

**FINAL REPORT FOR THE VISEGRAD SCHOLARSHIP
AT THE VERA & DONALD BLINKEN OPEN SOCIETY ARCHIVES**

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Project Title: Reclaiming the Hearts and Minds – The Reception of Cold War Cultural Diplomacy and the Iowa International Writing Program in Socialist Hungary (1967-1989)

Research Period: May 15 – June 15, 2017

The research I conducted at the Vera & Donald Blinken Open Society Archives with the help of the Visegrad Scholarship was planned to constitute a significant part of my dissertation research, conducted through the PhD program in history at the Indiana University, Bloomington. My research examines cultural diplomacy during the later period of the Cold War (1960s-1980s) through the example of cultural and scientific exchanges between the USA and socialist Hungary and Romania. While conventional historiography on the Cold War discusses the foreign policies of the United States and the Soviet Union, there is a growing scholarly interest in the role that cultural diplomacy played within the power relations between the two competing camps. This new approach views the Cold War as an ideological, psychological, and cultural contest for winning the “hearts and minds” of populations at home and abroad. By shifting the focus onto the actual people involved in such projects, new historiographical works examine the agency of individuals navigating international relations during the Cold War. My research wishes to join this emerging scholarship by examining the role of the actors and stressing the importance of agency in global diplomacy through the analysis of the emerging negotiations, contradictions, and ambivalence. The research asks the following questions: How did participants react to programs of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War? How did individuals interpret and negotiate their role in international projects which cut across the Iron Curtain? Moreover, how were they able to articulate their experience of global interconnectedness in an age of ideological polarization?

The overall goal of my research is to reconsider Cold War interactions by moving the focus away from one-directional narratives of the period. By looking at the negotiated

reception of cultural diplomacy projects, scholarship can arrive at insights that take us beyond the teleological narrative of “Western ideological penetration” listing the positive results of “soft power” efforts on the one hand, but also beyond the charge of US “cultural imperialism” with simplified accounts of impositions and exploitation on the other. Grounding the analysis of such projects within the discourses and experiences of those tasked with implementing them, and targeted with receiving them, not only shows the limits of these endeavors but has the purpose of deconstructing the simplistic dichotomies and hierarchies associated with Cold War divisions.

The initial case study of my research centers on the Iowa International Writing Program between 1967 and 1989. The IWP residency program was founded by American poet Paul Engle (1908-1991) in 1967 as an internationally oriented counterpart to the Iowa Writers' Workshop, also run by him. Similarly to other projects of US cultural diplomacy, the IWP received financial support from a combination of public and private sources, the main ones being the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the Rockefeller Foundation, but also Midwestern corporations like Deere & Company. Since its foundation, the IWP has hosted around 1,400 writers and journalists from more than 130 countries. During the Cold War, the Program's main goal was to bring writers to Iowa from the Soviet Bloc in order to introduce them to US social and cultural life. Several prominent literary figures from socialist Hungary participated in the program and a number of them published their accounts of the IWP experience even before 1989.

The focus on the organization and reception of the Iowa International Writing Program provides an insightful example by which to ground the efforts of cultural diplomacy in actual experiences. Treating the participants' account of the IWP and their organized tours of the US as Cold War encounters with a complex and ritualized American propaganda makes it possible to question straight-forward narratives of both “ideological penetration” and “cultural imperialism.” Reflecting on their transnational position of liminality in the heart of America, the East European writers gained access to a unique vantage point onto alternative and competing displays of industrial modernity. While negotiating these interactions, they faced paradoxes, and engaged in incompatible attitudes of acceptance and rejection, identification and detachment – and frequently adopted a schizophrenic position of “admiration and critique.” Through such a complex

reception, the participants of the IWP demonstrate their autonomous ability to reclaim their hearts and minds in a global geopolitical competition.

OSA archival materials and their contribution to my research

As I outlined in my application, I made use of the OSA materials on the one hand to examine the political and cultural context of the case study my research has focused on so far, namely the IWP and its Hungarian participants. I investigated the biographical background of the participants, the reception of their related work in the contemporary Hungarian press, and worked toward positioning the IWP project within the diplomatic and cultural relations between Hungary and the US during the late Cold War period. I was able to accomplish this by a process of cross-reading and gathering complementary information from three fonds of the Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, namely the detailed reports or press clippings of HU OSA 300-40-1 (Subject files), HU OSA 300-40-4 (Information Items), and HU OSA 300-40-5 (Biographical Files). Thanks to the rich database of the latter fond, I could reconstruct the professional trajectories of the participating writers during the period, and to gain a deeper understanding of the impact the residency program in the US had on their work. As such, I looked at the critical and journalistic reception of the following authors: Imre Szász (1970), Ferenc Karinthy (1971), Magda Szabó (1972), Imre Oravecz (1973), Ágnes Gergely (1974), Vilmos Csaplár (1975), Otto Orbán (1976), Mihály Sükösd (1977), József Tornai (1978), Miklós Haraszti (1979), Balázs Lengyel (1979), Ágnes Nemes Nagy (1979), István Bart (1980), György Somlyó (1981), Péter Lengyel (1982), Tóth Éva (1982), Zsuzsa Beney (1983), Zsuzsa Takács (1988), Miklós Hernádi (1989), Zsuzsa Rakovszky (1990). With the help of the two other fonds, I could follow in detail the long process of how diplomatic, economic, cultural, and scientific ties were (re)constructed between the US and Hungary starting with 1963. Examining the ups and downs of diplomatic relations and the long-drawn-out negotiations for cultural agreements between the countries revealed the parallelisms and incoherencies of international relations which actually formed the basis for the enhanced role of agency (individual initiatives, plural discourses, ambivalence, etc.).

On the other hand, immersing myself into the RFE/RL archive and systematically going through the materials available for the period 1967 and 1989 gave me the opportunity to effectively expand the scope of my PhD research – and thus meet the second goal of my Visegrad scholarship. Thanks to the findings in the OSA holdings, I formulated three new directions for my research: the analysis of popular Hungarian travelogues about the US; the examination of Cold War mediators between the two camps and the two countries, respectively; and finally, the exploration of a diverse set of cultural diplomacy projects initiated by both states and mediated by key Cold War actors in the name of improving yet ideologically conflicting relations.

First, the comparative and complementary reading of the above mentioned three fonds revealed – and contextualized – a number of politically and culturally significant travelogues about trips in the US, written by Hungarian intellectuals in the late socialist period. The ice-breaker in this regard was the 1971 books by writer Iván Boldizsár, entitled *New York percről percre* [New York, step by step], to be followed by the writings of philosopher Miklós Almási (1974), and writers Antal Végh (1980), Ferenc Kunszabó (1986), and Gyula Fekete (1987). These works were paralleled by the accounts of Hungarian journalists and foreign correspondents traveling or living in the US. These ranged from the book by the music critic and radio DJ Előd Juhász (1969) or the sports commentator Tamás Vitray (1972), to the more politically themed travelogues of acclaimed members of the socialist press, like Pál Ipper, János Avar, Péter Vajda, Tibor Pethő, Pál Bokor, and István Kulcsár. These books and the reception they received in the press had a central role in constructing the image of the USA for the socialist public sphere in Hungary.

Second, the archival materials of the RFE/RL Research Institute provided ample information on the trans-Atlantic political and cultural activities of Cold War mediators, that is, of actors who initiated, facilitated, and implemented the cultural diplomacy projects of the period. In the further stages of my research, I wish to focus on the mediating role of Armand Hammer (1898-1990), an American oil tycoon and art collector; Lajos/Louis Szathmáry (1919-1996), a Hungarian-born, Chicago-based renown chef, writer, and book collector; Sándor Püski (1911-2009), an emigre Hungarian

publisher and bookseller based in New York; and finally, Dénes Sinor (1916-2011), a world-renown Hungarian linguist and long-time professor at Indiana University.

Third, I shall be looking at the organization, implementation, and media reception of several cultural diplomacy projects of both socialist Hungary and the US during the examined period. For Hungary, I will focus on the US lecture tours of prominent intellectuals and academics (like István Király, Péter Hanák, or Béla Pomogáts), and the performance tours of Hungarian artists (like pianist Zoltán Kocsis) and artistic groups (State Philharmonic, State Folk Dance Ensemble, and theatrical, opera, and cabaret companies). For the US, I will examine cultural exhibitions and installations mounted in Budapest which communicated through a conscious mixture of aesthetics and politics, aiming to provide a sample of the “American way of life” for an audience behind the Iron Curtain. Such projects include the 1977 exhibition “Képek, gondolatok: A sokarcú Amerika” [Images and Thoughts: The America of Many Faces] in the Kunsthalle; the 1982 installation and performance by the Actors Theatre of Louisville entitled „A mai amerikai színház” [Contemporary American Theater], also in the Kunsthalle; the 1983 large-scale exhibition of the Armand Hammer Collection in the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts, entitled “Five Centuries of Masterpieces”; and finally, the 1984 cultural exhibition in the Ernst Museum entitled “Az amerikai film világa” [The World of American Cinema].

I truly believe that the materials consulted at the OSA with the help of the Visegrad Scholarship will form the bulk of my primary sources and will prove crucial for my developing PhD research. Since I plan on comparing the Hungarian examples with projects from socialist Romania, I have the intention of returning to the OSA at a later time, and examine the Romanian material of the RFE/RL Research Institute. I shall do so not only because of the unique importance and historical richness of the archive, but also due to the remarkable professionalism of the OSA as in institute for research and the unmatched kindness of the staff and faculty who assist the work of visiting scholars.

DETAILED LIST OF OSA DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

HU OSA 300 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute

HU OSA 300-40-1 Subject Files

Box 189 – Disszidálás, 1968-1990

Box 255-256 – Emigráció: Általában, 1955-1989

Box 261-262 – Emigráció: USA, 1955-1993

Box 263 – Emigrációs sajtó és irodalom 1960-1990

Box 1017–1026 – Külpolitika: Külkapcsolatok: USA, 1967-1986

HU OSA 300-40-4 Information Items

Box 2 – Foreign relations; Cultural institutes abroad; Diplomatic representation

Box 3 – Foreign relations: France, UK, USA

Box 14 – Foreign trade: [Culture] Kultúra

Box 16 – Tourism: General; Fairs

Box 25 – Culture: Cultural relations

HU OSA 300-40-5 Biographical Files

Box 3, 6, 22, 52, 61, 74, 76, 94, 105, 107, 109, 138, 146, 151, 159, 176, 179, 182, 183, 191, 196, 201

HU OSA 312 Alfred Reisch Collection

HU OSA 312-0-4 Copies of archival materials

Box 9 – European trip reports by George C. Minden, 1973-1990

HU OSA 336 General Király Béla Personal Papers

HU OSA 336-0-1 Academic Papers

Box 7 – various

HU OSA 336-0-2 Atlantic Research and Publication relating files

Box 3 – various