

Minutes of the USS Committee meeting, 18 Sept. 2022

Present: Heather Alberro (EDI officer); Sorin Antohi; Barnita Bagchi; Artur Blaim; Corin Braga; Zsolt Czigányik (Treasurer); Gregory Claeys (Chair, and Secretary *pro. tem.*); Burcu Kayışçı; Susanna Layh; Ewa Majewska; José Eduardo Reis; Adam Stock.

Agenda and subsequent discussion:

- 1. Advice and feedback from Organiser of Brighton 2022 – Trish McManus:** item not treated in the absence of Trish; query to be carried forward concerning the disposition of any surplus funds generated at the Brighton meeting & lessons to be learned from hybrid format
- 2. Queries respecting Cluj 2023 conference venue.** A letter, signed by five people and prefaced by HA as EDI officer, was sent directly to CB. Various objections were considered both to this direct communication by a member of the Committee to a local organiser, and to the specific contents of the letter. GC clarified that, while the rule is unwritten, in principle the Society never interferes with local arrangements, including the definition of conference themes. It responds to queries from local organisers, but descriptions of conference themes and the like are entirely in the hands of conference organisers. It follows that the letter should first have been considered by the Committee before being brought to the attention of the Cluj organisers, since it clearly does plead for interference with the Cluj arrangements. Several Committee members considered specific comments made in the letter, as well as its general tone, as well as the insinuation that some form of ultimatum was seemingly offered to the Cluj organisers and the Society, to have been offensive and insulting. In this context EM stated that even though she understands the concerns of the writers of the letter, she felt very safe in Romania. EM believes that anti-discrimination, anti-harassment and proper diversity framework in the conference in Cluj is an important matter. She added, that “one should not look at East Europe as the wildest region, where sexism and homophobia happen all the time, because this would be Westplaining, and sadly it sometimes is. But - in this case, we need to work for a good

strategy to have the USS, its conference, daily practice and other events, as a safe space for everyone, the LGBTQIA+ people and groups in particular.”

In the discussion it was concluded that the anxieties of LGBTQIA+ members of the Society respecting specific venues were addressed, and assurances offered as to the Cluj meeting. AB suggested that Queer utopianism could be the subject of many sessions and panels organised by participants interested in them. This was confirmed by CB. All participants agree that utmost care must be taken to respect and protect the rights of all minorities. CB will make available and publicise Cluj University's Code of Ethics, Guide of combating discrimination, and other significant documents vis-à-vis issues relating to discrimination (all these documents are published and can be consulted on the site of the Babes-Bolyai University). CB gave an update on venues and possible travel arrangements, and reiterated the theme of the conference, "Utopian Imaginaries", and several possible subsidiary topics. It was agreed that gender and sexual minoritarian utopianism as a utopian subject should be part of the open CfP.

3. **The Treasurer** reported that the Society has 4300 euros in its account, and that an expenditure for the website of 650 euros for three years was forthcoming.
4. **The format of future USS/E conferences.** (Fatima Vieira's suggestion to organise fully in-person and fully online conference days): It was agreed to host the 2023 conference from Mon. 3 July to Sat. 9 July 2023, with the first three days being online, and the second three days in person. The Society and local organisers will revisit this division of time when responses to the CFP have been received in late Jan. 2023. All who attend in person will be able to hear most if not all of the online events, but not vice-versa. A differential fee will be set, with online-only participation incurring a smaller fee than in-person attendance.
5. **Plans for the 2024 USS/E conference.**: BK expressed a desire to help organise this in Istanbul, possibly outside of an academic venue: she will report back in mid-2023, and hopefully before the Cluj meeting.
6. **Feedback on/updating of the current documents: Hints for Organisers and Code of Conduct.** {See attached}: GC: Point 4: "Extent of Participation" strengthen: not > one paper & participation in one roundtable: it was decided to clarify this "hint" in order to

prevent individuals from giving more than one paper and also contributing to a workshop or other event during conferences. It was also requested that Clause 13 of the current "Hints for Organisers" be rewritten. Furthermore, a plea by JER was made to emphasise that panels may be held in languages other than English, though the Society has stipulated that each panel may only be held in one language.

7. General Statement of USS/E Freedom of Speech.: this item was held over to the next meeting.

8. Consider rail subsidy (50 euros x 10) (or more) for conference participants not to fly. [GC]: it was decided to allocate 3000 euros to travel subsidies for Cluj, with applications to be treated on a case-by-case basis, without distinguishing the mode of travel. Subsidies will be a minimum of 100 euros and a maximum of 200 euros.

Conclusion: the next Committee meeting is scheduled for late Jan. 2023, to consider the response to the Cluj CFP (to be announced in early December 2022)

GC
19 Sept. 2022