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State Socialist Experts in Transnational Perspective. East European Circulation of Knowledge during the Cold War (1950s–1980s): *Introduction to the Thematic Issue*

Bogdan C. Iacob

University of Exeter

cristianiacob.bogdan@gmail.com

Corina Doboş

University of Bucharest

corina.dobos@istorie.unibuc.ro

Raluca Grosescu

University of Exeter

ralucagrosescu@gmail.com

Viviana Iacob

Center for Advanced Study, Sofia

vivianaiacob80@gmail.com

Vlad Paşca

New Europe College, Bucharest

pascavlad@gmail.com

Abstract

State socialist experts were at the center of Eastern Europe's internationalization from the mid-1950s until 1989. They acted as intermediaries between their states and other national, regional, and international environments. The contributions integrate national milieus within broader frameworks mostly circumscribed by inter- and nongovernmental specialized organizations (the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; International Theater Institute, or the UN Commission on Population and Development). The issue is an innovative initiative to identify within four fields (economy, demography,

theatre, and historical studies) state socialist experts' contributions to international debates and institution building. We argue that these groups were fundamentally characterized by their transnational dynamism. The resultant forms of mobility and transfer resituate specific systems of knowledge production from Eastern Europe within the larger story of postwar globalization. The collection also includes an anthropological study about the internationalization trajectories of lower-ranked professionals and the resilience of their expertise ethics after 1989. Socialist experts' mobilities can be circumscribed at the intersection of multiple phenomena that defined the postwar: national settings' impact on inter- and supra-state interactions; Cold War politics; the tribulations of international organizations; and global trends determined by the accelerating interconnectedness of the world and decolonization. Our findings de-center established narratives about the Cold War and they show how representatives from the East participated in and sometimes determined the conditions of Europeanizing and globalizing trends in their respective fields within particular organizations.

Keywords

experts – Eastern Europe – international organizations – globalization – Cold War

The twentieth century was indelibly shaped by experts. It was also a time of ideological storms, a past defined by momentous clashes of modernities inside and outside of Europe. There is an obvious, intricate connection between the two descriptions: communities of specialized knowledge were at the center of entanglements among world-views, international orders, social-economic systems, and nation-states. The very revision of the past century's history depends on the identification and contextualization of the flows of ideas, people, and goods that crossed borders and frontiers among countries, regions, organizations, and political systems.

The present thematic issue focuses on the transnational circulation of state socialist experts' ideas and knowledge from the mid-1950s to the 1980s. These actors were at the core of Eastern Europe's internationalization during this period, as they represented intermediaries between their states and other national, regional, and international sites. The articles tell forgotten stories of socialist experts' internationalization. Starting from the Romanian case, but offering a broader transnational perspective, the contributions integrate national milieus within broader frameworks mostly circumscribed by inter- and non-governmental specialized organizations.

The issue is an innovative initiative to identify within four fields (economy, demography, theatre, and historical studies) state socialist experts' contributions

to international debates and institution building. Simultaneously, we analyze the role of these communities' cross-border circulation in the process of professionalization and policy making in the former socialist bloc. We argue that these groups were fundamentally characterized by their transnational dynamism. The resultant forms of mobility and transfer resituate specific systems of knowledge production from Eastern Europe within the larger story of postwar globalization, which we see, following Mathias Middell and Katja Neumann, as a constant dialectical process of de- and re-territorialization (2010: 152). The issue also includes an anthropological study about the internationalization trajectories of lower-ranked professionals and the resilience of their expertise ethics after 1989.

The collection de-centers bipolarism through an analysis of the post-1945 period that avoids overemphasizing the Soviet Union-United States antagonism or the divide of capitalism vs. communism. By way of experts, we see the Cold War as a struggle of competing modernities. It was also an order of overlapping and clustered boundaries: national vs. regional; ideological blocs vs. international institutions; continental vs. global. The issue moves away from the limitations of diplomatic and political history. It does not take nation-states at face value, as conceptual black boxes. We underline the individuality of historical actors, the diversity of agency in multiple non-national environments, and the fluidity of the geographies of interaction along the East–West and North–South axes.

Socialist Experts: Who, Why, Where?

The definition of “socialist experts” adopted by the collection singles out individuals qualified in a certain area of expertise whose activity fulfills three conditions. First, they belong to state institutions and professional bodies which the party-state designed to be responsible for the administration and policy-making in a certain field/subject. Second, they employ specialized languages that are standardized via scientific publications at home and abroad. Third, they participate at a national and international dialogue, which was promoted by different tools of intellectual exchange (journals, volumes, conferences), with their peers from other countries. They often hold high-profile positions in party and/or state institutions as well as international organizations specific to their respective fields (Konrád and Szelényi 1979; Beissinger 1988; Kohlrusch et al. 2010). These experts represent larger national epistemic communities, which are networks of professionals with recognized competence in a particular area that make authoritative policy claims (Haas 1992: 3). The *differentia specifica*

for socialist experts is that they are formally agents of planned, ideologically conditioned knowledge inextricably tied to a project of societal change delineated by a particular form of party-state. We conceive expertise and politics to be irreducible because they are engaged in a mutually reinforcing dynamic of co-producing knowledge and policy (Littoz-Monnet 2016: 11).

Such a definition allows for a more inclusive understanding of socialist experts that does not unilaterally focus on “technocrats” or development-related experts. We look at demographers and economists, but we also deal with cultural experts, such as historians or theatre practitioners, who, with few exceptions (Verdery 1991; Balme 2017), are often ignored in discussions about internationalizing knowledge from the socialist bloc. In this vein, Gabriela Nicolescu’s contribution functions as a counterpoint to the historical analysis of the dynamic among professional elites proposed by the other texts. It switches the register from state/*supra*-state arenas to life-histories.

We present a universe of institutions, groups, conferences, or projects that until now has been eclipsed by scholarly focus on the primacy of politics read mostly via methodological nationalism. The contributions take the Cold War primarily as chronological context and less as paradigm for understanding the exchanges and interactions that characterized the expert cultures we discuss. Though ideological clashes and geopolitical rivalries constitute the background of our stories, we examine phenomena that essentially represented efforts to overcome or alleviate Cold War divisions. In our view, inter-bloc conflicts and cooperation are part of broader entanglements among groups, institutions, regimes, and ideas in various specialized fields during the post-1945 European and global history.

The premise of our endeavor is that state socialist experts have often been ignored or scantily discussed in the general literature about international transfers and the diplomacy of knowledge during the Cold War. By contrast, there is a rich literature that deals with Western experts’ involvement in postwar political, economic, or cultural projects (e.g., Cooper and Packard 1998; Scott-Smith and Krabbendam 2003; Engerman 2009). The issue aligns with the recent upsurge in reconsidering and resituating postwar intellectual trajectories from Eastern Europe within continental and global contexts. Some volumes point out the contributions of socialist cultures to the dynamics that have come to dominate, since 1989, Europe or the world (Bockmann 2011; Hecht 2013; Romano and Romero 2014). Others insist on the intellectual and human kinetics of the “Second world,” loosely grouping socialist countries, and its impact on other regions of the globe (Babiracki and Kenyon Zimmer 2014; Babiracki and Jersild 2016).

Socialist experts’ mobilities can be circumscribed at the intersection of multiple phenomena that defined the postwar: national settings’ impact

on inter- and *supra*-state interactions; Cold War politics; the tribulations of international organizations; and global trends determined by the accelerating interconnectedness of the world and decolonization. We argue that the general feature of the communities we investigate was their transnational character. We see transnationalism as both a perspective from which to approach our objects of study and a central topic of analysis for each individual article (Sluga 2011: 221). In 2013, the journal *East Central Europe* contended in a thematic issue on the study of communist dictatorships that “Eastern Europe can function as a laboratory for experimenting with new transnational perspectives” (Apor and Iordachi: 5). The present issue tests this statement, as we underline processes and actors involved in the international cultures and agendas embraced by communist regimes. It explores not only East–West links – which have been the subject of significant research in recent years (David-Fox 2010; Vowinckel et al. 2012; Mikkonen and Koivunen 2015) – but also underlines the importance of connections to the Global South.

Socialist experts acted as agents/vectors of internationalization (Kott 2011; Reinisch 2016). We argue that they were intermediaries between the regimes they represented and the agendas advocated by international organizations. They facilitated two-way transfers: on the one hand, they internationalized issues, experiences, and skills acquired in their home countries; on the other, they brought in their countries debates and disciplinary priorities, which they assimilated as part of their institutional socialization abroad. The articles stress the different synchronization levels of national and regional epistemic communities with global dynamics. This phenomenon in its turn sheds new light on domestic processes of adaptation and negotiation between politics and expertise.

In order to test the portability of knowledge from and into Eastern Europe, we study socialist experts in fundamentally transnational milieus: international organizations and “sites of convergence,” like conferences, symposia, and *supra*-state projects (Péteri 2012). In this manner we analyze the tension between the universalistic claims of individual expert cultures and their adaptation to and embrace of national/state priorities. At the same time, the emphasis that we place on international organizations is rooted in the fact that the latter were crucial targets for communist regimes for two reasons. They possessed material and informational resources otherwise unavailable or difficult to obtain by socialist establishments. More importantly, these institutions were endowed with the authority to orient action and create social reality (Barnet and Finnemore 2004: 6). They could act as forums for overcoming relations of dependency (within the bloc or in wider spatial and historical frameworks) as well as hubs for showcasing and diversifying the indigenization of specialized knowledge (Heilbron, Guilhot, and Jeanpierre 2008: 156).

A unifying thesis of the issue's articles is the relative autonomy of the experts' professional agenda in relation with local political officials, international dynamics within certain disciplines, and Cold War politics. Previous work on socialist policy making and international diplomacy has generally seen them as pure extension of party politics (Lowit 1979; Theen 1980). However, from 1955 onwards, once the "spirit of Geneva" permeated the bipolar world, experts in Central and Southeast Europe acquired greater authority than they previously had to reshape and internationalize economics, law, culture, etc., to redress the legacies of Stalinism, and to rehabilitate pre-1945 traditions. This implied numerous and intense connections with professional and academic associations from the West, organizations within the UN system or non-governmental institutions, as well as with elites from the "Third World." In the process, state socialist experts engaged in global conversations and dynamics on a multitude of specialized fields.

New Geographies and Chronologies

Our theoretical approach reveals geographies of knowledge and personnel circulation, which are an alternative or complementary to the East–West divide. Our findings supplement contemporary investigations of the counter-hegemonic alignments or the multiplicity of communicative trajectories during the Cold War between various countries and regions (Engerman 2011; Bott et al. 2016; Kalinovsky, Mark, and Marung 2018). The focus on Eastern Europe in general and Romania in particular signals the contribution of distinct individuals and groups at the periphery of bipolarism, thus going beyond the US-USSR antagonism.

Vlad Pașca points out how, starting with 1953, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) became a crucial space for consolidating détente because it created programs for East–West professional exchanges that aided individual westward turns among members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. The degree of involvement of particular socialist economists in such transnational interactions reflected the different paces of internationalization adopted by various East European regimes. Rather than seeing interaction as simply ideological rapprochement, Pașca points to the diversity of European mobilities and exchanges within the UNECE.

Viviana Iacob singles out similar phenomena: since its inception in 1948, the International Theatre Institute (ITI) attempted to provide a milieu where communication among theatre practitioners could continue despite ideological divisions. Unsurprisingly, the ITI-associated Festival of Nations was targeted by Romanian officials in mid-fifties for its early internationalization of local

socialist theatre culture. By the 1960s, Romanian participation at ITI-related events was a hybrid between regime cultural diplomacy and adaptations of socialist practices of acting, directing, staging, or teaching to contemporary trends in European theatre cultures. Romanian practitioners engaged in a dialogue with various schools and peers across the continent. In the process they selected and adapted the influences to which they were exposed within ITI, generating transformations in performative practices at home.

Corina Doboş identifies another direction of alignment: East-South, more specifically Romania's common front with socialist and developing countries at the World Population Conference in Bucharest (1974). This camp successfully promoted solutions to Third World overpopulation that countered the programs of the Anglo-Saxon dominated 'population establishment.' She goes further by tying this global position to the specific dynamics of population expertise in twentieth century Romania. She connects local epistemic trajectories to the regime's pronatalist policies while subsequently situating such domestic issues into the trans-regional conflicts over the 'population question' during the sixties and seventies. In his turn, Bogdan Iacob combines two geographies of circulation: the trans-systemic cooperation and competition among Southeast European scholars and regimes; and, their individual and collective involvement in UNESCO's project for a new world history, *History of Humanity*. Following this trajectory from local to regional to international, the contribution underlines the alliance between Balkan and Global South scholars within UNESCO. This Southeast-South collaboration was a maneuver for academics from the former area to obtain the recognition of their counter-hegemonic regionalism within pan-European narratives and universalisms articulated during the 1970s and 1980s within the UN system.

Gabriela Nicolescu discusses geographies of socialist expertise through the lens of personal itineraries. One actor recollects the transgressive scope of *artizanat*, traditional objects manufactured in Romania by the National Union of Cooperatives of Production (UCECOM). It was an important export commodity for the regime as well as a socialist product that defied ideological barriers because it was integrated in Western everyday lives. At the same time, the subject herself crosses spatial and temporal frontiers: she moves along the East-West axis and carries past the 1989 threshold the ethics of her state socialist socialization. The second subject of Nicolescu's article embodies similar personal geographies in flux: in post-socialism, she brings to a foreign country (Italy) the professional codes she learned before 1989 into a new line of work (healthcare), which ultimately reinforces her socialist-rooted identity.

The issue's emphasis on expert communities' autonomy generates periodizations that complicate the established Cold War timeline. We already

mentioned Vlad Pașca's and Viviana Iacob's analysis of early détente efforts among economists and theatre practitioners. In parallel, both authors show how the international organizations that they deal with generated conflicting agendas back in state socialist contexts. For instance, Iacob underlines how agents of internationalization from the sixties became troublesome factors for the regime in Bucharest during the seventies. They defied new official representations and recipes for local theatre both at home and abroad.

Corina Doboș's and Bogdan Iacob's contributions are telling examples of how the globalization of different epistemic communities does not always overlap with Cold War history (Iriye 2002). Debates on demography were indeed tied to the clash between socialist and capitalist modernities, but by late 1960s, they were also determined by the aftermath of decolonization and the conflict over different conceptualizations of development in newly independent countries. The World Population Conference in Bucharest seems less relevant through the lens of bipolarism. Its full significance comes into light if it is situated in the North vs. South conflict and in the context of developing countries' challenge against Cold War hierarchies.

Bogdan Iacob's article makes sense within the same chronology: Southeast European historians did not only engineer their own epistemic peaceful coexistence in détente Europe, they also used the Global South's push for cultural decolonization and endogenous development within UNESCO for their own agenda of de-peripheralization. Under the circumstances, it is no surprise that the networks, themes, and alliances formed among demographers or historians from the (South)East and the South survived despite the tensions generated by the 'new Cold War' (1978–1985). Nicolescu's anthropological approach reveals the continuity of professional values beyond the fall of the communist regime. She shows how pre-1989 experiences became central ingredients in the transnational 'capitalist' trajectories of the two biographies she analyzes. Her study warns against projecting ideological fetishism on personal stories before and after socialism.

On a related matter, the issue stresses the importance of individual biographies in the circulation and domestication of knowledge. Many of the actors that play central roles in our articles embodied continuities from the pre-1945 period. Others were exposed to pre-socialist expert cultures by way of mentors during their academic upbringing. Nevertheless, what our collection clearly stresses is that interwar topics and networks survived or were revitalized during the Cold War. Furthermore, these pre-existent connections sometimes acted as a basis for communist regimes' internationalization practices in particular fields. Vlad Pașca notes that, in some cases, the East European economists selected to participate in UNECE had played significant roles in their

countries and in European debates before World War II. Viviana Iacob shows how among Romanian theatre practitioners sent to the West there were individuals who had been involved with the pre-WWII precursor of ITI. Corina Doboş underlines how themes of pre-1945 Romanian demography were transposed in socialist population narratives, which were then exported into the global milieu of the World Population Conference. Additionally, Doboş identifies direct, personnel lineages either through the rehabilitation of interwar scholars or by way of mentorship. Though only briefly mentioned in his contribution, Bogdan Iacob has shown elsewhere that some of the most important academics from Bulgaria, Romania, or Yugoslavia involved in the trans-regional rebirth of Southeast European studies had been socialized in the field before 1945. Moreover, the dominant topoi of regionalist narratives since the sixties built on those developed during interwar (or even earlier) scholarly debates (Iacob 2016). In Gabriela Nicolescu's contribution, the regime's emphasis on *artizanat* is in itself an attempt to tie tradition with the polity's Cold War defying export-ready identity.

Internationalism and Agency

The issue's transnational approach raises the question of the relationship between the international and the national dimensions of state socialism. Internationalism from the vantage point of communist regimes was fundamentally unstable (Babiracki and Jersild 2016: 4) as it underwent significant transformations over the years from its proletarian origins to the Comintern era imbued with anti-fascist solidarities to the Cominform and the crystallization of the "Second world" to, finally, the individualization of internationalisms in the post-Stalin years. The collection focuses on the forms taken by socialist globalities during this last period of fragmentation as nation-states projected their policies, narratives, traditions, and self-representations abroad as part of their post-1956 rebranding campaigns (Cull 2010: 439).

The analysis of socialist experts in transnational contexts points to the fact that, in Eastern Europe, there were different cadences of entanglement in international organizations, conferences, or projects. Vlad Paşca shows how various socialist communities of economists approached the UNECE in disparate ways. Viviana Iacob stresses Romanian representatives' varying points of entry and approach within ITI in contrast with their bloc peers. Corina Doboş underlines how, in spite of the belated institutionalization and internationalization of population research in communist Romania, its practitioners found themselves in a privileged position in the global debates on population and development.

Bogdan Iacob insists on Balkan historians' parallel and often competitive involvement with trans-regional Southeast European studies and UNESCO.

Nevertheless, despite differences of interaction and transfer, the articles infer certain levels of convergence among East European experts and their peers in the West or the Global South. There are two consequences to such insight about the individuality of internationalizing tempos and dissimilarities of institutional/thematic synchronization. First, our findings de-center established narratives about the Cold War. Second, they show how representatives from the East participated in and sometimes determined the conditions of Europeanizing and globalizing trends in distinct fields within particular organizations. Our vantage point from Cold War peripheries allows us to go beyond the established focus on great powers. We show how East European experts did not only appropriate international issues in order to legitimize themselves at home and beyond national borders. They did not only negotiate with party-state authorities. They also translated agendas to which they were exposed abroad, subsequently enriching their initial epistemic idioms. Their engagements in transnational debates in various fields were often occasions to project on a global level the solutions they had formulated for their own local contexts.

Vlad Pașca discusses how, by 1970s, Eastern and Western economists were engaged in exchanges on equal footing. Socialist economists were not *bêtes noires* or 'poorer' partners within UNECE. Viviana Iacob stresses the bonds established between socialist and Western theatre practitioners, as networks resulted out of common purpose. Once a middle ground was found within ITI beyond the divisions of the Iron Curtain, it then functioned as a foundation for the accelerated diversification of cross-border exchanges among European theatre cultures. Corina Doboș emphasizes that the ability of Romanian officials and demographers to negotiate between the various camps at the World Population Conference placed them at the center of the momentous transformations that the field itself experienced in mid- to late seventies. Similarly, Bogdan Iacob insists that the ability of Balkan historians to produce and institutionalize international knowledge about their region on the basis of the UNESCO's own language about the originality of cultures and peoples allowed them to play a significant role in the project *History of Humanity*. More generally, we argue that state socialist experts, rather than being oddities of postwar European and global dynamics within international organizations, were significant actors, who did much more in transnational milieus than advance ideological agendas. Their presence and activity within "the sites of convergence" that we concentrate on considerably enlarged their professional horizons and the visibility of the national milieus they represented.

Maybe the most important contribution of our issue is that it reconstitutes and clarifies agency in multiple directions. We respond to questions such as:

Who were the actors who represented communist regimes abroad in particular fields of expertise? What were their intellectual and political profiles? How did they participate within specific international environments? What sort of networks were they a part of? What did they bring back to their local knowledge communities?

The last question points to the impact of our expert communities at home. Viviana Iacob shows that local practitioners' participation in ITI projects generated a shift in the attitude of the Romanian cultural establishment toward Eugen Ionescu's theatre. ITI events also prepared the ground for the re-opening of the directing department at the Theatre Institute in Bucharest. Corina Doboş maintains that the re-institutionalization of demographic research in Romania went hand in hand with the regime's internationalization of its population politics at the UN. Bogdan Iacob argues that the expansion of the postwar institutionalization of Southeast European studies in individual Balkan countries was directly linked to the will for multilateralism of the area's regimes. And, the trans-regional integration of this discipline in UNESCO programs fed into its development in national context to the extent that once UNESCO was in crisis, this epistemic cooperation found it near impossible to survive. Unsurprisingly, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Southeast European scholars tried to resuscitate their pre-1989 networks under the same tutelage. They even proposed, to no avail, that UNESCO would support a "History of the Balkans" as part of its regional histories program.

Nation-State Revisited?

Our contributions can be defined as histories in-between that interweave international politics and trends into national contexts and biographical experiences (Antic, Conterio, and Vargha 2016: 361). We do not see expert communities, decision-making establishments, or the institutions where such groups were present as monoliths. We map out the diversity of interactions and breakdown the significance of such internationalizations for the specific East European contexts we deal with. The last contribution in the issue supplements this approach with an anthropological analysis that enhances the interdisciplinarity of our discussion of state socialist expertise.

When we set out with the project "Socialist Experts during the Cold War (1960s-1980s)" [for details see the acknowledgement], the general objective was the reconstruction of the continental and global dimensions of Eastern European communist regimes (with Romania as starting point). As we progressed with the research and finalized the texts included in the present collection (among other publications), we realized that our analysis of socialist expert

communities led us to a re-historicization of post-1945 nation-states in the 'other' Europe. After all, "twentieth-century internationalism, like the UN, was composed out of a complicity as much as compatibility with nationalism" (Sluga 2013: 158). Every regime and each community we focus on boasted webs of diplomatic and epistemic exchanges that enhanced and expanded their agency during the Cold War.

Drawing on Akira Iriye's remarks in the *Oxford Handbook the Cold War* (2013: 29–30), we believe that the study of state socialisms by way of their entangled geographies and their representatives' transnational trajectories finally integrates East European states into the networks of interdependence that determined postwar global history. The significance of this new perspective cannot be overemphasized. It does not merely take us beyond the national paradigm in studying communist regimes. It also reconstitutes pre-1989 Europeanization and globalization in Eastern Europe – a significant interpretative break with the self-imposed insulation and self-centeredness of past historiographies about post-1945 Eastern Europe.

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