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# Between Westernization and Traditionalism: Central and Eastern European Academia during the Transformation in the 1990s

## Abstract

2021 saw the thirtieth anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and there is a growing interest in the historicization of the past 30 years of transformation. Taking this anniversary as a point of departure, we want to look into a specific area that has markedly changed in the last three decades – the scholarly community. The interest of analysing the academia in a period

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of transformation is not new, and the 1990s are amply covered by the literature scrutinising changes and forging plans for the future development, but we intend to enrich this discussion with approaches coming from the history of science and of scholarship.

By looking at changes that happened in the decade following the end of the Socialist utopia, we propose to look into mechanisms of organizational and intellectual innovation and place them in the context of European and global integration. As we argue, looking at the 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe can help us to understand how scholarly systems change by oscillating between tradition and innovation, and we propose the notions of a selective Westernisation and an equally selective traditionalism for our case study.

**Keywords:** *academia, transformation, post-Soviet era, Soros Foundations, scientific institutions, marketisation of universities, science in context, liberal thought, science under socialism*

## Między westernizacją a tradycjonalizmem: Nauka w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w okresie transformacji w latach 90. XX w.

### Abstrakt

Rok 2021 oznacza trzydzieści lat od rozpadu Związku Radzieckiego i rosnące zainteresowanie historyzacją ostatnich 30 lat transformacji. Biorąc tę rocznicę jako punkt wyjścia, chcemy przyjrzeć się jednemu, konkretnemu obszarowi, który w ciągu ostatnich trzech dekad uległ znaczącej zmianie – społeczności naukowej. Zainteresowanie analizą akademii w okresie transformacji nie jest niczym nowym, i szczególnie lata 90. XX w. obfitują w zarówno literaturę analityczną jak i tą snującą plany na przyszłość. W naszym tekście zamierzamy włączyć pytania z historii nauki w analizy o transformacji lat 90. XX w. Przyglądając się zmianom zachodzącym w dekadzie po zakończeniu socjalistycznej utopii, proponujemy przyjrzeć się mechanizmom innowacji organizacyjnej i intelektualnej i umieścić

je w kontekście europejskiej i globalnej integracji. Jak twierdzimy, spojrzenie na lata 90. XX w. w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej może pomóc nam zrozumieć, jak oscylując między tradycją a innowacją zmienia się system naukowy, lub, jak proponujemy je określić w naszym studium przypadku, selektywną „westernizacją” i równie selektywnym „tradycjonalizmem.”

**Słowa kluczowe:** *akademia, transformacja, postsowieckość, fundacje Sorosa, instytucja naukowe, urynkowienie uczelni, kontekst polityczny, myśl liberalna, nauka socjalistyczna*

## 1. Introduction

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, scholars in the Eastern Bloc looked toward an uncertain future. After 30 years, we can say that this future has developed in various directions, contrary to what acolytes of the modernisation theory had claimed. Some post-communist countries, especially those which accessed the European Union, embraced the idea of the autonomy of higher education and research institutions, and even illiberal governments began instrumentalising science<sup>1</sup> threatening the recently won autonomy.<sup>2</sup> In other countries, politicians did not leave universities and academies of sciences alone, although they allowed, at least for some time, free spaces for science to blossom outside direct state supervision. While the Bologna Process, inaugurated with the Bologna Declaration in 1999, is in many respects the symbol of the reforms of science and scholarship in the region – even if its primary aim was only higher education –, the section of *Studia Historiae Scientiarum* to which this article is an introduction focuses on the period from the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc to the Bologna Declaration, or, in other terms, on the 1990s and the concurrent transformation in politics, science, and scholarship. This decade has only recently moved into the focus of historians’ attention. Questions of (re)migration and economic transformation, but also of re-writing of the past, occupy a growing number of scholars and have led to the creation of new research centres.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this article we follow the Central and Eastern European tradition, in which “science” means both Anglo-American science and scholarship.

<sup>2</sup> Grzebalska, Pető 2018; Pető 2021.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Research Center for the History of Transformations (RECET) in Vienna. On re-writing the past see Kopeček 2013; Pakier, Wawrzyniak 2015.

By contrast, historians of science seem to have lost interest in the period of transformation. After an initial surge of interest in science in the early 1990s, fuelled by the possibility to see transformation in action and thus observe in more or less “live mode” how political crises impact scientific organisation and practices, the interest faded, being sustained mostly through education studies and scientometrics.<sup>4</sup> Only recently have new initiatives begun emerging, calling for a revision of previous natural science-based transformation models.<sup>5</sup>

By discussing several key aspects of the 1990s scholarly transformation, we aim to ignite a discussion about science and scholarship in transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The focus of our study is the social sciences and humanities in Poland, Czechia, and Russia, with other disciplines and countries playing a secondary role. We readily acknowledge that this region is heterogeneous and evades one single narrative. We feel, however, that substantial similarities call for a comparative history of the CEE academic space. Moreover, this space should not be limited to the former Eastern Bloc, but should also include Austria or the former Yugoslavia to call attention to different historical layers and avoid overhasty generalisations of this or that aspect as being specific to the CEE. Similarly, science and scholarship are heterogeneous phenomena, and not all our theses will equally apply to the natural sciences. The academia and the universities in Europe were clearly dealing with several simultaneous processes in the 1990s, e.g. the onset of neoliberalism in higher education and discussions of research models (Humboldt Model); additionally, as Kastenhofer shows in this issue, Austrian universities experienced at the same time a similar Westernisation discourse.

Since the Eastern Bloc is the topic of this text, a distinction should be made between post-Soviet states and former satellite states. Starting from the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the latter took a pro-European stance and embraced the path to join the European Union, followed later also by Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, who were previously part

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<sup>4</sup> From most important initiatives from the early 1990s see the series TERC Transformation of the National Higher Education and Research Systems of Central Europe (10 vols. Published between 1992 and 1998), result of the work of Expert Committee at the Institut für Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna and Graham, Dezhina 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Cirstocea, Dakowska, Sigman 2014; Gordin 2021.

of the Soviet Union. Thus, for them, the transformation of higher education and science was directly linked to the implementation of the European Union's norms and standards, as it was considered a part of the preparation for the accession. One should note considerable differences among these countries, which we will discuss below. Countries of the former Soviet Union did start from a different point, as they were more isolated from international science and more strictly adhered to Soviet models of science and higher education. Also in this case Westernisation played an important role in the catching-up discourse of the 1990s, although, as we will argue below, it remained quite an elitist concept limited to a relatively small number of institutions.

From the perspective of the Western countries, but also of multi-national foundations, reforming the system of higher education in post-communist countries was a crucial step towards their democratic transition and their accession to the EU. In a 2000 report by the Netherlands Scientific Council for Governmental Policy on the current progress in reforming higher education in CEE countries candidates for EU membership,<sup>6</sup> Richard H. Jones praised the role of education in “arming the individual for democracy” and put the modernisation agenda succinctly into the following words:

The biggest hurdle to be confronted in creating truly democratic systems in Central and Eastern Europe after decades of communism is the empowerment of ordinary citizens. They must be transformed from being passive observers and instead take their place at the centre of an open civil/civic society. This is not to say that there is a real danger of a return to the past. [...] At this stage of Central and Eastern European post-communist transformation, the emphasis needs to be directed toward getting the individual citizen to understand and espouse the ideas, institutions, and practices of democracy<sup>7</sup>.

While the first phase of the European integration concerned the disassemblage of the authoritarian Socialist political and economic system,

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<sup>6</sup> Jones 2000, p. 11. The countries discussed were: Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

transition to the liberal market economy, and founding of democratic political institutions (i.e., Copenhagen criteria established in 1993), the second phase involved the set of reforms of higher education and science. The tempo of the first phase of the modernisation was drastically uneven. While in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic this phase was accomplished by 1995, for Bulgaria and Romania it turned out to be a very hard, long, and even violent process which took the whole 1990s. Since the second phase, the integration of West European academic norms and practices, was connected to the adoption of common legal frameworks, it happened in CEE countries in parallel and in a similar manner.<sup>8</sup> Importantly, experts saw the process of integration as quite a passive one: new countries did not challenge the norms and forms of the West, but rather adopted them aspiring to contribute to a new, joint intellectual culture.<sup>9</sup> And indeed, one should remark that in most countries our article deals with, science, scholarship, and the institutions producing them did not experience major reforms during the decade, apart from the initial thrust following the system change in 1989/1991.<sup>10</sup>

The 1990s stay in the collective memory as a paradoxical era, seen at the same time as a period of economic and social troubles and of absolute freedom, a period of complete disorientation and crisis as well as full of new hopes and opportunities.<sup>11</sup> For science and higher education, the abolition of censorship offered plenty of exciting possibilities, but at the same time no significant change of leadership within the academia took place, nor budgetary constraints were lifted – both circumstances giving a reality check to blossoming expectations.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, while there were new models to follow, their appropriation required soft and hard

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<sup>8</sup> Common legal acts were, among others, the ratification of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region in 1997 and the Bologna process starting in 1999 simultaneously in the ex-Eastern Bloc). For a comparative analysis of the different national strategies of reformation of the education & science see Sokolov 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Scott 2002. See also on the idea of rejoining: Neave 2003, 26f.

<sup>10</sup> See, on Poland, Antonowicz 2015; Dziedziczak-Foltyn 2017. Ukraine did began serious reforms only in the 2000s, see Zakharchuk 2020.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g., Okrest, Buzer, Kuvaldyn 2017; Cooke 2005; Leyk, Wawrzyniak 2020; Pehe 2019 and literature quoted there.

<sup>12</sup> On the disappointment with reforms in CEE concerning higher education see Amsterdamski 1993, pp. 9–10.

skills that were not always present, and additionally met with opposition from various groups. Indeed, the modernisation of science in former Eastern Bloc countries was following the path of the multiplication of modernities and not settling on one unitary path. Thus, it seems that a tension between Westernisation and Traditionalism allows us to pinpoint the characteristics of the transformation in the most precise way. Needless to say, there is neither one Westernisation nor one Traditionalism, but they are used as arguments differently at different times and occasions.

In this *Studia Historiae Scientiarum* section, we will look at different transformations happening in Central and Eastern Europe by focusing on the case studies of Austria, Ukraine, and Russia. In this introduction, we will outline some general trends in the evolution of a post-Socialist scientific space, especially in Central Europe and Russia.<sup>13</sup> Firstly, we will trace some general developments which took place in the late 1980s and 1990s, starting with issues such as financing, institutional models, and the most crucial innovations. Secondly, we will look more in detail at how innovation was (not) happening, and what different constraints innovators encountered. As we will argue, most innovations were external and met with various obstacles while being accepted. Importantly, the successful adaptation of such innovations could not be achieved through a mere transfer but needed negotiation and the appropriation by the local institutional and knowledge conditions.

## 2. Liberalising Socialist Science

If the 1990s are to be seen as a period in which the Soviet model of science was left behind, we need to sketch a few key characteristics of this model, being aware of the danger of essentialisation. Trying to avoid this pitfall, we will mention only characteristics which were referred to in the 1990s themselves, negatively or positively. While some of them are obviously political, a non-political characteristic seems to have called most of the attention in the 1990s, and has had a long-lasting effect until now, namely the division between teaching and research. Following the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc countries

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<sup>13</sup> For overviews about post-Soviet countries see Huisman, Smolentseva, Froumin 2018.

adopted a model in which academies of science were responsible for conducting research, while universities remained exclusively obliged to education and witnessed more political supervision due to their purported influence on the youth.<sup>14</sup> This happened at least in theory, as some universities in Central Europe did research, especially those retaining it from the Interwar Period. In Russia, on the other hand, research university became the keyword symbolising the transformation of the 1990s and leaving the Soviet epoch behind.

The second characteristic of the Socialist science system is already at the crossroads between institutions and politics – centrality and politically-supervised allocation of funds. Stoyan G. Denchev, in the 1990s a senior advisor and head of the Department of Technology of the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria, put it into slightly more dramatic words:

For decades, the field of science and technology in Bulgaria existed as a system based on immorality, avidity, unscrupulousness, and political manoeuvring. Links between science and industry were broken. The main reasons were the feudal structure in science and technology [...] and the chaos in the production system.<sup>15</sup>

The “feudal structure” that Denchev reproaches has many facets. From ministers despotically controlling everything, through deans and directors of institutes abusing their positions, to students having career possibilities by blindly following senior scholars – not always the most renowned ones, but those with most institutional power. Finances were allocated vertically and had, with few exceptions, only one source connected to respective ministries.<sup>16</sup> The scant research grants available (international, or, more importantly, internal) were distributed following political sympathies;<sup>17</sup> travel abroad – both scholarships and conference trips– were strictly regulated.<sup>18</sup> This meant

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<sup>14</sup> On universities see Connelly 2000; Tromly 2013. On selectivity of adoption of Soviet ideals see e.g. Zysiak 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Denchev 1993, quoted in: Kozak, Bornmann, Leydesdorff 2015, p. 1102.

<sup>16</sup> Jablecka 1995, pp. 729–730.

<sup>17</sup> Štulík 2010, p. 99.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Pleskot 2005; for a perspective of a Western scholar coming to USSR see Fitzpatrick 2014.



a structure of dependence, where good contacts with supervisors played a more important role than scientific merits. Therefore, the founding of meritocratic grant systems in the 1990s was hailed in most accounts as crucial for the transformation.<sup>19</sup> This praise includes both the establishment of national grant systems and fewer restrictions for international money givers.

Opening toward the West, post-communist science relied on contacts made already before. International cooperation across the Iron Curtain existed, although often defined by various forms of scientific diplomacy. International foundations were, to an extent, active in the satellite states, and, to a lesser extent, in the Soviet Union. The best examples are activities of the Ford Foundation or Fulbright Commission, which began to be permitted across the Eastern Bloc starting in the late 1950s.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, there existed some bilateral exchange agreements with, for instance, the US National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Foundation, beginning in the 1960s but markedly increasing in the 1980s (and decreasing in the second half of the 1990s).<sup>21</sup> The Soros Foundation Budapest, a precursor of the Open Society Institute, was active in the region from 1984 onwards, but with divergent results – succeeding in the Hungarian People’s Republic (HPR) and failing in Polish People’s Republic (PPR). Soros blamed the unwillingness of civil society representatives to communicate with the government for this failure.<sup>22</sup>

The lack of internal grant systems in the East Bloc states was also connected with the fact that scientific development was more or less prescribed by politics and governmental planning. Even if academies of science, with science of science and futurology divisions, had some influence on science policies, party politics had the final saying. In the Research and Development (further R&D) sector, institutes were linked to (state) companies and worked to fulfil preordained tasks. While in the 1990s the secondary literature spoke of overinvestment in R&D during

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<sup>19</sup> See also Ilin, Bielik 2020.

<sup>20</sup> See the recent issue of *Serendipities* with Kiliias 2021 and Zarycki 2021 on the Polish People’s Republic; Hincu 2021 on Socialist Republic of Romania; Karády 2021 on Hungarian People’s Republic.

<sup>21</sup> Schweitzer 2004; 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Soros 1994, p. 2.

the Socialist period,<sup>23</sup> this meant more privileges for this field, rather than more freedom in these sectors.

Our remarks on international foundations above show that international cooperation was possible, although in a limited form, always politically overseen and centralised. The data on joint publications based on international cooperation show major disparities. While the HPR and the PPR gradually opened up in the 1980s, Czechoslovakia and the People's Republic of Bulgaria (PRB) were still dominated by cooperation within the COMECON.<sup>24</sup> USSR, and later Russia, had a relatively low level of publications based on international cooperation, especially with non-Socialist countries, a type of cooperation which began growing only with the introduction of the *glasnost* in the middle of 1980s.<sup>25</sup> In absolute numbers, however, joint publications became more frequent by more than tenfold from 1991 to 1995 – this rapid increase suggesting that there might have been more cooperation before there were measurable results.<sup>26</sup> Notably, the USA and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) were the leading cooperation partners for the HPR and the PPR already by 1989, while in the PRB and Czechoslovakia the USSR was the leading partner with a substantial difference.<sup>27</sup> The access to publications was also quite uneven, with all the countries of the Eastern Bloc struggling to obtain publications from abroad, and having them mostly in libraries situated in capitals. Translations were scarce, and equally uneven, with Russian, Polish (for Czechoslovakia and Western UkrSSR) and German serving as vehicles.<sup>28</sup>

Last but not least, ideology. Also, here one can discern both decisive similarities and local differentiation. While Marxism was proclaimed the official ideology, many of the instances of its hegemony disappeared in Soviet satellite states already with the end of Stalinism, while in the Soviet Union they remained untouched. An instance is the existence of chairs of Marxism-Leninism and the necessity to quote Marx/

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<sup>23</sup> Radosevic, Auriol 1999.

<sup>24</sup> Braun, Glänzel 1996; for an analysis of cooperation with FRG see Glänzel, Winterhagen 1992.

<sup>25</sup> Wilson, Markusova 2004, esp. p. 357.

<sup>26</sup> Glänzel et al. 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Teodorescu, Tudorel 2011, pp. 719–720.

<sup>28</sup> In Russia, for instance, abstract journals were the main source of information for scientists, see Markusova et al. 1996; see also Savelieva 2020.

Engels/Lenin/Stalin in every paper.<sup>29</sup> of course, this situation differed from country to country, depending on the political climate, but in no country was the ideology so pervasive as in the Soviet Union, where it began to slowly disappear only under Gorbachev.

Just before the collapse of the Soviet system, the countries of the Eastern Bloc were in different situations. In most of them, gradual liberalisation began already in the 1970s – even if the 1980s brought a backlash, often connected with financial difficulties. In Soviet Russia, *perestroika* meant a revolutionary (although not complete) opening of borders, archives, and minds.<sup>30</sup> In the PPR, new laws enlarged the autonomy of universities, allowing some of them to become centres of opposition activism.<sup>31</sup> On the other side of the spectrum, Czechoslovakia experienced an inverse trend after 1968, with the so-called “normalisation,” meaning a decrease in international contacts, the repression of scholarly activity, and the growth of intellectual dissidence. The newer literature was not translated and many scholars were removed from their positions following 1968, working either in lower, administrative positions or being pushed into internal or external exile. Thus, in retrospect, Czech scholars regarded their situation as significantly worse than that of their colleagues in Poland or Hungary.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. Leaving Socialist Science Behind

Once the Eastern Bloc dissolved, the question of *how* to deal with academia’s most recent past was raised. But the question was also *who* should deal with that past and who should be banned from participating in this process. Depending on governmental constellations, politically motivated removals were handled differently throughout the region, with Ukraine and Russia pursuing the most lenient policies. In Czechoslovakia, administrators and holders of leading positions were banished if they had collaborated with the regime; yet regular professors

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<sup>29</sup> On the references to Marxist classics in PPR literature see see Kulczycki, Kolasa, Szadkowski 2021.

<sup>30</sup> For an interesting account of such changes see Gerovitch 1996.

<sup>31</sup> So at least the Minister of Science and Education from this time, Benon Miśkiewicz, in his semi-analytical publication concerning this period (Miśkiewicz 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Pospíšilová 2013, pp. 21–22. On science in general after 1968 see e.g. Kostlán 2011, esp. pp. 54–184.

did not undergo lustration.<sup>33</sup> A significant number of scholars who had to leave Prague institutions for political reasons found refuge in newly established regional universities like Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem or the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. Since they were often full professors or academicians and had contacts in Prague's administrative circles, they provided new universities with the necessary social capital to represent them in state commissions or deans' conferences.<sup>34</sup> A legislation similar to the one created in Czechia was put in place in Hungary from 1994, but the socialists, who won the election a few months after the law had been passed, soon limited the lustration to senior posts in the government and the media.<sup>35</sup> In Poland, voices calling for lustration in the universities became strong only in the second half of the 2000s, as the right-wing government was in search of the "post-Soviet conspiracy (*układ*)" and called for purification in the academia.<sup>36</sup>

In general, there was a disinterest in complete lustration in academia. The most notable exception was former East Germany, which carried out a significant replacement of personnel, quite often even termed "colonization".<sup>37</sup> Especially in humanities, this replacement led to the development of a "second academic culture" consisting of those dismissed from universities and academies of science.<sup>38</sup> But even here one has to express reservations. If we differentiate between dismissals resulting from political involvement from those in which politics played a vital but secondary role (*politische Entfernungen vs. politisch verursachte Entfernungen*), then the number of those dismissed as a result of direct political lustration was low even in former East Germany.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Appel 2005, p. 386. This meant that, for instance, at the Charles University in Prague, around 95% of higher administrators lost positions: Havránek, Pousta 1998, pp. 584–586.

<sup>34</sup> We are thankful to Martin Franz for this information. See also Wernisch 1994, pp. 52–53 for an example.

<sup>35</sup> Appel 2005, p. 387.

<sup>36</sup> For the reactions of universities see Kędziora 2015.

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Ash 2020, p. 16 and the literature quoted there in footnote 30, as well as Ash 2021. Also in the case of Eastern Germany, the "Westgermanification" did not happen simply through West German Elites, as often argued. The process was supported and facilitated by parts of young dissidents and some politicians.

<sup>38</sup> Bloch, Pasternack 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Ash 2020, p. 292.

Such a limited lustration means that people who were reforming science and higher education were themselves active in academia before 1989/1991. Yet even though it is clear that former dissidents and foreign scholars were playing a significant role, local scholars with careers in the Socialist academia certainly represented a majority in this process. (To be fair, one should add that young scholars, not having previous power positions, sometimes even those who for political reasons were denied promotions or demoted, often actively participated in the reform process, but this participation differed from country to country.) One often finds disappointed dissidents complaining that their expertise was not welcome at the most prestigious institutions, and that they had to create spaces of their own. Through this creation they also became a source of institutional innovation, being instrumental in establishing new chairs and departments.<sup>40</sup> Their peripheral but crucial role can be exemplified by the fact that they helped to create Prague Central European University in 1992, while the signatories of Charter 77 and exiled scholars constituted the majority of its first board of directors (*správni rada*).<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the reforms were made rather in a way to protect those active in academia than to achieve a revolution. Reforms were often made by commissions consisting of scholars and politicians. Academies of sciences frequently claimed to have the expertise needed to apply crucial competencies to the reform projects, and students wanted to have a saying too. Of course, the most crucial and immediate reforms varied from country to country, but the abolition of censorship, the introduction/strengthening of autonomy in scientific institutions, the decentralisation and abolition of the institutional division between teaching and research, as well as the liberalisation of higher education (i.e., the approval of private higher education institutions and commercial programmes at universities) are among the most commonly cited changes.

The fate of the academies of science illustrates the divergences among countries very clearly. Because of their privileged position in the Socialist science system, academies were not always prepared to support measures that would endanger their position. In Russia, for instance, the Russian Academy of Science (RAS) opposed reforms such

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<sup>40</sup> Pospíšilová 2013, pp. 25–26; Skovajsa, Balon 2017, pp. 99–100.

<sup>41</sup> Pospíšilová 2013, p. 51.

as the introduction of the grant system, as it previously controlled the allocation of financial resources.<sup>42</sup> Academies of sciences could be either changed into “gentlemen’s societies,” with the research migrating to universities, as it happened in the Baltic states, or kept as research institutions, as it happened in Russia, Poland or Czechia (with some institutes becoming independent). Sometimes parallel institutions were created; alternatively, institutions historically independent and merged with academies of sciences in the communist time became independent again. In Czechia, the Learned Society of the Czech Republic (*Učená společnost České republiky*) was established to take on the role of “traditional” institutions, while the Czech Academy of Sciences kept its research function.<sup>43</sup> In Poland, the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences (*Polska Akademia Umiejętności*), an institution established in 1872 in Cracow and merged into the Polish Academy of Sciences (*Polska Akademia Nauk* (PAN)) in 1952, became independent again in 1989, pledging a return to traditional values and structures.<sup>44</sup>

Sometimes, plans to reform academies of sciences failed, producing new institutions. As was put in 2006 by Vadim Radaev, vice-rector of the Higher School of Economics in Moscow (HSE) since 2002, who had started his career as an economist in the Institute of Economics of the RAS in the late 1980s, he left the institute because of its internal degradation: “now I understand that structures like the academies of sciences are simply beyond reformation. When we were young, we tried to implement some reforms, but it did not work. Any practical efforts to change something from below gave nothing”.<sup>45</sup> The reform he talked about consisted of dividing the institute into three parts: one concentrating on the basics and financed with internal grants; one working for businesses and enterprises and thus bringing in money; and one consisting of employees not able to do good research nor good money, but whom it was impossible to fire. As the plan was not approved

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<sup>42</sup> Fortescue 2000, pp. 237–238.

<sup>43</sup> See a personal account of the creation, with typical historicization in: Zahradník 2008, pp. 205–214.

<sup>44</sup> Two other parts merged into PAN in 1952 reappeared as well. The Warsaw Scientific Society was reestablished already in 1980 and the Józef Mianowski Fund in 1991.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Vadim Radaev in Kurennoi 2006, p. 35. Our translation – J.S., D.P.

by the institute's director, Radaev and his colleagues left and founded HSE. They were helped by Yegor Gaidar's government, the European Commission's TACIS programme, and Soros funding, and the first two parts of the scheme Radaev had initially proposed to RAS were then successfully implemented.

#### 4. Poor but dashing: "likhie devyanostye"

One of the most widespread narratives about the 1990s is the extremely precarious financial situation in which science and scientists found themselves. Especially in the former Soviet Union, many were left without salaries for months or even years. This probably did not lead to the development of a lively criminal underground – the very occurrence of which is captured by the term "likhie devyanostye" i.e. "dashing 1990s." But many academicians had to leave their positions, emigrate, find a job outside of academia, or take additional academic jobs. Many stayed, since the situation in the non-academic economic sectors was also far from optimal. Up until now, the 1990s is the situation to which scholars (especially in the post-Soviet space) do not want to return – thus, the same as in popular discourse, in the academia the term "likhie devyanostye" came to symbolise the trauma of transformation, especially in Putin's Russia.<sup>46</sup>

An experience of poverty was common among scholars in the former USSR. In this situation, Soros Foundation's projects proved to be invaluable. In Russia, the distribution of emergency grants for scholars, even though highly selective, allowed around twenty thousand specialists to continue their research in the context of a total collapse of the whole academic infrastructure. In addition to individual grants for scholars, professors, and students (around 50,000 beneficiaries), the Soros Foundation supported scientific institutions (like *Akademgorodok* in Novosibirsk) and launched various projects aimed at transforming higher education, supporting libraries,<sup>47</sup> or translating Western scholarship.<sup>48</sup> Lastly, it was Soros' funding that allowed many scholars to make their

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<sup>46</sup> On political instrumentalization of the myth of "likhie devyanostye" see Sharaftudinova 2020, esp. pp. 105–132.

<sup>47</sup> Fond Sorosa 1997.

<sup>48</sup> Savelieva 2020.



first-time visits to Western academic institutions, create new scientific journals, and get their works published.

Various foundations were supporting scholars across the region, including Soros' massive sponsorship, the intensification of donations by the Fulbright and Humboldt foundations aimed at promoting excellence, and European Union programmes aimed at supporting systemic change. It is impossible to assess the impact of individual programmes, and their effects vary in different fields and disciplines. However, various foundations developed alumni groups arguing that this or that foundation played the most important role in this or that field, and in Poland, Czechia, or Russia, the authors of this article have first-hand experience of those groups, which were nationally coded and not entirely friendly to each other. Nevertheless, two theses can be offered. First, the 1990s allowed more cooperation among foundations than the 2000s, including forms of division of labour. Second, the Soros Foundation (under its different legal names and forms) was more important than it is today acknowledged, especially in the social sciences and the humanities. In the 2000s, Soros' projects became symbols of progressive thought and therefore they were contested, while before they had been a symbol for uniting different scholars around the agenda of de-Sovietisation. Commenting on the Hannah Arendt Prize awarded to George Soros in 1999, sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, an important figure in the coordination of modernisation projects in the 1990s, stated that "wherever we went, Soros was there before us," summarising well the importance of Soros' projects during this period.<sup>49</sup>

However, this selective system of individual grants that helped so many people and projects also had negative consequences. It created another form of inequality in the academic community (e.g., "Soros professors" versus those who did not get financial support) and left many scholars with the feeling that the game was not fair.<sup>50</sup> In Ukraine and at times Russia, there was even a special term, *grentoyedy/zpaimoedy*, literally "the grant-eaters," denoting those who had extensive experience abroad and who, in eyes of their critics, sold their souls to foreign donors and earned inexplicable sums of money.

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<sup>49</sup> Dahrendorf 2000, p. 83.

<sup>50</sup> Belik, Ilin 2020.



Even if foreign foundations' programmes allowed many scholars to continue their work, the general narrative is the one showcased by the academia and the R&D sector in general, drastically reducing the numbers of employees. Many reasons were given to justify this process. For instance, one of the experts summarised the situation of the R&D sector in Socialist countries by saying that there was "a continuing incompatibility between the areas of R&D and science development, on one hand, and the economy, on the other."<sup>51</sup> Given the extensive privatisation, which broke up existing information chains and cooperation and created smaller units where the risk could not be easily balanced, the R&D sector was the one suffering the biggest blow in the first half of the 1990s, although in a quite uneven manner.<sup>52</sup> In general, the research-based at academies of sciences seems to have experienced fewer layoffs than the one connected to the industry.<sup>53</sup> Transition could also mean in this case that there was less applied research commissioned to R&D sectors because of the economic insecurity or the low expected return.<sup>54</sup>

While there is abundant research on how many scholars left academia in the 1990s –whether through layoffs, brain drain to the West, or departure to private companies–, the discussion about this phenomenon is seriously beginning only now. While previous research relied on official statistics and repeated their numerical findings,<sup>55</sup> historians today are trying to reconstruct the fates of scholars and put more substance to the discussion about the brain drain devastating science and scholarship in the first half of the 1990s. This research is still ongoing, but two points are worth mentioning. First, the drop in productivity that followed the collapse of the Soviet era which was, quite independently of the methodology adopted, smaller than what one would expect based on the number of the employees' reduction. Second, the rationale behind releases, in the individual remembrances as well as in the literature that analyses them. Both use neoliberal language and speak of unproductive, unsuccessful researchers leaving

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<sup>51</sup> Kozłowski 1997, p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> See the discussion on factors in Czech case in Müller 1995; for Poland see Matras-Bolibok, Bolibok 2014; for Hungary: Mosoni-Fried 1995.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. Müller 1994.

<sup>54</sup> For Croatia see Prpić 2007, esp. p. 498.

<sup>55</sup> Characteristically: Yegorov 2009, esp. table 2.

academia.<sup>56</sup> To this one should observe that these stories are written by those who remained in the academia, thus that their descriptions of who was left behind inextricably reveal how those writing history want to present themselves and do not necessarily portray the situation as it was in the 1990s. Even if sometimes “objective,” “statistical” criteria were used, historians will likely uncover additional reasons why certain scholars were retained and others not that are not explainable by scientometrics.

Those who stayed in academia could hardly, as mentioned above, support themselves with only one job. The liberalisation of the market of higher education, dubbed sometimes marketisation,<sup>57</sup> proved here to be both a blessing and a curse. The boom of private education (emergence of private universities and fee-based educational programmes at state universities), was quite uneven, with, for instance, Poland wholeheartedly and Czechia only reluctantly embracing it.<sup>58</sup> In this respect CEE countries adopted an American model rather than a Western European one, and in the 2000s already more than 25% students in CEE were paying for tuition,<sup>59</sup> while in Western Europe the percentage was slightly below 6%.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, universities (classic or technical) were mushrooming in smaller cities and towns, often replacing vocational education institutions. Considerable criticism was raised against the lack of mechanisms of quality control in these new institutions and against the lack of cadres that could fill the new positions, which resulted in the fact that scholars had several jobs or very heavy teaching loads, as well as in the necessity to re-employ retired

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<sup>56</sup> Exemplary in Provazník et al. 1994, esp. pp. 34–40.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. Maximova-Mentzoni 2013; Hladchenko 2020, pp. 49–51.

<sup>58</sup> Cerych 1998. On conservatism of Czech universities to massification and marketisation see Hendrichova, Kabele 1994, pp. 102–103.

<sup>59</sup> The situation is far from being homogeneous: in Latvia, Poland and Romania more than  $\square$  of students are in private universities while in Hungary, Russia and Slovenia this number is limited. For instance, in Russia between 1995 and 2000 the number of budget-funded places in universities remained the same (around 2.5 million), while the number of fee-paid places constantly grew: from 0 to 500,000 places at private faculties and universities and from 0 to 1.5 million at public institutions (according to Sigman in Cîrstocea, Dakowska, Sigman 2014, p. 36).

<sup>60</sup> Levy 2012, p. 182, quoted in Cîrstocea, Dakowska, Sigman 2014, p. 9. Analogous processes can be observed also in the global south in the same period of time. See Qudus, Rashid 2000.

scholars (including those who retired because of their political past) or hire foreigner scholars without language competences.<sup>61</sup> It was a blessing because globally this process helped to meet the OECD directives and allowed more people to complete post-secondary education. For scholars, it meant the possibility to fix their savings. However, exactly this second point was at the same time a curse, since scholars were investing time in teaching rather than in research, as frequently they had three or more positions. This was reinforced by the fact that institutes for humanities and social sciences, disciplines previously taught only at selected universities, mostly in the capitals, were now being created also at smaller universities, causing a strong demand for teaching in exactly the fields where specialists were scarce. From the early 1990s onwards, also scholars employed by the academies of sciences could teach, a possibility that many of them readily embraced. This led, especially in the “soft academic fields [i.e. ‘arts and humanities’, ‘social sciences’, and ‘economics, econometrics and finance’ – J.S&D.P.]”, to the limitation of time available for research, and in consequence to a decline in academic productivity.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, this produced a new phenomenon, that of professors commuting to universities only to teach a few hours, or a day or two if necessary, but living in central cities, mostly capitals. This hindered stable student-professor relations, prevented the development of vibrant intellectual life at universities, and made the development of local research schools difficult, if not impossible. In Hungary, scholars commuting to universities in smaller cities were called “intercity professors,” and in Germany “Lufthansa Professoren,” depending on the means of locomotion they choose to commute.<sup>63</sup> One should note, however, that this phenomenon is by no means exclusive to CEE, as France has struggled with centrality already for some time, and universities in former Western Germany have a similar experience with scholars (here called “Di-Mi-Do Professoren”) commuting only for three teaching days, Tuesday to Thursday, to the respective cities.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Ratajczak 2011, p. 134–135.

<sup>62</sup> Kwiek 2012 on Poland; Markusova et al. 2004, p. 369 voice a similar concern about Russia.

<sup>63</sup> See Keczer 2017; Berg 1999, p. 138.

<sup>64</sup> Klenke 2017.

Even if they faced problems with professor-level staff, smaller universities were clear winners of the transformation. In the 1990s, local elites intensified their support for local higher education, and, due to a general economic crisis, students could afford less frequently to move to capital cities, where traditionally strong universities were. Local universities also began developing their own patterns of research collaboration, both nationally and internationally.<sup>65</sup> Yet the main universities remained leaders in grant-giving in the 1990s<sup>66</sup> and beyond, as the idea of excellence/flagship universities (with different names at different points of time in different countries) constantly returned in every reform discussion, either to strengthen them, or of distributing finances more equally, depending on the party in power.

Notwithstanding financial difficulties and global uncertainties, discussions about the future form of the academia were ongoing, even if, as mentioned before, the 1990s brought fewer reforms than one might expect. With governments and often scholarly communities hesitant, much thrust for institutional innovations came from external donors.<sup>67</sup> Key programmes for the region were financed by the European Union. In Central Europe, PHARE (established in 1989 as *Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies*) and, more importantly, TEMPUS (*Trans-European Mobility Program for University Studies*) were substantial gains in terms of personal and institutional development.<sup>68</sup> In CIS and Russia, TACIS (*Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States*) served a similar role. Additionally, around 100 USA foundations were active in the region providing support for science and higher education.<sup>69</sup> Thanks to the liberalisation of the education market, a number of institutions have been created with foreign support across the region, especially concentrating on the humanities and social sciences and fields not supported by traditional institutions.<sup>70</sup> While visible in

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<sup>65</sup> Markusova et al. 2004; 2012.

<sup>66</sup> In Poland University of Warsaw and Jagiellonian University; in Czechia Charles University and Masaryk University Brno; in Ukraine Taras Shevchenko University and National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”.

<sup>67</sup> Jones 2000; for a personal account see Quandt 2002.

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. Temple 2006.

<sup>69</sup> Jones 2000, p. 30.

<sup>70</sup> Most important new institutions were (main sponsors in brackets): The Invisible College in Budapest (SHS); Soros Foundation’s Higher Education Support Program

the public sphere and seen as an indispensable source of innovations, foreign aid remained quite limited: by the end of the 1990s, in Russia and Hungary around 10% of the financing of basic science came from abroad, in Poland slightly less than 5%, and in Czechia and Slovakia less than 3%.<sup>71</sup>

This does not mean that international money was not important. While it did not contribute to wide-ranging reforms, it did provide oases of innovation that have been fruitfully nourishing some parts of academia. This is true not only for institutions, which we will discuss below, but also, for instance, for translations. In this regard, the various projects by Soros, but also embassies and foreign cultural institutes, proved crucial. They did not only produce books but also supported scholars through translation stipends and helped the nascent independent academic-book publishing sector to overcome financial hardships.<sup>72</sup>

## 5. Re-Modelling Science & Education

By adopting the Western models of research and education new institutions became trailblazers of the Westernization and modernisation of higher education. Probably the most iconic are Central European University (CEU) in Prague (later in Budapest and now in Vienna), Higher School of Economics (HSE) in Moscow and Kyiv Mohyla Academy. All these institutions were based on foreign models: CEU and Mohyla Academy on American universities, and HSE on the London School of Economics, and all of them also readily imported scholars

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(HESP) backed the setting up of a network of similar institutions: Collegium Invisible in Warsaw, Society of Higher Learning in Bratislava, Invisible Colleges in Vilnius, Belgrade, Chisinau, Bishkek and St.-Petersburg; New Europe College in Bucharest (backed by the Institute of Advanced Studies in Berlin, HESP and Switzerland); Academia Istropolitana Nova (HESP & other foreign foundations); the College of Europe in Warsaw (Polish government, European Commission, EU); Collegium Budapest, Institute for Advanced Studies; Kyiv Mohyla Academy (mix of Ukrainian and US donors); European Humanities University, Minsk (mix of international foundations); In Russia: New Economic School (HESP Soros); Higher School of Economics (TACIS, French government grant, HESP, Soros as well as a substantial amount of state financing); European University in Saint-Petersburg (HESP Soros, Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation); Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences (HESP Soros, TACIS).

<sup>71</sup> Dezhina 2005, p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> Savelieva 2020; Surman 2016.

from abroad. While CEU and Mohyla Academy followed a mixed model of regional and USA scholars, in the 1990s most of the professors in HSE were Europeans, while the second generation of professors were Russians who obtained a PhD in Western universities.<sup>73</sup> Importantly, while CEU and Mohyla Academy were predominantly private institutions, HSE was a state institution with considerable state financing (Moscow School for the Social and Economic Sciences was the paradigmatic private university, yet it never attained the appeal that HSE had). But we should not oppose Western models and local/national ones too fast: Mohyla Academy was a result of (re-)nationalisation policies and referred to the tradition of *Collegium Kijovense Mohileanum*, existing, in different formats, from 1615 to 1815 and being regarded, as well as presenting itself, as an outpost of the Europeanisation of Kyiv's higher education.<sup>74</sup>

With references to the local past or without them, these new westernised institutions adopted explicitly international models and norms and grounded their legitimacy in international cooperation. On this basis, they claimed a superior status for themselves and their expertise (in the academic field as well as in the political one, where the reforms of science and higher education were being formulated). Their growing influence resulted in a constant conflict with conservative "classical" universities which were building their legitimacy on pre-Socialist traditions (in Central Europe) or Soviet legacies (in Russia).<sup>75</sup> According to sociologist Elena Gapova, this conflict provoked a "division of post-Soviet academia into two competing groups adhering to the 'Soviet' and 'Western' paradigms" struggling over domination in the national academic field and the international symbolic market:

One academic faction is interested in academic freedom, autonomy, and corporate solidarity, as the social and cultural capital of its members is involved with the global symbolic market: it is aligned with the liberal (economic) elites that

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<sup>73</sup> Also, the other new Russian universities followed this approach. In the New Economic School most of the professors were from Israel (including the President of the World Bank) and US (Harvard).

<sup>74</sup> Hladchenko 2020, p. 52.

<sup>75</sup> On the conflict in Czechia concerning CEU and the opposition of traditional universities see Pospíšilová 2013 and Hendrichova, Kabele 1994, p. 119.

emerged in post-Soviet Russia. The capital of the other group is invested in the slightly modified Soviet academic system and local symbolic fields, and it is supported and legitimized by the national government (this case is most visible in Belarus).<sup>76</sup>

Belorussia's and Russia's case, with a strong institutional division between Westernizers and Traditionalists, might be the end of the spectrum, with most countries' academies intensively discussing and partially implementing reform ideas. As Kastenhofer argues in this issue, in addition, such a division can be found outside former Eastern Bloc countries as well.

A careful reading of various programmatic writings is necessary to pinpoint the ideas looming behind prominently placed models. They varied in many ways, from the past they evoked to the way they dealt with texts written during socialism.<sup>77</sup> Characteristically, the main Czech publishing house, Karolinum, published a book in 1994—in a Czech and English version—entitled *Rethinking the University: a collection of texts on the Idea of the University, with reference to the present time*. It included texts written originally in Czech(oslovak) and translated. The earliest reprinted Czech(oslovak) texts had been written in the late 1920s, bringing into play an interwar academic tradition; the translated historical texts were by Karl Jaspers, discussing how to renew German universities after National Socialism. As surprising as it might seem in retrospect, Humboldt was not referenced here. However, it is exactly his name that reforms of the 1990s are commonly associated with,<sup>78</sup> before the 2000s brought a multiplication of references and new discussions of the universities in general.<sup>79</sup>

Reading through countless CEE texts using the Humboldt model one is astonished by a crucial characteristic of this model, namely its

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<sup>76</sup> Gapova 2011.

<sup>77</sup> For Polish examples see Winclawski 1994; Brzeziński, Nowak 1997.

<sup>78</sup> The Humboldt model was not the only one implemented: Romania and Russia tended much more to a “French model,” with a more extensive control from the state. Yet even there, the reference to the Prussian philosopher remains crucial up to this day.

<sup>79</sup> E.g. Michal Kokowski discusses various models of the university and then describes his own model of the university of new humanism, in which Georg Sarton's idea of a new humanism, the history of science and science of science play key roles—see Kokowski [2015a](#).



plasticity. In the documents from the 1990s, but also in many texts until today, Humboldt model is an epitome of freedom of teaching and learning, the autonomy of universities from politics, professorial independence from students' and public's demands, etc., many points which in fact were not historically present in Humboldt's texts. As in other cases, the Humboldt model became therefore a "myth" or "illusion"<sup>80</sup> meaning many things depending on the context of use.

There are many answers to why it was exactly Humboldt who became the symbol of the 1990s reforms. According to some researchers, the reference to Humboldt was an antidote to political and ideological constraints of the Soviet system, in which research was subordinated to the party, and freedom of teaching and research was replaced by ideological unity.<sup>81</sup> But maybe Humboldt was exactly the answer to *both* the challenges of the Communist past *and* the policies of the World Bank and EU, which tried to make what politicians unsuccessfully pursued before, i.e. forge a connection between universities and industry, make universities vocational and be able to measure their efficiency?<sup>82</sup> Or maybe was it a reference to a common Central European past and a statement of belonging that happened across the whole region facing the Bologna reforms and the pressure to marketise higher education? The 1990s, when neoliberal reforms were looming in Europe, was a time of intense investigation into Humboldt's legacy in Germany, and in Austria into Leopold von Thun-Hohenstein and his transfer of the Humboldt model to the Habsburg Empire.<sup>83</sup>

The revival of the Humboldt model was challenged only by the new model of entrepreneurial university, and one might even say that the discussion about novel university models was hindered by past references.<sup>84</sup> But in the end "Neo-Liberalism outflanked and enveloped the Neo-Humboldtian restoration"<sup>85</sup> –for instance, already in the question of teaching outweighing research.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ash 1999; Östling 1998.

<sup>81</sup> Neave 2003, p. 27.

<sup>82</sup> Tomusk 2004, pp. 193–194.

<sup>83</sup> Ash 1999; Fasora, Hanuš 1999, pp. 38–68.

<sup>84</sup> Cerych 1998, p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> Neave 2003, p. 30.

<sup>86</sup> Kwick 2012.



It goes without saying that the appropriation of model(s) from abroad was a social process with a network of actors mediating it. Since other authors have already analysed this,<sup>87</sup> we want to make only one additional statement. While experts were appointed to facilitate the implementation of the new norms and practices, their function was much more than just a mere “transfer of ideas”. As the head of Mellon Foundation operations in Eastern Europe, Richard Quandt, recollects, money givers had very strong ideas about the state of science and scholarship in CEE, ideas which were based on stereotypes and preconceptions rather than on real experience. Thus, his task was not only to facilitate the transfer, but also to change those preconceptions so that the foundations and other money givers did not impose their ideas but responded to the needs *in situ*.<sup>88</sup> Ladislav Čerych, an expert in higher education active in a number of international initiatives in education and research in the 1990s, equally wrote about the importance of his understanding of CEE: while most “100-per cent foreign experts” left their positions quite fast, he, a Czechoslovak émigré, was both a foreign expert and a Czech, thus speaking several conceptual languages which allowed him to manoeuvre among expectations from all sides.<sup>89</sup> Thus, as a go-between,<sup>90</sup> his asset was to know intimately the culture he mediated the new knowledge into, and not just to serve as a mere transmitter with a ready-to-go knowledge taken from abroad and simply put into the new environment.

The processuality of appropriation of new – and sometimes not new – models points also toward less known influences. One important factor, which has hitherto found only scarce attention in the literature, is the issue of travelling innovations between former Eastern Bloc countries. As Natalia Otrishchenko shows in this issue, cooperation with the Polish academia was crucial for the architectural studies in the L’viv Polytechnics. Such examples can be also found in other bilateral relations. For instance, sociologist and higher education administrator Voldemar Tomusk argued that Romanian models of quality assurance

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<sup>87</sup> See special issue of *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest* (2014) called “Les transformations des espaces académiques centre-est-européens depuis 1989”.

<sup>88</sup> Quandt 2002, esp. pp. 3–12.

<sup>89</sup> Čerych 2002, p. 116.

<sup>90</sup> Schaffer, Roberts, Raj, Delbourgo 2009.

influenced Estonian and Latvian ones.<sup>91</sup> The Soros-founded *East East Beyond Borders Program* concentrated on knowledge exchange across post-Socialist countries, aiming at fostering contacts among countries with a similar experience. Clearly, the way the flow of expertise was structured through the grants in the 1990s, concentrating on transfers from West to East, had a tremendous effect on the geography of information flows. However, previous contacts and the trust built through them, but also linguistic competence, could facilitate contacts in other directions as well. Maybe it was not an idea of an alternative form of modernity before 1989, but “East-East” contacts remained an important part of the new modernity, even if it was West-centric.<sup>92</sup>

## 6. Changes and Continuities: Disciplines and their Media

If we look at changes which occurred in the 1990s in disciplines taught at the universities, the most obvious transformation was a shift in the balance of power from the hard sciences to the social and human sciences. Under Socialism, the technical and natural sciences occupied a predominant position: in the Soviet Union, almost 90% of the state funding was allocated to research in these areas, mostly connected to the military and industrial sectors. The 1990s, with its transition to a market economy alongside ideological liberalisation, shifted the focus to social and political sciences, which experienced a real boom during this decade. In Russia, for instance, economics, law, sociology, psychology, and political science replaced physics and engineering in the top list of the most attractive disciplines for students, while the previously “elitist” disciplines of history or philosophy became complete outsiders.<sup>93</sup> This shift was significantly reinforced by the activity of foreign foundations financing the new schools and programmes as well as by private universities: around 97% of them were offered educational programmes only in social and human sciences and, especially, in management, marketing and economics.<sup>94</sup> For some sociologists, the fact that these

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<sup>91</sup> Tomusk 2004, p. 20.

<sup>92</sup> On the idea of 1989 as a threshold of modernity-models see Mark et al. 2019.

<sup>93</sup> Yurevich 2004, pp. 6–7.

<sup>94</sup> Kemerov 2001, pp. 84–88; Dezhina 1999.

newly established (or modified) disciplines were more often based on the Western models, signified that Russian social sciences were becoming a “mere transmitter of Western knowledge (as far as its interpretations and aberrations is concerned) into the national social practice”.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, this shift created a division between locally- and globally-oriented methodologies supported by varying local networks and validated by different (academic) media.<sup>96</sup>

While the appropriation of models can serve as an example of macro-change, changes at the level of disciplines can help us to pinpoint scholars’ experiences. Reading through the accounts of disciplinary innovation, one cannot escape the idea that “import” is highlighted, but never regarded as decisive. Much more prevalent are – in different versions – accounts of innovation resting on the shoulders of previous developments, which had been, however, constrained during the Socialist past. A very typical account would say that there were scholars interested in this or that discipline before 1989, but that they could not work on it because of lack of literature, deficient exchanges with the West, political meddling, bureaucratic conservatism, and so on.

The argument of seeds of officially unwanted disciplines being sown already in the 1980s was decisive when new disciplines were being established, which rarely happened with the help of external scholars. Thus, for instance, social philosophers could move to political sciences, and historians or literary scholars could embrace gender studies. of course, such scholars could not have been compromised by their involvement with the secret police or whatever the scholarly community deemed a reason for exclusion. Writing on Russian political science, Russian political scientist Olga Popova used a very characteristic sentence: “even in Soviet times, there existed a brilliant galaxy of scientists who always placed scientific truth above the requirements of the ideological maintenance of power.”<sup>97</sup> This was used to explain how a discipline not existing in the Soviet times emerged through post-Soviet academia. Such formulations are often used not by professional historians but by active scholars writing histories of their disciplines. And then again such assertions, which are more justifications than factual statements,

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<sup>95</sup> Yurevich 2004, pp. 22–23.

<sup>96</sup> Sokolov 2019; 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Popova 2015, p. 426.

become “sources” for historians’ narratives about the transformation of individual disciplines, adding to the modernisation theorem and neoliberal explications.

Looking at sociology and political science, but also (Russian) culturology, one cannot escape the impression that continuity is more a rule than an exception.<sup>98</sup> Often, new scholars came from disbanded Marxism-Leninism and/or Scientific Socialism departments –which existed in most of the main universities in the region. In Russia, scholars from these chairs turned to culturology, while in Czechia and Slovakia they requalified as sociologists and/or political scientists.<sup>99</sup> In Poland, the saying “Tylko krowa nie zmienia poglądów” (a wise man changes his mind, a fool never will), was used to refer to scholars who after 1989 dismissed their earlier views and/or invented for themselves a career in the opposition.<sup>100</sup>

The more one looks into 1990s disciplinary activities, the more continuities with the Socialist times become visible. A recent analysis of Hungarian historical journals showed that the topics covered in them remained stable, as did the gender ratio of authors and even the baseline methodological approaches.<sup>101</sup> The authors of an overview of Hungarian historiography come to similar conclusions, acknowledging that while new topics were introduced, the pervasiveness of institutional structures largely prevented innovation from stabilising.<sup>102</sup> A multi-author overview of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European historiography (without Russia) shows that the 1990s were not a change but a transition, and also a slow one. While new topics came, very often in areas obstructed during the Socialist era, there was nothing like the paradigm change one would imagine following an ideological revolution. The most common explanation given by historians (nota bene: writing about themselves with respect to their teachers) was the (relative) openness of respective historiographies already before 1989.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Bucholc 2016, p. 59; Skovajsa, Balon 2017, p. 130; as well as most contributions in Krauz-Mozer, Kulakowska, Borowiec, Ścigaj 2015.

<sup>99</sup> Skovajsa, Balon 2017, p. 130.

<sup>100</sup> Wiktor 2019, p. 18.

<sup>101</sup> Pető, Barna 2021.

<sup>102</sup> Trencsényi, Apor 2007, p. 59.

<sup>103</sup> Antohi, Trencsényi, Apor 2007.

Further, the disappearance of disciplines should be also added to this story, so far concentrating on innovation and stability. Marxism-Leninism and Scientific Socialism, mentioned above, were not the only disciplines that disappeared with the political change, although not all did because of political reasons. In Poland, this happened to Science of Science (*naukoznawstwo*), which was mostly dissolved after 1989, because it was regarded by politicians and administrators as the remnant of socialism and not as a continuation of the discipline that originated in Interwar Poland.<sup>104</sup> This happened also in other countries,<sup>105</sup> as the Soviet-style Science of Science, often closely connected to bureaucratic practices, could not seamlessly adapt itself to new managerial realities, with experience sought outside rather than inside the country. This might also have contributed to the initially low involvement of expert knowledge in long-term planning.<sup>106</sup> The new disciplines that gradually appeared in place of Science of Science bore already traces of Western Science and Technology Studies (STS)– bringing, paradoxically, materialism back into the discussion.

Another disappearance deserves mentioning, since it concerns a number of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, and is still felt today: theory (which was short-lived, as the next generation of scholars began to be interested again in theoretical thinking). With a few exceptions, both among scholars continuing their careers and those beginning it, we see throughout the Soviet space a serious limitation of deep theoretical divagations in favour of empirical work in the social sciences respectively positivist work in the humanities. Scholars writing about the 1990s have remarked on this as well, although to the best of our knowledge there is no deeper study about this phenomenon so far.<sup>107</sup> Reasons given for theory's disappearance also vary, including the obligated saturation with theory during the Socialist period leading to

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<sup>104</sup> Jablecka 1997, pp. 11–12 ; Kokowski 2015b.

<sup>105</sup> E.g. the Institute for History and Theory of Sciences of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (*Ústav teorie a historie vědy ČSAV*) was reformed beyond recognition starting 1990, with reasons given here mostly of political nature.

<sup>106</sup> See Dziedziczak-Foltyn 2017 (on Poland).

<sup>107</sup> See for instance on sociology in Poland: Keen and Mucha 2004, p. 134; Bucholc 2016, p. 68; the topic of turning to local, heavily archive-based studies in historiography can be found throughout analysis of post-Soviet historiography in: Antohi, Trencsényi, Apor 2007.

scholars abandoning it as soon as it was possible, a disappointment about and maybe even crisis of metanarratives on the global scale (“science wars” of the 1990s, etc.), strengthened through the looming crisis of Marxism and Marxism-based approaches, the favouring of smaller, data-driven research endeavours, new forms of financing, and a new world order in which scholars based in the former Eastern Bloc have been reduced to data suppliers.<sup>108</sup>

The change from theory to empirical hard data is also very closely connected to another change of epistemic configuration, namely that the 1990s witnessed the strengthening of the idea that the humanities and social sciences produce irrefutable truths – a phenomenon that should itself be analysed historically as one of the post-Socialist legacies.<sup>109</sup> This development is clearly at odds with more recent trends, often termed postmodernist or poststructuralist, that point toward the limits and situatedness of knowledge. Should scholars (or fields, like gender studies or cultural studies) contest this, they would be ousted and marginalised by the mainstream scholarship.<sup>110</sup>

The story of gender studies illustrates well what we said above, allowing us to demonstrate the appropriation of an approach from abroad.<sup>111</sup> Emerging at a time when retraditionalisation, patriarchal renaissance<sup>112</sup>, and a return to traditional gender roles (i.e., contesting the Socialist ideas of sex parity), feminism-based studies were contested both in the academia and the public sphere. (They remain contested in a number of countries, and the growing anti-genderism in Central and

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<sup>108</sup> Keen, Mucha 2004, pp. 134–135. Criticism of “semi-peripherality” of respective post-Soviet sciences is itself vast and ranges from scientometrics, psychology of science, sociology of science to, more recently, postcolonial and decolonial studies. It is, however, too vast and disparate to be discussed here.

<sup>109</sup> Cain, Hüchtker, Kleeberg, Reichenbach, Surman 2021.

<sup>110</sup> Nacher 2007, esp. pp. 172–173.

<sup>111</sup> The history of Gender Studies is in many ways a history of inscribing CEE scholarly community into a certain set of values connected with the Western academia. In the words of Susan Zimmermann (2008, p. 140): “it is not gender studies or the rights of women that is at the core of the agenda. The commitment of women’s and gender studies is a far more vicarious element of the general commitment to the values of (largely Anglo-Saxon) Western democracy and liberal social and economic order, and to the expectations of the political actors representing these values that were in ascendancy in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union”.

<sup>112</sup> Posadskaia 1994, p. 4.

Eastern Europe, inside and outside the academia, has recently become a particularly attractive topic of research).<sup>113</sup> Additionally, gender studies heavily rely on theory, and they came at a time when theory was marginalised.<sup>114</sup>

The story of the emergence of gender studies helps us to show how innovation is possible under unfavourable circumstances. There was a considerable amount of NGO support,<sup>115</sup> important foreign scholarships (supporting not only the transfer of theories and approaches, but also the preparation of books and articles), and the pressure from (parts of) the civil society and student groups.<sup>116</sup> There even was meandering across disciplines instead of a unilateral transfer: while gender studies became institutionalised fastest within sociology, the transfer of theories occurred through English philology before reaching disciplines like historiography.<sup>117</sup> Similarly with, for instance, postcolonial studies: for a long time there was no in-depth discussion of their methodology, and translations appeared in marginal journals, often unauthorised in small circulation. This led to a situation in which key theoretical texts were known only by a limited number of specialists, who were also representatives of the discipline, hindering a broader scholarly discussion about the theoretical foundations of gender studies. In general, gender studies as a field were very strongly defined by forms of sociability: both those within traditional academic spaces and those transgressing university halls.<sup>118</sup> They developed at summer schools, informal seminars, or public lectures, but also at international and national conferences. This shows the importance of activist motivation for gender studies –since time investment in the field rarely guaranteed an academic career. Looking at the articles on gender studies from the 1990s and early 2000s one finds another characteristic they share with other disciplines: the importance of a narrative of continuity in locating

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<sup>113</sup> See the discussion in Petó 2020 and Zimmermann 2008.

<sup>114</sup> Ousmanova 2003.

<sup>115</sup> E.g. Network of East-West Women, est. 1991 by Ann Barr Snitow, that was instrumental in establishing gender studies centers in several CESEE countries. See Johnson, Lazda 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Svadbová 1997, esp. pp. 5–21; Rossman 2021; Cîrstocca 2010; 2011; 2019.

<sup>117</sup> Discussed in Petó 2006.

<sup>118</sup> Rossman 2022; Titarenko, Zdravomyslova 2017, p. 131.



themselves on the map of research. Thus, for instance, in histories of gender studies (or gender) one often encounters clear references to trends originating during the Thaw.<sup>119</sup> While this strategy allowed gender studies to become a part of the local tradition, it run the risk of being perceived as a continuity of the Socialist approaches. But it also reflected the (still ongoing) dialogue or even conflict in local feminisms between the proponents of Westernisation and those intending to build it more strongly on local traditions. Thus, establishing gender studies, which in CEE happened before the respective national conservative turns in the recent years, needed a dialogue (of different intensity) between Western and post-Soviet feminism and models of gender analysis.<sup>120</sup>

What gender studies and feminist discussions could only marginally change was sexism in academia. There is also little evidence that 1989/1991 meant a big breakthrough in the gender order and hierarchies in academia. While the number of women employed in science and scholarship positions in former Eastern Bloc countries is higher than in Western Europe (which is a repeated reason for self-indulgence among politicians and high administrators), detailed statistics show that while their number as lecturers is high (often over 50%), the higher the hierarchy one goes, the lower their number becomes, with associate professors being 20-30% and full professors ranging from 7.2% (Czechia) to 18% (Latvia) in 1999.<sup>121</sup> This number also seems quite stable. In Russia, for instance, in only a handful of disciplines there was an increase of women's participation after 1991, especially in psychology, biochemistry, clinical medicine, and mathematics, where the number went from 5% to 15%. Actually, most numbers remained stable since the 1970s.<sup>122</sup> In most disciplines where women numbers increased, the researcher should assume that this is the effect of filling the gap after male scholars emigrated,<sup>123</sup> or that it was the result of these disciplines being underfunded and thus less attractive for male researchers.<sup>124</sup> It should also be no surprise that sexism

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<sup>119</sup> Good example of such a narrative is Żarnowska 2006.

<sup>120</sup> Fojtová 2016.

<sup>121</sup> Blagojević et al. 2004, p. 58.

<sup>122</sup> Paul-Hus et al. 2015.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Wojniak, Majorek, du Vall 2016, p. 2.



and patriarchalism remained part of the academic culture well into the 2000s.<sup>125</sup>

Last but not least: media. Also, here the question “innovation or continuity?” offers an ambiguous picture. In historiography, for instance, while a number of new journals appeared, especially connected with a new generation of scholars, they hardly challenged the hierarchies within the discipline.<sup>126</sup> It seems much more as if the journals which became crucial were either on the periphery of disciplines or already positioned as interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary. For instance, Warsaw-based *Second Texts* (Teksty Drugie, est. 1990) and Moscow-based *New Literary Observer* (Новое литературное обозрение, est. 1992) are both journals on the history of literature, but the texts published cover the whole spectrum of the humanities. Both have also been crucial in introducing gender studies or postcolonial theory (and many other theoretical novelties) in Poland and Russia respectively. Popular-science journals became venues for debates on controversial issues in Czechia (*Dějiny a současnost*) (Past and Present) or Ukraine (*Критика. Міжнародний огляд книжок та ідей*) (Critics. International Review of Books and Ideas), at least in historiography, which also suggests that established journals simply continued as before.<sup>127</sup> Importantly, not all these journals were new: *Past and Present* and *Second Texts* presented themselves as a continuation of periodicals which were discontinued for political reasons during socialism. More rarely, one can encounter journals that were explicitly successors of samizdat journals.<sup>128</sup> Yet other journals appropriated formats from abroad, often through contacts with émigrés (or even established by returning émigrés), or thanks to foreign grants.

## 7. Conclusions

The history of the 1990s will be written a number of times, and we propose only one interpretation of a handful of data. Additionally, our analysis is biased toward the humanities, where most of our examples

<sup>125</sup> E.g. as reported in Fuszara 2008, esp. pp. 23–28. It is not a chance that scholars talking there about sexism in the academia specialize in gender studies.

<sup>126</sup> Antohi, Trencsényi, Apor 2007; Petó, Barna 2021; Skovajsa, Balon 2017, p. 107.

<sup>127</sup> Kolář, Kopeček 2007, p. 180.

<sup>128</sup> E.g. Czech sociological journal *S-Horizon* (S-Obzor, 1992–1995), see Skovajsa, Balon 2017, p. 106.

come from. But even these data give us several insights contributing to our knowledge of the science's past in the former Eastern Bloc as well as to raising the theoretical question of how sciences react to regime changes.

To start with a preliminary answer to the question: they actually do more or less what they were doing before. And this is a bit surprising, given the range of our examples, involving various degrees of initial politicisation of the academia and its (assumed) "captivity" until and "liberation" after 1989/1991. As one of few theorisations of the processes of scientific transformation in the post-socialist countries, Mitchell Ash's resources approach explained the pervasiveness of traditional structures by the ability of some scholars to propose their knowledge (or other resources) to politicians and through this secure their future career under changed circumstances.<sup>129</sup> Conclusions from a larger project about academies in CEE done in 2000 seem to confirm Ash's model.<sup>130</sup> Central to the two models is that both argue that transformations are inherently a chaotic process in which neither player for power has a clear idea of where the development should lead; therefore, neither the onset of the Soviet academia in the 1920s, nor the transfer of this model to CEE in the late 1940s, nor the transfer of other models after 1989/1991 followed a coherent political plan, which allowed many spaces of negotiations for all actors. Given the limited personal change of professorial elites in the early 1990s, this seems to be an apt model to explain the conservatism in the transition period. Another thesis could be that the fast change did not take place because it was gradually happening already before, as especially evidence from scientometrics suggests. In this regard, the 1990s were not revolutionary, but part of an evolution that began in the 1980s and led in different directions in different countries.

One has to remain context-sensitive, however. Baltic countries are the region where changes were more thorough than elsewhere. But they were also the countries that had to change most, from being part of the Soviet Union to becoming part of the European Union. This is a different situation than Czechia or Romania, which, with different

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<sup>129</sup> E.g. Ash 1995.

<sup>130</sup> David-Fox, Péteri 2000.

intensities, were more open already before 1989/1991. Poland's 1990s were more a period of growth and marketisation than of larger reforms, also because the academia was comparatively international and liberal already before 1989. Russia and Ukraine created islands of westernised academia, which with changing luck exist until today – in Russia, they are being dismantled at the moment of writing this article.<sup>131</sup> But the innovation hardly reached the academies of sciences and traditional universities, creating in a way parallel academic words –with many personal intersections, however.

How did the innovation happen? Clearly not overnight, and in some areas not at all. And no doubt external influence was crucial. The intensity of changes suggests, rather, that we did not witness a forceful thrust of innovation, comparable to what many historians claim happened with the social sciences in Austria and Germany after 1945.<sup>132</sup> Clearly, there could have been the willingness and eagerness to innovate that failed when it had to be translated from ideas into practice. With certainty, some innovation was retained because of continuous financial support, but some stayed because it could meander its way through by using internal expertise from the beginning. Soros Translation Projects and OSI, new journals, or several disciplines mobilised local knowledge and local experts. A successful innovation needed embedding in the local environment, not only institutional but also, and maybe even more importantly, intellectual. Thus, the vocabulary of further research should look precisely into processes of translations and appropriations –of scientific knowledge, institutions, and practices. Yet, as our overview suggests, we do not know enough about the various inhibiting factors that made these translations and appropriations not to be accepted (or not to be carried out in the first place). This goes hand in hand with the criticism voiced toward an innovation-centred history of science and history of knowledge, that we would like to second here.<sup>133</sup> Maybe a history looking at failed innovations in academia in former Eastern Bloc countries in the 1990s would in fact provide a welcome correction to the optimistic histories coming from disciplinary chronicles.

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<sup>131</sup> Anonymous 2021; Balkanov 2021.

<sup>132</sup> Fleck 2010; Paulus 2010.

<sup>133</sup> Dupré, Somsen 2019.

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