

EEGA in Dialogue: Interview with Constantin Katsakioris

by Lena Dallywater

Dieser Beitrag ist hervorgegangen aus der Kooperation zwischen dem Leibniz-WissenschaftsCampus „Eastern Europe – Global Area“ (EEGA) und dem eJournal Connections. Die folgenden Interviews und Artikel geben Einblicke in die Forschungen am EEGA-WissenschaftsCampus, die den Entwicklungen im östlichen Europa in ihren globalen Bezügen gewidmet sind.

This item has emerged from the cooperation between Leibniz ScienceCampus „Eastern Europe – Global Area“ (EEGA) and the eJournal Connections. The following interviews and articles offer insights of the research projects at EEGA ScienceCampus, which are devoted to the developments in Eastern Europe in their global dimensions.

Interview with Constantin Katsakioris

Constantin Katsakioris is Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter at the Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) 1199, „Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition.“ He holds a PhD in history (2015) from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. Earlier he was postdoctoral researcher at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies and research associate in the project „African Elites Educated in countries of the former Soviet-bloc“ at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris. He is currently completing his first monograph entitled, „Soviet Lessons: The Education of African and Arab Students in the Soviet Union in the Cold War.“ Parts of his research have appeared or are forthcoming in twenty book chapters or articles in peer-reviewed journals, among which *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, the *Journal of Modern European History*, the *Cahiers d'Études africaines* and the *Cahiers du Monde russe*.

Which aspect of the global history of Eastern Europe do you study?

I study the history of the educational cooperation between the „Second“ and the „Third World“ during the Cold War and I investigate the

cooperation's impact on the phenomenon which several sociologists of education described as a „world educational revolution“. The term refers to the spectacular expansion of all levels of education in the postcolonial countries of Asia and Africa as well as in Latin America from the mid-1950s to the 1980s. During this period cooperation between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, on the one side, and the Third World, on the other, was established at all educational levels and took the form either of aid granted to Third World countries, or of civil cooperation initiated and financed by the Third World countries under various agreements (I use the term „cooperation“ for both). My project „Training the Postcolonial Elites: The Socialist Countries, the Global Cold War, and the Educational Revolution, 1950s-1991“ revisits this educational partnership which, I maintain, constitutes one of the most important and neglected chapters in the history of East-South relations. I am interested in higher education and in specialized technical education, that is in the training of postcolonial elites.

In these fields, there were three main forms of cooperation on which this project focuses. First, I study the training of students, which started in the GDR already in the early 1950s and received a spectacular boost with the creation of the Peoples' Friendship University in Moscow in 1960 and of the University of 17th of November in Prague the following year. During the period under survey, tens of thousands of students from Asia, Africa and Latin America received training in socialist „bloc“ countries, the majority of them in the fields of engineering and medicine. The second form of cooperation was the creation of universities, faculties or technical institutes in Asia and Africa (but not in Latin American countries other than Cuba which otherwise was a member of the socialist camp). The Soviet Union, for instance, created polytechnic or energy institutes in Bombay, Kabul, Bahir Dar (Ethiopia), and elsewhere. In Algeria, the USSR founded the African Center of Hydrocarbons and Textiles in Boumerdès, the National Institute of Light Industry and the Institute of Mining and Smelting at the University of Annaba. From its independence in 1962 and until 1989,

Algeria employed more than 4,000 faculty members from the Eastern „bloc“. The third form of cooperation was the dispatch of experts for purposes ranging from educational planning to the establishment of workers faculties (*rabotsye fakultety*).

Can you describe how you proceed in the study and what you want to achieve with it?

In terms of approach and method the project is intended to contribute to both a comprehensive history and a global history. The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, I maintain, constituted a global area which played a major direct and indirect role in the world educational revolution: direct through their aid and indirect as their cooperation spurred the West to increase its own assistance to the Third World. To make this case, I gather data from the archives of several socialist bloc countries as well as from the COMECON records and I compare them with data on the Western educational cooperation with the postcolonial countries. I also examine the political and intellectual background of the East-South cooperation and the East-West competition.

Last but not least, I study the impact of the cooperation on postcolonial countries. If, because of the demise of the socialist bloc, the political effects of the cooperation were rather limited, the social, economic, and cultural ones were however very significant. My purpose here is to highlight the concrete remits of the cooperation in several specific areas. A number of hospitals, for example, were set up with East European aid and functioned thanks to physicians trained in the socialist countries. Eastern-educated professors taught at high schools, technical institutes and universities and many of them became important scholars. Notoriously, a number of well-known filmmakers and award-winning writers, who studied in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, adapted the aesthetics of socialist realism to their artwork and writings. Eastern-educated engineers also served in newly-created public enterprises or contributed in the nationalization of foreign-owned ones. Even if some of these ventures were unsuccessful, a number of them achieved significant goals, something that was recognized either by

governments, or by private investors who latter took them over.

During my two-week stay at EEGA I had the chance to give two papers and to benefit from an excellent feedback. More importantly, my work on the Soviet/East European educational cooperation with the Third World, which assumes that the socialist countries went global through their policies of international education, fits within the scope of the EEGA research agenda and interacts fruitfully with Steffi Marung's work on the Soviet specialists of the Third World. Moreover, as Steffi Marung also examines the research training of African scholars at institutes of the Soviet Union's Academy of Sciences, my work acts complementarily to her own project. At the same time, while my research stay allowed me to enter in dialogue with colleagues such as Anne-Kristin Hartmetz, who is researching the relations between Ghana and the Soviet Union and Bence Kocsev, who works on the policies of the socialist countries with regards to the Third World's quest for a New International Economic Order.

I profited also from participating in the conference „Communism beyond Eurocentrism“ at the Center for Area Studies in September 2017 and will contribute to a panel convened by Lena Dallywater on relations between South African activists and the socialist countries in the framework of the German African Studies Association (VAD) conference in July 2018.

With its international identity, numerous and dynamic areas of study, and outstanding scholarly community, EEGA was for me the ideal environment to deploy my expertise and cultivate synergies. I am grateful both to the institutions which make up EEGA for the chance they offered me and to the community scholars of the Centre for Area Studies and the GWZO for their friendship and collegiality during my stay.