

Spaces of interaction

Towards a new understanding of East-South relations A case study on the Institute for World Economics¹

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Abstract:

Socialist global entanglements in the context of the Cold War constitute an open field of research, which brings together a wide range of studies dealing with the various political, economic, social, cultural and academic interactions. In this context, after briefly unfolding some of the main processes, practices and projects of socialist global relations and also shedding some light on how the political, ideological, and economic rationalities underpinning these relations changed over time, the current paper shifts the focus of analysis to specific academic spaces being responsible for the acceleration of interconnectedness between the socialist bloc and the Third World. Arguing that the “thick description” of these spaces could help us sketch a better overall picture on the nature of East-South relations and, in this case, more particularly on the circulation of economic knowledge and practices, the following pages zoom on the Institute for World Economics and its predecessor, the Centre for Afro-Asian Research in Budapest and aim to provide a micro-historical view on how discourses of development (and more generally of economic knowledge) were transferred, adopted and even reinterpreted within these particular spaces. The paper furthermore endeavors to take a closer look on actors being active in these institutions and show how they sought to position themselves beyond the dichotomies of the Cold War and attempted to function along the specific logic of own their fields of expertise.

Keywords:

East-South relations during the Cold War; spaces of interaction; development and area studies; Centre for Afro-Asian Research; Institute for World Academy; József Bognár; knowledge production and transfer.

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Introduction

Seizing on the opportunities offered by the gradual warming of the international climate in the wake of Khrushchev's thaw, a great variety of relations had been developed between the socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the newly independent countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Based on a commonly shared anti-imperialist solidarity (often intertwined with socialist sentiments) and molded into various forms of cooperation, the two worlds became increasingly entangled in the collective attempt to create alternative (or even socialist) modernities. The initially vigorous expansion of trade agreements, joint development (or in the state socialist terminology: technical assistance) projects, political collaborations, or even academic, scientific, societal and cultural exchanges created many illusions about the effectiveness of these connections. However, once the external conditions had turned less favorable in the course of the following decades, and particularly in the aftermath of the global economic crisis of the early 1970s, the situation significantly changed and the affinities that once glued these countries together started gradually to decrease. While the rearrangement of political and economic priorities led to the decrease of these relations, their legacies and reverberations still linger and, in a number of direct and indirect ways, influencing the newly phrased global opening policies of the formerly socialist countries.

Inspired by the growing field of global, trans-regional and area studies, in recent years, a promising body of literature has been developed to scrutinize these East-South, i.e. socialist–postcolonial relations. In this context, researchers have analyzed the multiple avenues in which the socialist camp established connections with the postcolonial world. Building on these findings, the following pages shift the focus of examination to a specific aspect of these relations, namely to academic knowledge production on the postcolonial regions and seek to apply a tentative analytical concept to unravel certain characteristic features of these contexts. Through the lens of the notion of *spaces of interaction*, the following pages aim to identify a specific institution, the Institute for World Economics (IWE) in Budapest, as well as a well-defined group of actors (economists) who had been seminal in shaping the relations between Hungary and the newly independent countries. The reasons for choosing this particular institute are manifold. On the one hand, the IWE was not just of utmost importance in forging and consolidating relations with the postcolonial countries but – in certain cases – was even allowed to shape joint socialist policies towards these countries. On the other hand, from a purely scientific perspective, the extensive research carried out on the social, political and economic conditions of the postcolonial countries gradually elevated the Institute to the unique position of being a major hub of developmental thinking not just within the socialist bloc but – with a reputation radiating beyond the Iron Curtain – even globally. Its outstanding academic performance notwithstanding, the Institute has neither received enough attention in the global history of development nor did it get its rightful place in Hungarian



historiography.³ Hence, teasing out more of the networks and connections that had been built in this specific space of interaction, and reflecting on some of the ideas, concepts and opinions that had been discussed and developed at the IWE might help us to raise more awareness to the importance of these institutions and experts. However, before embarking on the discussion of the topic, some rough and brief introductory reflections on the broader scholarship in which the current paper is positioned, seems to be necessary.

Some conceptual premises

The historiography of the Cold War has undergone a number of changes in the last couple of decades that led to the reconfiguration and reorientation of these studies both in approach and scope. Inclined to almost exclusively focus on the East–West axis of the Cold War, and – to a large extent – concentrating on the bipolar superpower competition and the ensuing arms race aspects of this period, Cold War historiography, for a long time, paid insufficient attention to the complexities of connections during this period (Hadler, 2018). Bolstered by the (partial) opening of the archives in the former Soviet Union, China and in East-Central Europe after the collapse of communism, the last couple of decades have, however, witnessed substantial changes, or even a paradigm shift, as Thomas Kuhn would call it, in the field of Cold War historiography. Based on the newly available materials and expanding the research methodology, the reshuffled scholarship gave rise to a number of new insights from which we will list here only those that are relevant for our purposes.

First, in their attempts to internationalize the history of the Cold War, a growing number of experts moved beyond discourses of East–West divide and embarked on projects seeking to reveal the more complex geographical entanglements of this period (see, e.g., Westad, 2005, Leffler et al, 2010). Reconceptualizing the era from a global perspective and considering events happening outside Europe as critical in determining the course of the Cold War, these studies substantially expanded the scope of research and provided fresh insights for further inquiries. In this context, projects gazing out to the “Third World” and investigating its complex connections and interactions with both the “First” and “Second Worlds” came increasingly to the fore and brought new attention to the many social, cultural, and political exchanges that produced geographies alternative to the Cold War dichotomy.

Second, with the wide(r) array of available archival and documentary sources entering the research circuit, a growing body of research started to focus on the socialist world in global history and, by focusing on their interactions with postcolonial countries, began to argue against the realist approach that claimed the total control of the Soviet Union on its junior allies and hence oversaw or neglected the agency of the smaller socialist states (cf. with Smith,

³ While the history of Hungarian economics (especially its reformist efforts and interludes) during the Cold War era is a relatively well researched area and while the achievements of the institutions and experts seeking to shape the economic agenda has often brought to the fore of scholarly attention, the IWE has never received the amount of scrutiny it deserves.

2000). While previously it was widely assumed that the foreign policy priorities of these countries were aligned with the Soviet ones (Després, 1987; cf. with Thornton, 1961; Mosely, 1966; Valkenier, 1968), with new materials at hand, this approach turned to be untenable (Engerman, 2011, p. 184). Looking beyond the Soviet activities in the postcolonial world and demonstrating that these countries had their own priorities and ambitions, new studies on East-South relations started to erode the image of the Bloc as being a monolithic group of the obedient controlled by the power centers in Moscow (Winrow, 2009; Lorenzini, 2010; Kibbe, 2012; Muehlenbeck, 2016; Muehlenbeck and Telepneva, 2018; Adi, 2018; Calori et al, 2019, Mark et al, 2020). Moreover, and further blurring the picture, these studies have raised attention to the fact that socialist countries maintained a rather fragmented approach towards the decolonized world and – despite the principle of socialist friendship and cooperation – often engaged in competition with each other to gain better positions and access to resources. In addition, recent studies have raised attention to the fact that socialist countries maintained a rather fragmented approach towards the decolonized world and – despite the principle of socialist friendship and cooperation – often engaged in competition with each other to gain better positions and access to resources, a feature further blurring the supposedly monolithic nature of the bloc. This, however, does not mean that their foreign policy was independent when dealing with postcolonial countries and hence the Soviet Union was unable to impose control and principles on the countries within its orbit. Rather, by conveying the message that the iron cage, to use this Weberian term, of the Soviet power was not that ubiquitous as it was previously assumed, and by revealing a system in which various forms of autonomies were practiced (Lerner, 1965, p. 43) this approach opens up a number of possibilities to reexamine the nature of the bloc (cf. Marung et al, 2019).

Third, given the exponentially expanding scholarship on East–South relations, research on the global influence of socialism even argues that alternative practices and projects of globalization emerged and existed within the framework of these relations (Calori et al, 2019; Mark et al, 2020). Analyzing transnational connections and entanglements that had emerged out of socialist and non-aligned contexts as decisive processes in shaping post-war globalization, this approach breaks away from the “classic” understanding of globalization, which consider globalization as a ubiquitous process arising in and spreading from the capitalist North.

Fourth, the commonly accepted notion, which was based on the assumption that the Soviet Bloc was more or less an autarkic entity, and hence was insulated from the world economy, have increasingly been revised in the last couple of years (for an eminent effort see Sanchez-Sibony, 2014). Examining the economic entanglements of the socialist bloc in the post-Stalin era, these works analyze in detail its trade relations with the capitalist and developing world and emphasize the many ways the socialist economies were embedded and integrated in the world economy (Pula, 2018; cf. with Sanchez-Sibony, 2018).

Fifth, illuminating a wide range of subjects and actors, and looking well beyond the classic bipolar military and economic horizon of Cold War studies, a rapidly growing field of



examination is devoted, for instance, to the flourishing trans-regional mobilities. Researchers, in this context, extensively examined the student programs and exchanges that had been established between the socialist and the postcolonial countries with the ultimate aim to build a new elite for these newly independent societies (Rupprecht, 2010; Hilger, 2011; Katsakioris, 2017; Katsakioris, 2019a; Katsakioris, 2019b; Hannova, 2014; Matusevich, 2012; Guillory, 2014; Müller, 2018; Burton, 2018) and a special attention has likewise been given to the expanding labor migration (both white and blue collar) between the Second and Third Worlds (Behrends et al, 2003; Dennis, 2011; Schwenkel, 2014; Alamgir, 2018; Bódy, 2020). Similarly, the circulation of cultural knowledge and practices, or even societal relations are among the better researched topics (Gildea et al, 2011; Mark and Apor, 2015; Mark et al, 2015, Christiaens and Goddeeris, 2020). While the various transnational solidarities and the circulation of cultural ideas and practices have raised ample scientific interest, the academic and scientific relations as well as the topic of knowledge production – despite some exceptions (e.g. Darch, 2007; Marung, 2013; 2017; 2021) – received a somewhat lesser extent of attention yet. Keep filling this lacuna, with its limited scope and depth, this paper intends to make more attention to this latter and hitherto often ignored aspect of these relations and, at the same time, seeks to briefly touch upon some of the above-mentioned issues as well.

The context: some selective remarks

As it was briefly touched upon in the introduction, cooperation between the socialist and newly independent countries gained impetus and significance from the late 1950s, when the Soviet Union, recognizing the opportunities the accelerating processes of decolonization could offer, began to change its attitude vis-à-vis the postcolonial world and – under the general framework of peaceful coexistence – started to pursue a more pragmatic foreign policy towards these regions (Westad, 2005, pp. 66-72; Boden, 2006, pp. 31-37; Hilger, 2017, pp. 322-333; Lorenzini, 2019, pp. 42-43; Rupprecht, 2015, pp. 1-22). This new discourse, based on the growing perception that in the international arena developing countries are becoming increasingly crucial areas for peaceful competition and ideological struggle (see, e.g., the argumentation of one of the protagonists of the current paper: Bognár, 1963, p. 509), then considerably expanded the room for the socialist countries to engage in relations with these newborn countries (or even with liberation movements striving to achieve independence).⁴

Envisioning of a common socialist world-system in which socialist and developing countries would share all the benefits the socialist way of development and modernity could offer, an alternative socio-economic model as well as generous aid to assist its implementation was

⁴ In this context, the engagement with the newly independent countries was often perceived as mean to gain international recognition or to increase the overall reputation of the respective countries. Most notably, for the German Democratic Republic and Hungary, establishing cordial relations with these countries was of great importance in order to loose off the shackles of the diplomatic isolation imposed on them either by the Hallstein-doctrine or as a result of the suppression of the Revolution of 1956 (for the case of the GDR, see, e.g., Engel and Schleicher 1998 and Winrow 2008; with regard to Hungary see, e.g., Búr 2010).

offered to these countries (Valkenier, 2002, p. 501). The subsequent measures and initiatives that were taken in both sides in order to boost these relations came quickly to fruition: the emergence of new possibilities, the circulation of people, goods, expertise, and ideas, as well as the creation of new markets and institutions created a complex web of exchanges and multiplied the volume of trans-regional relations in almost every aspect.

Whereas cooperation (especially in economic terms) achieved mixed results, given the intensity and variety of contacts and the new quality they brought into the global relations, some even argue that alternative practices and projects of globalization existed within the framework of these East-South relations. Indicating that these projects pursued by socialist agents were more global in their intentions than those of the West, as they did not reinforce the old metropole-colony relations but established new ones (Bockman, 2015), these studies raised attention to the capability of socialist countries to substantially shape processes of globalization. At the same time, however, the actual outcomes of the various agreements concluded within the framework of socialist internationalism were often in deep contrast with the overarching ideological claims underpinning these relations, as they often reinforced imperialist patterns and neo-colonial practices.

Initially, the anti-imperialist solidarity that underpinned these relations proved to be powerful enough to create the base of certain elective affinities, to use this Weberian term, that then brought the socialist and post-socialist countries closer together in forging a common future founded on economic and social equity. It seems, however, that, like chemical affinities, the elective affinities have the characteristics to decrease as rapidly as they have increased. Apparently, this was the case in this context too and once the large-scale structural changes of the 1970s (especially in economic terms) started to hit both the postcolonial and socialist countries, the hopes and illusions attached to the eagerly growing East-South cooperation started very quickly to droop (about the “shock of the global” in the 1970s, see Ferguson et al, 2011).

This did not mean that the relations between the two regions had immediately deteriorated, but the ideological premises, ideas and affinities that hitherto formed the basis of these exchanges were no longer sustained (Mark, 2019, p. 217). In this new phase, the line between solidarity/economic liberation and profitability became increasingly blurred and the crumbling economic relations had then serious repercussions on almost every dimension of these relations that “undermined faith in socialism itself not merely in the Third World but also at home.” (Valkenier, 2002, p. 499).

These processes eventually brought the Eastern European socialist countries closer to the West and many of them re-orientated their foreign relations while ceasing previous relations based on political affinities (Inotai, 2000, pp. 16-21; Mark, 2019, pp. 217-220). Amid these circumstances, the inability of the developing countries to pay back their liabilities to the (likewise indebted) socialist countries injected further tensions into an already constrained relationship (Bockman, 2017). During the 1990s, the transition and the related tasks opened



a whole new era in many dimensions while the region's international environment has fundamentally changed. Though an optimistic Hungarian report compiled for the comprehensive examination committee of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) claimed that the intensification of trade and economic relations with developing countries are expected to expand through exploring new avenues for co-operation, the reality, however, fell short of these expectations and the high hopes attached to them were left largely unfulfilled (GATT, 1991, p. 20). Under the motto "back to Europe" and with the hope to get re-positioned into the international community, this change of foreign policy entailed a decisive break of the former socialist countries with the South (Tarrósy, 2018) and the integration into the Western institutions destroyed many of the linkages that had survived even until the late 1980s. This approach lasted until the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, when some of the former socialist countries started to diversify and develop the global dimension of their foreign economic policies, and – within this framework – started to renew their ties with countries they once had intensive relations with (Tarrósy and Morenth, 2013). Hoping that the partnerships developed during the Cold War decades could successfully be converted into new type of relationships, former socialist countries approached many of their former partners in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (see e.g., Kugiel, 2016; Cibian, 2017; Kozár and Neszmélyi, 2018; Tarrósy, 2018).

From a micro-level perspective, a number of case studies has been carried out and analyzed the multiple ways how the shifts in both regions' political-economic integration impacted these relations. In this context, and by providing a methodological tool for the study of East–South relations, the concept of spaces of interaction has been advanced. The general idea behind the notion was to provide a tentative analytical and methodological tool to investigate and further nuance the macro level investigations on East-South relations and to investigate and categorize localities (both physical and imagined) that had been vital to forge and shape the interconnectedness between the socialist bloc and the Third World.

Against this background, zooming on the Institute for World Economics and its predecessor, the Centre for Afro-Asian Research and scrutinizing them as a space of interaction could provide a micro-historical view on how discourses of socialist and postcolonial development are tackled and adopted or even re-interpreted. Furthermore, the examination of these institutions would enable us to sketch a better overall picture on the global circulation of economic knowledge and practices during the Cold War. When speaking about circulation of knowledge it is rather difficult to prove how successful these efforts were. What is rather at stake here, is to briefly shed some light on how these transfers unfolded in the context of the Cold War.

The Institute for World Economics as a space of interaction

Responding to the new demands for adequate knowledge on these regions and to underpin political and economic interactions in particular, scholarly efforts increasingly expanded on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Although knowledge production followed different trajectories in East and West, some common features could nevertheless be detected. Most importantly, the anthropological, geographical and philological orientations that initially shaped and dominated the research on Africa, Asia and Latin America had largely been decentered to the margins of academic discourses and gave way for research agendas dominated by economic and political issues (Kemenes, 1967, p. 25). While the center of gravity of scholarship moved clearly towards more contemporary issues and allowed social scientists, and economists in particular, to gain ground in the research of postcolonial areas, this reshuffled focus did not lead to the disappearance of non-economic investigations. The shifting disciplinary context, however, went hand in hand with the rising importance of economists whose theoretical assumptions and advices – though with rather mixed results – quickly turned into practical prescriptions in a number of newly independent countries (Hirschman, 1963; Markoff and Montecinos, 1993; Lepenies, 2009; cf. with Coats, 1981).

Resonating with these worldwide paradigmatic changes and focusing on the socio-economic development of the decolonized nations, a mushrooming number of research centers and units were established throughout the socialist bloc (Marung, 2018, pp. 50-51). Arguably, the most peculiar (and in many ways, the most influential) institution dealing with the newly independent countries was the one in Budapest. Interestingly, the founding myth of the Centre for Afro-Asian Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (CAAR), which later transformed into the Institute for World Economy (IWE) circulates also around the above-mentioned economic advisory tasks, as it was established on the initiative of József Bognár, who had just returned from Ghana where he and his team was commissioned to contribute to the first seven-year plan of the country. According to the recollections of contemporaries, upon his visit in Hungary in 1961, Kwame Nkrumah was so impressed by a booklet on economic planning written by Bognár that he immediately invited him to join the international economic committee working on Ghana's development plan (Bácskai, 1997, p. 154). Bognár's African appointment, however, was not just an early recognition of his expertise in planning and development but also a sign of the gradual improvement of the international status of Hungary after the crushing of the Revolution of 1956. In this new international political context, foraying into the decolonizing world was perceived as a way to improve Hungary's fragile international position and hence to gain international recognition. Driven by the need to gain sound scientific information for the Hungarian policymaking towards these regions, Bognár and his few colleagues got the opportunity to form a research collective interested in analyzing the problems of developing countries (Inotai, 2000, pp. 3-6).

Being one of the most formative and outstanding economic scholars in the period under scrutiny, Bognár's social-scientific views and personality substantially shaped the intellectual character of the institute for more than twenty years and inspired its work even after his



retirement as director in 1986.⁵ His exceptionally broad interests and his engagement to raise attention to the mounting problems humanity had increasingly been facing made him one of the best-received economic experts within and beyond the socialist bloc. For today's reader it might even be surprising to what extent Bognár was committed to issues that are very high on the agenda today but received less popular attention in the 1970s and 1980s. He even suggested to discuss economic development in an "orbieconomic level". While his expression did not eventually stick in the international economic vocabularies, it shows his strong commitment to solve the global economic problems in a comprehensive way (Bognár, 1968). Dedicated to make ways for a more resilient economic, social, and environmental future, he consciously used his academic and public (including television and radio) appearances to raise awareness to global questions like non-renewable energies, food security, or technical and environmental hazards (cf. with Bognár, 1976, pp. 107-185). This ability to develop long-range visions and concepts made him perfectly suitable to become a member of international non-governmental organizations like the Club of Rome or the World Futures Studies Federation.

By wisely using his political embeddedness, Bognár constantly managed to provide a broad room for maneuver for his institute and thereby made it to a rather peculiar research unit within the bloc. Profiting from this political shield, a relatively free research environment and atmosphere was provided for the staff members of the CAAR that also allowed them to leave political indoctrination as much out of its scientific inquiries as possible and push Marxist-Leninist orthodoxies and propaganda into the margins of the dialogue. We should, however, immediately underline that this did not mean the total abandonment of ideological considerations, and even less that research and publication imbued with Marxism-Leninism were rendered obsolete. However, it can be safely stated that, compared to other similar socialist institutions, a relatively free environment for research was provided. Conferences and other academic encounters hosted by the Centre were likewise praised for the "unrestricted freedom of raising and discussing problems" and because of "the absence of schematic thinking" that, in turn, allowed participants to freely deal with the issues being on the academic agenda (Kádár, 1969, p. 321). Moreover, despite the generally scarce opportunities to conduct research on the spot, which was one of the major disadvantages of the state socialist scientists in comparison with their Western counterparts, researchers of the CAAR could easily obtain passports and gain valuable experience in the field (Simai, 2018; Velancsics, 2019). The comparatively high degree of research autonomy, the scholarships

⁵ Prior and parallel to pursuing an academic career, Bognár held a number of high political offices, including his mayorship in Budapest (he holds the record for being the youngest politician in this position), a more than four decades long membership in the Parliament (though under undemocratic conditions, but this holds also a record in Hungary), and a number of ministerial posts between 1946 and 1956. Being a widely appreciated politician (initially a member of the Smallholders' Party) who did not accept any high governmental function after the crushing of the Revolution of 1956, Bognár became an iconic figure of János Kádár's "policy of alliance" (szövetségi politika) that aimed at developing a socialist national unity. Between 1956 and 1990, he served in a number of influential political, cultural, social and academic functions and was involved in various economic reform initiatives, including the one in 1957 that circled around the outstanding (and, note bene, non-Marxist) economists, István Varga to provide comprehensive economic recommendations for the new government, or in the New Economic Mechanism of 1968, a major economic reform that, despite its curtailment a few years later, shaped Hungary's economic system until the 1980s, and led to the emergence of the notorious "Goulash Communism".

(including Western ones) and the number of renowned visiting scholars coming from abroad ensured that the quality was benchmarked to international standards.

Linking theoretical and practical work, the CAAR also took part in practical endeavors and participated in the preparation and instruction of specialists selected to be sent out to the developing countries, offered its consultancy services for economic organizations and governmental bodies, and contributed to the elaboration of policy papers with practical recommendations (Inotai, 2005, p. 5). In 1977, combining theory with practice, and on Bognár's initiative, the government founded a semi-governmental body, the World Economic Research Council (Világgazdasági Tudományos Tanács) for providing a forum where the representatives of the political and scientific fields could engage and work together. Commencing its activities in 1969, the Council sought to bring scientific research closer to decision-makers and thereby to facilitate the foreign economic policy-making of Hungary (Inotai, 2000, pp. 7-8). Besides closely following economic trends, experts involved in the work of the Council also considered and explored deeper social, cultural, and political contexts that might have an influence on economic policies.

Having gained the reputation of providing a more or less open research environment, the CAAR quickly acquired substantial reputation in socialist (Tjulpanov, 1972, p. 130) and broader international scientific circles and was well integrated into various global networks, which helped them to join research projects that were carried out under the auspices of international organizations like the United Nations (Kemenes, 1967, p. 260). Researchers of the Institute were furthermore often invited to take part in international expert and research groups, committees and sub-committees not only in their personal capacity but also on behalf of the institution they belong to. The Centre's multifaceted activities not just contributed to the expansion of scientific cooperation among East, South and West, but being a meeting place for bi- and multilateral dialogue, it significantly contributed to the Hungary's internationalization efforts.

This bridge building function of the CAAR was also reflected in its publication activity, in which the series *Studies on Developing Countries* (issued from 1965 to 1991) occupies a prominent place. Being a mediator of socialist scientific achievements in the field of development economics and comparative political economy, the series enjoyed considerable prestige abroad. Although regular publication of English-language publications was not peculiar to Hungary within the Bloc, for several Western scholars, the yellow-brown booklets (totally 134 was produced) were an easily accessible socialist publication. In this series, but also in the general research framework, sub-Saharan Africa and – to a lesser extent – the Middle-East and North African region (MENA) featured prominently. Providing a multidisciplinary framework that looks beyond the strict economic considerations was one of the greatest assets of the series that made it suitable for a wide range of readership (for earlier issues that consider non-economics topics, see, e.g., Fodor, 1966; Páricsy, 1969; 1971; Krizsán, 1970).



While the research at the IWE serves as a good example to showcase the upsurge of Hungarian world and development economic expertise, it substantially contributed to the development of a discipline what we might label today as area studies (Marung, 2018) by providing a broad framework for the study of non-European world regions and fostering the communication across disciplines. This latter manifested, for instance, in Bognár's chairmanship in the African Studies Coordinating Committee (Afrika Koordináló Bizottság) aiming at synchronizing and representing the Hungarian scholarship on the continent (Végh, 1968, p. 353). By rediscovering the importance of historical and cultural contexts in the study of the socioeconomic development of the postcolonial countries, philological, cultural, and historical efforts had never completely disappeared from the research agenda of the Institute, and, as a matter of fact, in certain cases they even flourished.⁶ Irrespective of its success of some of the endeavors, the Institute created a space for circulation and exchange of scientific inter-, and multidisciplinary knowledge.

In 1973, a major reorganization took place and the initial research portfolio was substantially expanded to cover the entire world economy, as the changing global environment required a more comprehensive research that would go beyond the East-South relations and take the general global trends more into account (Acta, 1973, p. 102; Almanach, 1976, p. 474). Although within an enhanced institutional setting and under a new name that reflects on these changes, one of the main task was still to provide a sound scientific foundation for government decisions. For the next more than fifteen years the Institute for World Economy had served as one of the main think tanks in economic policy-making. With the help of the publications of the Institute both the political class and the interested public could familiarize itself with the state and processes of world economy. For those who could read between the lines, the increasingly poor performance of the CMEA countries (including Hungary) became also apparent. Recommendations and advices attached to these studies have, however, often fell on deaf ears. For instance, as a pupil and friend of István Varga, one of the most influential Hungarian economists of the interwar period and a distinguished expert on business cycles, Bognár understood the mounting challenges the Hungarian economy was facing in the wake of the economic crisis of the 1970s. His Cassandra's prophecy that predicted severe consequences for the socialist countries unless they would adopt themselves to the new realities of the global economy was nevertheless largely and for a long time neglected (Simai, 1996, p. 215). In this context, it is also not surprising that, disillusioned by the reluctance of the policy-makers, Bognár – together with friends and colleagues – Rezső Nyers and Kálmán Kulcsár submitted a proposal on enhancing the role of social sciences in decision-making and called for a new attitude through which the initial mistrust of politicians towards

⁶ Strengthening the multidisciplinary character of the Institute, Bognár also commissioned experts from the fields of humanities. György Kalmár, who researched West-African and South-Asian issues extensively, László Krizsán, the notable Africanist, or Pál Páricsy, the renowned linguist of African languages had either a full or part-time status at the Institute, while others – like the above-cited István Fodor, who worked as a researcher at the Institute of Linguistics at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – were hired on a temporary basis to carry out a specific task. Moreover, leading economic experts, like Bognár himself, who was initially trained in human sciences, which probably had an impact on how he approached topics, or Béla Kádár, who also pursued a career in Hispanic studies, brought interdisciplinary perspective to the discussion as well.

academic research could disappear (Pál, 2018, pp. 37-38) The general ignorance of the political leadership that downplayed the seriousness of the structural – or, in Bognár's wording, epochal – change in the world economy eventually played an important role in plunging Hungary into massive debt to Western institutions (Kőrösi, 2017, p. 551). Recent studies, however, see Bognár's assessment on the changing economic conditions rather biased, and lambasting it for implying that the economic problems are only the repercussions of a process in which the capitalist world is undergoing a paradigmatic change and the socialist economic model in itself would be otherwise in a good shape. From this point of view, so goes the argumentation, the idea of the epochal change in the world economy was purely a research construction aiming at concealing the inability of the socialist economy to cope with economic difficulties (Mihályi, 2013, p. 66).

Despite the broader research focus, the developing world remained a largely covered research direction. In this context, the IWE, like its predecessor, was also often assigned to organize and host international conferences focusing on the economic circumstances of the developing countries. During these events a special attention was paid to the evaluation of the experiences of socialist-Third World interactions.⁷ The deep understanding that both developing and socialist countries faced similar problems, led researchers of the Institute to translate their ideas into models for economic reforms both at home and in other world regions. Bognár himself, e.g., was not only actively engaged in reform plans in Ghana and other postcolonial countries but –as it was already mentioned in the footnotes – also in the elaboration of the main ideas of the so-called New Economic Mechanism. While the experience with the failure of systemic models encouraged a critical re-examination of official theories, it is also important to underline transnational and transregional academic encounters substantially contributed to the cross-fertilization of ideas and knowledge. Hence, acknowledging Third World agency in shaping these interactions seems to be necessary, as they often served as inspiration and thereby enriched economic reform initiatives.

Being in intense exchange with global academic networks, the IWE provided a transnational space for sharing experiences and for facilitating the flows of ideas on how to better manage economic development within the postcolonial conditions and was able to shape global research agendas. Questions like how to overcome general underdevelopment and mitigate the effects of the disadvantageous international conditions in the postcolonial countries were among the major preoccupations of the Institute (Tulpjanov et al, 1972, pp. 122-123; Kocsev, 2018, p. 188). What the researchers of the Institute, confronted by the demands of their Third World counterparts, quickly understood was that orthodox methods – be they based on capitalist or socialist theoretical groundings – should be avoided, and advices of any kind

⁷ See, e.g. the UNCTAD conference in 1978, which was attended by representatives of seven developing countries (Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Sudan, India, Iraq and Panama) and six socialist countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland and the Soviet Union). Besides the UNCTAD several other international organizations (UNIDO, AAPSO, Union of Banana Exporting Countries, Third World Forum) joined this forum (Dobozi 1978: 171-177). Also, the EADI (European Association of Development Research and Training Institutes) meeting held in 1981 discussed development issues in a multilateral, East-West-South framework (Mándi 1982: 185-193). As a recognition of the work carried out in Budapest, the IWE was the only socialist research organ that was allowed to join the EADI.



should be adapted to the conditions of the respective countries. Maintaining an alternative approach to developmental problems traditionally solved along ideological lines, researcher managed to extricate themselves from ideological straightjackets. While convinced that the postcolonial economies would flourish through the implementation of socialist principles, in his book, *Economic Policy and Planning in Developing Countries*, for which he received rather mixed reviews, Bognár maintains a view that Stalinist-style collectivization of agriculture as well as plan fetishism should be avoided (Bognár, 1968; cf. with Kádár, 1969, p. 316; Raichur, 1973, p. 74).

Most notably, by critically reexamining the phenomenon of underdevelopment, Tamás Szentes, one of the leading scientists of the IWE, managed to significantly contribute to the theorization of one of the most burning issues of development economics at that time. Upon his appointment as a professor at the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM), Szentes was not just able to familiarize himself with the postcolonial realities but was allowed to join an illustrious set of scholars linked either tightly or rather loosely to the university (Gerócs, 2018). This collaboration and exceptional intellectual atmosphere might even have a substantial influence on him in developing his conclusive argument on the causes of underdevelopment and in offering a road to its elimination. Contributing to the worldwide thinking on the causes of underdevelopment, Szentes's interpretation, in turn, inspired a wide range of scholars both in Tanzania (like fellow UDSM professor, Walter Rodney) and worldwide, as it went beyond of the orthodox development doctrines (be they based on modernization theory or Marxist-Leninist principles) and offered not just a very thorough analysis but also remedies that took historical and cultural context into account. Although this seminal book, the *Political Economy of Underdevelopment* was praised for its comprehensiveness, its pragmatism and critical approach towards Marxist fundamentals, it unsurprisingly received criticism from Western scholars, questioning its policy prescriptions which seemed to them not to rest on proper analysis (Rostow, 1973). The many editions and translations, however, seem to prove the contrary and show that in its own time, the book provided an essential background for the understanding of underdevelopment, and offered a useful analytical framework with which the examination of specific problems of the postcolonial countries could be better scrutinized.

Skimming through these works, it became also clear that after the initial efforts to make a distinct socialist trade bloc, economists at the IWE started to reject the idea of self-isolation and self-sufficiency and urged for increased economic interactions with the outside world. As it was summarized by László Csaba, the renowned Hungarian world economist, who started his career at the IWE, "the impacts of the external disturbances made it crystal clear that ... the individual centrally planned economies, as well as ... the CMEA does not in any way constitute a separate economic world socialist system functioning according to its own inherent laws" (Csaba, 1990, p. 365; cf. with Simai, 2018, p. 4). Apparently, while positioning themselves beyond the dichotomies of the Cold War these economists often blurred or even redraw the borders of East, West, and South (Hartmetz et al, 2018) Against this background, and in their efforts to make sense of the increasingly interconnected world, a growing variety of

narratives circulated in which Eastern bloc experts had positioned their region as periphery (Mark, 2019, p. 222) and conceptualized socialist market reforms against this background. Most prominently, Immanuel Wallerstein's World Systems Theory found substantial reverberations in the region, as it helped to rethink questions of peripherality, backwardness. Socialist authors, however not just simply related themselves to this theory, but, in some cases, they actively contributed to the development of the concept. With his critical approach to the concept, Tamás Szentes, for instance, helped to nuance the theory by pointing out that dependencies could take other forms than being exclusively external (Gerócs, 2018).

At that time, when it was substantially debated on how to better integrate into the world economy, their search for alternatives brought these economists closer to the idea of the New International Economic Order (NIEO).⁸ In fact, a separate research unit with eleven researchers was created within the IWE in order to analyze the concept from the perspective of CMEA countries (Inotai, 2000, p. 13; Simai, 2018, p. 1, for the common IWE effort to deal with the concept, see, Bognár, 1981). Despite the fact that the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) has never managed to have a common strategy vis-à-vis the NIEO, in Budapest, the concept was nevertheless regarded with serious interest which allowed the IWE to join the global thinking on this initiative which manifested, among others, in a number of publication both in Hungarian and English and in workshops and conferences on the idea (concerning the Hungarian positions vis-à-vis the concept, see, Simai, 2018; cf. with Simai, 1980). While researcher of the Institute often "criticized many of the views the USSR presented on behalf of the bloc at NIEO" (Simai, 2018, p. 4) and approached the question in a more cooperative way than the Soviets did,⁹ support for a new order was by no means unconditional. From a rather practical point of view, the already mentioned Tamás Szentes raises moreover awareness for potential pitfalls inherent to the concept of the NIEO and that might substantially affect East-South cooperation. According to him, the NIEO provide only a general framework for cooperation, but encouraging the developing countries to embark on self-reliant projects that could provide them their desired economic independence would also reduce the flow of raw material exports. Hence, the question automatically arises: how could a country like Hungary that suffers from the scarcity of basic resources meet its raw material demands from the developing countries without reinforcing their inherited one-sided specialization? Another issue was the contribution of foreign capital and technology in the

⁸ The NIEO was a series of proposals put forward by the postcolonial countries within different fora of the United Nations for reforms to the structure, governance, and norms of the global economy and thereby to complete the 'emancipation' of the Global South by creating binding institutional frameworks, legal regimes and redistributive mechanisms correcting the core-periphery disparities evolved in the previous centuries. The NIEO declaration was accompanied by a program of action and by the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States. These documents created a certain political basis for elaborating a complex of practical measures aimed at improving the position of the developing countries in the world economy and at securing for them new sources for economic, scientific and technological progress. Although these three documents meant to forge discussion between the Northern and Southern hemisphere, they were too declaratory to fulfil this task. Moreover, and from a legal perspective, the biggest obstacle was that they were not binding.

⁹ The Soviets, for instance, presented the CMEA as an alternative model to the NIEO. The official socialist view claimed that "integration through equality" offered by the CMEA is the only solution to solve the mounting problems of the world economy and, consequently, everything that the NIEO could offer had already been achieved within the Socialist Commonwealth (Lorenzini 2014:189).



developing countries. In this regard, what alternative forms of production cooperation could Hungary apply instead of the export of direct investment capital resulting in long-lasting foreign ownership and control? Thirdly, it was unclear to what sort of industrialization projects the CMEA countries should assist in the developing countries (Szentés, 1976, Szentés, 1981). While the differing socialist stances vis-à-vis the NIEO translated into ambiguous positions, which eventually led to the fading of the idea, it became also clear that ideas on a reconfigured world (economic) order emerged not just from the centers of global capitalism but also from various (semi-) peripheries.

Final remarks

By zooming on these Hungarian institutes and understanding them as a space of interaction, the paper aimed to make some steps towards providing a micro-historical view on one of the aspects of the various interactions and exchanges between the socialist bloc and the Third World. In this context, the paper dealt with the transfers of economic knowledge and by doing so explored the rationales that guided the economists under scrutiny. As the previous pages aimed to suggest, the framework of analysis of these socialist experts was not (only) determined by the socialist-capitalist dichotomy, but, by breaking the supposed iron cage of bipolarity of the Cold War, and by producing alternative economic models, these economists have left traces of specific ways of experiencing and dealing with the global economy and with the position of both the developing and socialist economies within it.

The external conditions that provided opportunities for the development of these spaces had, however, changed drastically. While the 1960s and 1970s represented a peak period in the research on world economics, international political economics, and economic development, the overall conditions for these studies had significantly changed during the 1980s. Upon the change of the political conditions in 1989/1990, (and, as a matter of fact, even before this political juncture) countries of the later of the former socialist bloc started increasingly to pave their ways towards the Euro-Atlantic integration. As a result, the once important institutions dealing with the broader global issues, as well as the experts, the accumulated know-how and experience gained during the many years of research were put aside by politicians. While their legacies – in the strictest sense – seem not to have survived the transition period of the 1990s, their legacies have been bubbling up in certain ways up until today. Despite the CAAR and the IWE represented a heyday of the Hungarian scholarship on world economy, just a handful of studies have already touched upon on their oeuvre. While in 2000 a comprehensive overview has already been published by András Inotai, the later director of the Institute, more adequate inquiries have nonetheless not yet been conducted on this particular institute. To be sure, this paper with its bird's eye view approach is only an insufficient and fragmentary research effort to fill this gap. Accordingly, it serves simply as a discussion basis and hence its sole aim was to highlight – through the concept of spaces of interaction – some of the insights and perspectives this research could offer but more

thorough research is required to raise ample awareness to the body of research and the importance of these institutions and experts.

In the introductory remarks to the commemorative volume in honor of the already mentioned István Varga, József Bognár expressed his hope that Hungarian economics would be able and willing to deal with its greatest figures, „as their work and career are not only a contribution to the development of world science, but also an integral part of our current aspirations and abilities” (Bognár, 1982, p. 10). We could only hope that the protagonists of this paper (including those not properly been mentioned by their names) would find the place they deserve in the historiography of economics and in the pantheon of economic thinking.

Conflict of interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on contributor

Bence Kocsev is a historian, whose main research interests concern the economic history of the Cold War, the history of globalization (and Eastern Europe within these processes in particular), economic and academic relations between Eastern Europe and the Global South during the Cold War, and the history of area studies. In the last couple of years, he worked as a research fellow at the Collaborative Research Center 1199 at Leipzig University and at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO). His PhD dissertation investigates the socialist knowledge production on economic development and development policy-making in academic institutions during the Cold War, and – within this context – he particularly focuses on the East-European reception of the world economic reform initiative called the New International Economic Order.

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