



UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI UDINE  
**DIPARTIMENTO DI LINGUE E LETTERATURE,  
COMUNICAZIONE, FORMAZIONE E SOCIETÀ**

Sede Amministrativa: Via Tarcisio Petracco, 8 - 33100 UDINE  
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**venerdì 4 maggio**

alle ore 14.00

in aula 11

Palazzo Antonini, Udine

**La prof. Jiřina Šmejkalová,**  
Palacký and Charles University in Prague,  
Czech Republic

terrà una lezione in inglese dal titolo

**“Paper as an Actor of Socio-Cultural  
Change (1945-1989) : Impulses of New  
Materialism in researching Culture  
and Society behind the Berlin Wall.”**



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Abstract:

"Paper as an Actor of Socio-Cultural Change (1945-1989) : Impulses of New Materialism in researching Culture and Society behind the Berlin Wall."

The lecture based on data generated in close cooperation with Dr. Roar Lishaugen (Czech Studies, University of Oslo) addresses practices and performances through which paper, including the contexts and conditions of its production, operated as an actor in making and breaking command cultures with a specific focus on the former Czechoslovakia and its neighbouring countries.

The origins of our story can be traced back to the mid-13th century when Bohemian kings settled the Bohemian border regions with ethnic Germans, later referred to as Sudeten Germans. The invention of wood pulp for papermaking 600 years later turned this region into a key supplier of paper for the Habsburg Monarchy due to its rich resources of wood. In interwar Czechoslovakia, reportedly up to 80% of the Czech paper industry was in Sudeten German hands. The Potsdam Conference in 1945 resulted in the expulsion of nearly three million Germans from Czechoslovakia and along with them their expertise. Left behind was all their confiscated property, including most of the country's paper mills, which had to be re-staffed with largely unqualified Czech workers.

Drawing on methodological impulses of New Materialism (Parikka, Barad, Kafka) I examine the ways in which books' materiality reflected a "paper shortage" largely generated by these complex macro-historical conditions, including processes of nationalisation, centralisation and allocation. Also, I explore the ways in which "paper shortage" served as a tool of both discursive and actual manipulations of book production. Like in any totalitarian system, the less paper allocated to a certain, the more attractive such a "forbidden bestseller" became for readers. Consequently, a pressing "shortage" of books demanded by readers became one of the subverting actors which eventually lead to the collapse of the communist regime in 1989.