

## Conference report on the first PCPS<sup>CE</sup> general meeting in Prague

From Monday the 17th to Wednesday the 19th of February 2025, the COST academic community assembled in Prague for the first PCPS<sup>CE</sup> General Meeting. Throughout three days of densely packed working-group sessions, individual discussions and productive interactions, the PCPS<sup>CE</sup> Action continued taking its shape as members decided upon crucial points to actively move ahead with the project in the coming weeks and months. At various locations throughout Prague – such as the French Research Center in Humanities and Social Sciences (CEFRES), the Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences or at the iconic Karolinum – the hosts offered the PCPS<sup>CE</sup> network a rich and varied programme.

The first day of the COST Action PCPS<sup>CE</sup> opened with **WG1**'s meeting and was chaired by Doris Gruber and Michael Wögerbauer. Topics under discussion included publications on PCPS<sup>CE</sup> and the Young-Researcher and Innovators-Blog. This session aimed to introduce and discuss the two major scientific deliverables of the Action:

1. The Handpress World of the Habsburg Monarchy
2. Print Culture and Public Spheres in Central Europe, 1500–1800 (i. e. *Compendium*)

Discussions revolved around target audiences, the scope as well as the length of contributions, geographical *foci*, and ideas about how to capitalise on our collective expertise and knowledge of diverse literature on the matter of print culture and public spheres. These discussions were necessary in order to sustain knowledge dissemination after the project's life cycle ends and to continue to find ways to share it with the general public. The first deliverable of the COST Action, the literature review, has the title *The Handpress World of the Habsburg Monarchy* (planned for the Brill book series Library of the Written Word). Most of the chapters now have confirmed authors, with only Galicia, Milan and Venice still outstanding. The discussion moved next to the *Compendium*, which will be the final and biggest deliverable of this Action. A revised table of contents was shared and discussed, whilst De Gruyter was identified as the most likely choice of publisher. Questions of the length of chapters and targeted audiences were raised and will be finalised in the near future. The participants were also asked about their awareness of Zotero, with a good number responding that they were already using it for their bibliographic needs. A specific Zotero database will be established in the future so that all members can add works pertaining to the Action, with the possibility of user guidelines being produced if necessary. An Action-specific tagging language will also be developed and there was also some discussion over the inclusion of texts in multiple languages. A Doodle poll will be set up to canvas the members' availability for the next WG 1 meeting (online).

The afternoon sessions kicked off with the meeting of **WG2** (Annotated Data & Tools-Database) led by Thomas Wallnig (in attendance) and Joëlle Weis (online). Discussions focused on the role of WG2 as a central hub for computational humanities within the COST Action, ensuring that digital humanities (DH) decisions are effectively communicated across all working groups. This will primarily be the role of the representatives to WG2 from the other WGs. Key topics included (but were not confined to): data storage, the development of

a research portal and extensive discussions on metadata and potential tagging systems to make the planned Zotero Database more accessible. Following a general introduction on these topics and the various tools and databases to be made available during the COST, participants were split into experimental subgroups and were asked to think about how to connect their existing datasets on early modern print cultures with digital tools and research questions. Among the many points which were raised during the brainstorming session that followed the initial group phase, the environmental impact of training large language models (LLMs) crystallised as a key point of contention, with some members stressing the need for critical engagement with AI and data-mining tools. The discussion also included practical concerns about data interoperability and the challenges of merging regional datasets, bibliographical information, and historical corpora into a coherent analytical framework. The results of these discussions were compiled and will be used to help guide the direction of the upcoming hackathon in December 2025.

The first conference day closed with the **Management Committee meeting**, which voted on the newly nominated candidates for leadership positions. The meeting was also joined by our COST Action administrative officer, Olga Gorczyca, who gave a report on the Action's budget and reiterated the daily allowance and travel reimbursement rules. Various topics were covered including the three types of conference grants (ITC, YRI and Dissemination), as well the Open Research Europe (ORE) publishing platform. Updates from the SC team included the biannual newsletter and visual identity package, with an additional vigorous discussion had over the COST's social media strategy, including the ethics of using certain platforms. This will be reassessed again in approximately six months.

The second conference day, which took place on Tuesday the 18th of February, began with a joint meeting of **WG4** and **WG5** in order to discuss the YRI Summer School which will take place in Cluj-Napoca, Romania from the 21st to 25th of July 2025. The topic is still under discussion but it was established that 70% of the participants should be COST participants, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  need to be YRIs (i.e. younger than 40). There should be around 30 attendees in total and the summer school will include both training sessions and excursions to libraries, archives and heritage sites of the Transylvanian Saxons. The general topic of 'Readership practice - the use and circulation of books and ideas' was proposed, with the 4–6 sub themes intended to be related to topics from the compendium.

After the coffeebreak, WG5 met in the Lower Hall to discuss the topic of Texts and Ideas. The meeting was chaired by Martin Holý who introduced the main research interests of the group and their upcoming deliverables. After presenting the agenda of the meeting and introducing the entire WG5 team, an interesting discussion took place on the PCPS<sup>CE</sup> Compendium (Section 4). The assembled members of WG5 made initial declarations of commitment to work on the various subsections and it was decided that there should be one person nominated per subgroup to organise the subgroup chapter. A number of YRIs have already signed up and will work alongside more experienced researchers to deliver subchapters. Expressions of interest for participating in the summer school were also taken, with those wanting to take on roles as trainers asked to contact the WG5 leaders directly.

At the same time, WG4 met in the Upper Hall to discuss the topic of the materiality of the sources. Throughout the session, the WG divided themselves into smaller groups and dealt with topics such as the transition from manuscripts to print (or not) and its effect on public

spheres. Latin and non-Latin Scripts, as well as print genres and the intermediality between different print genres (media ensembles) as vehicles for the emergence of public spheres were also mentioned. Images, music, and cartography, as well as authenticity and imitation in prints and reprints were additionally covered in the discussions. The overall aim was to discuss potential keywords for inclusion in the *Compendium* and, following these discussions, the WG decided to move the subchapter on music to instead follow the discussion on the interactions between manuscript and print. This was due to the fact that the group concluded that music is inherently dynamic and so continued to circulate both in manuscript and print formats.

After the lunch break, it was the turn of **WG3** to hold a meeting on the theme of the Spring conference next year in Sofia, with various topic suggestions being taken. Some of the members will create a subgroup in order to draft the CfP for the conference (which should be sent out in July 2025). Similar to the other working groups, the participants of WG3 assigned keywords to their respective sub-chapters and also decided on who will coordinate specific sections of the *Compendium*.

At the **General Meeting** on Tuesday afternoon, the SC Team and YRI Team made calls for action in order to better engage all COST members. Both teams shared their work plans and their new respective email addresses: [scteam.pcpsce@gmail.com](mailto:scteam.pcpsce@gmail.com) and [yriteam.pcpsce@gmail.com](mailto:yriteam.pcpsce@gmail.com). The SC Team encouraged members to submit their photographs, current work, upcoming events and member profiles for inclusion on social media and the forthcoming website. The YRI Team asked the Action members to start collecting suggestions for future keynote speakers in their respective working groups. The discussions will be led by the YRI spokespersons, with particular attention paid to gender and regional balance, as well as to the preferences of young researchers and innovators. Subsequently, the WG1 leader, Doris Gruber, encouraged the attendees to comment on the contents of the *Compendium* in the shared google document:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1aaaoGE02XUJfjTt1peDe5SMbPIrqWVUr-UXMMbcMdBY/edit?tab=t.0>

In the following presentation, the leader of WG 2, Thomas Wallnig, explained the group's plan to deliver several intensive hackathons during the course of the COST and also presented some of the ideas for digital collaborations raised in the questionnaire. The reports by the leadership teams of WG 3, 4, and 5 then followed. The WG3 co-leaders, Simon Dagenais and Maria Baramova, announced the planned workshop in Sofia in May 2026 under the working title *The Impacts of Censorship on Circulation and Authorisation of Print in Central Europe (1500-1800)*. Stefania Demchuk and Adinel-Cyprian Dinca, as WG4 co-leaders, updated the audience on the upcoming YRI Summer School in Cluj-Napoca. On behalf of WG5, Martin Holý shared the spectrum of envisaged research subthemes as discussed by the WG5 members.

Following these updates, three keynotes concluded this work-intensive evening. Mathew Grenby of Newcastle University (United Kingdom), addressed the topic of "Children's Instructional Print in Early Modern Europe". Massimo Rospocher, Director of the Italian-German Historical Institute in Trento (Italy), discussed "The Intermediality of the Early Modern Public Sphere". Finally, local hosts Claire Mádl and Michael Wögerbauer delivered a

lecture on “Geographies of the Book: Mapping Networks, Softening Borders, Rethinking Capitals”.

On Wednesday morning, the **Core Group** met and discussed the upcoming online orientation on the COST Action grants (April) and the necessity of ensuring shared methodologies and conceptual frameworks for the *Compendium* (among other things). Another point of discussion was related to national teams, which consist of participants from the same country. Although these teams are not part of the official structure of the COST Action, they can be helpful in coordinating efforts within the Action. The final highlight of the conference was the opportunity for the attendants to visit the collections of early printed books housed in the Nostitz Library, Kinský Library, Strahov Library and the National Library. These visits offered attendees a much appreciated chance to ground some of the themes covered during the conference in the more tangible elements of Central European print culture. They will no doubt have inspired possible future avenues of research for some of our COST members!

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