Part II: Scholarly Interchange between Romania and the United States: Introduction

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Introduction

Why would an American want to conduct research in Romania? And if one did want to conduct research there, how in the world would one go about it? These are questions that inevitably confront the American anthropologist both while conducting research in Romania and after returning to the United States. An intellectual answer to the first question is easy. Romania is a socialist society and the anthropological literature is woefully short on material about such societies. The comparative and theoretical significance of such information is evident. The reasons why Romania would be selected instead of another socialist country, and why any particular individual decided to go there is more idiosyncratic, and therefore more difficult to generalize about. What is clear, however, is that it has had nothing to do with discovering one's roots. According to IREX files, the anthropologists going to Romania have not been of Romanian descent. This is rather different than exchanges with other East European countries.

The "how" of conducting research is addressed in the article by Lucia Capodilupo, IREX program officer for Romania at the time of the conference. With very few exceptions, research in Romania has been carried out by individuals participating in formal scholarly exchange programs. Capodilupo provides insights into the workings and future prospect of the exchanges with Romania in the context of the development of exchange programs with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in general (also see Byrnes, 1976).

An interesting aspect of the exchanges has been the different use made of them by the United States and Romania. In common with most East European countries, Romanian participants are mostly engineers and other scientific personnel. In terms of Romania's emphasis on economic development, discussed in Part I, it is not surprising that they would want to use the exchange as a means to gather information and to train people who can contribute directly to their development efforts. Almost all of the American participants, on the other hand, are in the social sciences and humanities. The result is that while the Romanians are learning about American science and technology, Americans are learning about Romanian society and culture. This does not sit well with everyone and there are those in the United States who see the exchanges as a vehicle for technology transfer to hostile nations with few benefits to the United States. Those who defend and promote the exchange, however, find value in knowledge of the workings of Romania and its neighbors in structuring economic and political relations with them. There are, thus, ongoing debates in the United States about the value of the exchanges and the level at which they should be funded (Conners, 1980; Gaer, 1980).
The climate created by the Cold War has affected not only those concerned with policy and foreign relations, but those who participate in the exchanges as well. Even during the relative "thaw" of detente, when most anthropological research took place in Romania, political tensions were a major factor structuring the research climate. David Kideckel, professor of anthropology at Central Connecticut State University, and Steven Sampson, who contributed an article to Part I of this volume, combine to examine the ways in which this climate affects the researcher, both while in the field and after he returns to the United States. While anthropologists working in other parts of the world see themselves adding to a store of knowledge about a particular place, Kideckel and Sampson find that learning and reporting on Eastern Europe is also a process of unlearning and dispelling disinformation about "commies" ingrained in Americans as a part of cold war ideology. Romanians can be suspicious of the reasons for the research, and colleagues and others at home can be hostile toward attempts to question cold war perspectives.

In the final contribution to Part II, Michael M. Cernea, former professor of sociology and member of the Academy of Social Sciences in Bucharest, and currently a senior Sociology Advisor at the World Bank in Washington, D.C., examines an earlier view of Romanian sociology, provided fifty years ago by the American historian, Robert Joseph Kerner. Kerner found Romanian sociology to be the most advanced in southeastern Europe, but he also documented its struggles to free itself from social philosophy and commented on the inadequacy of access to information from outside the country. He pointed to a severe shortage of foreign books and to little opportunity for foreign travel. Cernea finds that Romanian sociology is still struggling very hard, under adverse circumstances, to achieve its scientific independence in contemporary Romania, but he wonders if access to foreign ideas is all that it might be even today and calls attention to structural political factors. We can evaluate this in the context of Capodilupo's observations on the reluctance of officialdom in Romania to encourage its social scientists to use the exchanges and on limitations to the duration of their visits. We might also recall Kideckel and Sampson's thoughts about the suspicion that is sometimes directed against scholars in the United States who try for objectivity in their analysis of Eastern European societies. While the exchanges have certainly done their share in promoting scholarly intercourse, there is still much room for improvement in the overall performance of both countries.

References Cited

Byrnes, Robert F.
Conners, Walter D.

Gaer, Felice D.