



## THE EUROPEAN SPA AS A TRANSNATIONAL PUBLIC SPACE AND SOCIAL METAPHOR

NEWSLETTER NO 1, APRIL 2020

### WHO WE ARE

**The European Spa Project is a group of academics and non-academic institutions from all over Europe who are working on the theme of the spa from a historical and contemporary perspective.**

We are particularly interested in two aspects of this probably inexhaustible subject area: Firstly, the European dimension of the spa. We believe that the continent's thermal and climatic spas and seaside resorts are a pan-European phenomenon. Spa guests travel from the Baltic coast to the Crimea and from the French to the Croatian Riviera. Models and institutions for medical therapy (drinking, bathing or rest cure), but also for entertainment and relaxation (piers, casinos, cultural and sports facilities) are copied and adapted across countries. Secondly, we want to examine the health resort as a possible transnational public

sphere where people of different nations, cultures, ethnicities and sometimes social classes come into contact – or conflict, and as a result reflect and discuss issues of social and political relevance from a comparative European perspective.

**You want to know more about the team and our Associated Partners? Take a look at our website:**

<https://www.theeuropeanspa.eu>

Here you will also find current news and information about upcoming events. Furthermore, we collect online sources of spa literature, links to interesting related projects and provide lectures, presentations and reports. Piece by piece we are also building up our virtual exhibition with objects from the collections of our partner spa museums. Exhibits from Harrogate and Sopot can already be admired.

### RESORT RESEARCH IN TIMES OF CORONA

**The corona virus pandemic affects all areas of life, across all borders. We wish all our partners and readers to remain healthy and that the future of their work is not endangered. The health resorts as institutions – and thus also our partner museums – are affected by the crisis in many ways.**

Patients and guests are not able to travel. Exhibitions had to be closed. People have to keep their distance. This touches upon both aspects of principal significance to our research agenda: transnationality and public space. We will certainly talk about this at our next virtual and real meetings. Our own research is also practically affected. Research trips cannot be realized, planned events are subject to change. Please stay informed about current changes on our homepage. But we also want to make use of the possibilities conveyed by digital media in order to keep up with our topic: in an informative and entertaining sense. At the end of the newsletter you will find links to spa texts and films, which can be read, watched or listened to on the internet. Have you ever seen Charlie Chaplin taking the waters? Of course, it's a lot of fun. Laughter is a proven remedy even in times of crisis.





## WHAT HAS HAPPENED SO FAR?

Our research project “The European Spa as a Transnational Public Space and Social Metaphor” started at the end of May 2019, funded by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area). We have about two more years to go until the project ends in May 2022, preparing two books on the subject and developing digital exhibition modules together with our partners.

### KICK-OFF WITH SULPHUR



In June 2019 the team from the Universities of Amsterdam, Berlin, London and Lund met in Harrogate (UK) at the **Royal Pump Room Museum** with the Associated Partners, representatives of spa museums and associations from Germany, Croatia, Poland and the UK. Under the invigorating influence of Europe's strongest sulphur wells, we compared initial needs, experiences and expectations from the perspective of the researchers and the practitioners. How health resorts position themselves today between cultural heritage and wellness, tourism and therapy, is one of the questions that proved vital for all partners involved.

### APPROACHING PARADIGM SHIFTS IN THE HEART OF SPA TRADITION



In November we held our first fully-fledged academic conference, hosted by our Associated Partners in Baden-Baden. The city is part of the transnational World Heritage application **The Great Spas of Europe**. The decision is expected in June 2020 (should Corona not also play a trick here). We keep our fingers crossed! We discussed paradigm shifts in spa culture, the de-medicalization of the spa-discourse in the early 20th century, as well as recent trends such as “decay photography”, which strangely resonate with initiatives for the preservation of cultural heritage. Amsterdam based writer of Croatian origin, **Dubravka Ugrešić**, spoke to us via Skype about her novel “Baba Yaga Laid an Egg”, in which she depicts the European health resort from a female perspective. Highly recommended!

### COME-TOGETHER IN SOLIDARNOSC



In September we met in Gdansk for the official launch of the HERA call “Public Spaces: Culture and Integration in Europe”. We had the opportunity to get to know the other funded projects. Interested? Take a look at the website: [www.heranet.info](http://www.heranet.info) The meeting took place in the impressive Solidarnosc Center. It became clear during the discussions: research in the humanities in Europe is confronted with political agendas in the field of identity politics. Our object of study – the health resort as a transnational public sphere – moves precisely at this interface between national agendas and cosmopolitanism. On the occasion we also visited our Associated Partner, the City Museum of Sopot.

Please admire our logo: Our freshly designed logo is the result of a collaboration between students of architecture and communication design. The young people actually managed to pack our long academic title into a compact, expressive visual form that stands for: the natural elements, the social public, the place of the spa on the cultural map. Concept Judy Köhler, design Frederik Luserke

## WHAT'S HAPPENING

In February 2020, Anna Cabanel joined the Spa project as a postdoctoral researcher. After graduating with a Master's degree in Modern History at the Ecole Normale of Cachan, she obtained a Ph.D. in Cultural History from the University of Groningen and KU Leuven in December 2019. Her research focuses on the authoritarian and fascist regimes in 20th century Southern European countries, exploring how they made use of spa culture in defining and negotiating their ideals of society. Welcome, Anna!



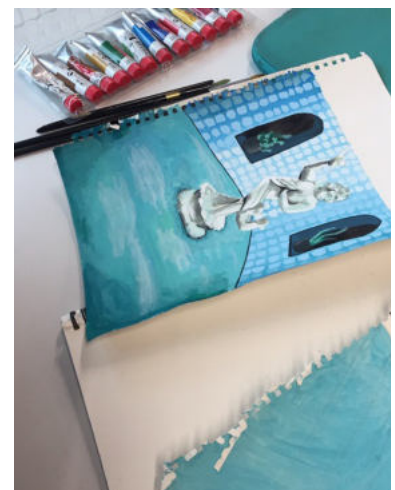
## MAPPING THE SPA

An important part of our work is the production of digital maps in order to visualise the historical developments of the spa resorts in Europe. With the help of these maps, we want to identify patterns that a purely text-based approach cannot reveal. They will also become part of our digital exhibition modules. In this way, museum visitors will for instance be able to follow the itineraries of individual spa guests in exemplary fashion, or see how an institution like the spa casino spread all over Europe. This requires a suitable database and visualization software, which we found with Nodegoat <https://nodegoat.net>. The system was conceptualised and developed by Amsterdam based LAB1100. In two workshops we learned how to develop our own data model and started working on it. First spa itineraries are in progress: for example of Austrian author Stefan Zweig, who in his diary entries also describes the changes of the spa resorts in times of war and exile.



## DRAWING THE SPA

In cooperation with the HTK academy Hamburg [www.htk.academy](http://www.htk.academy) we are working on an artistic project dealing with the health resort yesterday and today. Future communication designers worked out their very own vision of the health resort in the course "Experimental Illustration" under the direction of Hamburg based artist Gaby Bergmann. They did not shy away from theory and courageously explored the concept of the "heterotopos" as developed by French philosopher Michel Foucault. Theory put into picture! Painting sessions were partly held plein air in historical baths and health resorts.







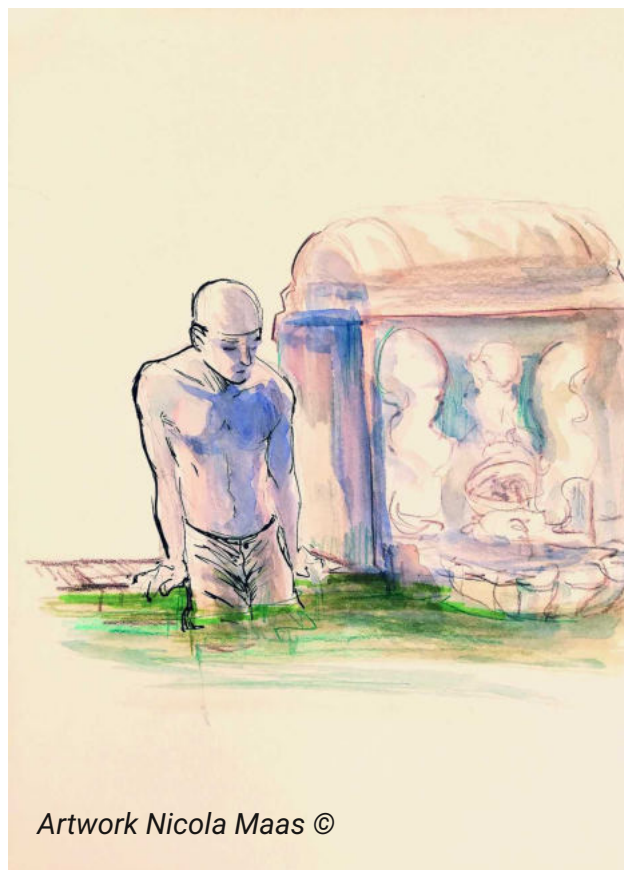
## WHAT'S NEXT?

Our new colleague Anna Cabanel is preparing the launch of an Instagram account, where we want to share resort photos from our field research. Check back mid-April #theeuropeanspa.



23 JUNE 2020

**Opening of the exhibition "Taking the waters. An allotted span of me time"** in the Hamburg Central Library <https://www.buecherhallen.de>. The participants of the mentioned art project exhibit their works. During the vernissage texts by Thomas Mann will be read out. This critical and creative engagement with the spa resort is intended to inspire young and old people to revisit and look again at this venerable, genuinely European place as a 'different place' of encounter and reflection about self and society. A cooperation with HTK Academy and the University of Theatre and Music Hamburg.



15-18 SEPTEMBER 2020

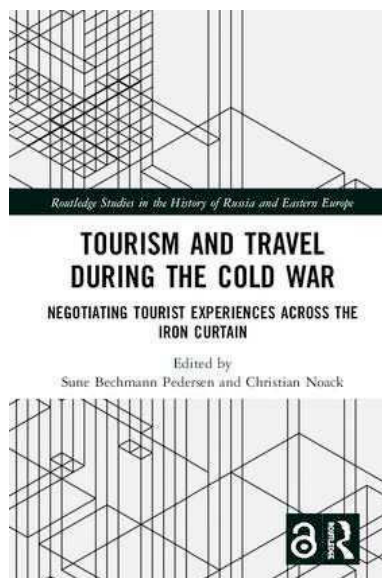
**Our second project conference** will take place at our partners in the seaside resort Sopot near Gdansk. The overriding theme is the health resort as a public place. Which theories on public space are relevant for our partners? And what are the local experiences with the use of public space by guests and local residents? Part of the public programme will be a spa concert and a film screening. Thanks for hosting us in challenging times, City Museum Sopot! [muzeumsopotu.pl](https://muzeumsopotu.pl)

**We hope that Corona will not upset our plans.  
Please check out the website!**



## WHAT TO READ, LISTEN TO, WATCH IN TIMES OF QUARANTINE

Two academic anthologies on the theme of the spa were published in 2019, co-edited by members of the team:



*Tourism and Travel during the Cold War* (eds. Sune Bechmann Pedersen, Christian Noack) contains chapters on seaside resorts in communist Bulgaria, Romania and Albania.



*Urban Microcosms. 1789-1940* (eds. Margit Dirscherl; Astrid Köhler) includes contributions on spa towns and artist colonies in seaside resorts.

Literary works, reportages and films about the spa, which are available on the Internet:

**The inimitable Charlie Chaplin** took on the spa in a surprisingly little known film. Of course, it's all happening here! As always with Chaplin, there is also a serious core to the fun: the spa satire shows us how the socially coded ideas and ideals of the human body change in "Modern Times".

<https://tinyurl.com/vrqyygo>

**A recommendation by our colleagues from Harrogate:** in a completely different mood, a touching BBC reportage tells of the Soviet prestige sanatorium Tskaltubo in Georgia, where Stalin himself once cured and today refugees from the conflict region of Abkhazia have found shelter. <https://tinyurl.com/we7wpa6>

**For our German-speaking readers:** The short novel "The Money Complex" by modernist writer Franziska zu Reventlow amusingly tells about the sanatorium as a place of retreat in times of crisis. Wonderfully read in a podcast of the the German Broadcasting Corporation MDR. Thanks for the recommendation to Christine Gölz! <https://tinyurl.com/woforbp>

## CONTACT

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