IREX in Romania: Overview of Programs to Date and Plans for the Future

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by

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The American Council of Learned Societies, the Social Science Research Council and the Ford Foundation created IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board) in 1968 as an organization that would act for the American academic community in conducting scholarly exchanges with the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe. IREX inherited its role from another organization, the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants (IUCTG), which had held this function since 1955, supported first by the Carnegie Corporation and later by the Ford Foundation and the Department of State. The IUCTG was a consortium of eight universities with no permanent headquarters or staff, which rotated its location among its members every five years. Because of the IUCTG's somewhat peripatetic nature, it was thought advisable to disband the consortium in 1968 and in its place to set up a permanent organization, removed from any particular university campus, to administer the exchange program.

IREX thus took over the IUCTG's very successful programs and their two main donors, the Department of State and the Ford Foundation. The programs IREX inherited included the exchange with the Soviet Ministry of Higher Education, the exchange with the Czechoslovak Ministry of Education, and the exchange with the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. In addition, IREX assumed the administration of the American Council of Learned Societies' own exchange program with the Soviet Academy of Sciences, which the ACLS had administered itself until that time. IREX was also to replace the bilateral programs of travel grants to the U.S., the Ford Foundation's own program for Eastern European scholars, which they were phasing out.

IREX's interest in Romania is as old as IREX itself. IREX was set up in July, 1968, and the first negotiations with the Romanian National Council for Science and Technology (NCST) took place in September of that year. An agreement with the NCST was signed in November, 1968. Since that time, despite the problems inherent in any exchange situation, and despite bureaucratic frustrations on both sides, the exchange program in general has flourished to the gratification of everyone concerned.

What kind of Americans go to Romania on the exchange program? The largest group represented are social scientists, with anthropology leading the field. Of the 68 Americans who have participated in the program in the past ten years, 33 have been in the social sciences, and 13 of these have been anthropologists. Political scientists have been second, with nine having participated. Historians are the next largest group after social scientists; 13 historians have participated in the exchange program. Other American participants have been primarily in folk art and math, with a sprinkling of other disciplines.

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It is interesting that virtually none of the American scholars who have gone on the American exchange program has had any kind of family connection with Romania. This is in sharp contrast to some of IREX's other East European programs, where family origin has usually accounted for much of the grantee's initial interest in the country involved. For example, in the case of the exchange with the German Democratic Republic, it is difficult to tell from looking at a list of the scholars' names whether the people listed are Americans going to Germany or Germans coming here. Similar situations exist in our programs with Poland and Hungary.

While I do not have exact figures for Romanian participants in the exchange program, approximately the same number of Romanian scholars have come here as there are Americans who have gone to Romania. Engineering is the main field represented among Romanians, with chemical engineering in the forefront. Electrical engineering, water conservation and mining are also well represented, and a few times we have even had researchers in vegetable refrigeration. Despite the preponderance of scientists in the program, the NCST has nevertheless respected the stipulation written into our agreement with them that no more than 60 percent of the scholars sent by them or by IREX can be in technical fields. The remaining, nonscientific 40 percent of the Romanians' quota has usually been filled by historians and literary scholars.

(I should add that IREX did appreciate the fact that Romania would have liked to send more scientists here than our agreement permitted, and so IREX put the NCST in touch with the National Science Foundation in Washington in 1972. As a result, there has been a scientific exchange program between the NCST and the National Science Foundation for several years now.)

In the early years of the exchange, we had a 100 person-month quota for Romanians coming to the U.S., and a 50 person-month quota for Americans going to Romania. By the mid-70's the American side of the quota had risen to a high of 80 person-months. The program was supported almost exclusively by funds from the Ford Foundation, since IREX's other major source of funding, the Department of State, could not contribute to our Romanian program as it was already conducting its own, Fulbright program with Romania. With the decrease in direct IREX support from the Ford Foundation in the mid-70's, occasioned by the Foundation's losses on the stock market, the quota was unfortunately reduced to 50 person-months for each side. That the cut in the quota was not even more drastic was due to the fact that IREX at this time began to receive funding for many of its American participants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Our Romanian exchange program now remains at the 50 person-month level and is funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and by a relatively new type of Ford support for IREX, a Ford Foundation-NEH matching grant. American participants in the humanities or in humanistic aspects of the social sciences are supported by funds from the National Endowment; American participants in other disciplines, and all Romanian participants, regardless of discipline, are supported by Ford Foundation funds. It is
interesting that our Romanian exchange program is the only IREX East European program that has never been funded by the Department of State or by the successor organization to the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the International Communications Agency (ICA). (Our Polish and Yugoslav exchange programs, which have also been generally ineligible for State/ICA support because of the existence of Fulbright programs in these countries, did at one time receive State funds for scholars' transportation only.) Since our Romanian program, like our current Polish and Yugoslav programs, receives no funding from ICA, our nominations for the program are not subject to the approval of the Board of Foreign Scholarships, which oversees ICA's use of funds for international education. No reporting on our Romanian program is made to the ICA, and the only reporting that is ever made to the funders of the program is financial in nature.

An additional reason for the mid-70's reduction of the quota of 50 person-months for each side, besides IREX's budgetary restrictions, was the difficulty in justifying our maintaining a 100 person-month quota for Romania when our traffic from Romania virtually ceased in 1976-77. In that academic year, only one Romanian scholar was sent on the exchange. While IREX has never been sure of the reason for this break in the program, it is my impression that because of a new regulation in Romania it had become financially disadvantageous for Romanian scholars to leave their work for the usual lengthy exchange visit. By 1978 the situation had completely returned to normal in terms of the quota's being fully utilized by the Romanians, but with the majority of scholars coming to the U.S. now for a maximum stay of only three months. In addition, the Romanian side tended to use some of its person-months to support delegates to scholarly conferences in the U.S. rather than allocating the months to research scholars in residence at a university. This practice has resulted in a large increase in the number of Romanian scholars participating in the program, with 24 Romanian IREX scholars visiting the U.S. in 1977-78 as opposed to the usual 9 or 10. If this trend, which makes the administration of the program more expensive for IREX, should continue, IREX may have to re-think its policy of having no limit on the number of scholars who may share the quota from each country.

The three-month maximum for most Romanian scholars' stay here has caused some difficulty for IREX and for these participants, since most of them are in the sciences, and it is almost impossible for a laboratory to accept a visitor who plans to stay for less than six months. As a result, some Romanian scholars are not being placed at the institution of their first choice. I believe that this is the major problem for Romanian participants in the program now. The major problem for U.S. scholars in Romania continues to be the delays that attend the issuance of the various research permits they need. Despite these two possible sources of complaint, however, the large number of scholars on both sides of the program who apply for a second IREX grant seems to indicate that it is all worth while in the end.
From the American perspective, I would like to point out that our program in Romania has been exemplary in several respects. For example, in the ten years of our exchange program, only one American scholar nominated has not been approved by the NCST. This compares very favorably with the situation in all of the other countries we deal with. For instance, in Czechoslovakia, in 1977-78 alone, four American nominees were rejected. In the German Democratic Republic, we have had two scholars rejected since our program started there just three years ago. I should also add that with the exception of Poland, and in the last year Hungary, anthropological field work as it is being done by our scholars in Romania is unknown in Eastern Europe right now. In Yugoslavia, for example, field work is forbidden to foreigners unaccompanied by a Yugoslav specialist, and village residence by foreigners, even in the company of a Yugoslav specialist, is restricted to one month. On the whole, we have been happy with our exchange program with the NCST, and we are looking forward to many more years of successful cooperation.

Another program that should be mentioned in this report is the Ford Foundation Management Education Exchange with the Romanian Ministry of Education, which IREX has administered for Ford since 1975. This program is coming to an end now, with the final management scholar leaving for Bucharest at the time of this writing. Approximately 20 American scholars and 30 Romanian scholars have participated in the management education program, which has been an extremely successful instance of IREX involvement in Romania.

In addition to the regular exchange program and to the management education exchange program, IREX sponsors other, non-exchange programs that affect Romanian research. One is our program of special grants to facilitate communication between U.S. scholars and scholars in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union, which has existed since 1968. Some examples of the type of award made under this travel grant program are Joyce Winkel's grant in 1977 to consult with specialists at the Folklore Institute in Bucharest about an exhibit on Romanian Folk Textiles to be presented by the Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles, and the grants given to support the attendance of a number of Romanian historians at the Conference on War and Society in the 18th Century that was held at the City University of New York Graduate Center in 1977.

IREX's other major non-exchange program is the program of grants for larger-scale collaborative activities and new exchanges with groups in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, which has existed since the early 70s. Some examples of the types of projects supported by the collaborative grants program are the visit of a delegation of distinguished Romanian historians to various institutes in the U.S. this past November and December, in connection with the sixtieth anniversary of the unification of Romania, and, most importantly, this current conference which is being funded by a collaborative grant to John Cole and his colleagues.
Another IREX program I should briefly mention is the Preparatory Fellowship Program, which was begun in 1972 to help increase the number of social scientists involved in the exchange programs. Under the preparatory program, young graduate students with expertise in their discipline but little knowledge of the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe can receive support for the language or area training that will make them competitive for our exchange programs. Although the preparatory program has primarily produced new scholars for the Soviet exchange program, we have had three new specialists on Romania come to our exchange program through the preparatory program. IREX is currently uncertain about the status of this program for next year, since the Rockefeller Foundation, which has supported the program since its inception, has announced that it will not fund the program again in 1979-80.

An important special event that should be mentioned in this report is the Conference on Romanian-American Cooperation in the Social Sciences that was organized by IREX and the Romanian Academy of Social and Political Sciences and held in Sterling Forest, New York, in September, 1972. Delegates to the conference outlined priority topics for joint research in sociology, economics, demography and psychology. Unfortunately, very few of the projects envisioned by this conference have advanced even to the earliest stages of implementation.

This brings me to the newest program that IREX would like to establish with Romania, a binational commission for the humanities and social sciences which would not only identify topics for joint research, as the Sterling Forest conference had done, but which would also organize all stages of this collaborative research, from the initial planning through presentation of research results at symposia through publication. The Binational Commission would be appointed by the ACLS and the Romanian Academy of Social and Political Sciences, with IREX administering the program for the ACLS. A suggestion for such a commission was made to the Academy of Social and Political Sciences by an ACLS-IREX delegation that visited Bucharest last May, and it met with a favorable response. IREX is now waiting for the first draft of a protocol for the Binational Commission to arrive from Bucharest.

As a general model for this program, there is the very successful ACLS-Soviet Academy of Sciences Binational Commission in the Humanities and Social Sciences that IREX has administered since it was established in 1975. Based on our experience with the Soviet "binac," we find the potential for such a commission with Romania to be very exciting. The Soviet commission is currently active in the following fields: anthropology, archaeology, East Asian studies, international relations, economics, law, and psychology. All of the groups are involved in extremely interesting projects. The psychology group is currently working on problems of memory and held a conference on this topic in Moscow in December. The international relations group has held two major conferences of leading Soviet and American sinologists during the past two years and is planning another meeting for next summer. The anthropology group, which
operates under the auspices of the ACLS and the Soviet Institute of Ethnography, has two major projects underway, one a series of symposia on the peoples of Northern Asia and Northern America, and the other a long-term study of aging and longevity.

The third meeting in the symposia series on the peoples of Northern Asia and Northern America will be held in Moscow and Leningrad in May, and the following topics will be discussed: Russian influence in the Aleut, Eskimo and Athapaskan languages; review of Asiatic-New World linguistic connections; demographic and social correlates of northern house types with emphasis on Alaska; ethnic consciousness of contemporary arctic peoples; anthropometry of contemporary and prehistoric northern peoples; pathologies of northern populations; biological affinities and distances of northern populations; radiocarbon dating as it pertains to arctic pre-history; the use of ethnohistorical materials in the study of cultural change; spiritual culture; Russian history and historical archaeology.

The second anthropological project, the longevity program, is studying the Mennonite population of Kansas, the Scots-Irish of Northern Kentucky, and the Abkhazian population of the USSR. A consortium of American institutions is involved in the American side of the effort, under the general directorship of Dr. Vera Rubin of the Research Institute for the Study of Man in New York City. Data is being collected on the ecology of the regions involved and on the community background, family history, and family genealogy of these long-lived individuals, as well as their personal life histories, their nutrition, fertility and medical history. A complete series of anthropometric measures is being taken and extensive physiological and biochemical testing is being carried out.

IREX is also getting ready to start work on another binational commission, this one set up in June 1978 by the ACLS with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. However, funding must still be secured before any Hungarian "binac" activities can get underway. The protocol for the Creation of the Hungarian Binational Commission calls for the membership of the Commission to consist of five scholars from Hungary and five from the United States, representing linguistics, comparative literature, anthropology, social psychology, and history with an emphasis on the twentieth century.

While the membership of the Romanian commission has not yet been decided, it seems safe to assume that anthropology will be represented on the Romanian Commission as it is on the Hungarian and Soviet commission. IREX is very hopeful that the Commission will be formed this year, and we invite your suggestions for anthropological projects when it is.