

Open Session title: *Grey Winter Fur Cap: Socialist Design and Consumer Technologies during the Cold War*

Session organizer: Elena Kochetkova, National Research University Higher School of Economics, St. Petersburg, Russia

E-mail: lena-kochetkova2008@yandex.ru, ekochetkova@hse.ru

Today many people from former socialist space are nostalgic about socialist consumer products, ranging from foodstuffs like bread to non-edible consumer goods like glass milk bottles and short coat with a quilted lining. This recent trend contradicts to a still widespread vision of socialist mass production as a result of deficit and lack of choice. While having the ideological and economic factors as important for thinking about socialist consumption, we are still missing from deeper knowledge about technology required for planning and manufacturing consumer goods in socialist economies.

Internationally, the post-WWII period saw the development of food, cloth, packaging, and other consumer industries as a result of the post-war technological success in the chemistry, pulp and paper making, and food canning industries. It showed the significance of consumer goods in Cold War competition and the pursuit of modernity. Comparing the socialist and particularly Soviet effort, some admit that Soviet manufactured goods were characterized by inner quality, but not design and beauty. Others say that capitalism and socialism were rather *both* about diversity (Fehérváry 2009; Reid 2013 et al). In particular, for the USSR, this was especially true in the 1950s-60s and during perestroika, when the Soviet leadership opened the door to new patterns of consumption from the West. The Soviets had never stopped transferring Western technologies and ideas seeing them as the means of building “technological base of communism”. After the war, particularly after making the regime more liberal the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev spoke openly about the need for competing with the West and learning about the best achievements of Western technology at the same time.

This session will discuss the scientific-technological dimension of socialist production of consumer products through the lens of the comparative history of material objects and their designs in the period of the Cold War. It is particularly concerned with technologies of planning, imagining, manufacturing goods and transferring of technologies. This session invites hybrid approaches from the history of technology to illustrate the interdependence of technological, societal, and cultural developments.

- What were the specifics of socialist consumption via the technological lens?

-How did socialist consumer products look like? How did engineers and scientists see their design and how did they work on it? What was specific in socialist design and taste? Was socialist consumer technology different, and how?

-What was the role of technology and knowledge transfers cross the Iron Curtain for designing and manufacturing socialist consumer products?

The session will allow examining the specifics of socialist consumption and production and the roles that technologies played there. It will, thus, bring us out of traditional visions of socialist consumption as an exclusively ideological and social category but will show the scene behind: how it was designed, planned, produced, and transferred. The papers are expected to refer to a global context to show the connections of blocs, countries, institutions, and individuals cross the Iron Curtain.

Please send your proposals (one-page abstract and short CV of 300 words max) to lena-kochetkova2008@yandex.ru by 25 March 2019. Looking forward to making up an exciting session!