BOOK REVIEW

Rindzevičiūtė: Power of Systems

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To those working on the history of the social sciences in the Cold War era, *The Power of Systems* is a long awaited book. The first reason for this high anticipation is the organization on which the book focuses: the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), an international think tank located in a beautiful castle south of Vienna, Austria. Thanks to some personal recollections of IIASA (Brooks and McDonald, 2000; Levien, 2000) and a few historical studies on the foundation (e.g., Riska-Campbell, 2011), a basic narrative about IIASA has been established, which presents it as the culmination of the political thaw between the United States and the Soviet Union. The joint creation of a scientific organization that—placed on neutral ground—addressed problems of a global scope appeared as a means to further the mutual rapprochement. Systems analysis, an amorphous complex of policy analysis techniques that was developed at the infamous RAND Corporation and had spread into various fields of policy making in the U.S. (Jardini, 2000; Light, 2003), came in handy: an umbrella term without precise meaning, it neither enforced restrictions on the scientific work to be done at IIASA nor suggested an ideological leaning (Duller, 2016). At the same time, it used many of the contemporary buzzwords of "high modern social science" (cf. Heyck, 2015) such as system, structure, function, interdisciplinarity, etc. Beyond this standard narrative, however, not much was known.

The second reason for the eager anticipation of the book is that an author would be writing in English about parts of the Cold War arenas that were inaccessible to most contributors to the English literature in the field: the actions, plans, and hopes of actors in the Soviet Union and their allies. Only a few studies exist in the English literature on the Cold War social sciences that overcame this language barrier, among them the classic study by Slava Gerovitch (2002) on Soviet cybernetics, David C. Engerman's (2009) book on American Russia experts, and a recent volume on the history of science studies on both sides of the iron curtain (Aronova and Turchetti, 2016). Most likely due to the fact that the field only came into

blossoming in the last decade, there is still a lack of English studies on Cold War social science in places outside of the English-speaking world (see Boldyrev and Kirtchik, 2016, for a more differentiated overview).

Thus, the expectations were certainly high, and yet, *The Power of Systems* meets them. The manuscript attempts to make three large contributions on theoretically distinct levels. The first contribution is on the level of historical materials and data. Rindzevičiūtė supplements intensive archival research with personal interviews and succeeds in interweaving these threads into a rich discussion of political and scientific developments that led to the establishment of IIASA (chapters 1 and 2). She further investigates how this context informed IIASA's organizational culture and activities (chapters 3 and 4), and how it permeated the knowledge produced there (chapters 5, 6, and 7). While some publications exist that focus on the Western part of the story, Rindzevičiūtė, to my knowledge, is the first to explore and publish an account of how the Russian side acted and thought about this project of East-West dialogue. What is more, she does so with precision and a love of detail that make her book a valuable source for further research efforts in this area—an outcome that could, however, have been improved by providing an index with all the names mentioned in the book. Because of the richness of the historical data provided, one easily loses track of the acting persons apart from the main proponents.

The second contribution takes the form of a thesis in the history of science, and it features prominently in the subtitle of the book, *How Policy Sciences Opened Up the Cold War World*. Arguing against authors like Paul Edwards (1996), Rindzevičiūtė claims that the philosophy dominating the policy sciences helped to overcome the cleavage between the Cold War opponents. Policy scientists had grown increasingly critical of an exaggerated belief in the capacities of science. Many of the alleged certainties produced by earlier scientific studies had turned out to be uncorroborated, and positivist epistemology had seen severe attacks from a broad range of camps. To cope with uncertainty and risk had become the major challenge of policy science, and it contributed to opening the Cold War world by disseminating this challenge as a new virtue of decision-making. While the problems were global in nature, no side possessed the true solution. Openness towards all sides had become the recipe of choice in the policy sciences, and from there it informed and slowly transformed the viewpoints of the political actors.

This argument by Rindzevičiūtė is strong, innovative, and I think very plausible. Alas, it is not explored fully. Rindzevičiūtė does not investigate the close relation between the discourses at and around IIASA on which her book focuses and the contemporary debates in the philosophy of science and science and technology studies (STS). This is unfortunate, because quite a few IIASA affiliates provided crucial contributions to these latter debates, among them Brian Wynne, Michael Thompson, and Jerome Ravetz (who is mentioned in passing on p. 200, though misnamed as Jeremy—after a brief correspondence with Ravetz, I can confirm that he participated in the meetings to which Rindzevičiūtė refers). Wynne, who had studied with David Bloor and Barry Barnes in Edinburgh, published classic studies

of the function of rituals in privileging expert over lay knowledge. Based on his IIASA experiences, Thompson wrote an anthropological essay "Among the Energy Tribes," where he first proposed the ideas that he later developed into a cultural theory of risk (Thompson, 1984). And while Ravetz never was an official member of IIASA, his concept of a post-normal science (PNS) starts from the same concerns as those held by Rindzevičiūtė's actors: that in the globalized era that characterizes coeval policy making, we must make decisions in the face of huge uncertainties; time pressure can make it irrational to wait for scientific certainty. I would argue that to explore the proximities between her policy scientists and the scholars working in STS or related fields would have helped Rindzevičiūtė to see them as parts of a larger debate over the nature of science in the outgoing 20th century. Such a study would have also allowed for an innovative perspective on a distinct chapter in the history of the philosophy of science.

The third level on which the book aims to contribute is related to the concept of governmentality. While referring back to Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France, recent authors reject one of the aspects deemed most fundamental by Foucault, namely governments' attempts to create, influence, and control the minds of citizens. Without this aspect, governmentality refers to nothing more than to systems of thought that influence policymaking. The difference appears obvious. While neo-liberalism can be described as a technique of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense, the systems approach in policy making cannot—or at least, Rindzevičiūtė does not do so to a degree that convinced me. By and large, it is unclear how the concept of governmentality helps the argument that she is making. Or, to be more precise, the argument would be as convincing if she had replaced governmentality with another term—philosophy or epistemology being possible and, in light of the previous remarks, perhaps more adequate candidates.

"This book is about science and power," states a bold claim in the book's introduction (p. 2). This claim is a bit exaggerated. Science and power are the props used to stage the drama. But their function is to provide a frame for the narration, not to enact it. True, the book is about an organization at the intersection of science and political power, and it is about how this intersection played out in the lives of a set of actors related to this organization. However, it is neither very specific about the scientific ideas, nor is it, in a setting informed by the sociology of knowledge and ideas, about explaining the specific shape of scientific ideas by reference to their place of origin. My main criticism of this otherwise outstanding book is that its objectives were too ambitious, and that while Rindzevičiūtė's knowledge about the fields and discourses involved is impeccable, restricting the text to making one or perhaps two of these contributions might have resulted in an even more convincing text.

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