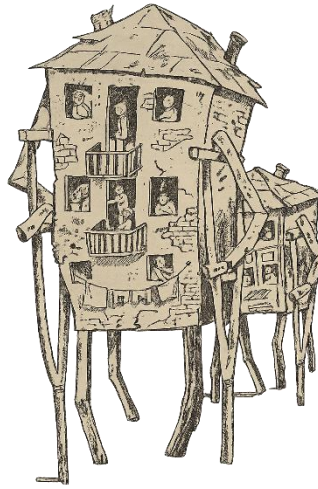


Call for Papers



Magazine „Niangi“ September 1933, №19, Page 7, Painting: Doni

Paths Not Taken:

Forgotten (!) (Non-)Territorial Entities in the Early Soviet Union

International Conference

Tbilisi, Georgia, 25-27 February 2027

Organizer: David Jishkariani (Max Weber Foundation – Max Weber Network Eastern
Europe (MWNO))

Co-organizer: Jörn Happel (Helmut-Schmidt-Universität/Universität der Bundeswehr
Hamburg)

Submission Deadline: **20 October 2026**

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union undertook a massive project of defining, institutionalizing, and mapping nationality. Grounded in the structural principles of territoriality, economic viability, and demographic/ethnographic composition, this era witnessed the creation of numerous territorial entities across the vast expanse of the early Soviet Union. Centered on the idea of nativization/indigenization (*korenizatsiia*), Soviet nationalities policy encouraged diverse ethnic groups to develop their own administrative, political, and cultural institutions. These formations varied significantly, reflecting distinct linguistic, cultural, geographic, and economic realities.

While the final model – one based on institutionalized national republics and their administrative subdivisions – eventually became the hallmark of Soviet federalism, this outcome was only one among competing visions. The landscape of the early 1920s was characterized by a fluid, partly experimental approach to administrative geography. Temporary territorial constructs - from the Bukharan People's Republic and the Far Eastern Republic to Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) and the Mountain ASSR – appeared on the map. These entities were largely meant to be temporary arrangements; expedient territorial solutions to help the Bolsheviks and their allies navigate/gain control over/secure sensitive/contested borderlands, manage revolutionary movements, and function as diplomatic buffers. But they were often more than that/ephemeral (or provisional) administrative units. Substantial projects, such as the Transcaucasian Federation (1922-36), endured for over a decade before being liquidated.

This conference seeks to move beyond the vantage point of the Soviet Union's eventual, successful establishment/institutionalization of nationality to explore these “forgotten” alternatives. We invite papers that examine not merely why these territorial and nonterritorial entities were dismantled, but how they functioned as sites of social and political experimentation. We ask: What did these structures mean to the officials who built them and the diverse populations who inhabited them? By recovering these projects, this conference challenges the teleological view of the USSR as a predetermined “communal apartment” of nations, revealing instead a period of possibility and contingency in Soviet state and nation-building.

The aim of this workshop is to introduce new conceptual frameworks and newly discovered accessible archival material into scholarly debates/discussions surrounding/regarding the historical trajectories, structural transformations, and contemporary resonance of early Soviet ethno-territorial entities. We invite contributions from historians, political scientists, anthropologists, geographers, and scholars in related fields that explore how these formations were conceptualized, contested, dismantled, and commemorated.

We welcome contributions addressing various geographical regions, scales of analysis, and chronological frameworks. Possible themes include, but are not limited to:

- Official and unofficial reasons behind the creation of territorial entities: the visions of the Soviet center and the role of local agency
- The role of personalities and negotiations in the formation of political units
- The influence of foreign actors in shaping these entities

- Internal dynamics and official and unofficial policies behind the dissolution of the (non)-territorial formations
- Memory, commemoration, and reinterpretation of these entities in historiography and public life

Please send your proposal as a single PDF file, including your name, affiliation, presentation title, abstract (300–500 words), and a short CV (1–2 pages) to info@mws-georgia.org, with “[Paths Not Taken]” in the subject line, by **20 October 2026**. Selected participants will be notified of their acceptance by **10 November 2026**.

The organizers will cover travel costs (airfare up to a maximum amount) and accommodation.