



Call for papers:

Uses of the Past by Enterprises in Central-Eastern Europe

ONLINE Workshop on Business History in Central and Eastern Europe

October 23, 2020, online
November 20, 2020, online

Format

Due to expected travel challenges in fall 2020, the second workshop on Business History in Central and Eastern Europe will be organized in the form of a series of two online meetings in October and in November. We hope to have a follow-up face-to-face workshop in the spring of 2021.

This online workshop aims to foster a discussion aiming at creating ideas for research projects in the field of business history in CEE and joined research applications engaging scholars across Europe. Therefore, besides discussing the accepted papers, we plan to have an additional informal session to present our current and planned research projects.

To apply, please, send an abstract of 500 words presenting the subject, the conceptual framework, the analytical approach, and the controversial issue(s) to facilitate the discussion, along with a two-page CV to echist@ucu.edu.ua by September 10, 2020. Papers for presentation will be selected following a peer-review procedure.

The format of the workshops is designed to facilitate a comprehensive discussion of selected topics. Participants will be invited to send an extended abstract (up to 2,000 words) *or* a full paper. We will distribute these texts among the workshop participants prior to the workshop.

Please feel free to contact the organizers via v.kulikov@ucu.edu.ua if you have any further questions.

Organizers: Volodymyr Kulikov (UCU), Alfred Reckendrees (EBHA, Copenhagen Business School)

For more information see: <http://usesofthepast.net/>

The concept

The Ukrainian Catholic University, in cooperation with the European Business History Association, invites scholars including Ph.D. students of any relevant discipline to submit paper proposals in a broad range of topics related to the uses of the past by firms in Central-Eastern Europe (CEE). In the context of this workshop, we wish to approach the past and interpretations of the past as resources, which are used or can be used by business organizations for their purposes in the present and the future. We understand history as performative interpretation, a tool that helps actors make sense of the past and present and build towards the future. We focus on uses of the past in CEE; however, case studies on other regions are also welcome in case they deepen our understanding of “uses of the past” by CEE enterprises.

The above understanding of history appears nowadays in more and more, specific areas of the discipline, replacing a traditional public understanding of history as being synonymous with the past. Business organizations also tend to see it now as a symbolic resource available for a wide variety of creative uses such as branding, strategy, and identity creation. However, CEE presents a special case in this respect, since most of the enterprises in the region experienced discontinuities due to nation state building after World War I, then the socialist era and the corresponding processes of nationalization. When the Communist regimes collapsed, new capitalist companies were established, many of them on the premises of former socialist enterprises. Multinationals, particularly from Western Europe and the United States, established new businesses or took over ownership of existing establishments. Both groups of companies faced the problem of how to handle socialist heritage, which was economically and environmentally unsustainable, and often considered as an uncomfortable past.

Most of the new capitalists (and particularly the firms from the west) decided to distance themselves from a past that was perceived predominantly problematic and start their “history” from scratch. Therefore, the past was either to be forgotten or wrapped up in nostalgia. Later, many entrepreneurs learned how to commodify the past and tried to use it to legitimize their organization. However, the past is rarely seen in the region as a source for creating knowledge, based on which business decisions are made. Entrepreneurs and business schools find the practices of multinational companies, such as Apple, Tesla, or McDonald’s, more relevant as models than the enterprises from their own region. However, this approach ignores the regionally specific business environment and path dependencies. The shortage of knowledge on CEE business history can result in a lack of understanding of the context, thus, in bad managerial and political decisions. Moreover, it deprives the international community of business historians of learning in greater detail about the varieties of capitalism.

Our workshop aims to explore the potential of the past as a resource in a business environment characterized by historical discontinuities. The call is open to all topics that fit the general scope of the workshop. However, we suggest some themes that are of particular interest. Papers may address one or more of the following questions:

1. How do firms use history to develop their strategy?
2. How do firms preserve their core values in a changing environment?
3. What are the various ways of using the past as branding and marketing? How do firms “sell” the past? What is the “dark side” of the commodification of the past?
4. How do business organizations rationalize, use, and abuse their tangible and intangible heritage? How do businesses handle their uncomfortable past? How can they turn it from burden to resource?
5. How do companies use corporate museums as a tool for history-making and place-making?
6. How can the history of enterprises be turned into a resource for business learning? What are the promises and limitations of historical approaches to strategic entrepreneurship research and theory?
7. What can we learn from business history in CEE about business resilience in times of crisis and disaster?

Both, synthetic and case studies are welcomed.