

**Vse idet po planu? – Unwrapping the (un)planned Soviet economy**  
Workshop at the German Historical Institute Moscow, May 27<sup>th</sup>/28<sup>th</sup> 2019

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The economic history of the Soviet Union remains a mystery for many historians. As a subject of historical research, it has been either avoided or dominated by rather stereotypical ideas about the Soviet style of economy: that it was ineffective and wasteful, that it failed to create positive incentives for workers and that, eventually, it caused the collapse of the Soviet state. Perhaps the most important notion of the Soviet economy is, that it was planned. However, we have been knowing for decades that the plan was constantly adjusted and as such very flexible. Sticking to the label of the “planned economy” that contemporaries both within and outside of the Soviet Union used for different purposes, therefore means to reinforce debatable notions and terms. In assessing the Soviet economy merely by economic criteria, we fail to see its “by-products” which, even though they did not translate into measurable economic output, helped Soviet citizens organize their lives and shaped individual and collective identities. Moreover, if we characterize the Soviet economy just by the existence of the plan, we will hardly be able to explain shifts and transformations in the relationship between ideas, policies and the everyday experience of production and consumption over the course of the Soviet period. In this workshop we want to focus on the post-Stalinist period to look for alternative categories and concepts that help us understand rather than mystify the realities of the Soviet economy. We invite participants to rethink Soviet history by looking at four dimensions of (non-)planning and how they unfolded at the micro-level:

1. *Plans*: While the Five-Year-Plans often serve to break up Soviet economic history into different periods, not much is actually known about how these plans materialized and how they affected the everyday decision-making of bureaucrats, managers and workers. We are interested in the processes of planning and plan adjustment as well as in the relationship between planned and unplanned economic activities. What was planned, what were the figures, what did they mean? How were the plans adjusted? Who was involved? How did the plan inform people’s lives and their professional and private decisions about what to consume and what to produce? To which extent was the existence of the second economy reflected in the planning process? How formal was the informal sector? What was socialist about Soviet plans?
2. *Space*: Economic activity always has a location, while, at the same time, it also transforms and constitutes spaces, through the allocation of resources, the construction of infrastructure or the controlled or uncontrolled flow of people and goods. We are interested in how space was imagined, produced, shaped and contested in the Soviet economy. Which spatial hierarchies did the Soviet economy bring about, between regions as well as within particular cities, villages or factories? How were spaces of production and consumption designed, and how did Soviet citizens appropriate them for their own interests? Can the commonly accepted dichotomy of urban and rural regions been held up, if we look at concrete economic practices and individual biographies, rather than adopting the categories of the Soviet administration for our analysis?

3. *Risk*: While the Five-Year-Plans were presented as tools to design and control the future, Soviet planners were often confronted with the fact that economic success depended on a number of factors that were beyond their control: technological failure, environmental hazards or human error. We want to understand the role and the meanings of risk and contingency within the allegedly planned Soviet economy. Why was the Soviet economy so prone for environmental phenomena, like drought? To which extent did the planned economy calculate risks and hazards which often were to be compensated by man power and unskilled labor? How did the Soviet economy and its planners react to accident? How were risks in practice distributed between different social and institutional actors?
4. *Value(s) and prices*: Contrary to the seemingly straightforward definition of value in Marxist theory, the concept remained highly contested in academic debate throughout the Soviet period. At the same time, calculating or projecting value as intended by Soviet planners proved impossible: How valuable something appeared from the perspective of contemporaries was highly contingent and dependent on many factors: the accessibility of concrete goods, services or favors and the availability of substitutes; the social status and the power of individual or collective actors who supplied or demanded something; the cultural prestige assigned to certain things. We invite participants to develop a fresh view on the problem of value in the Soviet economy by approaching it as a social and cultural category. How did cultural norms, power relations and social practices define economic value in the Soviet Union? What was the relationship between cultural preferences and the monetary value assigned to concrete goods or services? Did money function as a measure or a store of value in the Soviet economy? Which non-monetary forms existed to store value?

The workshop seeks to understand Soviet economy better by looking at the “plan” not only as an economic policy, but also as an institution that shaped peoples’ lives, while at the same time being subject to constant renegotiation and adjustment. We aim at integrating economic history into the social and cultural history of the everyday. Drawing upon the rich scholarship of the late-Soviet period, production and consumption in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union will be approached as social and cultural practices. In a more broader sense, we would like to find out what was “economic”, “Soviet” and “socialist” about the Soviet planned economy in order to situate the Soviet economic style in a larger international context of state economic activity during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This workshop is meant to create a platform for discussing work in progress in the exciting field of Soviet economic history. The papers will be pre-circulated among all participants and commented by two discussants each. The event is going to take place at the German Historical Institute, Moscow. Working languages will be Russian and English.

Abstracts (max. 300 words) and a short CV should be submitted by April 1<sup>st</sup> 2018 to one of the following addresses: oberlaendera[at]uni-bremen.de und BRUISCHK[at]tcd.ie