

**Report on the International CEELBAS Workshop:  
'Beyond Nationalism: 20<sup>th</sup> Century East-Central European Cultural Processes'**

On 25-26 February 2010, the British inter-university Center for East European Language Based Area Studies, CEELBAS ([www.ceelbas.ac.uk](http://www.ceelbas.ac.uk)) sponsored an international workshop at the Center for Urban History of East-Central Europe in L'viv. It was organised by CEELBAS Fellow, Dr Robert Pyrah with support from Drs Tarik Amar and Iryna Matsevko, respectively the Academic Director and Academic Coordinator at the Center.

This two-day event was designed to give a platform to new and innovative research by younger scholars working on the region. Four established keynotes were present, and a lively audience of approx. 30 participants comprising mainly doctoral and post-doctoral researchers.

The workshop's aim was to explore cultural themes, broadly defined, that transcend or challenge 'nationalist' discourse as a primary category of analysis. The papers reflected a bias towards Ukrainica, although the discussion and plenary panels reflected more widely on the problematic implied by the title.

Overall, the papers demonstrated the limits, but also potential behind the notion of culture as a means of transcending nationalism. Prof. Alex WÖLL of the Greifswald Ukrainicum opened the event with a background paper on Havel and Yuschchenko, comparing their self-constructed political identities. However, he concluded that neither were able fully to transcend nationalist frameworks of reference, despite invoking Central European discourses.

The remaining papers were broad-ranging in their research foci, but dealt with overlapping themes of how identities are constructed and contested using culture. Kateryna RUBAN (Doctoral student, Kyiv Mohyla Academy) offered a comparative, theoretical examination of how Kyiv and L'viv have been reconstructed as 'national' cities. Uilleam BLACKER (Doctoral Student, School of Slavonic Studies, London) provided a literary counterpoint by focusing on how the Ukrainian literary and poetic actionist group, Bu-Ba-Bu sought to create a Ukrainian urban literature using the idea of 'Central Europe'.

Two papers looked at the theatre. Robert PYRAH (Ph.D. holder and lecturer, Oxford), referred to the recent development in Habsburg studies to explore nationalism from the margins (cf. Judson, Brubaker). He offered the example of the L'viv city theatre in 1918-39 as a distorting prism, through which the centrally imposed nationalist politics of Warsaw were modified by a range of factors: aesthetics; local concerns; and a sense of local culture and tradition. Mayhill FOWLER (Ph.D. student, Princeton) dealt with how the Soviets transformed the city's theatre scene along rigorously ethno-national lines during their first occupation from 1939-41, incorporating eyewitness reports and detailed analysis.

Material concerns also informed the papers by Oksanna VYNNUK and Oleksandr NADTOKA (both doctoral students at the Kyiv Mohyla Academy). Oksanna examined how L'viv dwellers constructed a notion of the Russian soldiers as the 'Other' in 1914-15, and showed how this image was tinged with exoticism and

Orientalism. This case study again shows L'viv to have a long-standing self-image as 'western'. Oleksandr's examination of the urban text of Belgrade as interpreted by its citizens also highlights the limits of transnational discourses, here especially where the 'national' context was simultaneously a constructed multinational state.

Agnieszka KUDELKA (Doctoral student, Potsdam) examined memorial policy in L'viv, 1867-1939, focusing on the many agents in this process: local communities, city then district administrations; plus local ethnic or interest groups. She emphasises Polish pre-eminence in decision-making but also shows there was space for other means of expression, notably in the suburbs or else the city's central Lykachiv cemetery, where Ukrainian poet Ivan Franko's grave also functioned as a prototypical national memorial. Iulija KYSLA (Doctoral student, Kyiv and Budapest) focused on a single case in memorial policy: Lialia (Olena) Ubyyvovk, the leader of Komsomol underground anti-fascist organization in Poltava in 1941-1942, who was subsequently constructed as a heroine of the 'Great Patriotic War' in Soviet times, and memorialised as such. Iulija explored some of the tensions this image created with a Ukrainian narrative of identity in the Soviet period.

Referring to these papers, the plenary speakers drew attention to the difficulties of using cultural factors to supersede nationalist frames of reference. Prof. Yaroslav Hrytsak (L'viv) acknowledged that the temptation to transcend existing models is inherent to academic enquiry, but that nationalist frames of reference still remain important analytical categories. Dr Nelly Bekus (Warsaw) also reminded us that, as for example in Belarus, minorities (especially the Polish) still invoke cultural rights in national terms.

However, it was stated that the project emerging in recent scholarship, and on display at this workshop, indicates a level of nuance that enhances our understanding of nationalism in several ways: (1) by looking at cultural factors that break apart the idea of nationalism as a unified phenomenon emanating from a single state centre; (2) through the study of cities like our host town of L'viv, where transnational currents define its historical make-up. Prof. Jacek Purchla (Kraków) also pointed to trends in architecture and heritage policy, and together with Prof. Hrytsak, stressed the need for care when applying Western paradigms to East-Central Europe. Although the workshop did not succeed in transcending nationalism, the emerging research shows the need for work on culture to complement the more numerous studies of the region's ethnic and political history. For this reason a volume collecting some of the workshop's contributions is planned for later publication.

(By Robert Pyrah)