as well as a short academic CV (max. 150 words), and send us a PDF document at the following E-mail addresses, indicating “Conference Privacy 2017” as the E-mail subject: Lukas.Edeler@uni-passau.de AND Tatiana.Klepikova@uni-passau.de

We will contribute to the accommodation and travel costs of the participants. The conference will be based on pre-circulated papers that should be submitted until October 1, 2017. We plan to assemble an edited volume on the basis of the conference proceedings.

For any further questions, please contact Tatiana Klepikova (Tatiana.Klepikova@uni-passau.de). For further information about the DFG Research Training Group, please address <http://www.privatheit.uni-passau.de/en/>.