

The project “Documents and Bureaucracy in the formerly German lands: State Making, Regulating and Controlling in Poland and Czechoslovakia (1940s-1970s)” will allow to investigate what were the roles of bureaucracy and documentation in the formation of social and political life during the first two postwar decades. The comparative approach will be enabled by the selective case studies (Pomerania and Northern Bohemia), so the regions where the expulsion of the German-speaking communities took place. By using it, I intend to look for similarities, differences and mutual inspirations of the analysed phenomena. The material base for the project will be furnished by the archival study. I will take into account documentation produced by the state, local governments, social and party institutions of different levels.

A few words about the most important concepts I will use in my research. By “document” I mean a preserved physical object that I call a physical sign, since it carries information and represents a given phenomenon or event. Then, by “documentation” I understand a material outcome of bureaucratic practice: a set of documents with related meta-information, serving the purpose of managing, and finally by “bureaucracy” I mean an institutional network, clerks who work within them and policy-making practices created by the bureaucratic institutions.

My hypothesis sounds as follows: in post-1945 Poland and Czechoslovakia, following the expulsion of German-speaking communities and resettlement of the lands in question by the new settlers, a certain form of bureaucracy was implemented. Its goal was threefold: to create respectively Polish or Czechoslovak sovereignty, to regulate an organization of the migration processes, and to control the ways of living. At the same time, all three processes were an important element of introducing of the new political and social order. I would like to investigate how did bureaucracy create the new states in the territories in question, how did it control and constructed subjects and objects, what was the role of documents as artefacts in the everyday life, and eventually, how did the new bureaucracies process, erase or reconstruct the German past of the areas in question.

Among my methods of research will be the ethnographies of encounter: methodology drawing attention to the fact that there were always unequal relations between researched groups (such as the division between officials and their clients). It would allow me to investigate the dynamic shape of such a relationship and not only a state of art in some definite point in time. Regarding the archival turn, present in contemporary Humanities, I will include in my analysis the so-called stages of working with archives. During the creation of archives, we can distinguish such steps as: (1) making of sources when we create the facts; (2) the making of archives when we assembly the facts; (3) the making of narratives when we retrieve the facts; and finally, (4) the making of history in the final instance when we give a retrospective to the significance.

The proposed study would allow me to look at documents, and not only through them. The lands subjected to expulsion became exceptional laboratories for introducing communism – spaces where the completely new social and political situation was created. Further anthropological study of them would, therefore, bring them along one another to observe the wider cultural framework they imposed on the Polish and Czechoslovak state making processes. Such an approach would allow to draw conclusion on the Central European culture of resettlement, not only in comparison, but in connection. The proposed project will enable to prepare a language where the ethnographic experience undermines the fossilized binary oppositions, and instead presents the formation of society as a dynamic and changeable process.

The outcomes of the project will show what mechanisms to manage the space were applied in a situation, where the transfer of knowledge was disrupted. The effects of the project will impact historical research about the respective areas of study, and on the history of state socialism in Central Europe, but they will be applicable also in the case of other countries subjected to similar political dependency.