

EDITORIAL

Academic Exchange and Internationality in East European Social Science

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Like any intellectual pursuit, social science is dependent on the international circulation of thought and thinkers in order to yield its promise of enlightening the understanding of the societies they study. The four articles in this special issue of *Serendipities* deal with various aspects of the international embeddedness of East European social sciences during the socialist period. While social sciences are typically strongly context-bound or “indexical” (Fleck et al. 2018)—meaning they refer to particular historical situations, the analysis of which does not always travel easily across time and cultures—knowledge of a multiplicity of social realities appears to be a precondition for imaginative social thought. This, it seems, places all social sciences in the context of a global history of thinking about the human condition.

What kinds of global connections—ideational, institutional, personal, etc.—shape the social sciences in a particular situation is, of course, itself historically determined by many factors. Long-standing intellectual traditions matter as much as changing political power structures. Eastern Europe during the 20th century—here referring to the countries that were part of the socialist hemisphere for several decades after 1945—is an arena where the interplay of various historical forces can be studied exceptionally well. While several of these countries were integral parts, albeit to various degrees, of the intellectual movements that pioneered modern social science in the early 20th century, the Cold War significantly complicated international relations in the intellectual realm. Though the Iron Curtain was not nearly as insurmountable as the metaphor suggests (Boldyrev & Kirtchik 2016), there were indeed at times severe constraints to international travel and exchange of ideas, in particular (but not only) crossing the symbolic and material divide between capitalist and socialist societies. Oftentimes, the permeability of people and ideas in East European social science followed the political developments quite closely, as the timing and success of exchange programs such as the one by the US-American Ford Foundation exemplifies (Duller 2021).

That being said, the political context that enabled and restricted international contacts to take place between the blocs certainly did not determine the experiences of the scholars who traveled in either direction. It provided the common framework in which administrators, officials, and intellectuals negotiated and justified their endeavors. From the perspective of the actors involved (including many officials), their motivations might at times have been infused only minimally with world politics and to a much larger degree with personal curiosity.

The following articles reflect an awareness of the significant impact of Cold War politics as an enabler of not only the international circulation of people and ideas but also the limited permeation of the personal experiences of those involved. All four treat the theme of international exchange of persons and ideas as an element in the broader intellectual situation of the social sciences in the respective countries and are thus able to carve out the significance of internationality in each historical situation. Such attention to local contexts also allows the authors to tackle the question of how structural conditions affected the content of social science research and writing, which is arguably the crucial, if not the most challenging, task of any work in the sociology and history of the social sciences.

In the first article, Adela Hîncu discusses the changing role of academic mobility for three generations of sociologists in socialist Romania. While the dominant generation during the early socialist period could maintain their international contacts made in the interwar years (most often with France) to a limited degree, it was only the second generation, educated under socialism, that benefited from long-term travel through various fellowship programs during a rather short period of liberalization in the 1960s and 1970s, before Ceaușescu's escalating despotism stopped many of the most fruitful international connections. Hîncu's article presents both the general features of historical change across these generations as well as biographical sketches of exemplary scholars to highlight the personal and intellectual effects of international encounters on Romanian sociology.

Secondly, Victor Karády undertakes a comprehensive view on the development of the Hungarian social sciences from the perspective of international relations in a longer historical timeframe. His study, based on both his broad knowledge of the historical complexities in Hungarian social sciences and a number of well-chosen statistical indicators, portrays the changing international orientations of Hungarian social sciences from its beginning in the early 20th century into the present times. Among other things, Karády's analysis shows the dramatic impact of Stalinization on Hungarian social science. On the other hand, his data suggest that during the gradual liberalization after 1956, older intellectual traditions quickly regained importance and new ties with the West were allowed to take roots. Commendably, Karády extends his analysis beyond the end of the Cold War into the most recent setbacks under Viktor Orbán's government.

In the third article, Jarosław Kiliński takes up the issue of the Ford Foundation's social science program in Poland, which was the first major fellowship program for social scientists from a socialist country to visit "the West" during the Cold War. While this program has already been the subject of a few major publications, not least by Kiliński himself (2017), this article undertakes the worthwhile effort to look at the often overlooked inverse direction: American scholars traveling to Poland, as well as the effects of material and infrastructural support from the Ford Foundation on the institutional and intellectual developments of Polish sociology. Kiliński presents rich empirical materials that highlight the importance of long-lasting personal relations and mutual interest in transnational knowledge transfer as well as infrastructural efforts that accompanied the scholar exchanges.

Finally, Tomasz Zarycki presents the richly researched intellectual biography of Antoni Kukliński, one of the leading figures in Polish social geography during the socialist period and much of the so-called transition period after 1990. Again, international travel and research appear here as major elements in Kukliński's intellectual career and are both related to high professional gains as well as the difficulties of transferring that prestige back to the local Polish context. Zarycki's careful historical-sociological analysis of the social structure of the Polish intellectual field makes Kukliński's case not only the subject of an individual's remarkable (though by no means linear) career, but also a reflection of larger social change in Polish society over several decades.



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Author biography

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