

Bridging the Baltic V: Negotiating the common good – medical networks and transfers across the Iron Curtain in the Baltic Sea Area c. 1945-2004

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How did increasing political tensions influence medical networks and transfers of medical knowledge in northern Europe during the Cold War? To what extent did medical institutions and national governmental agencies succeed in co-operating and securing exchange of medical knowledge across the Iron Curtain? These key questions of this symposium¹ were discussed among Cold war researchers and historians of medicine from Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania Poland and Sweden.

After opening remarks by Thomas Wegener Friis, Juris Salaks and Nils Hansson, section I started with a talk by MATTHIS KRISCHEL (Düsseldorf), who, together with JULIA NEBE and THORSTEN HALLING (Düsseldorf) analysed the biography of the dentist Jenny Cohen and her Baltic network. After 1933, Cohen experienced anti-Semitic discrimination and persecution that led her to flee from Germany and settle, subsequently, in the Netherlands, the Soviet Union and Sweden, where she worked as district dentist in the town of Färila from 1942 to 1947. Her Scandinavian experience contributed to her professional and political success in East Germany, and she presented herself and her biography, including international work experience and political activities, to become a successful health policy bureaucrat in East Germany. Among her achievements was the introduction of water fluoridation in Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz), a method she had first seen in Sofia (Bulgaria), which makes this project a good example of transfers of knowledge wit-

hin the Eastern block. Her biography is especially interesting as many Western migrants and Jewish migrants were met with distrust by Eastern German authorities as they were often suspected to have a bourgeois attitude.

FELICITAS SÖHNER, THORSTEN HALLING and NILS HANSSON (Düsseldorf) presented results of an ongoing oral history project within the „Bridging the Baltic“ group. The starting point was to study how previously divided networks of medical actors initiated collaboration across the iron curtain. The focus was on how interviewees (retired professors in Estonia, Germany, Latvia and Sweden) located themselves and their institution in the national and international research context and what role the scientific exchange in the Baltic Sea region actually played in research practice and in everyday clinical practice. They pointed at different views on centres and peripheries in medicine during the Cold War. In some areas there was an intense scientific co-operation from which the participating researchers in both West and East equally benefited. Among the interviewees were the gynaecologists Liselotte Mettler (Germany) and Nils-Otto Sjöberg (Sweden), who took part in symposia in Eastern Germany (GDR) in person, and Georgs Andrejevs, physician and former foreign minister of Latvia, who shared valuable insights in the relationship between science and politics.

GARETH MILLWARD (Odense) addressed the current situation with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic by presenting transnational vaccination histories leading to a vivid discussion about how historians of medicine in the Baltic Sea region reacted to the pandemic in popular press.

Section II focused on state security and medicine. WLADYSŁAW BULHAK (Warsaw) investigated the allegedly mysterious deaths of Polish scientists in the USA. In the times of Cold War, the United States did invite Polish

¹ The symposium was funded by the German Research Foundation. Previous Bridging the Baltic symposia have led to the volumes Nils Hansson / Jonathan Wistrand (Eds.), *Explorations in Medical History in the Baltic Sea region 1850–2015*, Rochester, NY 2019, and Nils Hansson (Ed.), *History of Medicine in the Baltic Sea Region. Acta medico-historica Rigensia* 2021, 14 (special issue).

scholars to the U.S. as one measure in trying to influence Poland to move away from Soviet influence. Whilst Polish secret service suspected American agents behind the events, Bulhak could not reconstruct any such evidence. His talk raised questions about how scientists were used in science diplomacy and how security and intelligence agencies reacted to networks across the Baltic Sea and beyond. The Polish secret service's strong belief that the events were caused by American agents rather than natural causes, shows the fear and mistrust present in the times of the Cold war.

JOANNA NIEZNAŃSKA (Szczecin) presented the history of her alma mater, the Pomeranian Medical University. Analysing publications from the Stalinist and Post-Stalinist era, she found hardly any publications being written in Russian and identified several Szczecin scholars with extensive contacts to the West. The subsequent discussion led to the idea of analysing Polish citation networks in order to find out more about cross-border collaboration in communist Poland. It was found surprising that, despite Moscow's push to establish Russian as an international scientific language, Szczecin scientists resisted and continued to be orientated towards the West.

Section III shed light on connections between the Baltic republics. ULRIKE EISENBERG (Berlin) explored Estonian-Scandinavian relations in neurosurgery. After the end of World War two, 60 percent of Estonian neurosurgeons had left the country, many of them settling in Sweden. Collaboration between Western and Estonian neurosurgeons did take place, even if restricted by Soviet bureaucracy.

KASPARS ANTONOVICS (Riga) presented the Riga professor Aleksandrs Bieziņ (1897–1975), a pioneer in paediatric and orthopaedic surgery, and his foreign contacts before and after World War II. Whilst he travelled extensively to Western Europe before the war, he restricted his travels to the Warsaw pact states in the period of Soviet occupation. That was, according to Antonovic's research, typical for many Latvian physicians, who integrated themselves into Soviet structures rather well. Bieziņ was one of only few professors, who remained in Riga after World War

II, and he was, together with Pauls Stradiņš (1896–1958), one of the most influential physicians in Latvia. The lively discussion led to questions about the importance of party membership in Soviet-occupied Latvia.

JURIS SALAKS (Riga) analysed USSR-GDR symposia as a method of scientific exchange between historians of medicine within the Eastern block. Having attended the 1989 meeting in person, he described the symposia as politically well-orchestrated with a member of the East German socialist party always attending. The programme of these conferences was also significantly influenced by political ideology and reflected the "Leninist policy of peaceful co-existence between nations".

AISTIS ZALNORA (Vilnius) showed how Soviet ideology narrowed the scientific view, leading to mental diseases being a "political" diagnosis for enemies: Individuals who disapproved of the Soviet regime were automatically identified as mentally ill and treated as if they were objectively ill. However, other issues, such as social hygiene, venereology and psychiatry, which would have necessitated the analysis of social phenomena, were widely ignored. In the final discussion, the attendants discussed upcoming studies on science communication, science diplomacy and transfer of knowledge during the Cold War in the Baltic Sea region.

Overall, this "Bridging the Baltic" conference provided insights into different aspects of scientific collaboration in medicine during the Cold War. Case studies showed that, despite many obstacles, some scholars did indeed, due to university agreements or because of individual contacts, have the possibility to visit hospitals and conferences on the other side of the iron curtain, which enabled a scientific exchange on different levels.

Conference overview:

Thomas Wegener Friis (Odense) / Juris Salaks (Riga) / Nils Hansson (Düsseldorf): Welcome addresses

Section I: Transfer of knowledge across the Iron Curtain

Chair: Jennie Sejr Junghans (Odense)

Joanna Nieznanowska (Szczecin): First successful efforts at connecting Szczecin's Po-

meranian Medical University with the West (1958–1968)

Matthis Krischel / Thorsten Halling / Julia Nebe (Düsseldorf): “Scandinavian experience desirable?” – The dentist Jenny Cohen (1905–1976) and her re-migration from Sweden to East Germany after World War II

Felicitas Söhner, Thorsten Halling, Nils Hansson (Düsseldorf): Is there a need for Baltic Sea conferences? An oral history project

Section II: State Security and Medicine

Chair: Thomas Wegener Friis (Odense)

Gareth Millward (Odense): Transnational vaccination histories

Wladyslaw Bulhak (Warsaw): Liquidated by the enemy? The misfortune of Polish doctors in the US

Section III: Connecting the Baltic Republics

Chair: Peter M. Nilsson (Lund)

Ulrike Eisenberg (Berlin): Estonian-Scandinavian neurosurgical relations. From Ludvig Puusepp (1875–1942) to his successors until 1991

Kaspars Antonovičs (Riga): Foreign scientific exchange of Professor Aleksandrs Bieziņš [U+009A] (1897–1975) before and after World War II

Juris Salaks (Riga): Symposia of the USSR-GDR as a tool for scientific exchange between medical historians in the period from 1975 to 1989

Aistis Zalnora (Vilnius): The paradox of social medicine in the Socialist Republic of Lithuania

Section IV: Project discussion

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