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**An Important Source of Information  
on Social Research in Central Eastern Europe**  
*The Social Science in Eastern Europe quarterly\**

This quarterly bulletin is entirely devoted to the presentation of academic institutions which concentrate on social issues connected with Eastern Europe. It includes: a list of addresses and websites, information about management (founding date, organization, staff, headquarters), the historical development of the institution, main interests, a database providing details on over 1600 research projects, a project outline (research topics, a list of leading research institutions, the names of leading researchers in a given area) the latest publications and periodicals, membership in international research projects, sources and programmes of country foundations, information about conferences, summer schools and academic networks.

The editorial team's goal is to present those academic institutions which show active involvement in the social situation in various parts of Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, The Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Hungary).

This encourages the international exchange of experiences between the representatives of various disciplines and academic fields, establishing contacts and embarking on cooperation as regards interdisciplinary studies.

It is also an attempt at reviewing and redefining existing academic output, particularly after the political changes in Eastern Europe, with all the characteristics and stereotypes (unfortunately ever present in the social consciousness), such as the process of European integration.

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The reports are not only from Eastern Europe, but also from countries in Northern, Western and Southern Europe. Hence the diversity of issues raised in the research as well as different ways of viewing the social issues of Eastern and Central Europe (beginning with studies on regional identity, through development strategies of rural areas and ending in specific countries in the process of integration with the EU).

Before making a review of topical critiques, let us have a look at what researchers from outside the borders of Eastern Europe have to say.

In one of the issues of 'Social Science in Eastern Europe' (July 2000) reputable researchers were invited to participate in the preparation of country reports on the subject of research results on Eastern Europe. This resulted in a special issue with reports from 11 countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Spain, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Great Britain.

This is undoubtedly the first review of this kind and therefore all the more worth getting to know the presented standpoints.

The level of awareness concerning the subject matter tends to vary. Some institutes (France, Switzerland) embarked on the realization of prepared projects with evident fascination with Eastern Europe, some centres have undertaken a lasting cooperation with university researchers in East European countries (e.g. The School of Slavonic and East European Studies — SSEES — University College London with Polish academics).

Many researchers say that they have for the first time had the courage to have a fresh look at the problems of countries behind the "Iron Curtain" which were until recently hidden from the curiosity of "outsiders". Hence the wave of publications devoted to political, economic and social changes in post-Communist Europe and attitudes towards democratization and the free market (see: Austria and Switzerland).

Let us take Denmark as an example: since the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War it was politically and culturally inclined towards the Anglo-American world, with a clear division between researchers favouring either the West or the East (pro-Western and pro-Eastern scientists) which was so strong that it prevented researchers from penetrating their field of interest which had both moral and political consequences.

Along with the change of the political system in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe came the disappearance of unfamiliarity, lack of dialogue and the negative attitude towards reform. Studies on Eastern Europe both in Denmark and in other western countries are gradually blending with other research in the field of main branches of social science.

In spite of that nowadays, when without restrictions or political barriers Eastern Europe has become a potential area of in-depth research (not merely references) the number of academics remains low. In a review concerning their achievement in social science in 'Social Science in Eastern

Europe' Finnish sociologists admit that their interest in matters concerning Eastern Europe is marginal despite being close neighbours with Russia. Similar information can be found in the Swedish and Spanish reports ('In Spain the landscape of studies in the social sciences on Eastern Europe is a desert with some isolated oases'). Spain, the current leader of the EU sees that the reasons of this state of affairs lie in the history of economic and political ties. The interests of Spanish academics did simply not go hand in hand with the interests of academics living in Eastern Europe yet largely concentrated on South America. The author of the report does not hide the fact that the political changes in Russia were not easy to grasp by Spanish researchers. (A question arises: how can the East be understood in the light of current events in Israel?). There is no independent social science institute in Spain devoted to studies on Central and Eastern Europe. Consequently, we hear about the existence of a few academics working in isolation and according to the author of the publication it will take time for Spanish professors and researchers to resume cooperation. Luckily not all the researchers have a problem with internal integration. Hope lies with those "isolated oases". A common feature of the research groups is their low number, however we hear about courses and training which are popular among the young generation which is willing to study and take part in solving the problems of Eastern Europe.

The remaining issues of the periodical give an account of the situation of social sciences in Eastern Europe. The systematic review of academic institutions proves that the presented field of social science is by no means a wasteland (in Romania there is a team of 560 well trained interviewers under the protectorate of the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology).

The research perspective of realized projects much as in the case of western colleagues, can be brought down to the micro and macro social scale with the distinction that the activity of researchers of Eastern Europe is stimulated not only by known and witnessed activities yet also with the need for solutions which are pragmatic rather than speculative. That is why most projects are devised with the idea of using research results in order to initiate economic, political and social activity, particularly among village and small town inhabitants (Blue Bird Project Regional Fellowship Programme 2002–2003).

This is possibly an indication of progress in the sphere of communication between academic and political circles as a result of which the division into a diplomatic offensive on the one hand and an *ex cathedra* diagnosis on the other, the cooperation of specialists from many disciplines and areas are an opportunity for the less privileged communities. The following catchwords appear in all the reports: interdiscipline, complexity, integration, cooperation. They are an indication that conditions of communication and dialogue are taken into account.

According to further issues of the periodical — mutual interest in socially significant matters does not have to be steered by state institutions (we often deal with non-profit organizations). Research programmes are directed at academics and anyone interested in the problems of Eastern Europe, a result of which are training workshops attended by professors, students and volunteers from non-academic institutions.

The theme of such activities becomes part of a widely understood philosophy of solidarity with the less privileged (interest and aid from West European countries) as well as tolerance of otherness — an answer to the question about the possibility of the existence of regional identity in the context of globalization or European integration.

Last of all, this is an opportunity for poorly developed societies to initiate a dialogue with a more privileged partner so as not only to take advantage but also offer something. The authors of *Social Science in Eastern Europe* point out that such an offer may be the activity of academic centres or research institutes, developing in Eastern Europe and no philosophical superstructure is required to convince the reader that it is worth reaching out for such a periodical if only to develop a sense of social sensitivity.

The first issue of the bulletin appeared in 1996. There have been 26 issues of 'Social Science in Eastern Europe' to date, including some special and jubilee issues.

Among the few hundred addresses and characteristics of academic institutes it is difficult to refer to those dealing with rural area issues. The bulletin does, however, include a few addresses of colleges or organizations whose interests are similar to ours, e.g. the Folklore Institute at the Macedonian University, named after Saints Cyril and Methodius, founded in 1950. The institute has the purpose of introducing academic achievements to help local communities discover, collect, preserve and publish recordings, documents and manuscripts devoted to folklore.

The Hungarian 'European Folklore Institute' has a similar range of interests. In addition to national heritage the academics at that institute are also interested in the folklore and traditional culture of ethnic groups and national minorities in the whole of Europe.

The Romanian Centre of Urban and Regional Sociology is a private research agency with 560 well trained interviewers who carried out approximately 120 interviews monthly. One of the many research issues it deals with is the privatization of agriculture in Romania and its reorganization at three levels: the private household, agricultural associations and local communities.

The Institute of Landscape Ecology at the Slovak Academy of Science concentrates mainly on ecological agriculture. It carries out research programmes within the framework of the guiding principles included in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Agenda 21 (the main topic is the adaptation of tests aimed at increasing environmental biodiversity).

## **E-mail Addresses and Websites of some International Research Centres with a Special Interest in Eastern Europe**

<http://www.berlin.iz-soz.de/information/en/databases/eastern-europe/projects/index.htm>

<http://www.geis.org/en/index.htm>.

### **Belarus**

Central and Eastern European Book Projects — CEEBP: <http://www.cebep.org>

Centre for International Studies: [http://www.centis.bsn.by/ind\\_cup.htm](http://www.centis.bsn.by/ind_cup.htm)

### **Bosnia-Herzegovina**

Media Plan Institute — MPI: <http://www.mediaplan.ba>

### **Bulgaria**

International Centre for Minority Studies and International Relations — IMIR:

<http://www.einet.bg/~imir/>

### **Czech Republic**

The French Centre for Research in the Social Sciences — CEFRES:

<http://www.cefres.cz>

Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting — IER:

<http://www.ier.kier.ua>

Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs — RILSA:

<http://www.ecn/cicso/vupsveng.html>

### **Hungary**

European Folklore Institute: <http://.folkline.hu>

### **Lithuania**

Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science:

<http://www.tspmi.vu.lt>

### **Poland**

Centre for Social and Economic Research (Case Foundation):

<http://www.case.com.pl>

### **Romania**

'Babes-Bolyai' University Department of Sociology Research Centre on Inter-

Ethnic Relations: <http://www.ccrit.ro/>

Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology: <http://www.curs.ro/index.html>