

Call for papers

Eastern Bloc Universities as a Meeting Place for International Youth during the Cold War

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(CERCLE UR 4372 et ELLIADD UR 4661)

The current context of international student mobility, marked by an increase in numbers and the domination of the Western university model in terms of reputation and ranking, now in competition with centres such as China and Saudi Arabia¹, clearly shows that universities are not only places where knowledge is produced and mediated, but also places of power.

At the time of the Cold War, the struggle for influence between the two blocs was also being played out at university level, as both East and West sought to establish themselves as centres of learning, particularly for young people from the emerging Global South. Welcoming international students was a way of disseminating a cultural and ideological model and demonstrating the power of states. Universities were already instruments of soft power.

Looking beyond ideological rivalry, an angle from which the Cold War has already been widely studied, it is from the angle of transnational encounters, exchanges, and movements that this study day is taking place, as part of the transnational turn in research on the Cold War which, for some years now, has been highlighting a certain permeability of the Iron Curtain.²

¹ Christine Musselin, *La grande course des universités*, Les presses de Sciences Po, 2017 ; Julien Le Bot, *Le dessous des cartes – Soft power : La guerre des universités*, Arte, 2022.

² For a general overview, see: Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War : Raising the Iron Curtain*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003 ; Rana Mitter, Patrick Major (dir.), *Across the Blocs : Cold War Cultural and Social History*, Frank Cass, 2004 ; Tobias Hochscherf, Christoph Laucht and Andrew Plowman (dir.), *Divided, But Not Disconnected. German Experiences of the Cold War*, Berghahn Books, 2010 ; Sari Autio-Sarasma, Katalin Miklóssy (dir.), *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, Routledge, 2011 ; Sandrine Kott, Justine Faure (dir.), « Spécial: Le bloc de l'Est en question », *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 2011/1 n°109 ; Annette Vowinckel, Marcus M. Payk, Thomas Lindenberger (dir.), *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies*, Berghahn Books, 2012 ; Simo Mikkonen, Pia Koivunen (dir.), *Beyond the Divide : Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe*, Berghahn Books, 2015 ; Frank Reichherzer, Emmanuel Droit, Jan C. Hansen (dir.), *Den Kalten Krieg vermessen. Über Reichweite und Alternativen einer binären Ordnungsvorstellung*, De Gruyter, 2018.

East-West cooperation between scientific networks was the focus of subsequent research: Antoine Fleury, Jilek Lubor (dir.), *Une Europe malgré tout, 1945-1990 : contacts et réseaux culturels, intellectuels et scientifiques entre Européens dans la guerre froide*, Peter Lang, 2009 ; Corine Defrance, Anne Kwaschik (dir.), *La guerre froide et l'internationalisation des sciences : acteurs, réseaux et institutions*, CNRS éditions, 2016 ; Claude Debru (dir.), *Les sciences en guerre froide, 1946-1991 : France-Union soviétique et pays de l'Est*, Presses universitaires Rhin & Danube, 2022 ; Antonie Doležalová, Catherine Albrecht (dir.), *Behind the Iron Curtain : Economic Historians during the Cold War, 1945-1989*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

At the same time, researchers have been looking at artistic movements that transcend the partition of the world: Simo Mikkonen, Pekka Suutari (dir.), *Music, Art and Diplomacy : East-West Cultural Interactions and the Cold War*, Routledge, 2016 ; Stéphanie Gonçalves, *Danser pendant la guerre froide : 1945-1968*, Presses universitaires

This study day is intended as a forum for reflection and dialogue on the role played by Eastern bloc universities as a meeting place for young people from the East, the West and the Global South during the Cold War. The aim is to help write the transnational history of the Eastern bloc through the sociological prism of youth. As young people are still developing, they are considered susceptible to influence and ideology. They participate in international exchanges and meet other young people at a key moment in their lives when their identity and professional pathways are being forged. While recent research has focused on young people, it has done so mainly through the study of festivals, whereas it is the processes and repercussions of this encounter within the student community that are at the heart of this study day.³

Among the themes that could be addressed as part of this study day, and without this list being exhaustive, the proposals could develop a reflection around the following axes:

The challenges of international student mobility during the Cold War

The aim here is to understand the challenges of mobility at several levels. In addition to the benefits of student mobility for both sending and receiving countries - as a diplomatic instrument, a form of economic aid, or an expression of socialist solidarity - the day will look at the issues at stake at a university level. Were the universities seeking recognition for the teaching they were developing or the research they were conducting in a context of East-West competition? Was there any competition between the universities of the Eastern bloc? Were they involved in promoting student internationalism?⁴ What room for manoeuvre did they have in their choice of exchanges and host students? As for the students themselves, did international mobility allow for the possibility of personal fulfilment, social advancement, the promise of greater employability or the prospect of playing a key role in their country of origin?

de Rennes, 2018 ; Simo Mikkonen, Giles Scott-Smith, Jari Parkkinen (dir.), *Entangled East and West : Cultural Diplomacy and Artistic Interaction during the Cold War*, De Gruyter, 2019.

³ Pia Koivunen, « Overcoming Cold War Boundaries at the World Youth Festivals », in Autio-Sarasmo and Miklóssy (dir.), *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, p. 175-193 ; Quinn Slobodian, « What Does Democracy Look Like? (And Why Would Anyone Want To Buy It?) : Third World Demands And West German Responses at 1960s World Youth Festivals », in Vowinckel, Payk, and Lindenberger (dir.), *Cold War Cultures*, p. 254-275 ; Monica Fioravanzo, « La RDA et le Festival mondial de la jeunesse à Berlin (1973) dans une perspective transnationale : auto-représentation, cultures jeunes, réception », in *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande*, n°51-1, 2019, p. 51-65 ; Matthieu Gillibert, « Varsovie 1955 et la Guerre froide globale. L'internationalisation de l'Europe centrale au prisme du 5^e Festival mondial de la jeunesse et des étudiants », in *Monde(s)*, n° 18, 2020, p. 51-72 ; Pia Koivunen, *Performing Peace and Friendship: The World Youth Festivals and Soviet Cultural Diplomacy*, De Gruyter, 2023.

⁴ Matthieu Gillibert, « De l'internationalisation de l'université à l'internationalisme étudiant. Les migrations étudiantes en Europe à l'heure de la massification universitaire 1945-1980 », thèse d'habilitation, Université de Fribourg, 2020.

This section will look at the movement of young people and the influence of Eastern bloc universities. Who did they attract, in addition to students from the Eastern bloc? What is revealed about the proportion of movement from West to East, or from South to East? What assets did they promote? How did they organise the reception of foreign students? What investments did this represent for the States, both for those hosting and those sending young people?

The contributions may highlight the existence of specific programmes, funding and scholarship systems, and the role of certain institutions in this international mobility.

Forms and methods of international student encounters

From a perspective of micro-history, we will be looking at the material nature of these encounters and the variety of ways in which they took place at the student level. Universities are not only places of learning, they are also places of sociability and cultural mixing, and places of transnational contact.

Where, when and how did young people meet? Did foreign students attend the same classes as local students? What were the main meeting places: seminars, halls of residence, student social events, etc.? Particular attention could be paid to institutions that welcomed foreign students who needed to learn the language of the host country before they could begin their studies, such as the University of Łódź or the Herder-Institut at the Karl-Marx University in Leipzig.

Intercultural exchanges, successful encounters that may have gone as far as romantic encounters, as well as the difficulties faced by young foreigners will be discussed here. Did foreign students live in isolation, withdrawn into their own communities, or were they in contact with the local population? Did they suffer discrimination and racism? Were they subject to particular police controls? We may question whether the conditions in which foreigners were received can explain the relationship that the populations of Eastern European countries have developed towards foreigners and the strength of the anti-immigration discourse today.

Students from the Global South had the opportunity to travel to Western countries, particularly during the holidays. What were the implications of such travel? Did the Eastern universities on the border between the two blocs have any specific characteristics when it came to encounters between young people?

And finally, what kind of agency and room for manoeuvre did young people have in organising their meetings?

The impact of this international meeting on individual development

Understanding the influence that the experience of international mobility had on the personal and professional lives of these young people, and on their engagement in politics and social matters, is another important focus of this study day. Did international encounters at Eastern Bloc universities lead to intercultural enrichment for young people of different origins? Were these universities places of openness and emancipation in a context of ideological compartmentalisation? Did studying abroad reinforce the young people's convictions or open them up to other horizons?

What happened to these young people when they returned to their home countries? What did they take away from this experience of international mobility, which was sometimes imposed or even forced upon them? Did some of them manage to stay in the country where they had studied? Were they able to use their degree and their international experience at a university in Eastern Europe?

More broadly, what impact did these contacts and exchanges have on international relations during the Cold War? What role did the major events in the Eastern bloc, such as 17 June 1953 in the GDR, the Budapest uprising in 1956, the Sino-Soviet conflict in 1961, the Prague Spring in 1968, the rise of Solidarność in the 1980s, the demise of the Soviet bloc, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, etc., play in the encounters or relationships between students or in their perception of the world? How might these youth encounters have influenced the post-Cold War world?

From a methodological point of view, studying the Cold War through the eyes of students lends itself well to a 'history from below'. The emphasis will be on the role played by key players, whether individuals or organisations such as universities, and on their agency. Contributions based on the analysis of institutional sources and testimonies are particularly welcome insofar as they will enable us to analyse the history of student mobility in the Eastern bloc on a meso-scale - that of the universities - and on a micro-scale - that of the student community. We also welcome methodological papers looking at the difficulty of finding and analysing sources 'at the student level,' and ways to construct an oral history of this period and these international exchanges.

As this event aims to bring together different approaches, proposals from various disciplines such as history, sociology, cultural and linguistic areas (German studies, Slavic studies, etc.), film studies, etc. or those combining several disciplinary approaches are welcome, as well as those which compare the different levels, or different countries.

Proposals should include a title and a text presenting the content of the proposed paper (300 words, or 2,000 characters, including spaces), the main bibliographical references, and a short biographical presentation (15 lines max.). Proposals may be submitted in French or English as Word or PDF files by 15 May 2025 to clemence.andreys@univ-fcomte.fr and myriam.renaudot@univ-lorraine.fr. The scientific committee's responses will be sent by 30 June 2025.

The study day will take place on 7 November 2025 at the University of Lorraine, Nancy. Transport and accommodation for participants will be fully or partially covered, depending on the outcome of grant applications. Priority will be given to young researchers. A publication is envisaged.

Organising committee

Myriam Renaudot (Université de Lorraine) et Clémence Andréys (Université Marie et Louis Pasteur)

Scientific committee

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