Across Borders, Beyond Classrooms: Self-organised Students and the Informal Making of Historical Knowledge

Programme Event

International Committee of Historical Sciences | 26–30 August 2026 | Leipzig, Germany

DATE	LOCATION
28 Aug 2026, 11:00 - 13:30	House 1 T1006
THEME	CONFERENCE
B - Teaching History and Public History	International Committee of Historical Sciences

Overview

This panel explores the role of student organisations in developing history education and historical knowledge. From the nineteenth century to today, students of history and the humanities have organised themselves on the local, national and even international level. They did so to represent their interests within their academic institutions, to campaign for social change, but also to create alternative, informal spaces for intellectual engagements outside the official curriculum. This panel aims to focus on this lesser-studied aspect of the role of informal education and cultural and scientific exchange in history student clubs and student organisations.

International exchange of students has increasingly become institutionalised in the past decades, through programmes like Erasmus or university-led partnerships. Student-led initiatives and informal student exchanges, often independent from formal frameworks, have complemented or challenged academic hierarchies. Student-led organisations like ISHA, for example, aimed to expand their understanding of history as a discipline and the role of historians through a combination of informal learning and international peer-to-peer exchanges. This panel examines how self-organised student exchanges, study trips, seminars and cultural tours facilitated direct encounters between student communities across different cities and countries, historical traditions and ideological influence spheres.

By foregrounding the educational and cultural aspects of these student collectives operating within an international framework, the panel also reflects on what it means to study history across borders today. What can we learn from the self-organised models of student mobility and informal learning from the past, and how will contemporary challenges such as geopolitics, lack of institutional support, unequal access to travel and education, globalisation and polarisation, impact the viability of such initiatives? The panel welcomes historical case studies of student organisations and history clubs engaged in informal education and international exchange, as well as future-oriented contributions that critically address the possibilities and limitations of global student exchanges today.

Participants

Convenor

- Charlotte Rottiers (ETH Zürich/KU Leuven)
- Sven Mörsdorf (EUI)

Panelists

- Miroslav Vašík (Charles University Prague)
- Klára ?iháková (University of Edinburgh)
- Elina Ziehm (Central European University)
- David Kraus (Philipps-Universität Marburg)
- Julia Boechat Machado (Central European University)

Papers

Nation, Education, and Beer: Student Associations as a Part of Student Culture in the Czech Lands from the 19th century to the Present

Miroslav Vašík (Charles University Prague)

Die Gedanken sind frei? African Students in the 1960s GDR between Self-Organization and State Control

Elina Ziehm (Central European University)

The Foundation of the University of Naples: Centralising and Formalising Education

David Kraus (Philipps-Universität Marburg)

From Global Village to Gated World: Future challenges and possibilities for the International Students of History Association

Julia Boechat Machado (Central European University)

Between Diplomacy and Agency: Exchange Agreements, Mobility, and the British-Czechoslovak Youth and Students' Encounters in the 1970s

Klára ?iháková (University of Edinburgh)

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