

Naturalistic approaches to culture?

A strategic workshop by the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities

Call for Participation

ESF offers, on a competitive basis, awards to early career scholars to participate in the Workshop "Naturalistic approaches to Culture?"

The ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH) initiates among its strategic activities a workshop on the challenging issue of naturalistic approaches to culture. The event shall take place in Hungary, Balatonvilágos, between **4 - 7 September 2011**.

A group of 20 early career researchers will be selected by open competition and invited to actively participate in the event, including the presentation of a poster.



What is ESF?

The European Science Foundation (ESF) provides a platform for its Member Organisations to advance European research and explore new directions for research at the European level.

Established in 1974 as an independent non-governmental organisation, the ESF currently serves 78 Member Organisations across 30 countries.

The **ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)** covers the following disciplines: anthropology, archaeology, art & art history, classical studies, cognitive sciences, history, history & philosophy of science, linguistics, literary studies, Oriental & African Studies, pedagogical and educational research, music & musicology, philosophy, psychology, religious studies & theology.

For further information, see:

<http://www.esf.org/humanities>

Scientific scope

The main aim of the workshop is to explore the possibilities and limitations of naturalistic approaches to mind and culture. The most important new vistas arise from modern evolutionary theory but the issues also have, in the background, the traditional debates on reductionism and biological determinism. Two broad kinds of approaches will be discussed and compared:

1. During the past two decades with the advent of evolutionary psychology and related developments a new serious challenge has been made regarding the biological routing of some of the most cherished cultural achievements and features of humans. This challenge basically involves the idea that some of our cultural habits and propensities are the results of interactions between biological constraints and cultural shaping, rather than being constructed by culture alone.
2. Many scientists and scholars have argued, on the other hand, that the notions of the "biological" and the "cultural" are based on dualistic thinking that is increasingly problematic, given the human refashioning of nature both through the "culturing" of natural environment and life itself and through human impacts on global climate and environment. Thus, many scholars have found it necessary to speak of "naturecultures" and "biosocialities".

The two above broad paradigms need to be thoroughly discussed, annotated by some of the technical barriers to understanding. For one major obstacle to a better understanding and collaboration between naturalistic and cultural/humanities scholars is that of differences in methods and approach. This constitutes a barrier for communication within the sub-disciplines in naturalistic domains and across the naturalistic and cultural fields.

Some of the challenging issues involved are:

- the "natural" origin and "biology" of sociality
- the naturalistic origins of human cognitive capacities, including cultural phenomena such as art, literature, music, etc.
- the usefulness of the concepts of "naturecultures" and "biosocialities"
- the interface between biological evolution and cultural evolution
- adaptation as exaptation in explaining culture
- biological (most importantly neural and genetic) determinism and the prediction of human behavior

- universal and specific aspects of cultural systems such as languages
- the neural circuitry of primary (language like) and secondary (writing like) cultural systems

Discussions will be initiated by six key presenters from different fields. For the latest details on the workshop programme, see <http://www.esf.org/index.php?id=8346>. It is aimed that the workshop will initiate a long term initiative in the frame of the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities, that will further the interdisciplinary and inter-European exchange of ideas in this important domain.

Submission

Eligibility

There is no restriction on nationality, but an advanced level of English is required, since the workshop will be conducted in English. The following eligibility criteria must both be met. Applicants must:

- have a PhD, with successful viva completed by the time of submission but no more than 10 years ago;
- be affiliated with an institution of higher education and/or research in Europe.

Selection criteria and process

The selection will be carried out by the programme committee. Decisions will be based on the following criteria:

- Scientific track record and scientific potential;
- Originality of prospective thinking as expressed in the abstract and publications;
- All other conditions being met, the programme committee will aim for a geographic and disciplinary balance and a balance of male and female participants.

Documentation requested

The application material must be submitted as two email attachments **by 16 May 2011, 12:00 (noon) CET**, to the address of the local organizer, professor Csaba Pléh: pleh@cogsci.bme.hu.

- One attachment (title: FirstnameLastnameCV) should have your CV (max. 1000 words), including an overview of your education and main publications.
- The other attachment (title: FirstnameLastnameAbstract) should be an abstract for a poster presentation (max. 1000 words).

NB: Applications exceeding the indicated word restrictions will not be eligible.

Timeline for application and selection

1 April 2011	Call for Participation published
16 May 2011, 12:00 (noon) CET	Deadline for submission of application
By 15 June 2011	Notification of successful applicants

The ESF award will cover travel costs (up to a maximum of €350,-), meals and accommodation (3 nights).

Contacts:

Local Contacts: Professor Csaba Pléh
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