

**Revolution from Within: Experts, Managers, and Technocrats in the Long Transformation of 1989**

**Veranstalter:** Imre Kertész Kolleg, University of Jena

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If one can hardly talk about post-socialism without referring to neoliberal ideas, then the opposite may hold true as well: one should not talk about neoliberalism without mentioning post-socialism or socialism tout court. In a way, this was the theoretical bet of this year's annual conference organized by the Imre Kertész Kolleg in Jena, in collaboration with the University of Exeter's project „1989 after 1989: Rethinking the Fall of Socialism in a Global Perspective“.

While tackling directly the role of expertise and expert communities in the „long transformation of 1989“, the workshop also provided a more incisive analytical focus. It was an opportunity to reevaluate the interactions between the (post-)socialist world and the capitalist transformations that followed the 1970s. The global reach of various epistemic communities, crisscrossing the Iron Curtain, or the role played by expert knowledge in ushering the post-1989 transformations, prepared the ground for a reevaluation of what (post-)socialism meant. At least as importantly, however, it provided a reinterpretation of neoliberalism as such, of its geography and its historical development; a reinterpretation which would do justice to the role played by socialist societies in this narrative.

Some of the guiding lines of the discussions were mentioned by MICHAL KOPEČEK (Prague) in his introductory speech, as he highlighted the necessity of perceiving late socialism in direct continuity with the post-1989 period. Rather than a total about-face, the transformations following 1989 drew on forms of expertise, practices and discourses which had been developing over the late socialist years: new economic technologies, new managerial knowledge, new sciences of the

self, or even novel forms of urban intervention. For Michal Kopeček, the neoliberal turn of the 1990s in Central and Eastern Europe was hardly a mere adoption of a foreign language: it was intertwined with complex practices developed on the ground by local agents. Moreover, alluding to some of the political interpretations of neoliberalism (David Harvey, Jeremy Peck), he emphasized how this „revolution from within“ can hardly be cut out from the general transformations of global capitalism or, for that matter, from its effects on the Global South. This was a welcome gesture in an Eastern European historiography which has been rather shy of dealing with capitalism or with economic transformations as such.

The first panel of the conference tackled headlong the issue of economic change. LARS FREDRIK STÖCKER (Vienna) showed how the market reforms envisaged by Estonian economists in the late 1980s were intimately connected with Estonian state-building projects. Nevertheless, the economic blueprint chosen by Estonian economists and technocrats was the Nordic social market rather than the hardcore neoliberal models which came to dominate the country. This pointed out to a specific Nordic circuit of ideas, connecting the Scandinavian economies with the Baltic Soviet republics. TOBIAS RUPPRECHT's (Exeter) paper changed the geographical focus to the influence of the Global South on economic reforms in (post-) socialist Europe. As he remarked, the Chilean market model had fascinated both socialist and post-socialist elites: the appeal of the Pinochet regime consisted in its mixture of political authoritarianism and economic liberalization, the possibility of introducing market reforms without losing political power. VÍTĚZSLAV SOMMER (Prague) switched the perspective from this level of macro-economic design to a more micro approach to economic expertise, analyzing the management theories of late socialist Czechoslovakia and their intimate relationship with planning practices. As Sommer made clear, the market reforms of the 1960s had brought about an entrepreneurial take on firm management, built up through a direct dialogue with the Western litera-

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ture. Marginalized during Normalization, this form of „socialist entrepreneurship“ was once again revived in the late 1980s, becoming the hegemonic discourse of the transition period, although only by pushing aside any concerns for intra-firm coordination or social welfare.

The dialogue on welfare opened up by Vítězslav Sommer was continued during the second panel through MARTINE MESPOULET's (Nantes) paper. As she showed in her analysis, throughout the 1970s statistical offices in state socialist countries were in a permanent dialogue with their Western colleagues as they tried to do away with a pure economic approach to economic growth. On both sides of the Iron Curtain, statisticians and sociologists were eager to develop new ways of measuring welfare conditions, providing an abstract language through which inequalities in social development could be tackled at a global level. The question of how this vision of economic growth as social development was undermined during the 1980s and after 1989 was tackled by TOMASZ ZARYCKI's (Warsaw) fascinating biography of Polish geographer Antoni Kukliński. A founding figure of the school of regional planning, Kukliński's vision of development veered in the 1980s towards a competitive model in which powerful urban centers would vie for resources in a regionalized economic space. One of the results of this competitive developmental model, which became the hegemonic paradigm after the fall of socialism, was the gradual displacement from academic or public discourses of notions of regional inequalities or hierarchies. A case in point is the gradual disappearance of analyses focusing on uneven development or core-periphery relations. As a result, the Europe imagined by figures such as Kukliński was an idealized, abstract category where „regional differentiation became an effect of spontaneous forces and global incontrollable powers“ rather than structural factors. If hierarchies within Europe were erased from most „return to Europe“ accounts such as Kukliński's, global hierarchies were once again reinforced by the same period. As JAMES MARK (Exeter) remarked, late socialism witnessed an

intensification of debates over European identity, with socialist intellectual and political elites claiming once again their „European“ belonging. From the Helsinki process to Gorbachev's „Common European Home“, these „Europe talks“ were much more than ways of reimagining East-West connections. They were attempts to renegotiate the relationship with the Global South, as socialist countries slowly cut off their connections with the post-colonial world. Oftentimes this disengagement from the South was replaced by racialized discourses, in which the return to Europe became a commitment to a white capitalist civilizational model.

The keynote lecture held by DAVID PRIESTLAND (Oxford) tried to situate these transformations in the more general landscape of the economic discussions that emerged in the wake of „the contentious 1960s.“ As he pointed out, throughout the 1970s and the 1980s the technocratic allure that characterized Western neoliberalism was paralleled by a similarly technocratic vision of planning emerging in the socialist bloc. In socialist countries, economic experimentation with complex modelling or more humanistic approaches to planning had been generally sidelined before the Perestroika. From this perspective, the 1990s can be read as a moment of convergence between two technocratic traditions, complemented by a specific focus on individual agency which analyses such as The Novosibirsk Report brought about. This convergence was made possible through the continuity of local expert communities that had access to local practices and knowledge, while also being integrated in the global circuit of ideas.

The third panel featured a discussion on one of the main forms of expertise ushering the post-1989 transition: legal discourse. MARTA BUCHOLC (Bonn) showed how the legal discipline became one of the main motors of the liberal pedagogy that followed the 1980s. As a central agent of the transition years, the legal scholar assumed a pedagogical role, trying to instill the new liberal legal order into a reluctant societal body. Some of the questionable results of this forceful pedagogy were underlined by PAUL BLOKKER (Prague) in his analysis of con-

stitutionalism in Eastern Europe. As he remarked, modern constitutional practices have been perceived after 1989 as an easily transferable good, circulating across local legal cultures almost as a commodified good. Some of the unintended results of this optimistic perspective have become obvious in the recent constitutional crises affecting Hungary or Poland. Here a certain „legal resentment“ has spurred populist movements into dismantling the liberal constitutional order established after 1989, perceived as an alien implant into a nationalized state body. NED RICHARDSON-LITTLE's (Exeter) paper on East German lawyers provided a historical explanation for the pivotal role played by legal discourse in the transition process. As his analysis made clear, the decline of economic planning or of developmental disciplines had pushed legal expertise into a privileged position, providing to institutional tools for negotiating the changeover to market liberalism. Trained in state socialism, lawyers in human rights or constitutionalism „evolved from defenders of party rule at home [...] to their final role as reformers, first in an effort to salvage the socialist system and then to bury it.“

While the third panel of the conference focused on the legal interface that connected state institutions to the individual, the fourth session tackled the specific forms of expertise that aimed at managing the individual as such. MAIK TÄNDLER (Jena) offered an overview of the psy sciences in Western liberal societies. Focusing on the US and West German cases, he underlined the way in which they contributed to the economization of the self, „conflating self-actualization with the self-optimization required by market society.“ AGNIESZKA KOŚCIAŃSKA (Warsaw) pointed out how the concepts of self-actualization and self-realization, specific to late capitalist societies, featured prominently in the language of Polish experts of the 1980s. Their discourse, however, was part and parcel of a specific concept of „cultured sexuality“ which emphasized the importance of marital life. MAT SAVELLI's (Hamilton) talk analyzed the specificities of Yugoslav institutionalization of psychiatric authority and its underlying politics. He pointed out the similarities with the Western model, keen towards

individualization, but also the existence of specific practices which promoted socialization and collective praxis (such as the idea of democratic therapeutic spaces).

The final panel of the workshop addressed the way in which the urban space was reconceived before and after 1989, and the role played by professional expertise in this process. BRIAN LADD (Berlin) focused on the strenuous relationship between urban planning and preservation strategies in late socialist GDR. He underscored the in-between position held by experts, as they negotiated their position between local initiatives, state bureaucracy and professional identities. PETER ROUBAL (Prague) took up the issue of the transition to neoliberal urban policies in his discussion on Prague's Žižkov district. He traced the development of new modes of urban interventions based on novel claims for heritage preservation. As importantly, however, he showed how heritage-talk could be hijacked in the post-socialist years in what became a violent gentrification process. CSABA JELINEK's (Budapest) paper on urban rehabilitation projects in Budapest provided a structural analysis of the shifts affecting urban policy in late socialism and their post-socialist offshoots. His study traced the concern for urban rehabilitation and preservation to the crisis affecting Hungarian investment levels in the 1970s, and its deleterious impact on the construction sector. Consequently, although legitimized in the name of historical and social sensitivity, the turn to rehabilitation was the recognition of an economic impasse. Sustained by a powerful professional community, urban rehabilitation preserved its centrality in the post-socialist years, but with a twist: rehabilitation policies became increasingly de-politicized and de-socialized, a technocratic discourse „naturalizing“ gentrification.

The final roundtable took up the implications of these analyses, pointing out possible avenues for future research. It emphasized the centrality of the political economic context of the 1970s which shaped expert knowledge production in both socialist and capitalist contexts. These structural changes triggered a new culture of expertise, visible in an increased dialogue between East, West,

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and the Global South; a dialogue oftentimes intermediated by global institutions such as the United Nations. However, the relationship between expert communities and various forms of lay knowledge, „expertise in the wild“ is still a blind spot for historical analysis: especially in regard to social movements such as ecological or urban preservation campaigns. Furthermore, as Philipp Ther remarked, the position of expertise in a larger social context was heavily influenced by its inclusion in circuits of commodification, as it gradually became a lucrative business. These dynamics between expert and lay knowledge seem to play a powerful political role, increasingly visible in today’s debates about meritocracy: as it was noticed, various populist movements in the region have sharpened the conflict between expert elites and other social groups. In this sense, the workshop’s focus on expert cultures in the long transformation of 1989 played a double role. On the one hand, it brought historical depth to contemporary political conflicts over expertise and technocracy which have become central for our post-crisis societies. On the other, however, it rehistoricized the relationship between neoliberalism and (post-)socialism, the geography and the dynamics of this interaction.

### Conference Overview:

*Welcome and Introduction* Michal Kopeček

*\_Panel 1: Market Liberalism Between ‘National Sovereignty’ and Globalization:*

Chair: Eva-Clarita Pettai

Lars Fredrik Stöcker: *Exiting Communism: Visions of ‘Economic Sovereignty’ and the Creation of a National Economy in Estonia 1987–1991*

Vítězslav Sommer: *Management Theory from Late to Post-socialism*

Tobias Rupprecht: *Pinochet in Prague: Latin American Neoliberalism and (Post-) Socialist Eastern Europe*

Discussant: Philipp Ther

*Panel 2: Reimagining Europe*

Chair: Paul Hanebrink

James Mark: *Europe and its Others: Re-*

*imagining a Continental Space in Late Socialism*

Martine Mespoulet: *Europe by the Numbers: Social Indicators on Both Sides of the Iron Curtain 1960–1990*

Tomasz Zarycki: *The De-Spatialization and Europeanization of the Late Communist Imaginary: The Intellectual Trajectory of Polish Geographer Antoni Kukliński*

Discussant: Steffi Marung

Keynote Speech

David Priestland: *Regime Change: Market Liberal Transformations in Comparative Perspective*

Chair & Introduction: Włodzimierz Borodziej

Reception (Griesbachsches Gartenhaus)

*Panel 3: (Re-)Constituting the State*

Chair: Raphael Utz)

Marta Bucholc: *Liberal Pedagogy in a Post-socialist Society*

Paul Blokker: *Building Democracy by Legal Means: The East-Central European Experience*

Ned Richardson-Little: *Lawyers, Human Rights and Democratization in Eastern Europe*

Discussant: Michal Kopeček

*Panel 4: From ‘Socialist Personality’ to Liberal Individual*

Chair: Holly Case

Agnieszka Kosciańska: *Sex and Self-realization: Psychologizing Intimacy in Late State Socialist Poland*

Maik Tändler: *Psychological Experts and the ‘Western’ Liberal Self in the Late 20th Century*

Mat Savelli: *Medical Authority: The Collapse of Yugoslavia and the Rise of the ‘Trauma Society’*

Discussant: Adéla Gjuríčová

*Panel 5: Governance and Urban Planning*

Chair: Diana Mishkova

Brian Ladd: *Professional Identities and Local*

Initiatives in a Party State: Late GDR Urban Planning and Preservation

Petr Roubal: Žižkov Battle: Urban Planners Transition from Heritage Protection to Neo-liberal Discursive Planning

Csaba Jelinek: Turning a 'Socialist' Policy into a 'Capitalist' One: Urban Rehabilitation Experts in Hungary During the Long Transformation of 1989

Discussant: Matěj Spurný

*Panel 6 – Summary Session*

Chair: Joachim von Puttkamer

Melissa Feinberg, James Mark, Philipp Ther, Joanna Wawrzyniak

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