

Fellowship Report

Visegrad Scholarship at the Open Society Archives

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My research at the Open Society Archives followed young adults and young adulthood – as people and social category respectively – during the first two decades of state socialism in Eastern Europe. This topic is part of a larger dissertation on young adulthood in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe, which I intend to complete next year. More concretely, I set to answer two questions about the relationship between young adults and state socialism: How has the change of regime and political system changed the lives of young adults in Eastern Europe? If and how was young adulthood politicized and mobilized by state socialism and its opponents?

The first question required extensive use of the subject files of Radio Free Europe's Research Institute (OSA-HU-300). I began looking at files labelled explicitly as "youth." Doing so confirmed my suspicion that reporting on youth will treat youth as an imagined collective title for stereotypical young people (behaving badly or contributing their share for the building of communism) or for organized youth (Pioneers, etc.). Following this route allowed me to form hypotheses in answer to my second question, since these files focused on the political mobilization of youth as youth. Radio Free Europe seems to have grouped these documents to build a propaganda campaign around the alleged continuities between the fascist youth movement and the communist youth movements.

Some more specific files (like files dedicated to Youth as a subcategory of Labor) focused on the closely related propaganda around harsh conditions, as they described the exploitation of underage workers. This meant, necessarily, that Radio Free Europe (and the sources they collected) adhered to the rather recent idea that all children belong to school until they are 18. Since I was most interested in young adults who had already left their parents' houses, the files allowed me mostly to better outline the differentiation between young adults and youth, a differentiation whose origins I trace back to the 1880s in Western Europe. The criticism of working youth was not so much the work itself but the working conditions, which conceals the very major change that this whole project of youth labor brought – it refocused childhoods around work instead of school. In doing so, it threatened to undo the general trend of keeping children away from the workplace.

To search for young adults themselves, I began looking at topics that concerned the life of newly independent young people. Of particular importance were files on housing, labor/manpower policy, and education. These files included sporadic materials on young men and women up until the late 1960s, when a more concrete emphasis on the dissatisfaction of educated young people began to emerge. I found these files useful for thinking about social mobility and the promises made by the state socialist regime. Radio Free Europe, too, labelled phenomena like unstable housing markets or the fight against quick changing of jobs to be evidence for socialism underdelivering on its promises. However, I was more intrigued by the range of promised

solutions that state enterprises and planning agencies promoted in practice, such as the automatization/mechanization of house construction and opening of labor export.

In order to excavate the voices of actual Eastern Europeans, I turned to interviews from the Voices of the 20th Century Archive and Pál Schiffer's personal papers. These interviews consisted of young workers in factories during the 1970s and high school dropouts in the 1980s. Most helpfully, the latter collection often included interviews with the dropouts' parents. This provides an intergenerational view on social mobility and occupational choices, thus allowing a better contextualization of these decisions within the family environment. I am not familiar of any other interviews collection available for researchers that features familial matching. Using these interviews, which I will have to analyze after my stay at OSA, I expect to gain meaningful insights not only on the 1970s and 1980s but on the periods reaching back to the 1930s.

Finally, my time at OSA helped me develop a post-doctoral project on the Perestroika in the Soviet periphery. Using a rare collection of newspapers from Central Asia, I was able to formulate initial hypotheses on the visions Gorbachev's Soviet Union developed for the 1990s and how it communicated these visions to teenagers. I worked with newspapers that were published both in Russian and in a local language (Tajik, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz) to assess how language differences fed into social differences that later proved important during the consolidation of the post-Soviet state. I intend to return to OSA for further work on this new and exciting direction in September 2023.

Detailed List of Boxes

- HU OSA 300
 - HU OSA 300-10-1 Albanian Subject Files
 - Box #1: Agriculture
 - Box #2: Agriculture, Army
 - Box #3: Literature and Theater
 - Box #6: Economic Policy
 - Box #10: Labor
 - Box #11: Manpower Policy, Organizations
 - Box #17: Youth
 - HU OSA 300-10-2 Yugoslav Subject Files I
 - Box #5-10: Agriculture
 - Box #22-23: Army
 - Box #117: Economy
 - Box #122-123: Economic Conditions
 - Box #127: Economic Housing
 - Box #136: Education
 - Box #141: Employment, Elementary School
 - Box #157: Family
 - Box #191: Higher Education
 - Box #238: Labor
 - Box #239-240: Labor Emigration
 - Box #241: Labor Employment
 - Box #242: Labor Force, Labor Law, Labor Wages
 - Box #424-426: Students
 - Box #493-496: Youth
 - HU OSA 300-20-1 [Bulgarian] Subject Files
 - Box #2: Agriculture: Manpower and Competition
 - Box #6-7: Army
 - Box #37: Literature
 - Box #47-48: Economic Planning
 - Box #55-56: Education
 - Box #160: Labor
 - Box #185: Social Structure
 - Box #187: Housing
 - Box #205-207: Youth
 - Box #209-210: Description of the Country
 - HU OSA 300-60-1 [Romanian] Subject Files
 - Box #14: Administration – Education
 - Box #169-178: Education
 - Box #594-610: Youth
- HU OSA 420 Collection on the Hungarian Institute for Public Opinion Research
 - HU OSA 420-1 Research
 - HU OSA 420-1-1 Research
 - Box #4

- HU OSA 420-2-1 Manuscripts, Background Materials
 - Box #1-2, 4, 7
- HU OSA 409 Voices of the 20th Century Archive
 - HU OSA 409-1 Ilona Liskó Collection
 - HU OSA 409-1-6 Research on Secondary School Drop-outs
 - Box #1-13
- HU OSA 356 Pál Schiffer Personal Papers
 - HU OSA 356-1 Saját filmjeinek dokumentációja
 - HU OSA 356-1-6 Munkásinterjúk
 - Box #1-2