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REGARDING THE RECEPTION OF THE STALINIST PLAN FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF NATURE IN HUNGARY, CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND POLAND[*]

Abstract: Originating in nineteenth-century scientism, the effort to control and transform nature was an important part of the communist ideology. This article deals with the implementation of the Stalinist plan for the transformation of nature in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary.
Keywords: the Stalinist plan of transforming the environment, Stalinism in biology and agriculture, forestry in the Stalinist period.

Environmental issues constitute an ever-growing field of research in world historiography. Only in small measure, however, does this interest seem to concern Eastern Europe, where it remains limited to the history of Russia and the Soviet Union. Works on how other communist regimes treated the environment are few and far between. For this reason one should welcome the attempt to fill, at least in part, the gap in our knowledge regarding the way in which these regimes were affected by the Stalinist plan for the transformation of nature. The volume's publication was supported by the Visegrád Fund and by a number of academic institutions in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

In the preface to the monograph Paul Josephson, Professor at Colby College in Waterville (Maine) and at Tomsk State University, outlines both the origin of the plan and the way in which it was implemented, first in the USSR and then in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. Adopted by the Soviet leadership in 1948, the plan, according to Josephson, expressed an intention to subjugate nature to the Party. The scholar traces its origin back to the 1930s, when the Soviet Union became involved in the realization of a variety of great projects affecting the environment such as, for example, the construction of the Moscow–Volga canal

[*] *In the Name of the Great Work. Stalin's Plan for the Transformation of Nature and its Impact in Eastern Europe*, ed. Doubravka Olšáková, New York: Berghahn Books, 2016.

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or the creation of a 327 square kilometre reservoir of water known as the Moscow Sea. It was at that time that Stalin contemplated the idea of diverting the River Moscow to the walls of the Kremlin. However, in the 1930s the planners had their minds set mainly on rapid industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture, and it was not until after the Second World War that the large-scale environmental projects were launched. The pre-war initiatives should be viewed only as a prelude to the changes brought about after 1945. In the years 1927–41 trees were planted over an area of 468,000 ha, forty-three times more than in 1817–1917, and 75 per cent more land was irrigated in the first five-year period of Communism than had been before the revolution.

In 1948, these ideas reappeared in a significantly expanded form. According to propaganda from the period, droughts, heat waves, dry winds and energy shortages no longer threatened to prevent Stalin from achieving superhuman goals in the field of industry and agriculture. It was announced that rivers would be transformed into machines equipped with water reservoirs and hydroelectric power plants, and water would be harnessed in the service of irrigating fields, generating energy and industrial production throughout the year. Relevant plans involved building 45,000 water reservoirs and artificial lakes. Foresters were entrusted with the task of planting 70,000 forest strips in order to protect arable lands from winds and to maintain the humidity indispensable for growing crops where, for climatic reasons, they had never been grown before. Water distributed through irrigation systems was supposed to transform the huge desert regions of Central Asia into fertile farms of cotton, citrus fruit, rice and other rarely grown crops. The creation of huge industrial combines was announced. Josephson argues that the Stalinist plan was a response to the droughts that hit, in 1946, Ukraine, North Caucasus, Western Siberia, Kazakhstan, the region of Chernozem soils and the Volga river region, causing, in tandem with the murderous pace of industrialization, a famine and the death of about one million people. Means by which it was planned to ensure abundant crops involved not only the irrigation systems and forest protection strips, but also the achievements of 'a new biology'. This, epitomized by a pseudo-scientist Trofim D. Lysenko (1898–1976), departed from the mainstream understanding of genetics. The employment of Ivan Michurin's (1855–1935) methods for cross-breeding plants was considered to guarantee the success of arboricultural projects, and the saying with which he has been credited — 'We cannot wait for favors from Nature. Our task is to take them from her' — became one of the slogans of the plan's propaganda. Wasilij Williams' (1863–1935) grassfield system, in turn, was supposed to enhance soil fertility.

Josephson investigates the way in which the plan was implemented, focusing his attention mainly on the scale of various endeavours and the failures in their implementation. It turns out, for example, that more than half of the trees planted between 1949 and 1953 failed to take root.

Further on in his text, Josephson offers a summary of the changes brought about by the realization of the plan in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. His

concluding remarks are based on findings by the authors of the work's respective chapters. He maintains that the failures in which attempts to implement the plan in these countries ended arose from the autonomy their communist rulers enjoyed within the framework of their general subjection to Moscow, the tradition of the natural sciences (whose rapid development had continued there since the nineteenth century) and the failure of agricultural collectivization. Due to these factors the plan passed into oblivion after the Kremlin dictator's death. Attempts to reactivate some of its elements during the tenures of Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev failed to gain traction in the satellite states.

What follows consists of detailed studies devoted to the reception of the plan in the countries under discussion. They were written by the following authors: Doubravka Olšáková and Arnošt Štanzel ('Kafkaesque Paradigms. The Stalinist Plan for the Transformation of Nature in Czechoslovakia'), Zsuzsanna Borvendég and Mária Palasik ('Untamed Seedlings. Hungary and Stalin's Plan for the Transformation of Nature') and Beata Wysokińska ('The Conspiracy of Silence. The Stalinist Plan for the Transformation of Nature in Poland'). Organized according to the same scheme, all the studies begin with prefaces providing basic information regarding the political changes that took place in these countries after the Second World War. Their goal is to outline the historical circumstances in which the plan was carried out. These opening remarks are followed by an analysis of the transformation (Stalinization) of academic institutions, especially those of life sciences, and the reception of the theoretical grounds on which the plan was based in the Soviet Union, particularly the ideas developed by Lysenko. The monograph's contributors analyse the implementation of the 'Great Projects of Communism', the rise of new cities and the development of those already existing (Sztálinváros, Kazincbarcika, Komló and Tatabányá in Hungary, Nová Huť and Vítkovické železárny — both located in Ostrava and bearing the name of Klement Gottwald, the cities Havířov and Poruba in Czechoslovakia and Nowa Huta in Poland). They also seek to reconstruct the history of the implementation of great hydrological projects: dams and cascades on the rivers Váh, Vltava, Tisa and Vistula; artificial reservoirs: the 'Czech Sea' on the river Vltava, Kružberk on the river Morawice, Žermanice on the river Lučina, Goczałkowice on the river Vistula and Gabčikovo-Nagymaros on the river Danube; canals: the Danube–Oder canal, the Danube–Tisa canal and the Wieprz–Krzna canal. The authors' analysis also includes the attempts to introduce into these countries crops exotic to the region such as rice, cotton, taraxacum kok-saghyz, kenaf, citrus fruit — and of various methods for controlling the potato beetle. Propaganda pertaining to the plan is dealt with in the concluding parts of each of the sketches.

The research field thus outlined is open to criticism. Should all the specific issues, assembled by the authors under the collective category of the 'plan for the transformation of nature' be treated in this way? It seems that the concept was originally given a narrower meaning. The authors of the 1950 work published in Polish and devoted to the issue in question maintained that it was the

'plan for the complete transformation of the climatic conditions and agricultural production of the country'.[1] The work's chapters contain discussion of such issues as the creation of protective tree strips, the fight against soil erosion, the construction of ponds and water reservoirs. Only in passing, however, do its authors mention the fact that the widespread use of a grass-field system were to make it possible to grow crops from certified seeds suitable for local conditions.[2]

So it seems that the authors of the volume under review were not precise in outlining the field of their research. They have addressed a great number of issues which, while concerning the biological and agricultural sciences and the development of agriculture, had little to do with the Stalinist version of the plan. In this sense they have done more than is suggested by the title of the work. My remarks concern the wide spectrum of problems touched on in their work.

Arranged around different national perspectives, the work lends itself to insightful comparative analysis. We are offered the possibility of comparing the importance attached in each of the three countries to implementation of particular elements of the plan. The authors have made an effort to gather the interesting collection of documents providing information about the issue in question. Particularly valuable is the archive research on which the chapters devoted to the implementation of the plan in Czechoslovakia and Hungary are based. For obvious reasons it is difficult to give a definite answer to the question of whether the authors of particular chapters were able to make full use of the gathered sources.

However, it is worthwhile to try to answer the question of how exactly the plan was received in those two countries, and how it compared with the efforts taken in this regard in Poland.

In Czechoslovakia the plan for the transformation of nature was proclaimed not in 1948, as in the USSR, but in 1953 (efforts to implement it lasted until 1962). It was in January 1953, during the founding meeting of the Czechoslovakian Academy of Agricultural Sciences, established with the participation of Soviet advisors, that its chairman announced the creation of the Committee for the Transformation of Nature.

The plan's effects proved quite limited, ascribed by the authors to the fact that Czechoslovakia was a small country of intensive farming. They claim that those in power were reasonable enough to focus on meticulous planning rather than a feverish execution of particular projects. Politics probably played its part too. Among the ruling communists the transformation of nature along Soviet lines was ardently advocated by Rudolf Slánský and Josef Smrkovský, both of whom fell victim to the political trials held in 1951 (the first was executed in 1952). In these circumstances propagation of the plans was not without its risks, and

[1] Plan 'zupełnego przekształcenia warunków klimatycznych i produkcji rolnej kraju', Stanisław Ehrlich and Tadeusz Dominik, *Stalinowski plan przeobrażenia przyrody*, Warsaw, 1950, p. 5.

[2] Ibid., p. 13.

postponement of their implementation was a safer path to follow. In addition, the sketch's authors indicate that a significant number of the projects to be launched under the plan were based on proposals put forward in the nineteenth century by naturalist circles of established tradition (the idea for the construction of some canals originated in the fourteenth century). The 'adjustments' which the Soviet ideas underwent are also reflected in the propaganda coverage of the plan. It was no accident that in Czechoslovakia it was presented as aiming at the subjection rather than the transformation of nature.

In Hungary the plan was launched much earlier (1949) than in Czechoslovakia, and with greater commitment from the authorities. According to the authors of the relevant chapter, this meant that its implementation began with intensive efforts to introduce new crops. Hungarian agricultural institutes became involved in the production of not only their own varieties of rice, but also of such exotic plants as the already mentioned Russian dandelion or kenaf. Undeterred by the adverse weather conditions, Hungarian scientists were unstinting in their efforts to find ways of growing cotton. This task, one might add, was imposed by the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) on all the countries of the Soviet bloc (as was that of gaining independence from the West in the production of linen and hemp). The experiments pertaining to Hungarian cotton collapsed in 1953, when 75 per cent of this crop had to be ploughed under because of the cold winter. No more further attempts were made to implement these ideas. In terms of growing crops considered exotic in Hungarian conditions, the attempts at rice cultivation were the most effective.

However, among the elements of the plan which produced the most positive results, one should note especially the programme for the creation of protective forest strips. The authors claim that thanks to the realization of this program, Hungary had for the first time since the annexation of the Pannonian Basin managed to raise its level of afforestation. However, given the habitat-conditioned nature of the lowland's woodless formation, we can question whether this change was truly positive.

What, in view of the above, is the scholarly value of the 'Polish part' of the monograph? Its author, Beata Wysokińska, undertook a difficult task. Debate on the plan for the transformation of nature is essentially absent from Polish historiography. To some propagandistic brochures from the 1950s, one can add only very few works that fall within the scope of the topic, and the focus of most is on the Polish reception of Lysenko's theories — that is, a problem which can hardly be considered the heart of the plan.[3] Wysokińska's analysis is based on academic works, memoirs, the press, propaganda brochures and audiovisual materials (the Polish Film Chronicle materials).

[3] Among others, Piotr Köhler, 'Łysenkizm w botanice polskiej', *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki*, 53, 2008, 2, pp. 83–161; *Studia nad łysenkizmem w polskiej biologii*, ed. Piotr Köhler, Cracow, 2013.

Relying on the sources mentioned above, she argues that in Poland the plan was surrounded by a kind of a 'conspiracy of silence', which, we are told, was caused by the strength of agricultural traditions and the commitment to diversifying ways of protecting nature. When the plan is examined from a wider social perspective, it becomes clear that in Poland its implementation was not as widespread as in the other countries of Eastern Europe.

But was it really the case? This view may call for further research.[4] And the possibilities for advancing it further? Without trying to disregard the author's efforts, path-breaking in Polish historiography, I would like to indicate the research potential of the archive collection of which the author has failed to make use. This source material illuminates issues which fall within the research field outlined by the authors, without, however, necessarily being part of the plan under discussion.

Analysis shows that the authorities did not ignore the idea of transforming nature. In addition to the reorganization of agricultural sciences (the Government Presidium's Resolution No. 33 of 24 January 1951[5]), work was also undertaken on the introduction of new crops (the Vice-chairman of the State Commission of Economic Planning order No. 74 of 8 March 1951 on the 'cultivation and alteration of the rubber yielding plant kok-saghyz',[6] the Government Presidium's Resolution No. 221 of 29 March 1952 on the acclimatization of cotton in Poland[7] and the Government Presidium's Resolution No. 213 of 29 March on the establishment of the crop varieties testing stations[8]).

To investigate the problems addressed by Wysokińska, it is worth taking a closer look at group of documents from the Archive of Modern Records marked: 'The Office of the Agricultural Research Institutes at the Ministry of Agriculture (1950–1965)'. It contains the Institutes' files from the first half of the 1950s. Reports from the period seem to be of particular value for this topic. Although interpretation of this kind of document presents a variety of methodological difficulties, it should not be omitted from analysis. The reports pertaining to the subject of the reviewed book testify to Polish attempts at rice cultivation, a fact also referred to by Wysokińska. We learn from the reports that the experiments in rice domestication began in 1948 in the State Research Institute of Life Sciences (the PINGW).[9] The report on the research activity (in 1952) of the Industrial and Fibre Crops Section of the Plant Breeding and Domestication Institute (the IHiAR) states that

[4] It seems that some arguments in favour of this view can be found in Szczepan Pieniążek's memoirs (*Pamiętnik sadownika*, 2nd edn, Warsaw, 2000, pp. 155–60).

[5] Aleksander Kochański, *Polska 1944–1991. Informator historyczny*, 3 vols, Warsaw, 1996–2005, vol. 1, p. 365.

[6] Ibid., p. 373.

[7] Ibid., p. 433.

[8] Ibid.

[9] AAN, Ministerstwo Rolnictwa — Biuro ds. Instytutów Rolniczych Naukowo-Badawczych (hereafter BdsIRN-B), 542, Sprawozdanie PINGW za rok 1950, załącznik, n. pag.

the Institute's Rice-Breeding Team already had more than one hundred 'pedigree numbers from the cross-breeding and selection'.[10]

These domestication efforts produced, it seems, moderate results. Of the rice varieties brought to Poland, those from Romania gave, as stated in the 1952 IHiAR report, the best yields. Polish researchers established the need for rice seeds to be enclosed with windproof belts and subject to the process of vernalization.[11] However, the final conclusion drawn from this research was very peculiar: the water with which to irrigate the rice fields in Poland should be heated to a temperature of no less than 20 degrees Celsius.[12] Given this requirement, it is hard to understand how one could hope to develop the mass production of this crop in Poland.

The Agricultural Institutes' reports bear testimony to what Wysokińska omitted from her analysis and what is dealt with in the chapters devoted to Hungary and, to a lesser degree, to Czechoslovakia — namely, Polish attempts at cotton production. It transpires that research into the crop's domestication, which got under way in 1948 in the PINGW,[13] continued into the first half of the 1950s. In 1952, the IHiAR's five Research-Breeding Stations (Smolice, Radzików, Grodkowice, Bydgoszcz, Sadłowice), the Crop Selection Station of the State Agricultural Farm (PGR) in Modzurów and 55 other units across the whole Poland (Michurinist circles, inventors and innovators in the field of plant breeding) were involved in the research work devoted to cotton cultivation. Initial conclusions were pessimistic. It was stated, however, that 'some interesting observations were made regarding the knowledge of this crop's biology, new to Polish conditions'.[14]

At that time the IHiAR was also involved in other research projects whose focus may have been tied up with the realization of the plan. Apart from the work concerned with growing varieties of corn suitable for Polish conditions (in the fields around Wrocław), attempts were made to domesticate some fibre (kenaf, abutilon, common yucca) and rubber-yielding plants, and to grow new and

[10] AAN, BdsIRN-B, 525, Sprawozdanie roczne z działalności naukowo-badawczej Działu Roślin Specjalnych, Przemysłowych i Włóknistych Instytutu Hodowli i Aklimatyzacji roślin za rok 1952, n. pag. On the experiments regarding rice domestication in Poland see reportage by Cezary Łazarewicz, 'Sadzimy ryż, budujemy socjalizm', *Magazyn*, no. 26, dodatek do *Gazety Wyborczej*, 2000, no. 150, p. 6.

[11] 'Vernalization' refers to biochemical processes that occur in winter and multi-annual crops in low temperatures, affecting their bloom.

[12] AAN, BdsIRN-B, 525, Sprawozdanie roczne z działalności naukowo-badawczej Działu Roślin Specjalnych, Przemysłowych i Włóknistych Instytutu Hodowli i Aklimatyzacji roślin za rok 1952.

[13] AAN, BdsIRN-B, 542, Sprawozdanie PINGW.

[14] 'ciekawe obserwacje dotyczące poznania biologii tej nowej w naszych warunkach rośliny', AAN, BdsIRN-B, 525, Sprawozdanie roczne z działalności naukowo-badawczej Działu Roślin Specjalnych, Przemysłowych i Włóknistych Instytutu Hodowli i Aklimatyzacji roślin za rok 1952; Kochański, *Polska 1944–1991*, p. 433.

more frost-resistant varieties of grain.[15] In 1952, the IHiAR's Garden Plant Section bragged about working closely with 'the leading Polish Michurinist, citizen Władysław Kalinowski. Under this collaborative effort, Kalinowski was commissioned to breed a cross of melon and watermelon suited to Polish climatic conditions'.[16] The IHiAR reports indicate that these projects (including those regarding the cultivation of rice, cotton, kenaf, abutilon and Russian dandelion) continued in 1953, as did collaboration with the Michurinist circles.[17]

The Research Institute of Pomology also attempted to introduce Lysenko's and Michurin's methods, as evidenced by its reports from the early 1950s. 1,500 varieties of fruit trees and shrubs were subjected to testing in the Pomological Orchard in Skierniewice as early as 1951, as were about 300 varieties in Górna Niwa: 'The work's special focus has been on apple varieties from the Michurin farm. If the recent results are confirmed in further research, it will be possible to subject some of them to regionalization'. Research work on grapevines expanded too. The Institute included an Agro-biological Section whose task was, among other things, to establish contacts with fruit growers — Michurinists and Michurinist circles.[18] In 1952, the Institute held the first two day-long Michurninist-Fruit Growers Convention, with about 50 guests from all over Poland in attendance.[19] This activity continued in 1953.[20]

At that time the Institute of Cultivation, Fertilization and Pedology (The IUNG) was involved in carrying out research into corn cultivation and the Williams' grassfield system. IUNG also established cooperation with 30 Michurinist farmers regarding such issues as the domestication of corn, sorghum and other rare plants.[21] The garden experimentation formed an important part of the work carried out by the Vegetables Cultivation Institute attached to the Main School of Life Sciences in Skierniewice and Krobów.[22]

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[15] AAN, BdsIRN-B, 525, Sprawozdanie roczne z działalności naukowo-badawczej Instytutu Hodowli i Aklimatyzacji Roślin za rok 1952, n. pag.; ibid., Sprawozdanie roczne z działalności naukowo-badawczej Działu Roślin Zbożowych Instytutu Hodowli i Aklimatyzacji Roślin za rok 1952, n. pag.

[16] Ibid., Sprawozdanie roczne z działalności Działu Roślin Ogrodniczych IHAR za rok 1952, n. pag.

[17] Ibid., Sprawozdanie roczne z działalności naukowo-badawczej Instytutu Hodowli i Aklimatyzacji roślin za rok 1953, n. pag.

[18] 'W pracy tej zwrócono baczną uwagę na odmiany jabłoni hodowli Miczurina. O ile dalsze obserwacje potwierdzą dotychczasowe wyniki, kilka z nich można będzie poddać próbom rejonizacyjnym', AAN, BdsIRN-B, 537, Sprawozdawczość roczna Instytutu Sadownictwa za r. 1951, n. pag.

[19] Ibid., Sprawozdanie z działalności naukowo-badawczej i usługowej Instytutu Sadownictwa za rok 1952, n. pag.

[20] Ibid., Sprawozdanie z działalności naukowo-badawczej i usługowej Instytutu Sadownictwa [za rok 1953], n. pag.

[21] AAN, BdsIRN-B, 542, Sprawozdanie z działalności Instytutu Uprawy Nawożenia i Gleboznawstwa w 1952 roku, n. pag.

[22] AAN, Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Reform Rolnych, 2772, Dyrekcja Instytutu Uprawy Nawożenia i Gleboznawstwa, Warszawa, 7 IV 1951, fol. 48.

The archive material provides us with one more lead that should be pursued in further research, even if it proves not directly related to the plan for the transformation of nature. It seems that many enterprises from the field of agrobiology remained a matter of debate among experts from the Soviet bloc. This was certainly the case with crop protection, as evidenced by the report on the proceedings of the Fifth International Crop Protection Conference held in Berlin on 2–14 December 1952 with participation of delegates from the USSR, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, China and the GDR. The conference was concerned mainly with appraising the efficacy of efforts undertaken to prevent the spread of the potato beetle. It was also marked by the elaboration of a specific plan of action involving the instalment of 'gripping belts of sprouted potatoes' (a step designed to capture potato beetle *Leptinotarsa decemlineata*) and the application, twice, during the vegetation period of potato and of other crops, of chemical protection measures to all the fields lying along a fifty-kilometre-wide strip of the Polish-German border and a thirty-kilometre-wide strip between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Conference participants also sought to establish methods for eradicating other pests.[23]

Also surviving is the report of the Polish Delegation for the Sixth International Crop Protection and Quarantine Conference held on 10–20 December in Sophia. Its participants, the same as those who had attended the conference mentioned above, focused their attention on the potato beetle — mainly because of the discovery of its first impact in the region of Kaliningrad and because of the 'cases of the complete destruction of potato crops in GDR'. Among the problems addressed was also the establishment of plant quarantine services, to be entrusted with 'the task of preventing pests and various diseases from being brought in and spread with the imported or exported vegetable goods'. Polish participants were severely criticised by Russian delegates for 'having hitherto failed to organize such services'. Interestingly, Polish attempts to get the members of the GDR delegation to agree to the idea of controlling the potato beetle by disinfecting soil encountered 'implacable resistance' from the Germans.[24]

The cyclical character of these conferences leaves one with the question of whether this was not also the case with the meetings of other experts in the field of life sciences. What, in this context, was COMECON's role? Was the imposition by the Council of the production of cotton on member states the expression of a rule or an exception? It seems that further archival searches may give us answers to these questions.

That such a search is worth pursuing is testified by an analysis of the segment of the plan regarding a water reservoir network. A flagship project in this field

[23] 'pasy chwytne z kiełkowanych ziemniaków', AAN, Ministerstwo Rolnictwa (hereafter MR), 516, Uchwała V Międzynarodowej Konferencji Ochrony Roślin, Berlin, 2–14 grudnia 1952, n. pag.

[24] AAN, MR, 118a, Sprawozdanie z udziału delegacji polskiej na VI Międzynarodowej Konferencji Kwarantanny i Ochrony Roślin w Sofii w czasie od 10–20 grudnia 1953 r., n. pag.

was the construction of the Oder–Danube canal. As evidenced by the report of June 1957 surviving in the records of the Ministry of Shipping and Water Management, the project got under way as early as July 1947, along with the establishment of the Polish-Czechoslovakian Committee for the Study of the Oder–Danube Water Route. The Committee was an organ of the Polish-Czechoslovakian Communication Commission. Its task was to elaborate both technical and economic guidelines for the construction of the canal. However, significant divergences of opinion appeared even from the beginning of the Committee's work. Controversy surrounded the canal route (on the left or right side of the Oder river) and the distribution of its construction costs. The project did not progress beyond planning stage. The 1956 Romanian initiative regarding the complex use of Danube water resources was an attempt to revive this idea. To this end, in May 1957 Moscow's COMECON Office hosted a conference that brought together representatives of all the interested countries (Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union and the GDR). The Danube Affairs Committee was established during its course.[25] Detailed arrangements regarding the Oder–Danube canal were negotiated by the parties directly involved. In January 1958 meetings were held in Berlin and Warsaw and their conclusions were turned over to Czechoslovakia. At the turn of June–July 1958 a tripartite conference was held in Prague. Its final guidelines were imparted to Moscow.[26] Despite these measures no agreement regarding the issue was reached.

The example indicates the importance and possibility of searching for coordination on the attempts to transform nature within the Soviet bloc. It also confirms the opinion expressed by the authors of the monograph that various undertakings initiated during Stalin's lifetime continued after his death, with varying results.

However, this cooperation was not always pursued on such a large scale. This is exemplified by a project referred to in the records of the Ministry of Shipping and Water Management, concerning the East–West water route envisaged to connect the Upper Silesian Industrial Region with Ukraine. With this goal in view the Presidium of Government adopted resolution No. 656 of 15th September 1951 on the regulation of the river Bug for navigation and on the preparation of the technical and economic documentation necessary to ensure the further development of water routes in Poland. Serious preparatory work (water reservoir projects in Granne, the Udrzyn–Barcice canal, drillings, aerial photographs) got under way in 1950 and continued into 1953.[27] Further research is required in order to answer questions regarding the development of these projects.

[25] AAN, Ministerstwo Żeglugi i Gospodarki Wodnej (hereafter MŻiGW), 230, Wł. Weber, Sprawa kanału Odra–Dunaj w okresie 1947–1957, n. pag. For detailed documents on the project of the canal, including notes from relevant conversations and reports on Polish-Czechoslovakian and multilateral conferences held within the framework of COMECON see AAN, MŻiGW, 101 and 102.

[26] AAN, MŻiGW, 102, Notatka w sprawie kanału Odra–Dunaj [1960], fol. 7–8.

[27] AAN, MŻiGW, 222, Sprawozdanie z przebiegu realizacji i eksploatacji inwestycji z dziedziny gospodarki wodnej 10-cio lecia Polski Ludowej, fol. 7.

Wysokińska says that the idea of the Stalinist plan emerged in connection with the construction of the Wieprz–Krzna canal (1952), that had a harmful effect on the environment of the region of Polesie Lubelskie. It is true that it was an important element of the plan. That the construction of the canal began in 1954 is referred to in the resolution of July 1954 adopted by the Second Plenum of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party.[28] On 18 September 1954 the Presidium of Government adopted resolution No. 642 on the permission for provisional realization and financing of the Wieprz–Krzna canal's construction.[29] In 1954, following recommendations from the Second Plenum, the Institute for Land Reclamation and Grassland Farming set out to prepare a pre-reclamation assessment of economic and agricultural characteristics in the canal area.[30]

The concluding part of the monograph's 'Polish chapter' addresses the issue of the plan's propaganda coverage. In dealing with the problem, the author not only made use of press materials but also analysed Polish film chronicles. Such an approach is in all respects interesting, allowing the problem to be seen in the light of a repeatable source which a mass audience had the opportunity to become familiar with. It is clear that the analysis of sources other than those used by the author may add new details to our knowledge of the issue,[31] but I doubt they are likely to change the conclusions arrived at by Wysokińska.[32]

Doubravka Olšáková's concluding remarks are entitled: 'Environmental History, East European Societies and Totalitarian Regimes'. In her opinion, the history of the way in which each of country the book looks at carried out the plan shows that implementation, despite the similarity of changes, differed depending on the local traditions and the interests of local leaders. Stalin's plan was, according to Olšáková, an element of the Sovietization of Eastern Europe. Its failure acted as a catalyst for those sciences that were dissenting from the

[28] *Uchwały Komitetu Centralnego Polskiej Zjednoczonej Partii Robotniczej od II do III Zjazdu*, Warsaw, 1959, p. 33.

[29] Kochański, *Polska 1944–1991*, p. 543.

[30] AAN, BdsIRN-B, 530, Sprawozdanie z działalności Instytutu Melioracji i Użytków Zielonych [za rok 1954], n. pag.

[31] See, for example, Piotr Köhler, 'Lysenkoist Propaganda in *Trybuna Ludu*', *Studies in the History of Biology* (St. Petersburg), 8, 2016, 3, pp. 25–42.

[32] In this context, it would be interesting to analyse brochures published by Wszechnica Radiowa (Radio Academy — one of the most important institutions of Polish Radio involved in popularizing science) and Towarzystwo Wiedzy Powszechnej (Society of Popular Knowledge). Inquiry into the collection of the brochures, kept in the holdings of the National Library, of both these institutions indicates that the plan for the transformation of nature figures in their pages. As an example, one can indicate a number of such publications: *Agrobiologia (skrypt wykładów)*, Warsaw, 1952; Mieczysław Birecki, *System trawopolny (Wiliamsa)*, Warsaw, 1953; Szczepan Pieniążek, *Dlaczego wymarzają sady w surową zimę?*, Warsaw, 1955; idem, *Sady Miczurina*, Warsaw, 1951; Marian Lachowicz, *Każdy rolnik doświadczalnikiem*, Warsaw, 1954; Stanisław Skowron, *O dziedziczności*, Warsaw, 1952; Włodzimierz Michałow, *Organizm i środowisko*, Warsaw, 1953.

Stalinist orthodoxy. This also concerned agricultural and biological sciences that played a key part in realization of the plan.

The work under review significantly adds to our knowledge of the impact the Communist era had on environment. It stands out in offering a comparative approach to the problems with which it deals. Even if falls short in its analysis of some issues, failing to use the source material to its full potential, its research value certainly surpasses any defects.

(Translated by Artur Mękarski)
(Proofreading by Yelizaveta Crofts)

Summary

Edited by Doubravka Olšáková (*In the Name of the Great Work. Stalin's Plan for the Transformation of Nature and its Impact in Eastern Europe*, New York, 2016), the book under review sets itself the ambitious goal of recounting means to carry out plans, elaborated in emulation of the measures imposed by Stalin in the USSR in 1948, for the transformation of nature in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Contributors to the volume deal with such elements of the plans as water power projects, the use of rivers as communications routes, land drainage, irrigation, the introduction of new crops, the use of the 'new Soviet biology' (associated with Trofim Lysenko), Ivan Michurin's methods of the plant cross-breeding (1855–1935) and Wasilij Williams' grass-field farming system (1863–1939). The publication also provides an analysis of the 'great socialist projects' and advancement in the creation of forest protection strips, including the propagandistic coverage of the plans.

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