

Abstract « From Student Internationalism to Erasmus - globalization and Europaization of student life since 1945

The position of students has developed and changed significantly over the seven decades following the Second World War. Starting as a small elite portion of a generation in the post-war time, students saw the democratization of tertiary education in the 1960s, the turn of individualization and career-oriented educational systems in the 1980s, and the creation of pan-European international student networks in the 1990s. These processes often intersected with other trends and phenomena of the twentieth century, such as the Cold War, globalization, decolonization, social movement or the growing role of international organizations. The project concerns with students' political and social life in post-war Europe. It will focus on the analysis of student organizations as platforms that channeled the student agency - both on international and national levels. The Swiss-Czech team will examine international student federations on both sides of the 'Iron Curtain' as well as national student unions in both countries. While the operation of these organizations was certainly affected by the Cold War ideological clashes, this project focuses not only on divisions.

Studying the interactions between the student international unions, we will examine their cooperation and exchange, but also their shared imagery and cultural environment, trans-bloc transfers of knowledge, and contributions to the creation of a European academic space, questioning the impermeability of the 'Iron Curtain'. The student organizations will be viewed as transnational spaces, centers of knowledge production and interaction. The international organizations were hubs where students from the whole world met and influenced each other. In a way, these interactions affect career and life trajectories of several generations of student leaders. The project will pay particular attention to the importance and influence of the students from the Global South who were bringing fresh perspectives and ideas beyond the dichotomy of the East-West divide. The roles of the national and international student organizations in the Cold War were diverse. At times, they served as tools in the ideo-political struggle. But being in contact with each other on international platforms, they were also testing limits of the possible in terms of trans-bloc relations. In both East and West, they were also not only advocating student rights, but also promoted democracy, decolonization, human rights, women's rights, development, and peace (in their own understanding of the terms). The project will examine how some of these legacies survived beyond the Cold War and how they translated into the creation of new liberal European networks such as the Erasmus program. The team will also focus on differences between the Cold War 'political' student unions and concurrent religion-based organizations. Aside from the archival research, the team will also conduct a number of interviews with former student delegates and the unions' officials, which will help paint a more vivid picture of the described events and processes.