

[Conference: Technological Innovation and the Spread of Globalization in the Cold War](#)

Discussion published by Christoph Strobel on Friday, February 2, 2018

Posting this on behalf of Peter Svik:

Technological Innovation and the Spread of Globalization in the Cold War

In 1951, in an article entitled "Culture Theory and Industrial Analysis", the American sociologist Paul Meadows pointed out that "with the advent of industrial technology... a new culture system has evolved in one national society after another [and] its global spread is incipient and cuts across every local ethos." Quintessentially rationalist and econometric in its essence, this new industrialist culture rests on routinization, mechanization and serialization of skills and techniques "once used for the fortuitous fashioning of implements and weapons", Meadows went on.

This being the first academic article to use the term globalization in its present-day meaning, its key thesis can be distilled into the following argument: while globalization presents a specific stage in the historical development of industrialism, the growth of these two processes has been initiated and stimulated by the new technological inventions which eventually resulted from a (military) competition between various nations or political ideologies.

A similar conclusion can, for example, be drawn from Odd Arne Westad's seminal work *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* in which the Cold War was interpreted as a clash of two hegemonic ideologies. Both the US and the USSR struggled to gain an upper hand in application of newest technologies and in attaining the political backing from the countries of the so-called Third World. However, we still know very little on how East-West technological competition fostered the processes of globalization or how technology transfers contributed to the creation of interconnected structures between the two hostile blocs and how such structures, in turn, may have facilitated the world-wide technological unification and standardization.

To address this glaring lacuna in research, an international conference

will be held in Vienna on October 12-13, 2018 and its keynote lecture will be delivered by Prof. Odd Arne Westad, the S. T. Lee Professor of US-Asia Relations at Harvard University. The conference, organized by Prof. Wolfgang Mueller and Dr. Peter Svik of the Department of Eastern European History of the University of Vienna, centers (albeit not exclusively) on following research themes and research questions:

- Technological development and the globalization of Cold War ideologies: How did the influx of new technologies (aviation, nuclear energy and computation technologies) influence and shape ideologies, geopolitical strategies and policies followed by the key actors? Did the threat of mutual nuclear annihilation or increased air travel since late 1960s inspire the rise of internationalism, environmentalism and other trans-national ideologies? How did these and similar factors influence the growth of global awareness and identities over the world and across local cultures?
- Actors and agency: Did East-West competition in providing economic development programs to the developing countries increase globalization and if so, how and in which ways? Who were the key actors in promoting globalization? To what extent was their policy-making inspired by the Cold War ideologies, by belief in technocratic internationalism or by more practical considerations such a public safety or elimination of pollution? What role did international organizations such as various United Nations bodies play in the rise of globalization and East-West interconnectedness?
- Cold War technologies and globalization: In what ways did East-West technological competition stimulate globalization? What role did the military sector play in this process? How did new military technologies, or technologies originally developed for military sector stimulate globalization? And would today's globalization be conceivable without the strong initial interference from the military and public sectors, both in the West and the East, taking into account the tremendous expenses for various aerospace, communication and computer development programs?
- Technology transfers: How did the adoption of global international norms and standards influence the transfers of technology and the rise of the East-West technological inter-connectedness? Did common norms directly instigate the process or was their contribution more modest and were other factors of technological and economic nature of equal or even greater importance?
- The impact of transfers on the Eastern bloc and post-Cold War transformation: How did Soviet bloc countries use the technologies imported from Western countries? Were they employed for their original purpose or were they adapted for a different use than originally intended? Was it the transformation from industrial to information

economies, mainly driven by increased global mobility of goods and people, where the Soviet bloc missed the train? To what extent did technological and infrastructural interconnectedness enable a swift transformation from communist to capitalist economies in Central European countries?

Although all proposals for case studies are welcome, we particularly appreciate proposals taking a comparative, transnational or systemic perspective as well as those approaching the subject from multi-/trans-disciplinary positions. Proposals accompanied by brief CVs, both no longer than 300 words, should be delivered to peter.svik@univie.ac.at by April 15, 2018. Selected participants will be notified by April 30, 2018.

The organizers are endeavoring to find third-party funding to cover (or refund) travel costs, but do encourage applicants to secure their own funding if any such available. The selected participants will be informed in due time on available options.