

Visegrad Scholarship at the Open Society Archives  
Research Report  
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**Producing Socialism while Making Films: Film Industry in Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union  
(1957-1972)**

Research project

The empirical scope of the present research are the social, cultural and economic reform processes as they developed in the film production systems of two differently organized socialist regimes: the state socialism of the USSR and self-management socialism of Yugoslavia. Theoretical wager of choosing this type of empirical material is that film production approached as an economic and social activity can prove instrumental for analyzing the social practices organizing late socialist societies. Essentially different from and, in a context of dominant visions of productivity and labour, marginal to the heavy industries of the age, it can help us unravelling how concepts such as economic efficiency, profit, or consumption were envisaged and structured as social practices in the specific context of reform socialism.

The dissertation explores the social process of film production (and exhibition) against the backdrop of two historical shifts in European socialist states of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: a partial transfer of Cold War competition from the military to the spheres of economy, consumption and socialist welfare (Maier 2010) and a concomitant attempts at economic reforms designed to increase efficiency and financial accountability of a socialist enterprise through reduction of administrative controls and imitation of market mechanisms. These processes prompted introduction of concepts traditionally associated with representations of Western market economies – such as *profit* – and led to transformations of the ways in which films were integrated into social vocabularies and systems of valuation as economic products, art objects, statistical elements or educational tools (Boltanski 2006). Tracing the shifting understandings of the relationship between categories of commerce and social good (Zelizer 2010) as they facilitated the gradual redefinition of film as a commodity, film viewer as a consumer, and cinema as a service enterprise is the subject of the present inquiry.

The current research pursues three interconnected themes that were of particular importance for the film production systems of both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia: the growing concern with efficiency and accountability, the management of cultural labour and the emergence of a consumer society. The themes are chosen for two reasons: on the one hand, they refer to objectives and developments that were common to both Yugoslav and Soviet socialist projects. Both societies

believed in the educational and transformative power of culture, were engaged in reform processes designed to develop a more efficient economy, as they were concerned with developing democratic institutions for workers in general (and cultural workers in particular) and film viewers. However, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union pursued those abstract socialist ideals in strikingly different manners and by using very different social and economic technologies.

On the other hand, all three themes were of particular importance for the development of film industry of that time and, more broadly, for the reorganization of socialist economies. In the context of rising concerns with the efficiency and accountability of socialist economies, by the early 1960s film industries in both countries were expected to become financially self-sustainable. This pursuit of economic sustainability and efficiency was deeply embedded in the general reforms of self-management structures and market institutions in Yugoslavia. Similarly, it was closely linked to the revival of the notion of *khozraschyot* ('economic accounting') in the Soviet Union. These large-scale government initiatives were accompanied by various lower-scale regulations designed to facilitate the efficiency of film production units, studios, and cinemas.

This concern with efficiency and productivity was not limited to the checks and balances of financial accounting – it was extended to questions of socialist cultural labour. Following general trends in labour history, the implications of this efficiency drive on the industrial shopfloor have received some attention from scholars of late socialism (Filtzer 1992). Nevertheless, its influence on non-manual and service professions remains understudied, overlooking essential questions about the variety of labour in socialist societies. Labour-intensive, stratified and heterogeneous in its structure, film industry provides a perfect setting for an analysis of the bureaucratic and organizational mechanisms devised to encourage the efficiency of cultural and service work. Furthermore, it sheds light on the ways in which social distinction and stratification was produced and maintained between elite, hard-to-replace creative workers (scriptwriters and film directors) and their peers engaged in administrative or service work (film mechanics or cinema managers). The difference between different types of work-contracts, the diversity of the remuneration schemes, or various forms of protest, are just a few sites for exploring the conceptualization of socialist cultural labour. These different conceptualizations of cultural labour elicit the difficulty socialist societies had in including cultural labour within their Fordist framework of institutional design.

Last not least, cinematic life in both contexts was deeply influenced by the rising consumerism of socialist societies (Crowley and Reid 2010, Luthar and Pušnik 2010), and the development of new instruments for conceptualizing and reframing consumption within socialism. The sociology of cultural consumption developing throughout the 1960s (Huxtable 2013, First 2008) was one of the most notable areas in which this was done: it provided essential tools for exploring the

interconnection between education, economy and film viewers. However, sociological research was not the only field in which the profile of the cultural consumer was moulded throughout this period. The still young network of regional cinemas was being re-invented as a type of service economy: its activities evinced contested understandings of the socialist consumer, the obligations of the cultural worker, or of the material setting of cinema as a socialist industry. Along with long-standing socialist institutions such as the viewers' councils (Dobrenko 1997) they provided contested redefinitions of the viewer as a consumer which blurred the boundaries between ideological impact, socialist democratic potential and economic interests.

### Research at the OSA

OSA holdings provided a particularly rich source material on the topics of Yugoslav film industry in the context of economic reform. For the purposes of the present research project, especially valuable were the Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute and their Yugoslav Subject Files collections. Press clippings from Yugoslav and Western press, excerpts of RFE Research Reports and Yugoslav Press Survey materials reflect an avid interest RFE research branch had in the processes of and local discussions on the Yugoslav economic reform of the 1960s. The Archives, thanks to close attention that RFE researchers paid to some of the most important contemporary debates and often conflictual negotiations over the meaning and implementation of self-management in the reform context, proved instrumental for broader contextualization of some of the research questions pursued in the dissertation. Some of the discussions highlighted in the compilations of Yugoslav press clippings (especially the unit 300-10-2:101) bring to the fore complex issues regarding the function of the material product of film industry – the film – in the socialist polity undergoing the process of experimentation with introduction of market mechanisms to its economy. The reconfiguration of institutional structures facilitating production, distribution and exhibition of film intensified the disputes over the dual nature of a film as a merchandise and film as a social function or, in broader terms, film as an object of consumption and film as a tool dedicated to promotion of social growth. In other words, following a more extensive introduction of market mechanisms to Yugoslav film industry, film production and exhibition became a venue for discussions over the relationship between the culture and the market. In the context of growing fears over 'commercialization' of film, the two ways of understanding the function of film in self-managing society were becoming increasingly difficult to reconcile.

In addition, the Archives allowed further exploration of another central theme of the dissertation: labour relations under self-management in general and in film industry in particular. Yugoslav press, as well as RFE research reports, dwell extensively on the question of the distribution of worker responsibilities and rights under new economic conditions, paying particularly close

attention to the problem of developing institutional schemes that would enable assigning responsibility to independent film production units for the performance of their films among the viewers. OSA holdings shed some light on how, against the backdrop of furthering market relations in a self-managing economic system, film industry was renegotiating such problems as measurement of intellectual work, the principles of income for regularly and temporarily employed film workers, legal and social formulations of the relationship between film workers and enterprises, and the most fitting principles of remuneration. Archival collections illuminate in this way the growing tension between visions of market as the best tool for supporting one of the tenets of culture in self-managing society – establishment of a direct link between producers and consumers of culture – and growing disappointment in market's power to achieve this very aim.

List of the OSA holdings used

HU OSA 300-10-2 Yugoslav Subject Files I

- 300-10-2:142/7 Enterprises, 1964 - 1983
- 300-10-2:238/9 Labor Code, 1963 - 1970
- 300-10-2:322/2 Party Reform, 1966
- 300-10-2:355/9 Reform [1/2], 1965
- 300-10-2:355/10 Reform [2/2], 1965
- 300-10-2:356/1 Reform, 1967 - 1982
- 300-10-2:27/5 Arts, 1963 - 1983
- 300-10-2:69/2 Chambers of Economy, 1967 - 1969
- 300-10-2:101/5 Culture, 1963 - 1973
- 300-10-2:158/1 Film, 1965 - 1971
- 300-10-2:159/1 Film, 1972 - 1973
- 300-10-2:261/3 Market, 1965 - 1971
- 300-10-2:261/4 Market, 1972 - 1984
- 300-10-2:261/5 Market Economy, 1966 - 1973
- 300-10-2:261/6 Marketing: Yugoslavia, 1970 - 1974