

ESF Exploratory Workshop on

**The International Community of Experts and the
Transformation of the Fatherland.
Central Eastern Europe in the European Context since WWI**

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Convened by:

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Abstract:

The proposed workshop intends to look closely at the phenomenon of the transfer of knowledge and technological expertise in Europe after the First World War, mainly focussing on Central Eastern Europe. In order to use this focus, the workshop will explore three perspectives: experts and the media of knowledge-communication; the role of the state and finally the relation of expertise and power.

The Case for the Workshop:

Despite the great incursions of the First World War, the subsequent nationalisation of communication spaces, and the respective exclusion of experts from the defeated nations from international professional associations, the period between both world wars was characterised by an immense expansion of professional communication. Forums developed in existing and specially created organisations, which drew their dynamic from the need to keep up with the accelerating pace of technological development. Although this development was severely disrupted by the Second World War, it nonetheless continued. A tense interrelationship between nation-states and expert-knowledge was observable. On one hand, the latter having developed as a result of the transnational transfer of knowledge in the framework of a universal understanding of knowledge, on the other hand, this was intended to serve the progress-oriented development of the respective national society.

Especially in the case of the newly founded states of Central Eastern Europe, which are to be one focus of this workshop, these issues are of high relevance for understanding the history of the 20th century. After the First World War, these states urgently needed technical expertise and newly trained functional elites. Then, after the Second World War, socialist systems were imposed under external pressure, and this led to the exchange of elites. From 1989 on, advised by foreign experts, the states again underwent a political, economic and social transformation. Under the slogans 'Knowledge Transfer' and 'Transnationality' the workshop touches upon two approaches to these events, which have been assigned great importance by current

historical research, although little empirical research has been done on them. In the context of Central Eastern Europe, this project does not a priori proceed from the premise that the Western experience of modernisation constitutes the only or main benchmark for the classification of the region as underdeveloped. The experiences and developments in Central Eastern Europe themselves have to be classified according to the approach of 'multiple modernities' (Eisenstadt). However, in doing so, the region should not be isolated from its connections to the West, nor the East, rather analysed in a pan-European context. For this, examples from Western Europe will be integrated into the workshop.

Three areas of analysis warrant particular attention:

Experts and the Media of Knowledge-Communication

The transfer of expertise in Central Eastern Europe gained specific importance in two ways after the First World War. Both the organisation of states and the overcoming of fundamental structural economic problems, particularly in the East of the continent, required that external knowledge be imported. The workshop seeks to explore this transfer of knowledge, whilst not disregarding the lines of continuity originating from before the First World War.

The recruitment structure of experts was non-traditional. Hence, women and comparatively young experts could enter positions they could not (or not in such numbers) fill in western countries. In addition, it is necessary to question the extent to which these protagonists of the knowledge transfer were able to generate a greater scope of influence resulting from their 'hinge function', which went beyond that of comparable groups in 'established' states. Finally, it is necessary to analyse to what extent the media (creation of specialist journals, new methods of presentation) have enabled other forms of specialist exchange to gain particular relevance in the Central Eastern European context.

The Role of the State

The workshop aims to trace the expectations the state held of scientific organisations and the experts it funded, and vice versa. To give an example, this question was particularly precarious for Poland during the time of the Second Polish Republic. From the point of view of the state after the time of the partitions, the development of the nation state, and particularly, industrial economic development had to catch up, the latter often being considered central to the success of the ‘nation-state’ project in Central Eastern Europe. Consequently, expectations, which are not only exemplified by the promotion of close cooperation between science, technology and industry, were high.

Hence, in developing knowledge-based societies the matter involves the potential possibilities of exploiting knowledge for state ends, the transformation of expert knowledge into administrative decisions, concrete actions and symbolic power. At the same time, ‘nation-states’ legitimising strategies have to be scrutinised when examining the role of state-funded or state-related organisations in the development of certain images of the respective nation (in the context of the tense relationship to international transfer of knowledge and transnational networks).

Expertise and Power

The transfer of knowledge takes place within structures of power. Therefore, social factors significantly influence the validity of knowledge both domestically and transnationally. The relationships of dependency and power that exist amongst the different protagonists, and which are reproduced or emerge within communication processes, have to be analysed. On one hand, the extent to which experts of this region are represented within organisations and decision making structures with a universal claim and have influence on the setting of internationally binding norms is of interest in the context of Central Eastern Europe. On the other hand, Central Eastern Europe is suited for case studies on regions in which, during

periods of change, the spreading of new knowledge is to a far lesser extent hindered by fixed structures of an old power structure than in the consolidated states of Western Europe.

This, in particular, would also lend itself to a comparison between East and West, a subject of discussion in the framework of the workshop.

All in all, the workshop intends to take up current research paradigms, such as the transfer of scientific knowledge and transnationality, but aims to develop them further in an innovative manner with equal consideration of Eastern and Western Europe. Another novel aspect of this question is the basic premise that the formation of Europe is not only a result of construction in politics, history and culture, but equally in the areas of technology and its changes as well as in the natural sciences. Hence, technology also played an important part in the construction of Europe.

The analysis of the relationship between technological innovation and transnational communication of knowledge has long been neglected by historiography. These questions were rarely followed up prior to 1989 as a result of the general political situation. This also requires linking eastern and western narratives to develop a new synthesis of the history of technology and science and its transfer in Europe, as seen from the outside. The proposed workshop intends to make an important contribution towards this goal.