Cold War, Warm Friendships (Cluj-Napoca, 17-18 Oct 24)

Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Oct 17–18, 2024
Deadline: Apr 15, 2024

Karolina Łabowicz-Dymanus, Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Sciences

Cold War, Warm Friendships: Politics and Culture in The Cold War Editions of the World Festival of Youth and Students.

During the Cold War, both blocs championed art, popular culture, sporting competitions, and major exhibitions and festivals for propaganda purposes shedding light on the strategic deployment of cultural diplomacy in a time of crisis. György Péteri's conception of the “Nylon Curtain” provides a more accurate image than the “Iron Curtain,” conveying a scenario in which both the United States and communist countries prioritized visibility on the other side. This curtain-like transparency enabled the USA to promote its lifestyle and values, thus exposing socialist societies to the capitalist paradigm. Conversely, isolation was not advantageous for the “Eastern Bloc” countries, as it signified international failure and consequent marginalization.

Pia Koivunen (2022) provides a comprehensive analysis of the World Youth Festivals during the Cold War, particularly focusing on their role in Soviet cultural diplomacy. Koivunen's study reveals that the Soviet Union successfully utilized the World Festival of Youth and Students for its cultural diplomacy efforts from the late Stalinism period through the early Khrushchev era. She discusses the evolution of these youth gatherings into a Soviet cultural product, beginning with the first festival in Prague in 1947. Importantly, Koivunen re-evaluates the role and agency of young people in these events. She argues that the World Youth Festivals were not merely orchestrated rallies by Kremlin bureaucrats. Instead, they became significant spaces for transnational encounters among young people. These festivals provided opportunities for youth to find ways to overcome the various restrictions and boundaries imposed by the Cold War world. Through detailed analysis of grass-roots interactions, she suggests that individuals had more opportunities for transnational contacts than previously acknowledged by scholarship.

The forthcoming conference poses a question about a nuanced view of the World Youth Festivals, highlighting their complexity and significance as tools of Soviet cultural diplomacy and as platforms for youth interaction and exchange during the Cold War. We want to examine the relationships not so much between the two blocs, but we are particularly interested in cultural diplomacy, cultural exchanges and individual relationships and the complexity of these large-scale events and their political, cultural, artistic and social implications within the State-Socialist World and on the background of Cold War propaganda.

Possible paper topics include, but are not limited to:

- Politics and Parades: Youth, Festivals, and Communist Propaganda.
- Peeping through the Nylon Curtain: Propaganda Visibility
- “Body and Nation”: Communist Festivals, Youth, Education, Peace and Sports
- Merging Rituals. Religious versus Soviet-Style Ceremonies
- International Solidarity and Metaphors of the Anti-Colonial Rule within Propaganda
- Economic and Civil Costs of the Youth Festivals
- Cultural Exchanges as Facilitators of Future Economic and Political Agreements
- The Festivals: Global audience and Exoticization
- Activism and Feminism in Youth Festival Propaganda

To submit a proposal for a 20-minute contribution, please send an abstract of no more than 300 words and a short bio of up to 100 words in a single file to the organizers Andrada Fătu-Tutoveanu (andrada.pintilescu@ubbcluj.ro) and Karolina Łabowicz-Dymanus (karolinalabowiczdymanus@gmail.com) by 15 April 2024. Selected applicants will be notified by 10 May 2024. The working language of the workshop will be English. For any inquiries, feel free to contact organisers.

Reference:

CFP: Cold War, Warm Friendships (Cluj-Napoca, 17-18 Oct 24). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 27, 2024 (accessed Nov 25, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/41086>.