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Igor Czernecki. "The intellectual offensive: The Ford Foundation and the destalinization of the Polish Social Sciences". *Cold War History* 13:3 (August 2013): 289-310. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2012.756473. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2012.756473>

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Reviewed by **Marcin Kula**, Warsaw University

Igor Czernecki touches on a subject with significance for the history of the social sciences, the study of International Relations, and the history of Poland. The object of his study is an offer directed at Polish sociologists by the Ford Foundation following the post Stalinist thaw of 1956 that ended the worst of the communist repressions. The Foundation's program intended to close the gap between Polish sociologists and the Western social sciences, scholarships for study at universities in the United States being the primary means of achieving this. Needless to say, the program functioned with the support of the United States government and with consent from the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland. This was an interesting example of cultural diplomacy at a time when the reduction of Cold War tensions made 'hard' power in international relations less likely. The authors of the cultural diplomacy approach were considering the long-term effects of their action, with the intention of influencing the official elites as well as the actual and potential counter-elites of a given country. The Ford Foundation program offered scholarships both to intellectuals close to the authorities and to those who kept their distance. In fact, it could not be otherwise. The future revealed that the approach focused on long-term results and aimed at the elites was appropriate. Communist Poland was, all in all, much closer to the West than most of the other Communist states, thanks in part to the experience that the intellectual elites gained abroad. Visits made by Western scholars to Poland through the Ford Foundation added to the minimalizing of its isolation. Even some of the bon mots of Poland's visitors became well known there. During a visit of Paul Lazarsfeld to Poland in 1958, the American pointed out that 'capitalism makes social mistakes, but socialism makes capital mistakes.'

Beyond its academic implications, the increased traffic of intellectuals between Poland and the United States increased understanding of the latter in Poland, adding substance

to the age-old positive myth. Polish sociologists traveling to the U.S. brought back not only American methodology but also observations of life, which some gathered together in interesting books on the subject (Józef Chałasiński, Jan Strzelecki).<sup>1</sup> In terms of academia, the Foundation's program related to a prewar tradition of contacts between Polish and American sociologists (including Ludwik Krzywicki, Florian Znaniecki, and Józef Chałasiński).<sup>2</sup>

Focusing on the Ford Foundation program, the author studied both the American and Polish archives. His conversations with participants of the historical events are noteworthy, especially in light of the fact that communist sources – like most sources – should not always be taken for their face value. For example, the critical opinions the Polish communist philosopher, Professor Adam Schaff, expressed in public in the context of the tightening of control by the Polish authorities over the Ford Foundation program, which are referred to by the author, could have served as a smoke screen or been a 'necessary sacrifice' made by a man whose relation to Polish Sociology was ambivalent (he was a Communist ideologue who attacked the methodology of opinion polls, while at the same time shielding the nascent Sociology Department in the Polish Academy of Science). The Party weekly *Polityka* published a text, referred to in the manuscript, which criticized the Ford Foundation program; at the same time the weekly sympathized with Polish sociologists and was an important agent for modernization within Communist Poland, publishing Schaff's attack on the polling method, only to allow sociologists who disagreed with him to voice their opinions as well.

The study under review adds to and expands on what has been written (by Antoni Sulek)<sup>3</sup> on the topic of Polish sociologists' contacts with the West. The author describes the development and realization of the Ford Foundation program with the conflict between East and West as the backdrop. He is right to assume that this conflict was fundamental. In future works, however, I would recommend a more in-depth reflection on the civilizational and political context in which Poland found itself in and around 1956 (that is, the period of de-Stalinization). I would suggest a focus on the central role that the intelligentsia played in less modernized countries, in this case East Europe and specifically Poland. With a high representation in the Polish Communist Party at the time, the intelligentsia helped Władysław Gomułka, the Polish Communist leader

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<sup>1</sup> Jozef Chalasinski, *Kultura amerykanska*, LSW, Warsaw, Jan Strzelecki, *Niepokoje amerykanske*, PIW, Warsaw 1962

<sup>2</sup> Ludwik Krzywicki, *Za Atlantykiem. Wrazenia z podrozy po Ameryce*, IFiS PAN, Warsaw 2011, William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Octagon Books, New York 1974, Jozef Chalasinski, *Szkola w spoleczenstwie amerykanskim*, Nasa Ksiegarnia, Warsaw 1936 .

<sup>3</sup> Antoni Sulek, "'Do Ameryki!'" *Polscy socjologowie w USA po przelomie 1956 r. i rozwoj socjologii empirycznej w Polsce*," in Antoni Sulek, *Obrazy z zycia socjologii w Polsce*, Oficyna Naukowa, Warsaw 2011, 96-141.

imprisoned during Stalinism, gain power while pushing for modernization and an opening to the West. Gomułka was, at first, politically weak, threatened by conservatives in the USSR, Polish Stalinists, workers demanding an improvement in living conditions, an economy in ruins, and so on. Therefore the First Secretary needed contact with the West and could not simply brush intellectuals aside. Sending social scientists was easier than sending artists; although the latter were deemed less of a threat by the authorities, they did not necessarily find an audience abroad. But with time Gomułka became stronger. Securing the support of a Soviet Union that was not interested in excessive contacts with the enemy camp, and being intuitively opposed to liberalism and unsympathetic to the West, he 'tightened the screws.' A comparable shift could also be observed in his relations with Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, whose support he too needed at first, if only to increase pressure on the Catholic Church. It is safe to assume that it was the strength of the Polish intelligentsia that prevented Poland from once more being cut off from the West, as was the case during Stalinism. A very important reason for this, in my opinion, is that sensible intellectuals, who opposed renewed isolation, were present in the Party and State apparatus in a time when repressions against those not towing the line were no longer that severe. The author describes how surprised Shepard Stone, the Ford Foundation officer, was by the rank of his visit in Poland (with the Prime Minister and Minister of Education, among others, welcoming the American). But the Poles were keen on making it known that they had a visitor from America, and themselves were impressed. Stone was also given an audience with Cardinal Wyszyński, who had his own reasons for the meeting; most likely he too was supportive of opening to the West while concurrently counting on scholarships for the Catholic University of Lublin.

The author is right to show the importance of the Ford Foundation scholarships for Polish sociology. Studying sociology in the years 1960-67, I could appreciate the experience my teachers gained in America. In this sense, although I myself did not receive a Ford Foundation scholarship, I benefited from the program. While the political backgrounds of the lecturers varied, the achievements of American sociology were nonetheless present in studies and didactic work in Warsaw University's Sociology Institute. The quality of lectures that were critical of American sociology was also markedly better due to time spent by the lecturers in the U.S. The fact that the social sciences across the Atlantic proposed a non-ideological approach while being practical for obvious reasons (opinion polls) factored in on their popularity. The influence of U.S. sociology was greater still due to the fact that sociology as an academic field was only reestablishing itself in Poland after being banned from university under Stalinism, while in the USSR it did not exist (fortunately for Poland). This allowed for significant influence.

The authorities frequently attacked academia for the Americanization of Polish sociology, with opinion polls being especially aggravating. Nevertheless, sociology secured for itself a solid standing regardless of Communist obstruction. In the case of another field – history – inviting Polish historians to France, especially by what today is known as the

*Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales*, played a similar role in that field (described by Patryk Pleskot).<sup>4</sup>

The program analyzed by Igor Czernecki brought about long term effects. Due to contacts by its practitioners with the American social sciences, Polish sociology became relatively well developed. The fact that many Polish sociologists, amongst whom were Ford grantees, joined the ranks of the opposition that led to the transformation, points to the fact that the Ford Foundation's scholarship program was effective. This policy proved sensible in a later example, concerning the Soviet Union, as well. Surely it was not a coincidence that among the first four Soviet grantees to travel to the United States in 1957, two became leading reformists, while one – Aleksander Jakowlew – is considered to be the brains behind Perestroika (as noted by Andrei Lankov).<sup>5</sup> French contacts with Polish historians played an analogous role. It has been pointed out more than once that the scholarship offered to Bronisław Geremek for a stay in Paris was France's best investment in Poland. When he went to France for the first time, he was a young man. Later on, already as a known historian, professor at the Polish Academy of Sciences, he became one of the architects of the Polish peaceful escape from the communism.

**Marcin Kula** is a historian and sociologist at Warsaw University. His latest book is *Ostatecznie trzeba umrzeć. Wykłady z socjologii historycznej* Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2012. The most recent collective work under his editorship is Marcin Kula (ed.), *Kłopoty z seksem w PRL*, by Piotr Baranski, Aleksandra Czajkowska, Agata Fiedotow, Agnieszka Wochna-Tyminska, IPN, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw 2012. He is currently working on a new volume of lectures on Historical Sociology.

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<sup>4</sup> Patryk Pleskot, *Intelektualni sasiedzi. Kontakty historykow polskich ze srodowiskiem "Annales" 1945-1989*, IPN, Warsaw 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Andrei Lankov, "Toppling Kim Jong Il," *Newsweek*, April 27, 2009