

Czechoslovak-Polish Scholarly Entanglements in the Cold War Between High Politics and Individual Strategies.

Cold War might have been not the best time for international contacts. Iron Curtain has cut previously most intensive channels of scholarly exchange, socialist states pursued politics of nationalization, and the East Bloc was Russia centered. However, growingly international contacts transgressing the prescribed channels were established, often following previous, interwar cooperation, but often building on shared interests by scholars from two countries. The project “Czechoslovak-Polish Scholarly Entanglements in the Cold War Between High Politics and Individual Strategies” follows these contacts in natural sciences and social sciences, looking at the contexts of emergence of these contacts, their stabilization, and effects they produced.

Fields that we chose to research are selected because of their importance for the state – be it in through investigating the society in sociology, or planning the future in science studies or economy. Thus and easy assumption would be, that international exchange is hindered there. On the other hand, because being vital for the state, social scientists, but more importantly natural scientists, had more resources at their disposal, which allowed them also more free space for travel. Thus, we intend to show that there existed plenty of contacts, very often outside of the official, prescribed channels of interuniversity or inter-academy exchanges, created and valued by scholars, who regarded them as a necessary aspect of their academic work.

These contacts changed over time, reacting to political changes like the Prague Spring. From the late 1940s scholars regarded Czechoslovak-Polish contacts as a replacement for the previously predominating contacts with the “West” (esp. Germany, France), and Socialist internationalism was directed toward strengthening contacts within the Eastern Bloc. 1968 meant not only change of political situation, expulsion of a number of internationally active scholars and tightening of state’s supervision, but also a generational change. Young scholars, entering the academia in the 1970s, proved innovative in forging new contacts, which often were not recorded in journals and official documents.

A Polish-Czech research team will investigate these exchanges basing on ego-documents and interviews. By this we expect to achieve a more delicate and varied pattern of scholarly contacts that would be possible by concentrating on official documents. Research in archives and libraries will allow us to describe contexts in which these entanglements happened and pinpoint the ways in which scientists manipulated these contexts to achieve intended results. While this does not directly challenge the research that spoke on predominance of the state in structuring, allowing and limiting international contacts, it does point toward spaces of freedom that could be created – both outside of the official channels, but often also within them.

While Czechoslovak-Polish entanglements are in the center of our research design, results that we achieve will have an impact on the burgeoning field of Cold War science studies. While hitherto the research predominantly concentrated on transfers involving US and Russia, our project brings the space “in-between” to the map of scholarly transfers. By this we want to question the predominant geography of Cold War research, showing that in many disciplines the neglected neighbor played a more important role than the political center.

Apart from an English language (collective) monograph, our project will also create a webpage, which will serve as a resource on oral history of Central European science. The webpage will include chosen transcribed interviews, overview over oral history resources and literature.