

CfP: Limits of Europeanness? Contested Notions of Difference and Belonging (16th-21st Centuries)

Research Centre “Concepts of Europe” at the University of Innsbruck
Institute for the Study of Ideas of Europe at the University of East Anglia

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Local organisers: Stefan Ehrenpreis, Niels Grüne, Dorothee Birke

Fourteenth Annual Conference of the Research Network on the History of the Idea of Europe

A basic tension inherent in any idea of Europe is that it links some set of “cultural values” (H. Joas/K. Wiegandt) to a geographical space on the western fringe of the Asian landmass, but at the same time allows for a significant degree of internal diversity, the boundaries of which are constantly shifting and disputed. One case in point is the history of religion. Arguably, the denominational plurality in the wake of the Reformation could still be subsumed by contemporaries under the umbrella of European Christianity, while the distinction from the Orthodox Churches proved more divisive in this respect. In recent years, the Brexit debate or the current Russo-Ukrainian War show the continuing force of visions of centre and periphery in this context, both on the territorial and metaphorical level. The variety of ways in which such topographies of cultural values have served to underpin notions of difference and belonging in the light of Europeanness are at the core of this conference.

What Europe is or should be is particularly controversial in conflicts about inclusion and exclusion, but also in discourses about self-images in various regions of the continent. Historians and sociologists like Jürgen Osterhammel, Wolfgang Schmale, or Peter Wagner have emphasised the pivotal role played by “mental maps” – in the sense of value-laden geographies – in struggles over political domination, cultural hierarchies, and economic dependence within a space of interactions and mutual perceptions labelled ‘Europe’. And they stress the enduring nature of these cognitive and normative patterns over the centuries.

In probing this multi-faceted field of research, the Innsbruck conference aims to bring together several disciplines ranging from history, intellectual history and art history over cultural and literary studies to musicology and anthropology. We will explore how and by whom an overarching concept of Europe was developed, politically enforced, and negotiated in the arts and media. The focus lies on a comparative view of the relationships between imagined European centres and regions that have at various points in time been regarded as being on the periphery of Europe: be it in geographical terms (e.g. Russia, the British Isles, Scandinavia, the Balkans) or in other respects such as political system, religious creed, economic performance etc. How was the tension between nation building and continental integration understood? When and how were traditions of European values invented and established? And who was excluded from or by these processes?

Topics might include – but are by no means limited to:

- Discourses of inclusion in or exclusion from a European ‘centre’ or a hegemonic model of Europeanness in political, social, cultural, economic etc. terms
- Representations of borders/fringes of Europe in philosophy, arts and literature

- Images of Russia as European or non-European (seen from outside and inside)
- The Balkans as an 'internal other'
- Images of Northern Europe's specific cultural legacy (British Isles, Scandinavia) and these regions' contribution to an idea of Europe
- Representations of Europe in its colonial and imperial environments

If you would like to present a paper (ca. 20 minutes), please send an English abstract (max. 300 words) with a title and a short biography to Niels Grüne (niels.gruene@uibk.ac.at) and Jan Vermeiren (j.vermeiren@uea.ac.uk). The deadline is 15 February 2023.

Please note that the working language will be English. There will be no conference fee.

Limited grants for travel and accommodation are available to non-tenured scholars; please indicate in your proposal whether you would also like to apply for this funding.