

The conference, which took place on December 10-13, 2003 in Budapest was planned, organized and held by Angela Eder (*Kakanien revisited*), Wladimir Fischer (Univ. Vienna, *Spaces of Identity*), Annette-Höslinger-Finck (*Kakanien revisited*), Amália Kerekes (ELTE Budapest), Nadežda Kinsky (*Kakanien revisited*), Peter Plener (*Kakanien revisited*, Univ. Vienna, ELTE Budapest), Béla Rásky (ASRLO Budapest), and Ursula Reber (*Kakanien revisited*).

»Kakanien revisited« is a platform for interdisciplinary research in Central-East and Central Europe. It is a networking-project supported by the bm:bwk and the University of Vienna as a space for exchange and a multiplicity of voices from yesterday and today, which should in particular be available to researchers in the Central European states.¹

Thus reads the first paragraph of the self-description for the project *Kakanien revisited*, which played a substantial part in the organisation of the conference *NetCultureScience – NetzKulturWissenschaft*. It was not least the interest in one's own activities as well as experiences with the constant shift and change in the processes of »networking« – the development of centres of activity for a certain time, the occurrence of simultaneous ideas, the pitfalls of the exchange of information and the appearance of dead ends past which no information can pass, etc. – that lead to the idea, conception and execution of this conference. These interests met with those of the ASRLO Budapest² and the web-journal *Spaces of Identity*, who planned the conference together with *Kakanien revisited*.

1 www.kakanien.ac.at/home [Italics by the authors].

2 We would like to give special thanks to the main sponsor, the ASRLO Budapest, represented in the person of Béla Rásky, who stood by our sides with immeasurable know-how on all academic questions, decision processes and organisational problems. We also thank ASRLO Sofia, the *Aktion Österreich-Ungarn* and the *Österreichisch-ungarisches Kulturforum* for their support.

3 Cf. the contributions by Eliza Eranus, Sarolta Láng und László Letenyei and by Claudia Aguilar.

4 A particularly interesting experiment was started by sociologists in Hungary with <http://www.wiw.hu>. Access is exclusive in that it is only possible via the invitation of a person who is already a member of this »net«. Once one is »in«, one can look for people one knows personally among the registered persons (who themselves also then have to confirm knowing the other person), one can invite new people to participate, have the various personal constellations and degrees of connection between people represented graphically, and discuss various topics in an online forum or send e-Mails internally, etc. The most interesting aspect is the applications programming (which allows for the representations of personal networks) and the possibility of graphically representing different degrees of networking.

5 Cf. Barabási, Albert-László: *Linked. The New Science of Networks*. Cambridge/Mass.: Perseus 2002.

»Network« is essentially a metaphor originating in physics and the technological sciences, which has been adopted and made into a central concept by the social and economic sciences. The concept has been in use in sociology since the late 1950's – primarily so in North America –, and political metaphors have known a similar use of the terminology since the late 1920's. The social sciences seem to be much closer to the parameters of the natural sciences³ with their use of the terminology of »network« and »networking« than the humanities and cultural sciences – the initiators' background disciplines – are. This could among other reasons be due to the fact that in sociology, investigative samples and their analysis play a large role – this is so especially in quantitative social research, which is methodologically already much more closely related to the natural sciences.⁴ Such samples on the one hand imply the collection of a large amount of data and on the other hand the use of forms of visualisation as part of the analysis of the data that illustrate laws and regularities. The crux of this way of working lies obviously both in the premise and in the hypothesis: For example, a collection of primarily non-historical samples (network methods are mostly used in anthropology, ethnology and also in those social sciences that concern themselves with contemporary phenomena and especially globalisation processes) demands a directed strategy during the process of formulating questions, interests and aims that stands at the beginning of every collection and analysis of data. The discourse analysis of Michel Foucault or the mapping of Deleuze/Guattari and many others may offer excellent examples for working with provoked coincidences – meaning the networking of differing objects contrary to habitual principles of causality and continuity and thus reaching conclusions, as was e.g., applied by Sylke Kirschnik in her contribution –, but with the greatest probability, the dangers inherent in such methods, to reach either no or very far-fetched conclusions, are far too high for the academic world and publication market to be consequentially applied. Hence one has to assume that the importance granted to, for example, questions of nationality (Claudia Aguilar) or gender (Alexandra Millner) for the emergence and stability of networks, are in line with the researchers' expectations and strategies, which, taken together, lead more or less directly to the expected results. The regularities, the trees, graphs, crystalline structures that emerge from the visualisation of the connections of a net, and the order that one may suspect behind them or even calculate in *formulae*, may similarly seduce into reaching certain conclusions. Although the definition of regularities is not necessarily traditional or timely in the current discourse of the social and cultural sciences and humanities, this does not have to mean that it would be wrong or without parallel in the activities of actual networks. The natural sciences are less reticent with the localisation and definition of laws, even if they do approach this work with a necessary wink of the eye – aware of constant revisions of revisions (János Kertész).

According to current research on the complex of networks⁵, the emergence of networks does not occur randomized, but rather following exactly definable power laws. This means that there are mostly free-scale networks.⁶ One decisive conclusion implies that networks cannot be either democratic or anarchic, which contradicts precisely the traditional theories of

6 The key to understanding »natural networks« was found by Barabási, when he tried to define the typical number of connections, which a random node possesses – meaning the so-called »scale« of the network.

The result was: there is no such scale. There is a mathematical law, according to which there are few nodes with a very many connections – »centres« – and a growing number of nodes with ever fewer connections. This is the scale-free-ness of »natural networks«.

7 Cf. Bolter, J.D.: *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*. Hillsdale/NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Ass. 1991; Bruner, J.: *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard UP 1986; Bush, V.: *As We May Think*. In: Nyce, J.M. / Kahn, P. (Eds.): *From Memex to Hypertext: Vannevar Bush and the Mind's Machine*. San Diego: Academic Pr. 1991; Snyder, Ilana: *Hypertext. The Electronic Labyrinth*. New York: New York UP 1997 gives an overview.

8 Excerpt from the panel description by Karin Harrasser, Florian Oberhuber, Else Rieger, Holger Schulze, Anton Tantner and Veronika Wöhrer.

network media that are specifically related to post-structuralism and which would declare the hopes of a radical democracy of reading, telling, writing, e.g., in the Internet utopian.⁷ Moreover, networks in their most different aspects (structure, participation, perception, etc.) represent a specific cultural technique of modernity. Networks, with their hubs and links, far away from any hint of functioning centralisation, can be related at the very latest via this point to the debates on media associations, and again – probably to the surprise of many – it will fall to the social and cultural scientists and the academics of the humanities to discuss those aspects and to differentiate those levels of interests that can only very limitedly be formulated by the natural scientists (barring a very few exceptions): power, capital, elites.

While the humanities and the cultural sciences – excepting some more advanced approaches – time and again apply the simple equation of *network = contact + exchange*, many social scientists are working towards an examination of network-specific qualities of nodes that take into account synchronic and diachronic aspects, so that one can recognise a dynamic mesh as opposed to a mere circuit. This observation ought in no way imply a primacy of the natural and social sciences. However, it seems beyond debate that these research methods have developed a far more stringent (even if often also naïve) use of the terminology in question and its application. Nevertheless, it is questionable whether such an approach could be adopted by the humanities and the cultural sciences, or even whether such a demand should at all be placed upon them. As indicated above, these disciplines already hold in their discourses certain specific potentials and qualities (as is also the case with the other two – and everything speaks for the continuation of these differences, but at the same time one also has to be able to demand some development).

Another point where natural and social sciences on the one hand can meet the humanities and cultural sciences on the other, seems to occur with the question on the functionality of communication abilities of networks, which are necessarily given: Spoken, as well as written, language, polyvalences, decoding, etc. certainly offer leverage for necessary additions to the given methods of the quantification of samples. It is often shown that networks tend towards dynamisation and hierarchisation and that these processes probably follow specific laws. But which qualities do the communicative aspects hold, are there interdependent conditions of networking specifications and communicative qualities, can one exist without the other – at least as long as one remains within the approximate realm of human boundaries? The Panel *Thinking and Acting in Networks: On Mediology* (cf. esp. Holger Schulze) took as one of its primary aims the idea that networks do not limit themselves to the interpersonal or inter-human basis, but that they also involve the transfer of artefacts, situations and meanings:

The discipline of Mediology, inspired by Régis Debray, understands the relationship between organised material and materialised organisation as constitutive for a society's forms of cohabitation. The »network« as an ideal construct of a-hierarchical, democratic communication and as technical and social reality is a medium in exactly this double sense: It enables material and immaterial phenomena of transfer, which Debray described as »transmission«. The transfer of things, people and ideas through space (logistics, communication) and time (politics of remembering) creates the setting for collective and individual action.⁸

It appears at this point most sensible to proceed critically, meaning to take the transdisciplinary beginnings of the cultural sciences and contrast them, in a process to be understood as interdisciplinary to begin with, with the results reached by the social sciences – and let one shine through the other, so to speak. How else could one approach a solution to problems like these: To explain the emergence of networks, their divergent development of horizontal and vertical structures, i.e., their forms of organisation and self-organisation in their reflection of power structures? In each case, one again comes across the question how one ought to or could portray these connections – via graphs or trees, via descriptions or three-dimensional depiction – each time raising the challenge of how many degrees of networking one might at all be able to depict. Dependant as one is on these architectures – visual depiction will probably always stay at the forefront of these issues; the obvious multi-dimensionality of these constructs reminds one of »worlds« and architectures –, one must ask which dynamics are possible in networks and what these feed on or what boundaries they have (what role do parameters such as communicability, knowledge, identity, etc. play?) One also needs to address the

9 On this site you will find contributions by the conference participants, as well as continuing texts and contributions by participants who were unable to attend the conference itself.

laws themselves as well as the qualities of complex networks. Via the tool of visualisation in the form of an animated portrayal we can recognise that more factors than only our assumed laws can influence this construct of flow and flux. Especially an investigation into human networks must address the question of principles of exclusion and inclusion and of the role of the network's users as simultaneously its »actors«. Given the case that there are residues of freedom from power, the potential differences between empathic-democratic and purely (economically) functioning, hierarchical networks remain to be investigated, as well as the way such residues are distributed towards centralisation or peripherisation within a single network. The question whether there are given »locations« where new »links« are particularly frequently and easily located and where the connections (which lead further on) are placed also demands that attention be paid to the character and the direction or distribution of these links.

The conference contributions⁹ that are collected on this site cover a broad range of questions addressing these topics and more, which are not mentioned here. They also reflect a similarly broad range of academic approaches to the concept of »network«. The claim that the perception of networking qualities might be a phenomenon of modernity or post-modernity will also be addressed: About 50 % of the contributions were historical case studies, ranging from the network of Habsburg print politics (Johannes Frimmel) and translator networks of the 16th century (András Balogh) to patronage networks of the early modern era (Gabriele Jancke), from the network of romanticists (Magdolna Orosz), the romantic national youth movements in Serbia (Tajana Marković) to the Austro-Hungarian academic networks and their development from the 19th to the 21st century (Kristóf Nyíri) and gender-specific networks of Austrian writers in the 20th century (Alexandra Millner). The questions these authors asked themselves on the topic differed widely: While Kristóf Nyíri provided an overview of randomized phenomena between and within forcibly united peoples and geographical neighbours and portrayed the at times highly intertwined paths of information flow between Austria and Hungary/Austria-Hungary, which one might describe as a »disturbed, but at least existing communication«, Tatjana Marković and Alexandra Millner addressed far more concrete and personalised questions: Who – which persons – were members of which groups and could hence create connections between these; who organised where and when which concert or reading or similar event, who instigated or visited an event – all these questions are just as important to the growth and distribution of a network as is the kind of information and actor-intentions that were or should have been transferred. At this stage, network theory becomes a detailed communication theory, within which the single actors are understood as carriers as well as units of information on the premise that the aim is not only the transfer or attainment of information, but also the fact that literally anything can be information – another aspect of the »world as text«. The perspectives of the users and the creators of networks are hence of the highest importance.

The other half of the contributions dealt with various – technological, aesthetic, sociological, political, media-theoretical, philosophical, etc. – questions and cases of contemporary networks. Placed at the beginning of the conference, Marc Ries' talk on the *Ontology of the Virtual* provided a marker for the »aesthetic« and »philosophical« questions addressed throughout the conference. It followed a specific concept of the perception and space of the simultaneisation-machine Internet on the one hand, and on the other repeatedly underlined the special potential of the power-free residues, the ideal of a »togetherness« and the special opportunities granted by the virtual space and its transmission not only to the users but also to the creators of networks.

In a recent Hungarian fairy tale book, »Uncle Emil«, who is obviously of most phantastical physicality, has to go to live in the Internet in order to secure the flow of Email-communication. This issue also arose – albeit on a somewhat different level of seriousness – in several cultural-historical or literary-theoretical contributions to the conference. The personalisation of the modelling of networks placed the problem of centripetal or centrifugal movements into a new light: The phenomena of cultural transfer and of group construction were investigated with an eye to the relation of multiplexity and solidarity, where the more general, and contradictory, conclusions reached stated on the one hand that the growing complexity of networks lead to the loosening of the connections between single nodal points (Alexandra Millner) and on the other hand that strongly centred networks can lose their network-character over time (Donald Daviau).

The problem of simultaneity has to be considered particularly when looking into the literary equivalents of cultural nets: Personal fluctuation can be complemented by the multiplied definition of single textual nodes, making even comprehension itself difficult due to the multi-dimensionality achieved by the growing expansion of textual references. The problem of incomprehensibility arises especially in those systems that assume their own universality based on the very flexibility and openness of their individual nodal points.

This kind of mobility, with its gaps and blind spots, was opened into two important directions. The problem of the hermeneutical, pre-structural content of cognition, which is located beyond any form of representation and altogether questions the possibility of representing mechanisms of recognition was raised by Dimitri Ginev. The claim that only the networks of processes of recognition are to be imagined as rhizomatic synchronisation lead among others to a discussion on the element of space and time in Deleuze's rhizomatic. One vital insight that arose here is that one needs to pay more attention to the dimension of time in the concept of the ›rhizome‹. Stephen Kovats programmatically addressed the aspect of timeliness and temporaneity with his *Unstable Media* and represented artistic-historical approaches to the specifics of media (and their duration) and their ways of networking. When dealing with literary case studies, there arises the need to consider the temporaneity of nodal points in one's reading (Markus Reisenleitner) and the de-historicisation or problematic chronological location of their connections (Katalin Teller). The concept of ›coincidence‹, also in the sense that to »make rhizome« is something down to beings and things, relates *per se* to the gift of observation, the gaze, which allows us to see the non-structure – insofar as the structure has anything to do with generative and hierarchically visualised or understood matter. These markers of appearance primarily in time and only in the second instance in space, the serialisation of dissimilarity and imprecision, of substitutes, which make out the rhizome according to Deleuze/Guattari, obviously make the concept more attractive and simpler for the application to artistic works, although the author duo speaks from the neighbouring discipline of medicine, psychology (in combination with philosophy), and the authors take their examples to a large extent from biology. The attention of the analytical gaze that is demanded here does not draw laws but rather phenomena, does not divide into individuals, but finds individuals as (undirected) processes. From this approach, one can hardly find a bridge to link to the natural, cultural and social sciences in their nearly exclusive forgetfulness of more or less binary power structures, identities and Othering-processes. Whether the method for this is rightfully claimed as a residue of above all the humanities and arts or not, this observation of one specific world as opposed to another would originate from a certain *Schadenfreude* and must be questioned as much as a world full of laws building hierarchies has to be.

Referring not to Deleuze, but to Borges, Bettina Twrsnick offered an apparently utopian cartography of the »library« as a space of the classifying, yet not hierarchising method of archiving that allows the most different fields of knowledge to be linked. The quasi-rhizomatic structure of the library was also reflected in her sociogram that illustratively addressed the issue at the example of the Phantastic Library in Wetzlar with its activities of safeguarding and transmitting knowledge, of entertainment, of cultural transfer a.o.

Stefan Krammer, Wolfgang Straub and Sabine Zelger dealt with the question of the agents in cultural nets and the problem of participation and observation, locality and universality at hand of the state theories during the 19th century. These holistic designs show very clearly the interpretational problems of the concept of an ›counterdraft‹ and an ›abstract system‹ as well as their very adherence within a dynamic of nets. The challenge of definition in the categorisation of the chronological and spatial roots of networks, and the problem of simultaneous participation in different networks is underlined by the issue of how one can assess a counter-concept where roots are explicitly denied or the basic concept is just immeasurable, implying as it would the complete net of society.

Another entire panel singled out similar problems with regard to academic-artistic networks. Agents in networks that have actively been created experience that this process can only be directed with great difficulty, if at all. This might have less to do with »society« than it does with a part-society, one interest-bound and problem-oriented scientific and artistic community, but again, as was the case with the concepts of the state, there arises the problem of dynamics and stasis. The confrontation with single and multi-layered individuals and their wishes, interests, needs, which are consciously bundled and are to be satisfied in one way via the largest possible consensus, stops the emergence of dynamics and arrests the network in a

10 Nearly all persons reporting from the perspective of creators of relatively complex new networks needing a relatively great geographical and/or social range, make similar observations, e.g., Michael Stanzer, Raimund Minichbauer, Brigitte Winkler-Komar, Johanna Laakso, Tzveta Sofronieva, Bettina Twrsnick, Emilia Ilieva, Anelia Kasabova-Dintcheva, Claudia Preschl and Veronika Zangl. On the other hand, such an issue of »teething problems« does not become that obvious in the analysis of comparable historical networks.

minimal state or even a *status nascendi*.¹⁰ In these cases, one ought to speak of »interest groups«, »working groups«, »communities«, etc. rather than of a network that would allow the uncontrolled and »spontaneous« flow of information as well as the tendency to expansion, change and »wandering«.

With her keynote speech on *Electronic Markets and Activist Networks: The Weight of Social Logistics in Digital Formations*, Saskia Sassen provided a theme and direction for the majority of the contributions broadly based on the social sciences with her contribution and the ensuing discussions addressing the function and effect of social logistics in the global capital market and in networks of global political activists. While she recognised the transformative effect of computer technologies and the possibilities that have arisen thereof for communication and networking, she acknowledged at the same time their limits and the fact that they can achieve very different effects in different social formations: In the case of financial markets, she found that international networking and participant growth have led to power distribution accompanied by increased central control, while she saw political activist networking independent of locality and region avoiding existing power structures and creating a transnational public space. Function and effect of technologies of power distribution are largely influenced by other mechanisms that emanate from the networks themselves. »Networking« does not necessarily signify distribution of power, but can quite to the contrary also lead to a concentration of power. Social logistics steer a network in its development at least as much as the technologies that enable it: the technological standpoint alone does not allow us to predict the social effects of the application of technologies.

One of the most important topics that continued through all the contributions is without doubt the question of power in networks. Networks were described as phenomena that can maintain or create power (Gabriela Jancke), but also as phenomena and strategies of anti-hegemonial aims. The latter were represented in networks such as peer-to-peer-systems (P2P) for music-downloads as one example of non-hierarchical organisation (Marc Ries, also Gábor Vályi and Vesna Mikić), and the former were reflected in statements that demonstrated networks as potentially horizontal structures that can support exclusion. Boundaries of exclusion may be closed in any direction – above, below or simply to the outside; e.g., the exclusion of women, Jews or workers from a bourgeois network of club members (such as in the contribution on Viennese music life by Cornelia Szabó-Knotik). In such cases, verticality outside of the network also plays a role.

The claim that power concentrations are also present in P2P-networks, for example by users who can provide particularly many pieces of music, demonstrated that the issue of power concentration cannot be reduced to a case of black and white with one dividing line, but rather that one has to take into consideration a great deal more details. One might reach the conclusion that while network structures carry within them non-hierarchical potential, this potential nevertheless cannot be realised without directed effort, nor can it be so to an ideal degree.

Even though the Internet takes up a prominent place in the concept of networks, every researcher who works with it has to ask him- or herself whether it is necessarily sensible to use the Internet as a metaphor for any social phenomenon – not least because the World Wide Web is in fact not really a space of uncontrolled flow of information. It can be misleading to discuss networks independently of their resources, since otherwise the observation of the structure turns into a mere end of itself, losing sight of the functionality of the Net in its economic and social context. Hannes Leidinger's plea against using the term »network« as a new label for an old concept that only hides the mere continuation of power relations and for a gaze that does place the central issues at the centre, can be cited as a synopsis of many of the contributions for discussion that insisted on the continuity of fluidity and dynamics of reality in their descriptions.

Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the Internet at this stage, nor can one deny its ability to productively alter the discourse. It is unquestionable that there occurs a great deal of idealisation, simplification and falsification in the transfer of terminology, »ontology« and system onto basically differing and non-mechanically structured net-systems, since most on the net-researchers are primarily familiar with this phenomenon as users and not as designers of electronic networks. Herbert Hrachovec is, like Thomas Burg, Viktor Bedő, Gábor Vályi and Báalazs

Bodo, one of the exceptions; his contribution dealt with Internet protocols and the specifications and rules of such data communication. Precise observation can show that these protocols induce different social processes and that the alphabet soup of different acronyms very much does represent different forms of communication: NNTP, SMTP, IRC, http and RSS are about Usenet, E-mail, chat, World Wide Web and news-feeds. »Net-culture« in these contexts, then, emerges at the interface between technical details and forms of communication, meaning also: group fantasy.

Thomas N. Burg differentiated between networks of the first order (radio transfer, networks), of the second order (fax machines and networks), and of the third order (Internet). In this context, too, there arose the question after control and the regulation of information. Burg pointed out the danger of fragmentation that goes hand in hand with deconstruction: E.g., William Gibson stopped posting his daily brief textual fragments because they stole his time and inspiration for writing a larger, continuous text. This makes discourse-analytical research into the question how a text constitutes its semantic structure, and whether a structure-defining textual direction may be present in short fragments, all the more appropriate.

The *Situation of Academics* in a time of neo-liberal deregulation as something fundamental to one's life emerged as a sustainable point of discussion. Networks, after all, were not only an object to be described at the conference, they were in a sense also its subject: It was about working on a network and thinking about the nature of existing networks, in this case primarily of academic networks. Anelia Kasabova-Dintcheva explicitly addressed the problems of current academic politics with their still-existing male clubs, tightly intertwined with tendencies of collectivisation, flexibilisation, interdisciplinarity while critical attitudes and competition are reduced and finally the increasing social insecurity of academics caught in multiply broken patchwork-careers, also and most of all in the post-socialist countries. Kasabova-Dintcheva provocatively asked whether not all too often the simple fight for material resources is at the forefront in academic networks, encouraging the creation of closed groups and a tribalisation of academia. Marc Ries dismissed the opposing pairs of sequential order with their categories of space and time for an order of arrangement next to each other – elements ought to relate to each other in egalitarian, P2P relations, rather than in hierarchically ordered models. Anelia Kasabova-Dintcheva agreed to this view in her future vision of the academic business. Finno-Ugristics is another discipline that sees itself confronted with dwindling resources and decreasing interest in its subjects. The Viennese Finno-Ugrists met this problem that is based on the substantial connection between information and interest and the shrinking accessibility to the relevant informations resulting from the stasis and the break-down of the academic network, by »going into the net«, by making accessible texts and other informations as democratically as possible in the World Wide Web. The splintered situation of single disciplines and academics and activists altogether obviously creates a heightened need for the establishment of networks of all kinds everywhere in the world, but especially in the difficult situations given in countries in transition, where civil society networks may work differently from or not at all like those in the so-called example countries (Raya Staykova).

Networks also function as a forum of cultural politics (Andrea Hurton), socio-politics and activism (Helga Köcher) and an instrument of academia and publication (Gerald Lamprecht and Roman Urbaner, Ulla Pape). Implicitly or explicitly, one encounters similar questions here – on the nature, the being of networks: Did they grow organically, do they build on fixed positions – or do their individual elements relate to each other in a dynamic structure, in a system aiming for balance? Is the hierarchisation that emerges from single, clearly more netted/involved nodal points, so-called hubs, based only in the method of representation, or do there really exist more and less important nodal points in a network? Can one in that case still speak of a network or ought one choose a different image? In this context, the issue of the functionality of a network becomes important: Does it function optimally under hierarchical or egalitarian conditions? How far can technical progress (such as a complex content management system used in so-called web logs) be used for the creation of ideally equal conditions (of communication)?

Many of the contributions discussed the impact networks have on their members as active or passive participants therein. Marc Ries first introduced the idea of the network as marketplace of human resources, where everyone arrives with something to give and something to take,

which was adopted and taken up repeatedly throughout the conference and applied to several levels of meaning. One of the »goods« that are given and taken within this form of organisation is the element of role-definition and self-identification that networks as structures of human life provide.

Networks provide, and are themselves, structures: structures, in which hubs – which may, but need not be individuals or groups – connect various nodes with each other, and these connections are defined above all by the flow and exchange of knowledges and information along them. In the social and human context, this organisation of nodes, hubs and connections can provide a specifically desired order and safety net. Individuals find a role in their position within a network – even if this role may be ever changing as the network itself fluctuates in the location of nodes and hubs and connection, re-connection and disconnection of links and flows. An individual's ego-net may in the first instance be based on the fulfilment of certain political or professional – and other – needs, but in the second instance, identification via participation in this group occurs, particularly so because the role one has in the network, or the specific place in the network where one finds oneself (nearer the periphery or nearer a hub) may significantly change one's life in terms of acquaintances, equipment or opportunity: Gertraud Steiner-Daviau spoke about the social net of Hollywood emigrants in the 1930's, while Karen Virag and Juliet Kershaw used their letter exchange on the discovery of the history of Kershaw's father and grandparents between 1938 and 1945, which witnessed the destruction of Jewish identity and a subsequent substitution by a non-Jewish identity which was in part forced, in part self-supported to present networks of family connections and beyond. László Letenyi, Sarolta Láng and Eliza Eranus' study on Internet and computer equipment spread in rural Hungary showed that not only participation, but also one's specific place in a network, have noticeable effects. On a more abstract level, Karin Harrasser dealt with the narrative order in the construction of an ego-net in biographies and letters, while Florian Oberhuber addressed the consciously directed network activities and self-representation of academics at conferences as temporary hubs.

The network as a structure embedded into society also functions as a role-giving structure, where belonging to a specific network may strengthen one's own self-image as well as one's appearance to the »Others«. This became particularly apparent in contributions dealing with border areas and spaces (Angeles Espinaco-Virseda, Andriy Zayarnyuk, Christoph Augustynowicz). Borders, here, do not necessarily have to be geographical borders, but can be drawn through any society at hand of political, economic, social and other aspects. Andriy Zayarnyuk noted the formations of closed networks in different social strata in Galicia of 1886 in a political-revolutionary atmosphere. Entrance into networks was already heavily dependent on projected identity (markers such as place of origin, language – including accent –, profession, and others) as a basis for trust. Particularly powerful – and rare – hubs in this instance are those individuals who are capable of fitting into two identification patterns and can thus provide a cross-border link, like the intellectual might be able to do in the village he came from, where he has remained despite his change of social class »one of us«. Popular and social networks as identity structures require a relatively high degree of closedness to »outsiders« in order to provide this function of safe-guarding identities, where the »Other« is clearly defined. One more parlous method of such identification strategies in negative and positive ways was dealt with by Maciej Czerwiński, who talked about the linguistic manufacturing of a Western-oriented Croatian identity. Tzveta Sofronieva also investigated strategies of inclusion and of exclusion on a linguistic and semantic basis, and discussed »Forbidden Words«: Words that are of immense importance for the identity of a group or nation. She traced the collisions these words experience in translation – in the sense of cultural transfer and mediation – underlining the limits of comprehensibility and translatability.

Several contributions dealing with migratory experiences took up the aspect of how such essentially closed networks are opened by their members, with deep-running effects for the entire community. Ukrainian emigrants (Natalya Shostak) simultaneously leave holes in the old networks – village communities – and create new connections and new networks in their new surroundings abroad, providing a link back to the old network. Via these newly-created links, new migration routes are established, and customs and ideas – as well as money, signifying a change of social setting on a different level – begin to flow along new routes.

The degree to which such identification networks are defined by perceived roots and a definition of the other in the given context was touched on in the context of back-migration

at hand of the Greek-American example (Anastasia Christou). While identification takes place via the Greek community for children born in America, though into this net of immigrants, the experience of a return to the »homeland« leads to the realisation of serious differences between the realities of these two apparently or allegedly identical communities. Again, an important aspect is the degree of Othering involved: The immigrant community has to define itself more explicitly, strictly and clearly as a way of identifying itself as the Other, or as placing a boundary to the Other community in which they live, while the Greek community in Greece is far less restricted by these needs and is thus freer to reinterpret, lose or open up specific characteristics. The definition of an Other and the boundaries drawn are heavily dependant on the larger level network or community in which this smaller net is placed, being ripped out of this context leads to a serious confrontation with issues of identity. Like in the case of geographical migration, this transferral of weighting is an important contributor to the essential fluidity in time, space and arrangement of networks. Here, the constant movement within networks allows for new influences to arise, and also leads to a constant challenge of the existing or original pattern and values. Emigration, immigration and back-migration challenge not only the identity that was created within the original network, but also the new identities that have arisen both in the original network and in the new hubs that have emerged in the migratory destinations. Particularly the clash between original hub and new hubs, for example in the case of back-migration, can be deeply challenging to migrants, who find themselves confronted with a discrepancy between the perceived and the real significance of their own information flows and connections.

As individuals we are context-bound, and we find those contexts in order to represent ourselves and to help ourselves in our stated goals. The striking similarities between Jancke's representation of patronage networks in the 16th century with contemporary experiences in the »academic village« where who you know can often be who you are, highlighted the degree of continuity in these formations – here as well as at many other places, the concept of networks as a novel sign of our times was seriously challenged. One aspect of networks that is novel, however, are the new possibilities of investigating and representing such networks in their complexity and self-regulation. One of the aims of this conference was to make a contribution to precisely this discourse.

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