

CALL FOR PAPERS

Educational Sciences, Education in Europe between Authoritarianism, Totalitarianism, and Freedom in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century

Organizers: Technical University of Liberec, Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences University of Pannonia, Humboldt University of Berlin, University of Porto, Complutense University of Madrid, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, ELTE University Budapest

10–11 June 2027, Technical University of Liberec

From a political and social perspective, the second half of the twentieth century brought radical changes to Europe's cultural and geopolitical foundations after World War II. These changes also included significant shifts in the understanding and conception of education, as well as in the direction of educational science and educational discourse.

The two parts of Europe, divided by the Iron Curtain, competed in the political and economic spheres for the victory of world orders – the communist, state-planned system versus the liberal, civic, and social market system. But post-World War II Europe was politically, economically, and culturally more complex than might appear from the perspective of its split into unfree communist countries controlled by the Soviet Union and the “free West.” Authoritarian and totalitarian systems did not determine political and social life only in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe controlled by the USSR, but to varying degrees and in various forms until the 1970s also in Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, and, to some extent, Greece), and even Finland's path could not be pursued entirely freely without regard to the policies of the USSR.

After World War II and through the 1970s, educational policy and discourse in Europe were shaped by the premise of raising a “new” man with strong communist values (collectivist, atheistic, internationalist, and socialist education) or a citizen of an undemocratic, conservative nationalist state; or, on the other hand, by efforts to provide a democratic education for citizens for a social market economy and a liberal democratic political model. Processes of modernization and social change were reflected to varying degrees and in various forms in expert educational discourse and in the broader educational policy of countries, both in a democratic, integrating Europe and in undemocratic, authoritarian-corporatist, and totalitarian states of Europe. Following the political and social changes in southern Europe, the dynamics and structure of the political, cultural, and thus educational life of European society—divided into “East” and “West”—began to “simplify” from the 1970s onward. It must be emphasized, however, that both “blocs” (Soviet vs. democratic) were internally diverse and responded in specific ways to socio-political challenges and tasks, including those related to education.

The conference aims to reconstruct, analyze, discuss, and compare examples of educational discourses, theories, and practices (in both formal and informal education) in a divided Europe during the second half of the 20th century. We ask which educational themes, goals, and concepts were developed in different parts of Europe, and which themes were shared, even though they were contextualized quite differently politically and socially. We ask whether, in a politically and culturally divided space, similar or just different educational questions and goals nevertheless circulated. From a transnational perspective, we ask how these themes and discourses circulated, how they traveled and why, from where and how they were transferred,

“imported and exported,” “borrowed and lent,” and how these pedagogical discourses were assimilated and internalized in individual states or “national” educational discussions:

1. What challenges and tasks did educational theory, practice, and research in Europe set for themselves shortly after the end of World War II—taking into account the individual “national” educational traditions of each country, the civilizational turning point of World War II, and the “challenges” of a politically, economically, and socially divided world after 1945?
2. What was the development and direction of educational science, educational theory, and practice in the countries of Western and Northern Europe, taking into account the processes of democratization, modernization, and civil-liberal emancipation as a “counterpoint” to education in the unfree, undemocratic countries of the “Communist East” during the period 1945–1968? Which educational theories and concepts became after 1968 dominant in the free educational discourse of Western Europe, taking into account the processes of European political and economic integration, globalization, cultural migration, and, not least, the distancing from the “Eastern model”?
3. What educational themes were addressed, and how were educational sciences and educational discourse structured in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, given the processes of Sovietization and the “transformation” of educational sciences in the spirit of Marxism, as well as their political instrumentalization in accordance with the power objectives of totalitarian communist states? How did educational science develop, become structured, and change after 1945 through 1953, through 1956 (the 20th Congress of the CPSU), through 1968, and subsequently in the 1970s and 1980s in the communist countries of Europe? What educational concepts, why, and how circulated in pedagogical discourse in the “Eastern Bloc”?
4. What educational discourses and principles were developed in educational discussions in the undemocratic authoritarian systems of Southern Europe in the 1950s and 1960s? What models and trends were followed in the development of educational sciences in the democratizing and rapidly developing economies of Southern Europe (Spain, Portugal, Greece) in the 1970s and 1980s?
5. How did efforts toward international and supranational understanding (UNESCO, UN) influence the structure and dynamics of educational discourse in the politically divided world of East and West?

Please submit your proposals by 30 October 2026 (abstract of 250-500 words, **Length of presentations:** 25 minutes) to tomas.kasper@tul.cz
The conference is free of charge. Presentations may be given in English or German.

Conference dates and venue: 10 and 11 June 2027; Technical University of Liberec

The conference organizing committee reserves the right to select presentations. We will contact you no later than 30 November 2026 with the result of the assessment of your abstract and additional information about the conference.

The conference is held as part of the project project of the Czech Science Foundation GACR no. 25-16883S: For a New Model of Educational Sciences - Totalitarianism, Ideology and Political Instrumentalization in Educational Sciences in the Communist Period.