

**Bloc-Building and (Dis-)Continuity. Cross-border connections and transformations in industrial enterprises in East Central Europe and China, 1945-1960**

**Abstract**

The formation of the Soviet bloc brought along a massive redirection of economic flows. East Central European economies, which had been closely entangled to the large West and Central European economies were completely re-oriented towards the Soviet sphere within a few years. Socialist China, too, changed its economic orientation completely, from colonial entanglements and the Japanese war economy to the Soviet sphere. The stunning numbers of this redirection have been taken as a point to argue for 'bloc autarky' by economists and historians. This project proposes to move the focus away from the macro perspective and trade numbers and look instead at the practices of industrial enterprises during the transformation towards socialism. A specific focus will be put on the international connections of these enterprises, namely trade, capital flows and know-how transfers. How these connections developed in respect of continuity and rupture is the main research question of the project. Such a focus will reveal a more complicated pattern of rupture and renewal than what research hitherto suggests. It will show that actors beyond political leaderships disposed of their own power resources in the form of technical knowledge and transnational networks. The outcome was shaped rather by negotiation processes among various social forces than by a complete communist takeover.

The proposed studies will examine cases in the machine- and vehicle building sector inside Eastern and East Central Europe (Czechoslovakia, Poland, GDR and Bulgaria) and in East Asia (People's Republic of China – PRC in the following) and thus deliver the fundament for a comparative perspective on economic (dis-)continuity in the transformation towards state socialism after World War II on a global scale. Based on the assumption that the agency of enterprises did not simply vanish when new socialist elites took power in East Central Europe and China the project will refine the picture of early Cold War socialism and the Soviet bloc, which is mostly associated with nationalization, isolation and the cutting of ties. It will show how second-tier actors in industries, i.e. enterprise managers, technical experts and trading specialists, contributed to forming the socialist regimes' foreign economic relations by bringing in their resources and networks. The project thus will also challenge the widely assumed dichotomy of socialist party-state and society. Furthermore, it will contribute a template for comparison to the more general question of what happens to industries and specific enterprises when countries form blocks or get separated from one another for political reasons.