

The Structures of Conceptual Transformation in the European Space

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By means of innovation, the book *Conceptual History in the European Space* (2017) attempts to illustrate the present condition of the practice of conceptual history in a post-Koselleckian era.¹ The three editors, Willibald Steinmetz, Michael Freeden, and Javier Fernández-Sebastián are well-renowned scholars in the field of conceptual history. The volume is part of a series on European conceptual history by Berghahn Books. The series reflects on theoretical perspectives rather than a specific analysis by placing its focus on important historic European concepts such as democracy, civilisation, liberalism, and parliamentarism.

The lengthy introduction by W. Steinmetz and M. Freeden revolves around five subjects: the speed and time of conceptual change, comparisons and the conceptualising of concepts, centres and peripheries, multilingualism and translation, and spatial dimensions. The introduction not only knits together the forthcoming essays, it forms

¹ Steinmetz W., Freeden M., and Fernández-Sebastián J., *Conceptual History in the European Space*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2017.

a crucial foundation for exploring new methodological, thematic, and theoretical contributions in the field of conceptual history. Developing innovative approaches and typologies helps to produce less vague conceptualisations of prime European concepts. Both authors clearly communicate that taking conceptual history beyond the confines of Europe before grasping a better understanding of the asymmetry and complexity of the conceptualisation of European concepts will harm its evolution and ‘precision’. The book encompasses ten chapters that attempt to discuss and portray a post-Koselleckian conceptual history by addressing various methodological and theoretical elements. In the first chapter, Helge Jordheim warns for a European conceptual history that embodies multiple meanings and layers not depending on the progress, decline, and acceleration of the different histories of Europe. Without accepting that the European history of languages and cultures move into different directions and speeds, area-specific conceptual histories will be inaccurate. History moves into disparate directions at contrasting times, different narratives provide conceptual understandings that do not necessarily match.

Part of the essays in this volume are re-fined theories that derive from previous examinations. One of the most captivating ideas put forward is the ‘performativity’ of concepts by W. Steinmetz and M. Freeden. Concepts perform differently, but the question that remains is why do some concepts out-perform others? W. Steinmetz suggests devoting more time to examining the political language surrounding the concept by creating a larger timespan. Expanding the timespan can contrive vital information that allow for a more precise recognition of *German* key concepts within their respective historical environment. However, crossing unexplored time in history can take away the intended research focus and lead to indefinite results. The following chapter, written by Kari Palonen, continues to build upon creating a more precise historical environment for the conceptualisation of key European concepts. His essay aims to better understand the relationship between rhetorical perspectives and concepts by examining works from Koselleck and Skinner. By placing his focus

on parliamentary debates, he determines that the nature of political concepts is inconspicuous. Utilising rhetorical functions such as agenda-setting concepts and procedure concepts is fruitful for a better dissection of key concepts into their various political aspects. In other words, the ability to influence the significance of concepts by observing and hypothesising political debate.

The beauty of conceptual history is the endless cycle of re-interpretation resting on the cognitive development of human knowledge. Conceptual histories not only try to re-capture the historical semantics of terms, instead they embed concepts into history. Over time, concepts have gone through an endless change of interpretation depending on ideology and language. M. Freedon adds two supplementary dimensions, temporality and spatiality, and is aware of the danger of *deliberate semantic control* concerning political concepts and procedures. The interpretation of a concept depends on its use and relationship between historical semantics.

The 'Nordic periphery' essay by Henrik Stenius concentrates on the relationship between concepts and their respective territorial validity. It is very dangerous to perceive concepts as universally grounded when there is a lack of historical context. Adding a layer of geographical genuineness improves the understanding of fundamental concepts. Jani Marjanen continues by trying to portray the space in which concepts function. His essay on transnational conceptual history tries to move away from the typical methodology of one specific language or national space. The conceptualisation of space is an overarching theme in this volume. Diana Mishkova and Balázs Trencsényi speak about a specific regional concept: meso-regions and the difference between sub-national and supranational regions. They argue that regional terms emerged as a historical practice to generate 'natural' geographic boundaries. Victor Neumann's chapter examines the conceptual history of modernity in Central and Eastern Europe. According to him the concept of *place* defines the understanding of modernity.

The last chapter of the volume, written by J. Fernández-Sebastián smoothly ties together all previous chapters by providing an agenda

for future scholars that want to research European conceptual history. He emphasises that looking beyond the current research structures and including the everyday social and political dimensions by form of cross-examination of processes of interaction is necessary for a greater plurality of debates. This plurality gives way to new perspectives and narratives concerning the conceptualisation of European history.

Altogether, the volume remains a crucial guide and statement concerning the methodological and theoretical development of conceptual history. Most of the book's contributors have developed distinct and innovative structures that look beyond the contemporary conceptualisation tools and instruments. Koselleck's work does not only serve as footing but inspires to scrutinise and re-invent his theories and methods. It has to be noted that without any knowledge of previous conceptual history research, grasping the full meaning of the many essays in this volume would be complicated. Furthermore, due to the innovative nature of these essays, there is a lack of scrutiny on the proposed methodologies. Nonetheless, these added elements will form the backbone for future research that will allow conceptual histories to include a vibrant new perspective on semantic interpretation in the European space. Despite that conceptual history has for long been part of a selected and compact social demography, this volume gives a remarkable insight in how research could evolve. The re-invention of key structures and understandings will proof to be very useful for future transformations in the field of conceptual history.