

The First V4 Summer School in Economic History, Prague, 2023

Antonie Doležalová 

Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Prosecká 809/76, Prague 9, 190 00,
Czech Republic; a.dolezalova@hiu.cas.cz

In the last week of August 2023 (27 Augustus – 2 September), the first V4 Summer School in Economic History was held in Prague. It was organized by the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences in cooperation with the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, and the University of Warsaw. The event was financially supported by the Visegrad Fund.

The long-term target of the Ph.D. Summer School in Economic History was to incorporate the V4 historiographies of economic history into international networks. It intended to encourage the young generation of economic historians to enter the international scene and participate in an open academic discussion.

After 1989, economic history, which before 1989 had been a dominant stream of historiography in the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, and Poland, was moved to the periphery in all post-socialist countries. This happened partly because economic history as a history of the workers' movement, jointly with philosophy, political economy, and scientific communism, was at all universities in socialist countries part of the institutes of Marxism–Leninism that were dissolved. Their former members either left academia or retrained in more convenient fields of expertise, such as microeconomics, macroeconomics, or political science; some of them found new positions in the departments of history at newly created, state or private, often regional, universities as most of these new universities focused on the humanities and social sciences. In addition, historians refocused their research on more attractive, previously prohibited areas of political, cultural, and social history.¹

Consequently, economic history in post-socialist countries is not an adequately recognized field of European or even world historiography due to the modest number of publications in prestigious journals and low participation in joint

1 Antonie Doležalová, "Epilogue," in *Behind the Iron Curtain: Economic History During the Cold War, 1945–1989*, edited by Antonie Doležalová and Catherine Albrecht, 248. London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31578-7>

multinational projects. In the early 1990s, the exile community of scholars from former socialist countries helped open post-socialist academia to the world by inviting colleagues from post-socialist countries to participate in international projects. British–Austrian–Czechoslovak economic historian Alice Teichová (1920–2015) played a significant role in this regard, as she opened doors to the international scientific community to an entire generation of Central European economic historians, by inviting them to projects, conferences, and publications she organized. After she had completed her last project a few years after the beginning of the new millennium, nobody from the Central and Eastern European region replaced her.

In the view of the Summer School organizers, establishing a platform for young and senior economic historians to meet and share their experiences in this framework seems to offer a valuable option for scholars from V4 countries to break out of their isolation and return V4 historiography into the global mainstream. To achieve its targets, the Summer School gave economic history students a full understanding of the latest research trends in the field.

Organizers of the Summer School welcomed applications from the broadly defined field of economic history, including business history, social history, and the historiography of economic history. Doctoral projects focused on Central European issues were particularly welcomed. Organizers accepted fifteen applications, fourteen of them from V4 countries.

Students' theses represented a broad spectrum of economic history topics. From a thematic point of view, the projects covered topics from economic and social history, through the history of international economic relations and business history, to intellectual history. From the time-scope perspective, two projects dealt with the early modern period (*Local Economic Markets in the Sixteenth Century through the Example of the Sandomierz Voivodeship; The Economic Background of the Radvanszký Family in the Eighteenth Century*). Three projects dealt with the long nineteenth century (*Economic Relations of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy Outside Europe, Focusing on Brazil between 1867 and 1918; The Occupational Structure in the Lands of the Congress Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century; Water Management and Its Socio-economic Impact in Hungary under Dualism: The Regulation of the Lower Rába Region in the Belle Époque*). Eight projects addressed twentieth-century issues (*Corridor Transport on the Slovak–Hungarian Border after the Vienna Award in 1938–1945; A Two-year Plan in Czechoslovakia; The Problem of the Restitution of Monetary Gold Looted by the Third Reich: Poland and the Tripartite Gold Commission; FDI and Its Role in Shaping the MNE–State Relations and Policies: A Case Study of the Czech Republic; Forbidden Faith: The So-called Religious Sects and Communist Dictatorship; Multinationals and the Making of the Post-war Dutch Tax Regime in 1940–1960; Relations in the Power Structure in the Soviet Type Economy: Institutional Analysis of the Polish People's*

Republic in 1970–1983; Relations of Hungary with the Countries of the Third World in the Socialist Era in 1962–1990). In the latter group, six projects elaborated on the socialist period. Two projects covered the long-term period between the mid-nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century (*The Development of the Chemical Fertilizers Market in the Bohemian Lands with an Emphasis on the Superphosphate between the 1870s and 1938; The Formation of the Concept of Ownership in Belarus and Estonia*).

The program of the Summer School, housed in the picturesque Villa Lana, incorporated lectures and seminars on recent methodological developments in economic history, including quantitative methods, available archives, and databases suitable for economic history research, philosophy of historiography, and recent historiographical developments. Lectures were delivered by scholars from organizing institutions and prestigious universities and workplaces not only in V4 countries but also in the U.S. (Harvard University, Ohio Northern University). A significant part of the program was devoted to tutorials about individual students' Ph.D. theses and papers in progress. This gave students the opportunity to discuss their research with senior scholars and their peers.

Based on the feedback that organizers collected in the closing session, the Summer School provided significant help in improving the participants' writing, their understanding of the importance of theory in historiography, in broadening their perspective on how to look at the history of Central Europe and how to incorporate in economic history various aspects of history and various methodological tools, including quantitative analysis. Students appreciated most the opportunity to participate in intense debates about their papers in assigned and individualized tutorials, which encouraged them to publish their research results in foreign journals. Finally, they were pleased to have been able to practice their speaking and writing in English in an academic context.

The overall experience from the first run of the V4 Summer School clearly shows that the School opened an innovative mode of incorporating V4 historiographies into the international network. Students coming from V4 countries had the opportunity to establish contacts that they would utilize in their future research projects. Senior scholars opened the discussion about joint research and publications activities. Thus, the School made a direct social impact beneficial to the community of V4 scholars and other internal and external stakeholders, such as academies of sciences and universities. Organizers firmly believe that the Summer School should be continued with the second V4 Summer School in Economic History in 2025, as it offers (1) a new and effective way to surpass the weak penetration of Central European historiography into the European and global mainstream; (2) strengthening the inclusiveness of Central European historiography for the generation of

young scholars; (3) the training of upcoming generations of scientists in the latest methodological developments in the field of economic history; (4) creating an inclusive network of junior and senior scholars in V4 countries that could become a firm foundation for broader Central and Eastern European cooperation in social sciences and humanities. In this regard, network building can rely on the social media platforms already created for the V4 Summer School.

