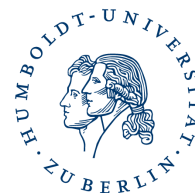


Press release

15. June 2022



Science plans war crime

Humboldt-Universität presents publication on its dealings with the National Socialist "Generalplan Ost"



(Graphic: HU Berlin)

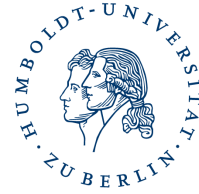
[TEXT: BOOK LAUNCH AND PANEL DISCUSSION
Science plans war crime]

The history of the Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität, and later the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (HU), is closely interwoven with times of new beginnings, freedom and innovation. Yet, the history of the Humboldt-Universität is also marked by obedience to state power and involvement in injustice, racism, anti-Semitism and war crimes.

This also includes the scientific justification and derivation of the so-called "Generalplan Ost" (Master plan for the East). Between 1940 and 1943, Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler had a total of five variants for the violent transformation of Eastern Europe drawn up by scientists at what was then the University of Berlin. Together, they formed the complex of plans that made up the "General Plan East". The key player in these plans was the National Socialist, agricultural scientist and University of Berlin professor Konrad Meyer.

Close relationship between science and National Socialism

Victims' associations, politicians, activists and citizens have long been expecting the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin to take a close look at its dealings with this war crime. On behalf of the

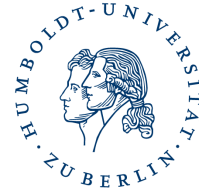


President's Executive Council and the Historical Commission of the HU, the historian Dr Sven Oliver Müller – who conducts research on the topics of violence in the First and Second World Wars – has now put out a publication on the background to this entitled *Wissenschaft plant Kriegsverbrechen. Der Umgang der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin mit dem nationalsozialistischen Generalplan Ost* (Science plans war crime. How the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin deals with the National Socialists' Generalplan Ost).

The book is about the development of the "Generalplan Ost" during the Second World War and the handling of this war crime after 1945. The mass-murderous plan aimed at the settlement of Eastern Europe following its conquest and occupation by Nazi Germany. Sven Oliver Müller's work sheds light on two key aspects: on the one hand, it highlights the close relationship between science and National Socialism during the Second World War; on the other hand, the focus is on the interests after the Second World War of those actors within science (in particular, from the HU) in not wanting to face up to their responsibility for this war crime.

Key results:

1. The perpetrators of this mass murder during the Second World War were not only National Socialist politicians or officers. They also included many renowned scientists at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin. The mass murder was possible because scientists worked out the plans for it and personally participated in it.
2. Representatives of the Humboldt-Universität, as the university later became, as well as the scientists involved after 1945 successfully argued that one had to separate one's own research from the genocide by the Wehrmacht and its accomplices in Eastern Europe. Science is unhampered by politics, they said. A large proportion of the researchers continued to work in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), while others continued their careers in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). From the early 1950s onwards, there were hardly any trials against war criminals in either the GDR or the FRG. The HU is barely any different from other universities in Germany in this respect.
3. The university as an institution was, ultimately, no longer protecting itself through its silence. In 2002, 60 years after the "Generalplan Ost" was handed over to Heinrich Himmler, two public statements were issued. The first from the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture (Prof. Dr Jens-Uwe Nagel) and the second from the president of the university itself (Prof. Dr Jürgen Mlynek). Both emphasised the complicity and



responsibility of their own institution and its members for their participation in the German Reich's war of extermination. At the end of 2001, initiatives relating to this by HU students were already in existence.

4. The aim of the publication is not to bring the debate to a close, but, rather, to continue it intensively. The author, Sven Oliver Müller, suggests that the HU uses the opportunity – supported by research, but also by the state and victims' associations – to understand more about this war crime in order to benefit the present. To this day, for instance, there is still no biography of the main perpetrator, Prof. Dr Konrad Meyer, and, likewise, there is a lack of comparative research that relates the HU's handling of Nazi crimes to the way other German universities come to terms with their pasts.

During her term of office, former President of the Humboldt-Universität, Prof. Dr.-Ing. Dr Sabine Kunst, set the course for an in-depth investigation into the HU's role in the "Generalplan Ost" – and, indeed, beyond the turning point of 1945. The background to this was the fact that demands from the public and political spheres did not stop.

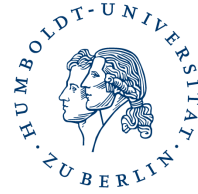
Some things have now become known as a result of the publication. At the same time, however, the gaps in knowledge are enormous and the way in which the researchers remained silent after 1945 can only be discerned to some extent.

"This publication makes an important contribution to the Humboldt-Universität's handling of the topic after 1945," says Prof. Dr Peter Frensch, Acting President of the HU. "Our conception of ourselves as the HU only really comes alive and becomes sincere if it also includes an honest examination of the dark periods. However, we do not see the reappraisal of the Humboldt Universität's handling of the "Generalplan Ost" as a mere look back. It's also about looking ahead. It is about how we want to live up to our responsibilities in the future and how we can credibly position ourselves against anti-Semitism, racism, war and crimes against humanity."

Focusing on the victims in Central and Eastern Europe

It is an important task of today's society to precisely analyse the perpetrators in this history of violence, how the victims in Central and Eastern Europe are seen, and, lastly, the networks between science and politics. In view of the increase in radical political movements, racism and anti-Semitism in Germany, the foundations and effects of the "Generalplan Ost" ought to be recognised more clearly than before.

Scientific visions, racist demographic policy, economic



exploitation and mass murder all intertwine in the "Generalplan Ost". The aim was to create a German agricultural society in Poland, in large parts of the former Soviet Union and in the Baltic States. German settlers were to open up a new "habitat" by colonising the territories of the Slavic population and forcing the people there to work, deporting them or murdering them.

Further information:

[Read the publication as a PDF via the HU's edoc-Server](#)

On 15th June 2022, a panel discussion at the HU with historians who have researched the "Generalplan Ost" highlighted some aspects of how it came into being and the impact it had. Prof. Dr Isabel Heinemann gave a talk, and Prof. Dr Michael Wildt led the discussion between Prof. Dr Gabriele Metzler, Dr. Jörg Morré and PD Dr Sven Oliver Müller. They discussed why and in what way outstanding experts in Berlin used their knowledge, skills and the university's infrastructure to plan a genocide in Eastern Europe.

It is necessary to look at how this war crime was dealt with at the Humboldt-Universität in Berlin after the Second World War. At the same time, the issue is also about academic activities in the German Democratic Republic and in the Federal Republic of Germany. The new book by PD Dr Sven Müller on this topic was also presented.

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