

## **OSA Visegrad Scholarship Report**

Scholarship recipient: Monika Metykova (University of Sussex)

Period: 23 June – 31 July 2014

### **Introduction**

I have a long-term research interest in the development of media policy in countries of the former Eastern Bloc and before my stay at the Open Society Archives I have mainly focused on media democratization post-1989 in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. My current research project aims to go further back in time and explore media policy influences in communist Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The ultimate aim – apart from a more historically informed approach – is to re-think some theories of media in totalitarian regimes.

The Hungarian Mass Communication Research Institute (and its successor the Institute for Public Opinion Research) that existed in Hungary between 1969 and 1991 is a very important case when attempting to understand the complex interaction of forces that shaped media policy and research in Hungary under communism. The Institute was in a somewhat exceptional position in the Eastern Bloc because it was closely aligned with Western media scholarship and scholars. Similar institutions existed in other Eastern Bloc countries but the Institute and its representatives were among the very few Eastern Bloc scholars who regularly contributed to European and global media research (including publications in the *European Journal of Communication* and those by UNESCO) in the 1970s and early 1980s in particular. The fact that the Institute's director Tamás Szecskő co-headed the Political Economy section of the International Association for Mass Communication Research – IAMCR – since 1980 and acted as Secretary General of the International Association for Mass Communication Research – IAMCR – between 1988 and 1992 illustrates how internationally informed the research conducted at the Institute was.

I aim to extrapolate broader conceptual 'lessons' from this case and my stay at the OSA was the first in a series of planned archival visits.

### **Sources at OSA and their significance**

OSA recently acquired the Collection on the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research (HU OSA 420) which comprises different types of materials (the large majority of these are in Hungarian):

1. Reports on public opinion surveys – some of these include questionnaires as well as coding sheets. The range of topics covered in the surveys varies significantly and the content lists for individual boxes provide excellent guidance on what is available.
2. Original studies and reports (including specifically for the Central Committee of the Communist Party or the Propaganda Department) into a number of aspects of media and their role in society, including the impact of particular television programs; the role of media in building a socialist consciousness. Other areas of research that are represented in the collection include content analyses; research into the journalistic profession; availability and affordability of media (studies were particularly critical of the poor spread of telephony). Methodological treatises are also represented in the OSA holdings as well as translations of Western studies (including policy documents). Very few of the studies available in the collection were published by Institute researchers in English.
3. Institutional correspondence. The correspondence that is preserved is somewhat uneven but it covers the Institute as well as the IAMCR.

The material in the collection is extensive and provides an insight into the range of research that the Institute was involved in. I plan to supplement my search for materials related to the Institute by a visit to the Szechenyi Library and the Hungarian National Archive in Budapest.

The largely missing element in the collection is documentation on the financial and organizational side of the Institute, the OSA is currently attempting to acquire access to such documentation which will hopefully help answer the most intriguing questions about the Institute: Why did the Communist Party allow the existence of this (Western-style) bourgeois research institute? And how much interference did the Institute face from government bodies?

### **Preliminary findings and further avenues for research**

It is clear that some public opinion surveys and research in more general were essentially commissioned by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Propaganda Department and similar. These included opinions about consumer goods, housing, party congresses and also one-off political events or speeches etc. The reports written for government agencies were confidential, the colour coding of covers indicates the level of confidentiality and sometimes documents are numbered and the total number of copies is also indicated. Materials that were not intended solely for government agencies were either available to the Institute's staff and associates or were widely available in publications.

Some of the original research conducted in the Institute in the 1970s was concerned with the impact of mass communication on audiences, not only in relation to political or ideological aspects. This, however, was in line with prevalent media research trends at the time.

Surprises so far:

*The documents available in the OSA suggest that mass communication research conducted in the Institute closely followed trends in capitalist countries (particular the US) and very little attention was paid to studies in the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries.*

There is a number of research areas that the materials in the collection could contribute to such as:

Mass communication theory in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s

Media policy in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s

Hungarian mass communication research in an international context in the 1970s and 1980s

Methodological challenges of public opinion surveys

Media theory and socialist ideology

### **Plans for use of material acquired**

My main question in relation to the materials that I consulted is: How do they help us re-think/modify/challenge theories of the role of media in authoritarian regimes?

In the next stage of my research I will catalogue the materials that I copied in the OSA and I will identify gaps in my sources so far. I aim to conduct further research upon my return to the University of Sussex and I also plan to apply for further funding in order to continue with archival visits. I plan to work on publications at a later stage when further research and analysis have been completed.

### **Overall evaluation of stay**

This was a very successful research stay that marks the beginning of a new research project. I have collated material that will enable me to gain a solid understanding of the

research conducted at the Institute. I have also identified further sources that I need to consult and I am now at a position when I can plan further stages of my research with clarity.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge help without which my research at OSA would not have been a success. The OSA Visegrad scholarship provided the financial support for a month-long stay in the archives in Budapest, it is needless to say that a month-long concentrated research effort would not have been possible without the scholarship. All staff whom I encountered at the OSA were very professional and went out of their way to ensure that my time at the archives was as fruitful as possible. I would especially like to thank Katalin Gádoros who kept everything together with charm and ease; staff in the reading room – Robert Parnica and Örs Lehel Tari – who supplied much needed advice, practical help and a sense of belonging and my mentor Iván Székely who shared his invaluable knowledge of the Institute and the collection.

### **List of sources**

Archival sources in which relevant materials were found:

OSA 420-2-1 Boxes 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14, 18, 29, 38, 41, 42, 43, 47

OSA 420-2-2 Boxes 1, 3, 10, 12, 13

OSA 420-3-1 Boxes 1, 2

Online databases:

CEEOL

OSA periodical collection