

# Business Travels and Cold War mobilities

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In the last two decades, the humanities and social sciences have confronted themselves with the need to account for the increasing mobility of people and goods.<sup>1</sup>

In 2017, following a debate that Gijs Mom had initiated more than a decade before, Massimo Moraglio, as the new editor of *The Journal of Transport History*, voiced the need for a new ontology for transport history to enable it to adopt mobilities as analytical lenses linking historical research on transport, which had long focused on the development of technologies and the economic function of transport, with a new awareness of the multiple experiences of traveling and the social and cultural nature of movement.<sup>2</sup> The articles in this special issue, focusing on business travels, are situated at the crossroads of the disciplines and approaches that have characterized historical research on transportation and mobility to this day, and contribute to the ongoing debate about the future of transport history.

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<sup>1</sup> Mimi Sheller and John Urry, “The New Mobilities Paradigm”, *Environment and Planning* 38:2 (2006), 207–26, Peter Merriman and Lynne Pearce, *Mobility and the Humanities* (London: Routledge, 2018) and Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Massimo Moraglio, “Seeking a New Ontology for Transport History”, *The Journal of Transport History* 38:1 (2017), 3–10; Gijs Mom, “What kind of Transport History Did We get? Half a Century of JTH and the Future of the Field”, *The Journal of Transport History* 24:2 (2004), 121–38, and John Walton, “Transport, Travel, Tourism and Mobility: A Cultural Turn?”, *The Journal of Transport History* 27 (2006), 129–34.

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## Business travels as socio-technical systems

Looking at Communist Czechoslovakia, we argue that a business trip is a complex socio-technical system with mobility at its core.<sup>3</sup> The system has material and immaterial components that involve the individual or the group or both.<sup>4</sup> The components of the system have been investigated by the various social sciences and from different perspectives, but they are strongly interdependent.

Business trips must have a rational and determined purpose (political or economic) but they set in motion a series of social, cultural and psychological processes which go well beyond their initial stated purpose. According to the American tax authority, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), business travel is the travel that the taxpayer does away from home for business purposes: “you are traveling away from home if your duties require you to be away from the general area of your tax home for a period substantially longer than an ordinary day’s work, and you need to get sleep or rest to meet the demands of your work while you are away.”<sup>5</sup>

This definition includes employees traveling for an organization, self-employed individuals, scientists and experts traveling for academic and scientific purposes, expats, employees in the transport industry, athletes, salesman, as well as artists and politicians. The IRS definition excludes commuters and migrants, and defines a business trip as travel that duties impose on an individual, who must have a specific “business” need to satisfy, and that such “duties” make the traveller modify his or her personal habits (sleep or rest or eating).

Although their origins are clearly rooted in the professional environment, business trips constrain and disrupt individual behaviour and have an impact on the traveller’s life beyond the professional sphere.<sup>6</sup>

Business trips take place only if there are material or professional incentives, pay raises, expectations of profit or of career advancement. The distance, the duration of the travel, the means of transport all change the nature of the trip and its impact on the

<sup>3</sup> Wiebe E. Bijker, Thomas Parke Hughes and Trevor Pinch (eds), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems. New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge MA, London: MIT Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Colin Divall and George Revill, “Cultures of Transport. Representation, Practice and Technology”, *Journal of Transport History* 26:1 (2005), 99–111 and Colin Divall, “Mobilizing the History of Technology”, *Technology & Culture* 51:4 (2010), 938–960.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc511> or see also KPMG, “International Assignment Policies and Practices Survey” (Geneva: KPMG, 2020). Attempts at definitions and classifications of business trips are present also in managerial literature: Liisa Mäkelä, Kati Saarenpää and Yvonne McNulty, “International Business Travellers, Short-term Assignees and International Commuters”, in Yvonne McNulty and Jan Selmer (eds), *Research Handbook of Expatriates* (Cheltenham and Northampton MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), 276–96. Denise Welch, Lawrence S. Welch and Verner Worm, “The International Business Traveller: A neglected but strategic human resource”, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 18:2 (2007), 173–83. Denise Welch, and Verner Worm, “International Business Travelers: A Challenge for IHR”, in Günter K. Stahl and Ingmar Björkman (eds), *Handbook of Research in International Human Resource Management* (Cheltenham, and Northampton MA: Edward Elgar, 2006), 284–301.

<sup>6</sup> Mina Westman, Dalia Etzion and Ety Gattenio, “International Business Travels and the Work-Family Interface: A Longitudinal Study”, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 81 (2008), 459–80.

individual and social sphere.<sup>7</sup> All these elements are evaluated and quantified and determine the material incentives to be given to the employee or the quality or quantity of the gains to be expected by the entrepreneur or organization. The necessity and the consequences of business travel need to be assessed by a cost-benefit analysis made by the traveller and the organization which has hired him or her.

### **Necessary and discretionary business travels...**

Business trips link past and present. They have existed for centuries and today involve even more people than in the past. The COVID-19 pandemic has markedly reduced the number of business trips but did not stop them completely. Seldom and for a short time, the 2020–2021 lockdown targeted people who travelled for work reasons. Yet the pandemic introduced an even sharper distinction between tourism and leisure and between discretionary and absolutely necessary business travel.<sup>8</sup>

Looking closely at business trips, as we shall see in what follows, encourages scholars to move continuously back and forth between the physical and the psychological dimensions of the travel experience, between the exploration of the needs of business and of individuals, between the collective and the individual perspective.<sup>9</sup> Business trips are thus at the intersection of two red threads: the macro-histories of institutions setting the rules and promoting or hampering travel; and micro-histories of individuals who travel, whose life, perceptions, and professional and personal choices are directly or indirectly affected by work-related mobility.

### **And the physical and mental baggage of business travels**

The stories of individuals taking part in those trips matter. Business trips, especially when frequent or requiring relocation, have an impact both on professional and on personal identities. This emerges clearly from travel reports and memoirs, which often show how business travellers observe reality from two considerably different perspectives. On the one hand, they adopt professional filters, discerning what is important for their work task. On the other hand, they end up observing the broader picture, comparing their home environment with the host environment. They need both to understand and often to adapt to the host community's particular social rules and codes of conduct, which might be different from what they practise at home. The travellers might even have changed by the time they return. In this sense, a business trip might also change the traveller's views of home and the host society, and even of himself or herself.<sup>10</sup>

The practical arrangements of the business trip (mode of transport, organization, motives) contribute to what a traveller brings back from the trip and the quality of the experience.

<sup>7</sup> Mina Westman and Dalia Etzion, "Characteristics of Business Trips and Their Consequences: A Summary of Recent Findings", Working Paper No. 13/2004. The Israel Institute of Business Research, Tel Aviv University.

<sup>8</sup> Colin Divall, "Business History, Global Networks and the Future of Mobility", *Business History* 54:4 (2012), 542–55, 545.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Lipartito, "Connecting the Cultural and the Material in Business History", *Enterprise and Society* 14:4 (2013), 687–704.

<sup>10</sup> Cresswell, *On the Move*, p. 4.

This experiential part of the “baggage” that individuals carry back and forth from necessary business trips is of course highly subjective, hard to describe, and almost uncontrollable; it might even have an unexpected impact on the home organization and society.<sup>11</sup>

## Business travel documentation as a source for economic and business history

Business trips have been a gold mine for scholars, and in particular historians. Not only does researching them mean having to consider a set of questions at the intersection of different disciplinary perspectives. But the documentation produced and collected in relation to them – orally or in writing – offers information on many crucial aspects of a society and an economy, on material circumstances and symbolic meanings.<sup>12</sup>

The study of the itineraries of the trips, the time necessary to move from A to B, and the availability of transport modes has significantly helped economic historians to draw maps of European industrialization and describe the rise and decline of industrial powers – the home of “best practices” and the destination of “industrial pilgrimages”.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, business routes per se created the space for the economic activities since transport infrastructure and personal encounters have made business networks possible and allowed historians to trace them on maps.<sup>14</sup>

The speed and frequency of business trips are a measure of the connections between different areas of the globe or of the exclusion of certain regions, and of the availability or lack of transport infrastructure. Debate on globalization and its origins is based largely on historians’ assessment of the impact of business trips on the global economy. Although the circulation of goods and people did not lead to price convergence (the ultimate measure of hard globalization) until the nineteenth century, most historians agree that, at least since the seventeenth century, commercial travellers and merchants circulated, together with goods, production and accounting practices, consumption preferences, social habits and cultural values, in a process of soft globalization, which paved the

<sup>11</sup> Many published historical works focus on the educational journeys of entrepreneurs and experts, but, although based on diaries and memoirs, they seldom focus on personal experience, while insisting on practical aspects and technical details connected to the formal aim of the travel. See Francesca Polese, “In Search of a New Industry: Giovanni Battista Pirelli and his Educational Journey through Europe, 1870–1871”, *Business History* 48:3 (2006), 354–75.

<sup>12</sup> Here we focus only on travel literature strictly related to business: travel reports, technical notes, and documentation referring to business travel organization.

<sup>13</sup> Anna Pellegrino, *Les Fées machines: Les ouvriers italiens aux Expositions universelles (1851–1911)* (Paris: Classique Garnier, 2017). It was perhaps when they were debating post-war Americanization that economic and business historians perhaps most explicitly paid attention to missions or business trips as means of transferring technical and cultural models: Harm G. Schröter, *Americanization of the European Economy: A Compact Survey of American Economic Influence in Europe since the 1880s* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005); Dominique Barjot, (ed.), *Catching up with America: Productivity Missions and the Diffusion of American Economic and Technological Influence after the Second World War* (Paris: Presse de l’université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002); Jonathan Zeitlin and Gary Herrigel (eds), *Americanization and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Matthias Kipping and Ove Bjarnar (eds), *The Americanisation of European Business: The Marshall Plan and the Transfer of US Management Models* (London, New York NY: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Michael M. Miller, “The Business Trip: Maritime Networks in the Twentieth Century”, *Business History Review* 77:1 (2003), 1–32, and Gelina Harlaftis, “The Onassis Global Shipping Business, 1920s–1950s”, *Business History Review* 88:2 (2014), 241–71.

way for the first industrial revolution.<sup>15</sup> There is a considerable amount of scholarship focusing on salesmen, their culture and their lives.<sup>16</sup> Business trips also have a central role in resources-based theories of the firm and the multinational corporation: business travellers and dislocated workers have long been key instruments for guaranteeing the transfer of corporate culture, routines and resources from headquarter to divisions or subsidiaries in host countries but they have yet to be systematically researched.<sup>17</sup>

The material produced by organization, firm or institution promoting travel in order to justify and define its rules, or to report the result of a trip offers useful insights on the strategy, purpose and operations of the same organization. This is evident when dealing with a firm or an entrepreneur.

Documents concerning decisions about the organization of a trip, its length and aim, as well as the kind of transport to be used, can often provide useful information about the strategy of the firm, the relationship between subsidiaries and headquarters of multinational and the management of human resources.

In the history of the automotive industry, the itineraries of business trips abroad, taken by experts and other employees, as well as the enormous behind-the-scenes work to organize them in detail, reveal the strategic relevance of these travels for many operations of the firm, from strategy to marketing, to human resources and corporate culture.

For instance, in the aftermath of World War II, Fiat experts travelled to the United States to study mass production. The strategic aim was to learn how to produce a car for the mass motorization of the domestic market.<sup>18</sup> A decade later, Fiat sent engineers abroad to study potential new markets for their products. The choice of destination – under-motorized markets which could absorb Italian produced cars for every purpose and taste – made perfect sense. Hence, the interest in Spain, South America and central and Eastern Europe. Each of these projects, meant not only sending executives to deal with long, complex negotiations and events to reach an agreement (including visits to plants and research centres, and the organization of trade fairs), but also relocating hundreds of experts and workers to provide technical assistance once the contract was signed. It also

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<sup>15</sup> Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "Once More: When Did Globalisation Begin?", *European Review of Economic History* 8:1 (2004), 109-117, and Jan de Vries, "The Limits of Globalization in the Early Modern World", *The Economic History Review* 63:3 (2010), 710-33, here 711; see also Pim de Zwart and Jan Luiten van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization: World Trade in the Making of the Global Economy, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> George V. Taylor, "Notes on Commercial Travelers in Eighteenth-Century France", *Business History Review* 38:3 (1964), 346-53; Arnaud Bartolomei, C. Lemerrier, Viera Rebollo-Dhuin, Nadège Sougy, "Becoming a Correspondent: The Foundations of New Merchant Relationships in Early Modern French Trade (1730-1820)", *Enterprise & Society* 20:3 (2019), 533-74. Michael French and Andrew Popp, "Ambassadors of Commerce: The Commercial Traveler in British Culture, 1800-1939", *Business History Review* 82:4 (2008), 789-814, and Michael French, "Slowly Becoming Sales Promotion Men?: Negotiating the Career of the Sales Representative in Britain, 1920s-1970s", *Enterprise & Society* 17:1 (2016), 39-79.

<sup>17</sup> Geoffrey Jones, *Multinationals and Global Capitalism: From the Nineteenth to the Twenty First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Fiat travel reports have been published and wisely used to reconstruct the history of the company. See Pier Luigi Bassignana, *Taylorismo e fordismo alla Fiat nelle relazioni di viaggio di tecnici ed ingegneri, 1919-1955* (Turin: AMMA, 1998) and Duccio Bigazzi, *La Grande Fabbrica: Organizzazione aziendale e modello americano alla Fiat dal Lingotto a Mirafiori* (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1999), pp. 173-83. See also Dante Giacosa, *I miei primi quarant'anni di progettazione alla Fiat* (Milan, Automobilia, 1979).

meant hosting and accommodating foreign experts and workers, as well as diplomats and political leaders, in Turin, and choosing what to show them and what not to, well aware that this might well have an impact on the success or failure of the negotiations. The way in which the trip was organized had repercussions for the image of the brand and the marketing of its products.<sup>19</sup>

For instance, in Soviet-Italian cooperation for the construction of the Volga Automobile Plant (VAZ), from 1966 to 1972, it required a great deal of work to choose the personnel to be sent to the USSR, verify their credentials (they were preferably young and non-sympathizers of the Italian Communist Party), convince Alitalia to organize a direct flight from Turin (where Fiat headquarters is located) to Tolyatti, where the new factory was located, find the right material incentives to convince personnel to spend months away from home and in a quite uncomfortable city under construction, in the middle of nowhere, freezing cold in winter, very hot in summer. Translators had to be found and Russian–Italian technical dictionaries had to be compiled hastily. And this was not all: workers and technicians had to re-establish their lives in Tolyatti: Church services with an Italian priest, as well as schooling for the children of the families who were allowed to stay, were guaranteed by Fiat; the company also took care of their employees' leisure time, organizing dancing and recreational areas as well as excursions.<sup>20</sup>

The story of Fiat in the Soviet Union shows how a firm, when dealing with employees' business trips, could be fully aware of the need to see to every component of the system to be sure to achieve its aim, and not to damage its corporate image. As Pavel Mücke's contribution to this special issue demonstrates, the same intense care on practical details characterized the organization of business trips abroad taken by members of the Czechoslovak Communist leadership.

## The hazards of business travel

Business trips offer great opportunities but are not without risk. Early modern craftsmen were well aware of the risks of travel, yet their mobility was necessary if they wanted to make a profit or even simply to survive. On the one hand, local authorities and trades offered incentives to their members to travel abroad to gather information about best practices in industry, or the arts; on the other hand, they struggled to set limits and regulate their travels.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Although business-employee mobility is considered a key resource for firms, few works have analyzed the actual impact of business travels on marketing or brand. See Maria Sarmiento and Cláudia Simões, "The Evolving Role of Trade Fairs in Business: A Systematic Literature Review and a Research Agenda", *Industrial Marketing Management* 73 (2018), 154–70.

<sup>20</sup> Don Galasso Andreoli, *Cappellano con la Fiat a Togliattigrad* (Milan: La Nuova Europa, 1991); Claudio Giunta e Giovanna Silva, *Togliatti la fabbrica della Fiat* (Lugano: Humboldt Books, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Giovanni Favero, *Old and New Ceramics: Manufacturers, Products and Markets in the Venetian Republic in the 17th and 18th Centuries*. Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Department of Economics Research Paper Series No. 05/06, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=942732>. Stephan R. Epstein, "Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship and Technological Change in Preindustrial Europe", *The Journal of Economic History* 58 (1998), 684–713.

Among the risks was the revealing of industrial secrets, and also clearly the “collateral damage” of business travel, namely, the risk of transferring more than the organizers had planned and needed to transfer, mobilizing more than they expected or were willing to mobilize.

Fiat, when organizing its employees’ trips to Tolyatti, had to face the possibility of Fiat employees violating the rules of behaviour jointly established by the Soviet authorities and the company management. A particular problem was bringing into the USSR publications (like the Communist daily *L’Unità*) and goods which could be improperly used by Fiat personnel for political propaganda or as special presents to Soviet citizens.

Lenka Krátká, in her contribution to this special issue, focuses on the smuggling of goods by employees of the Czechoslovak transport industry. She shows how the necessity of business travel did not rule out the problem of the control of the traveller’s physical and intellectual baggage. For much of its forty-one-year history, the Czechoslovak Communist regime was torn between the need to let some citizens travel and the need to control not only who was actually travelling and why as well as to check what traveling citizens were bringing back with them from abroad. The regime allowed and patronized mobilities functional to its interests, economic or political or both, but tried to prevent undesirable flows, that is, mobilities potentially able to subvert the order given by the Party to the society and the economy.<sup>22</sup> The power to modify the status quo and the subversive potential of necessary trips was clear to the Czechoslovak Communist regime, hence the need to control and constrain mobility through the minute organization of every detail of the trip.<sup>23</sup>

But, as Krátká makes clear in her article, dealing with business trips was for the Communist Party in the last decade of its rule, a hazardous game. Aggressively guarded borders, the criminalization of travel, and the various control mechanisms in fact nurtured the citizens’ need or at least desire to travel and their appetite for illicit goods, creating a network of subversive mobilities, which became endemic and contributed to the crisis of the Communist system.<sup>24</sup>

## Business travel and Communist Czechoslovakia

The experience of Communist Czechoslovakia tells us much about the economic, political and cultural function of business trips on the one hand and about the risks of necessary business travels on the other. Through the evolution of itineraries and the rules set for business trips we gather interesting information about the contradictions of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia and in other communist countries during the Cold War.

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<sup>22</sup> For the concept, see Mikkel Thelle, “Subversive Mobilities: The Copenhagen Riots, 1900–1919”, *Transfers* 3:1 (2013), 7–25, and Erik Cohen, Scott A. Cohen and Xiang (Robert) Li, “Subversive Mobilities”, *Applied Mobilities* 2:2 (2017), 115–33.

<sup>23</sup> A few recent publications shed light on “red” tourism. See Diane P. Koenker (ed.), *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2013) and Sune Bechmann Pedersen and Christian Noack (eds), *Tourism and Travel during the Cold War: Negotiating Tourist Experiences across the Iron Curtain* (London and New York NY: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>24</sup> E. Cohen et al., “Subversive Mobilities”, 116.

The contributions to this special issue are the result of a research project led by Krátká and Mücke at the Institute of Contemporary History (Prague) focusing specifically on business trips in the central-European country between 1945 and 1989.<sup>25</sup>

The business trips of Czech experts and workers mirror the redirection of trade and political relations following the Communist takeover in February 1948. Whereas between 1918 and 1948 (not including the war years, of course, March 1939 to May 1945), the destinations of business trips taken by industrial workers and experts (often organized by Czechoslovak enterprises), but also of academics and artists, followed a pattern common to many other states of the European periphery. The destinations reveal the relevance both of business and cultural linkages with France, Switzerland, Germany and the United States – since the 1950s, the Soviet Union and other Comecon members became the main source of industrial models, technology, commodities, and artistic inspiration.

The organization of business trips became less and less a concern of enterprises or communities of experts or artists and more and more a state interest. The State and the Party were the main actors deciding about mobility, setting the rules of business trips, determining whether a trip was necessary and why, whether a citizen was loyal enough to be allowed to travel.

The military-strategic dimension of each business trip was predominant when it implied cross-border mobility. Traveling beyond the borders of the socialist state, particularly outside the Soviet bloc, was not easy for individuals. Borders were strictly guarded and the objects and people that did cross them, especially out of the country, had to go through many checks.

This special issue focuses therefore on a “privileged” category of citizens who had permission to travel abroad while “ordinary” citizens did not.

Each of the three articles focus on a particular socio-professional “subgroup”: the Communist élite – “co-creators of state-socialist regimes”; the employees of the state transportation industry; and the musicians of the Czech Philharmonic, a musical ensemble of world renown.

These categories were allowed to travel to “friendly” regimes but also to the West because their trips served the political and economic interests of the Communist state, which deemed them necessary. Each trip was in fact “institutional”, that is, organized by state institutions and enterprises, it had a specific aim and followed precise rituals.

Yet the authors of these three articles show how individuals not only gave their trips different meanings but they also used them for different purposes, mostly personal. This was particularly true of business trips outside the Iron Curtain, which not only influenced the travellers’ perceptions of life in both socialist and capitalist countries, but they helped to change the material conditions of the lives of the individuals involved.

Pavel Mücke analyses the performative nature of the business trips that members of the Czechoslovak Communist élite took outside the country – in particular, the travels of the First Secretary of the Communist Party, and President of the Republic, Antonín

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<sup>25</sup> “Business Trips abroad from Czechoslovakia in the Years 1945–1989”, a project funded by the Czech Grant Agency, No. 19-09594S.



Novotný, between 1953 and 1968. He refers to a particular kind of business trip, state visits by diplomats and state leaders, which were intended to “promote” a positive image of the Communist state and its representatives to both foreign and domestic audiences and, at the same time, the achievements of Czechoslovak industry. The rehearsals and rituals concerned every minute detail of organizing the trip (not only procedures to get permission, the transport mode, programs, food, and security arrangements, but also speeches to give abroad and the reports) and not only concerned the safety of state officials, but also assured that the right political message was delivered. Communication mistakes could cost one dearly, as Novotný learnt from a “lapse” during his visit to Slovakia. These trips had another function too: they reinforced the travellers’ rank within the system of power at home, creating “travel experiences” that made this small, privileged group of travellers stand out from everyone else. The distinctiveness and exceptionality of the group was supported by a series of material arrangements, in part connected with the choice of transport technologies – airplanes, jeeps, and also luxury cars – in part with the accommodations during the trips and gifts received during them.

A question that requires further investigation concerns the point at which the state visits of Communist leaders differs from the trips taken by members of the political and industrial élite of capitalist countries, both in symbolic and in material aspects.

By contrast, the articles by Lenka Krátká and Lucie Marková focus on what is known as the normalization period in Czechoslovak history – that is, the years that followed the Soviet-led military intervention and occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968. This event interrupted the democratization and reform process inaugurated by the demise of Novotný in January 1968, and the rise to power of Alexander Dubček.

Far from being a return to “normality” as pretended by Communist propaganda, normalization was in fact a return to the abnormal rules of a strict authoritarian regime. One of its first measures was to impose severe new restrictions on free movement across borders, especially in the 1970s. These years were characterized by a boom in the grey economy as a result of the malfunctioning of the command economy and ordinary citizens’ loss of illusions and loyalty towards the ruling elites, the Party and the State.

Krátká’s article deals with practices of unofficial and illegal trading – smuggling – by “men travelling for business”, mainly as a consequence of their being employed by the transport industry (aircraft and ship crews, truck drivers). Krátká describes in detail the circumstances that enabled smuggling and fostered black markets in 1970s Czechoslovakia, focusing on both controls (their participants, destinations, individuals) and the practices and routes used to circumvent those controls. This article, similar to the one about the Czechoslovak Philharmonic by Lucie Marková, reconstructs the micro-histories of individual business travellers through an impressive series of interviews – showing the discrepancy between the interests of the organization promoting the trip (a state-owned enterprise) and the private interests of the individuals involved.

These people were carefully selected because the regime, after intense investigation, considered them loyal and because they had particular professional skills: when travelling, they were representing the Communist system, showing the technical achievements

of its transport industry and the high level of its cultural institutions. At the same time, however, they had access to hard currency and foreign goods, which could significantly improve their quality of life and standard of living. They also received a travel allowance, which they could either save or use to buy a number of goods not available at home or only in the Tuzex shops. They bought these goods for themselves or, more often, to resell on the black market or to exchange for other goods and services. Each group of workers had its strategies and conventions in trafficking: these might depend on the amount of the allowance but also on the transport mode, destination, and frequency of travel.

Krátká argues that the risks of sanctions were considerable both at home and abroad and, in fact, smuggling was often a matter of teamwork, involving an entire group of colleagues. For these employees, the greatest deterrent was threat of being taken off the list of people who could travel to the West, which entailed the loss of all benefits. These fears contributed to a measure of self-discipline, which regulated smuggling among business travellers under Communist regimes.

What becomes clear from these articles is that the Communist authorities, while doing their maximum to prevent citizens from traveling and coming into contact with the capitalist way of life, were exposing the weaknesses of the command-control economy, including its inability to supply goods that were in demand. While using strict laws against people trying to leave their country, they were nurturing organized mobility regimes that were able to subvert the mobility regime they were defending. They focused mainly on the material and apparently controllable components of the business-travel system, the circulation of goods and people, but they were unable to detect and control the individual perspectives and non-material processes. They did not realize until it was too late that the business trips they deemed necessary to promote Communism were contributing to subvert its ultimate dogma – namely, the idea of an egalitarian society based on levelled salaries, introducing significant differences of income and status among its citizens, between the “grey” population of the Czechoslovak people’s democracy and their own colourful ruling class.


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