DGEKW Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft

AFTER / TOWARDS / BEYOND EUROPE?

Cultural Studies Perspectives on a dynamic formation

46th Congress of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft (DGEKW) | German Society for Cultural Analysis / European Ethnology

Vienna/Austria | September 14-16, 2027

Call for Papers

Europe features in everyday life in a variety of ways: as a political arena and an institutional framework, a cultural construct, a trans- and post-national category of belonging, a space of memory, a colonial legacy, an imagination of modernity and modernism, a utopian place of longing, and a horizon of experience – in short, as a highly contradictory, complex formation. For Empirical Cultural Studies, Europe, in its multiple dimensions, is both an object of research and a research context. The 46th congress of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft* will examine this formation that is central to the discipline.

"After/Towards/Beyond Europe?" focuses on the construction, position and role of Europe in a variety of everyday contexts as well as in research settings, and is to be understood in temporal, regulatory, methodological and spatial terms: *First*, the title "After/Towards/Beyond Europe" refers to the contingency, the processual nature and the historical dimensions of Europe, to the temporal "where from" and "where to": Europe after 1989, after the EU's eastward enlargement, after financial, refugee, climate and pandemic crises, after Brexit, after 2022, etc. – in other words, transformations that continually reframe our understanding of the European. This also raises the question of the post-European: How are the formation of Europe and European projects changing in the face of multiple crises and post- and decolonial critique? *Second*, "after/towards/beyond" addresses regulative-normative action in accordance with European legal systems and policies, as well as their translation into procedures, infrastructures and practices. *Third*, "after/towards/beyond Europe" also opens up a methodological interpretation: tracing Europe means seeking its traces in material cultures, affects, institutions and knowledge systems – an ethnographic call to follow actors, standardizations, networks and cultural formations, and to analyze them in terms of their historical development. And fourth, the title addresses movements "towards Europe" and thus research fields that are significant to the discipline: migration (e.g. Hess/Binder/Moser 2009), mobility and border regimes as well as everyday orientations that construct Europe as a destination or a frame of reference. The question "After/Towards/Beyond Europe?" thus opens up a broad space for challenging teleologies, taken-for-granted assumptions and Eurocentrism and for analyzing the ongoing production of Europe.

At the turn of the 20th to the 21st century, Europe was thriving and sounded like the future: Europe, as an idea, a space and a practice, became the focus of the cultural and social sciences. In Empirical Cultural Studies, the much discussed "turn to Europe" or "European turn" (Johler 2013; Poehls/Vonderau 2006) culminated in research on Europeanisation, which revealed how political programs, concepts of identity,

transnationalization, regionalization and border regimes were taking on an increasingly "European" form in everyday life worlds, whilst the European was also constructed "from below" (e.g. Johler 2002; Welz 2015; Zabusky 1995). At the same time, postcolonial and subaltern perspectives (among others, Chakrabarty 2000) problematized Eurocentrism and called for a "provincialization of Europe" – a debate that has expanded and continues to transform knowledge production and research practice in cultural studies (e.g. Warner 2021; Knecht/Römhild 2019; Conrad/Randeria/Römhild 2013).

However, examinations of Europe and European culture have been central to the discipline's identity for much longer than the turn of the millennium. They have been shaping the disciplinary history of Empirical Cultural Studies / European Ethnology (formerly *Volkskunde*) and Ethnology (formerly *Völkerkunde*), established their distinctions and demarcations and continue to manifest themselves to this day within universities, in regional centers and in museums (Schwell 2012; Walgenbach 2010; Kaschuba 2008; Kaiser 2012; Edenheiser 2021). The European manifests itself in terminology and constitutes a constant point of friction that calls for critical self-positioning. European research networks such as SIEF or EASA shape the production of knowledge within the discipline and, together with EU university reforms and funding programs, contribute to the formation of a – albeit often fleeting – "European Anthropology" (Brković 2020). Seen in this light, Europe is not only an object and context of research for Empirical Cultural Studies but also a challenging heritage.

In recent years, Europe has once again been changing. In the wake of a multiple crisis (Brand 2009) and global shifts in the balance of power, an analysis of the European seems necessary, one that draws on ethnographic, cultural, sociological and power-analytical examinations of the everyday and the specific: Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine as well as the wars in the Middle East, military rearmament, renationalization, divisive policies, the effects of anthropogenic climate change, digital public spheres and new infrastructures (of mobility, data, the legal system and utilities) are influencing the way in which Europe is imagined, negotiated and lived – in academic, political and media discourses as well as in everyday practices. Right-wing authoritarian policies often present themselves simultaneously as pro-European (in the sense of the fiction of the "Christian Occident") and also hostile to the EU. Positions of migration deterrence, which have gained acceptance well into the political center, are leading to an expansion of the European border regime, which is increasingly seeking to reestablish internal borders alongside external ones. At the same time, a contradictory, ambiguous Europe is constantly being recreated in everyday practical formations: in career and educational biographies, in collaborative networks and within the framework of funding programs, in museums and research institutions, in pop and popular culture, at borders and centers, as a community of shared feelings and a space for information, as a construct of remembrance culture, and as a promising utopia. In doing so, a diverse range of actors draw upon the foundations of identity in which human rights, democracy, (also ecological) care and freedom are highlighted and discussed as European achievements – each with their own opportunistic interpretations and political objectives. In this way, they either reinforce or challenge conceptions of self and other and mobilize these values for conservative as well as progressive, exclusionary as well as global solidary policies.

The 46th DGEKW congress brings together research on the diversity and powerful dynamics of Europe across a wide range of social spheres, cultural expressions and spatio-temporal configurations. From the perspective of a (historically grounded) analysis of everyday culture as well as ethnographic research into social conflicts and normalities, we ask:

- How and where is Europe constructed, effective or ineffective in historical and contemporary contexts – in bottom-up practices (Europe "from below"), in experiences and emotions, in institutions, infrastructures and policies (e.g. *Schengen*, the GDPR, *Green Deal*), in work, education, care, urban and regional development as well as in material cultures, museums, digital environments and popular culture?
- Which negotiations, conflicts, inequalities and translations shape the European and its meanings – from border regimes, mobilities and logistics through to environments, NatureCultures, technological dispositions, cultures of memory, protest, colonial history and restitution, up to public spheres in the media, multilingualism, senses of belonging and atmospheres? And how, in turn, are these shaped by the European – in the sense of its many layers of meaning?
- What does it mean to do science in and about Europe – epistemologically, methodologically and institutionally – and how do the history of the discipline, debates on Eurocentrism and

decolonization, funding regimes, collaborations and transnational perspectives alter the production and circulation of knowledge about and in Europe? The aim is to make Europe and the European visible as a multi-layered, dynamic, contested and, at the same time, productive formation – right where it is lived, constructed, negotiated, habitualized, appropriated, defended, rejected or even fought: wherever the analysis of everyday culture can discern nuances between ideal and realization, center and periphery, continuity and rupture, vision and practice. We look forward to contributions that make these dimensions productive and examine them through empirical cultural analysis, multimodal approaches and theoretical-conceptual frameworks.

Literature

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Organizational Information

We invite all those in the disciplinary community who are interested to contribute their expertise to the congress theme, and we expressly also encourage the DGEKW's scientific working committees, cultural studies researchers in museums, non-university institutions and freelance settings, as well as PhD candidates, to submit their proposals.

The deadline for submissions is **December 31, 2026**, 00:00.

Various formats for participation are planned for the 2027 DGEKW congress:

Plenary contributions: Individual presentations of approximately 30 minutes held in the plenary session, followed by a discussion. The congress organizers will select presenters from the submissions. In some cases, experts will be directly approached for keynote speeches.

Sections: Two-hour parallel sessions, usually comprising three thematically related individual presentations (each lasting approximately 20 minutes, followed by a discussion). The congress organizer will determine the grouping of the presentations and appoint a chair.

Panels: Two-hour parallel sessions that center on an overarching theme. Panels comprising a maximum (!) of five thematically related individual presentations (including an introduction, comments, etc.) are proposed by a panel chair (!). The joint abstract includes the titles and short abstracts of all individual panel contributions as well as the names and short CVs of the panel participants.

Innovative and experimental formats: In addition to these traditional presentation formats, we also intend to provide a space for individual formats that facilitate, for example, new or unusual teaching methods or interactive work.

The Vienna congress also aims to continue the tradition established at previous congresses of *practical research and subject policy workshops*. Topic here may include issues such as research ethics, methodology, digitalization practices, etc.

The *student panel* is a fixed part of the program. It is intended to offer various opportunities to discuss ongoing student research and projects. A separate call for papers has been published by the student representatives on the DGEKW's main committee (https://dgekw.de/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Stud.-CfP_Kongress_Wien_2027.pdf).

Guideline for submissions

Please observe the following guidelines when submitting your abstracts:

- In addition to a brief summary of the content, abstracts must include details of the research question and empirical basis or provide information on the context in which the contribution originates, including, where appropriate, details of any publications already available, the current status of the author's own research or preliminary findings.

- It goes without saying that the research presentations must be new and previously unpublished. A willingness to have the contribution published for the first time in the congress proceedings following the event is an absolute prerequisite (manuscript submission in spring 2028)!

- Contributions may be presented in German or English.

- Please provide current contact details; for panel proposals, this applies to both the person responsible for the submission as well as all participants! Please inform us of any subsequent changes.

- Abstracts for individual presentations must not exceed 2,500 characters, and those for panels must not exceed 5,000 characters (including spaces). Submissions exceeding these limits cannot be considered for selection!

- Abstracts and personal details may only be submitted via the designated online form: **https://dgekw.de/veranstaltungen/kongresse/dgekw-kongress-2027-beitragseinreichung/**. Only fully completed forms will be accepted.

- The deadline for submissions is **December 31, 2026**, 00:00.

To facilitate the selection process and ensure transparency, all applicants are strongly urged to follow these guidelines. The Executive Board and the Main Committee, together with the local organizers, will select the contributions and finalize the program at their joint meeting in February 2027. Notifications of acceptance or rejection will be sent out in March 2027.