



## **Regional Seminar for Excellence in Teaching Social Mobility and Modernization in Eastern Europe in the 20th Century**

Between April 30 and May 6, 2014, a group of early career scholars from Eastern Europe gathered in Orheiul Vechi, Republic of Moldova, under the guidance of local and international faculty, to discuss challenges and opportunities that are to be faced in the region, as it entered the era of post-modernity and globalization. The meeting took place within the major program scheme of Regional Seminar for Excellence in Teaching (ReSET), initiated and generously supported by the Open Society Foundation. This program has been part of the long-term initiative of the Foundation's Higher Education Support Program in the area of development of individual faculty capacities for undergraduate teaching in the social sciences and humanities throughout the region of Eastern and South Eastern Europe, the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union, and Mongolia.<sup>1</sup> Starting with 2003, over 80 ReSET projects have been organized in Russia, Kazakhstan, Slovenia, Kyrgyzstan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Romania, Mongolia, Georgia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Belarus, Lithuania, and Moldova.<sup>2</sup> During the last decade these projects created a framework for long-term regional and international collaboration, linking more than 150 universities around the world. ReSET scheme became a successful platform where participants had the opportunity:

- 1) to critique the theoretical and methodological grounding of the subject through the review of key concepts, texts, and approaches and to challenge the existing orthodoxies in the academic subjects;
- 2) to bring about change in undergraduate classroom through creative revision of teaching in the light of progressive scholarship;
- 3) to create collaborative teams of junior faculty participants from the region and international resource faculty, who engage in intensive learning and debate on the subject matter.

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/grants/regional-seminar-excellence-teaching>, accessed on July 25, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/reset-projects-2003-14.pdf>, accessed on July 25, 2014.



In 2011-2014 within the ReSET scheme in Moldova took place six consecutive seminars, organized within a three-year cycle by the World History Department of Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University, under the leadership of Octavian Munteanu and Diana Dumitru. The ReSET project, entitled *Social Mobility and Modernization in Eastern Europe in the 20th Century*, brought together over twenty participants from the region, plus international faculty from Europe and North America, and local faculty: Diana Dumitru, Andrei Cușco, and Petru Negură from Ion Creangă State Pedagogical University and Igor Cașu from State University of Moldova. The session from Orheiul Vechi finalized ReSET's decade-long activities, as the program has come to an end by 2014. The participants of ReSET were predominantly junior faculty holders of international degrees in humanities and social sciences, who have been teaching and conducting research in Moldova, Armenia, Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus.

Each consecutive session has been devoted to multiple aspects of the 20th Century Eastern European history through the lens of modernity. The first session (held in August 2011) brought together participants and local and international faculty, including Donald Kalb (Central European University), Sorin Antohi (UK), and Alexei Miller (Central European University). This session, was entitled *Theories of Modernization and Ideologies of Social Change in Eastern Europe* and was devoted to theoretical approaches and attempts to interpret phenomenon of 'modernity' as a framework within which one may understand the dynamics of social mobility in the region through-



out the 20th Century. At the second session (held in January 2012), the invited faculty Mathijs Pelkmans (London School of Economics) and Lilian Negură (University of Ottawa) joined local faculty and participants to bring into discussion topics on *Social Engineering and Affirmative Action: Policies and Practices in 20th Century Eastern Europe*. The emphasis was on such theoretical questions as “have social engineering and population politics been integral parts of 20th Century modernization paradigm?”, “how did religion intersect with politics in post social-engineering era?”, as well as on empirical cases from early Soviet Central Asia and interwar Eastern Europe.

The team met again in August 2012 to discuss *Downward Social Mobility and Strategies of Resistance and Accommodation in Eastern Europe under Nazi and Communist Rule*, this time being joined by Professors Lynne Viola (University of Toronto), Michael David-Fox (Georgetown University), Victor Taki (University of Alberta), and Constantin Iordachi (Central European University). The fourth session (held in January 2013) has been devoted to the discussion of *Social Status and Everyday Life in Eastern Europe before and After WWII*. The invited international faculty Elena Osokina (South Carolina University) and Vintilă Mihăilescu (University of Bucharest) together with local faculty and participants took part in round tables, discussions, and seminars on post-WWII everyday life experiences and strategies of survival, applied by different social and gender groups and manifested through variety of sources, such as diaries, documentaries and literature. The fifth session held in July-August 2013, was entitled *Exploring Late Socialism and Post-Socialist*

*Society: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching and Research* and attended by the core team together with international faculty Kate Brown (University of Baltimore), Monika Heintz (University of Paris) and Carter Johnson (Moscow Higher School of Economics). A variety of topics have been brought into discussion, with an emphasis on Eastern Europe since 1989: political, economical, cultural, and moral consequences of the Communist system's collapse. Final session, held in April-May 2014 in Orheiul Vechi, was entitled *Eastern Europe Between Post-Modernity and Modernization*, and focused on methodological approaches to study of contemporaneity, as well as global migration in the era of post-colonialism, politics of history, behavior of ethnic minorities and cultures of memory, distinctive for Eastern Europe today. Professors Zvi Gitelman (University of Michigan) and Donald Kalb (Central European University) led in-depth discussions on these topics and inspired the participants to think about creative ways of linking their research and teaching. Throughout all 6 sessions ReSET participants have been introduced to recent secondary literature on the subject, exposed to innovative teaching techniques, and engaged in open debates, stimulating critical thinking, as well as self-reflection. Since ReSET has been aiming at enabling close linkage between scholarship and teaching, participants demonstrated acquired knowledge and skills via developing collective and personal research projects (draft of papers to be published) and syllabi for undergraduate and graduate level courses, introducing teaching techniques targeted to intense interaction with students' audience. The projects include collective article's draft on political aspects of imagery and making of canon in literature and printed media for children in the Moldovan SSR; article draft on new Central-Eastern European cinema about WWII; article draft on social history of rock culture in the late USSR; on Soviet nationality politics towards Armenian people; project on the impact of higher education on dynamics of social stratification in the Republic of Moldova. Additionally, projects of course curricula on non-verbal communication strategies in pedagogical training and on mental mapping of Black Sea region are of no small importance. Participants got feedback from core and invited faculty, thus building and increasing transnational intellectual and professional network.

by **Anastasia Felcher**