

Workshop

Global crisis and economic alternatives in Central and Eastern Europe

Workshop organised by Tereza Virtová and Josef Patočka at the Academic Conference Centre

21. 3. 2025

Akademické konferenční centrum —
AKC (Husova 4, Praha 1)

Programme

- 9.30 Welcome by the organisers
- 9.35 - 10.40 Keynote presentation
Agnes Gagyí: CEE in geoeconomic transformation - stakes for solidarity economy
(chair: Tereza Virtová)
- 10.40 - 10.50 Break
- 10.50 - 12.00 Panel: Transformative economic pathways in the Czech republic and beyond
Lucie Sovová: Transformation and quiet sustainability: food self-provisioning and the alternative food movement in Czechia
Tereza Virtová, Josef Patočka: Pathways to scaling economic alternatives: the case of food coop-tenant union alliance in Prague
Robin Maialeh: Progress Without Reinventing the Wheel: Revisiting Effective Policy Measures
- 12.00 - 12.45 Discussion

Global crisis and economic alternatives in Central and Eastern Europe

In recent years, Central and Eastern European economies are undergoing a host of challenges connected to their semi-peripheral position in global capitalism. Rising cost of living and inequality, partial reindustrialization, and heightened geo-political tensions only exacerbate long-term contradictions of the post-socialist economic model based on subordinate integration in global value chains and increasingly authoritarian models of its political management (Gagyí, 2021).

At the same time, recent years have seen a reappraisal of various forms of alternative economic practices and institutions in the region - including food self-provisioning, DIY practices, forms of cooperativism both traditional and new and other forms of what has elsewhere been conceptualized as a solidarity economy (Miller, 2010). Rather than being seen as signs of lagging behind in efforts to catch-up with the countries of the capitalist core, they are suddenly re-evaluated as potential sources of resilience in the escalating global crisis, or even starting points for emancipatory socio-ecological transformations (Cima & Sovová, 2022; Pungas et al., 2024).

What are the ways such practices and institutions could proliferate beyond their current marginality in the overall pattern of social reproduction and expand into more comprehensive alternative economic pathways? How will the changing forms of the region's integration in global processes shape the opportunities and limits to such transformations? How could actors beyond solidarity economy initiatives - such as trade unions, social movements and electoral parties - collaborate to intervene in these conditions? And what is the role of research in informing such strategies for socio-ecological resilience?

In this workshop we will explore various strategies for the scaling of economic alternatives in the context of current capitalist transformations in semi-peripheral Central and Eastern Europe. The aim of the seminar will be to better understand the region's position in today's global crisis, and identify openings for building economic alternatives in the CEE region.

Keynote presentation

Agnes Gagyí, Solidarity economy centre, Budapest & University of Gothenburg, Sweden: CEE in geoeconomic transformation - stakes for solidarity economy

This talk introduces some long-term elements of dependent semi-peripheral development that has characterized our region's integration into global capitalism since modernity, and then discusses how these have been reconfigured throughout the current, post-1945 hegemonic cycle of the global economy. I point out major shifts of CEE's integration into successive phases of this cycle, with a particular focus on global neoliberalization as an early stage of a cyclical crisis, and the current context of protectionism and geopolitical rivalry as a late phase of the same crisis. I place major socio-economic transformations experienced in our region within these crisis dynamics, and then point at possible openings for economic alternatives that prioritize social and environmental reproduction.

Panel: Transformative economic pathways in the Czech republic and beyond

Lucie Sovová, Rural Sociology Group, Wageningen University: Transformation and quiet sustainability: food self-provisioning and the alternative food movement in Czechia

At first sight, the Czech food system can be characterised by agroindustrial monopoly and the dominance of supermarkets, with slowly proliferating alternatives (e.g. consumer cooperatives, community supported agriculture). At the same time, half of the Czech population produces some of their own food in a garden. Food self-provisioning is not recognised as part of the alternative food movement, but it exists in parallel and partially overlaps with it. In this talk I will explore the conditions in which traditional food practices might form the backbone of a more environmentally just food system, and the actions required to amplify this potential.

Tereza Vrtová, Filosofický ústav AV ČR; Josef Patočka, Department of Environmental Studies FSS MUNI: Pathways to scaling Economic alternatives: the case of food coop-tenant union alliance in Prague

What are the conditions for the success of economic alternatives? Current research challenges the narrative in which the success of economic alternatives is the work of 'heroic individuals' among social entrepreneurs. It argues that the successful expansion of alternatives beyond isolated islands is often the work of collective mobilisation, conditioned by the ability to link economic alternatives to broader social movements. In our paper, we want to present one possible form of such an alliance that we ourselves have been involved in creating: the linking of the consumer coop Obživa and the tenants union „Tenants Initiative“ in Prague, Czech Republic. We will present both the benefits this experiment has achieved and the obstacles it has helped to expose.

Robin Maialeh, SKODA AUTO University & RILSA: Progress Without Reinventing the Wheel: Revisiting Effective Policy Measures

The persistent socio economic challenges in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region necessitate a critical examination of alternatives to mainstream economic policies. However, must change always be driven by the idealism of romanticized heroes, or can enlightened governance provide desired solutions? Should we place our hopes in solidarity emerging from individual acts of kindness amid the capitalist struggle for survival, or should we instead rely on the rule of law to institutionalize humanity as a fundamental principle? This brief note explores how well-designed policy measures can significantly enhance broad socioeconomic conditions.

The workshop can be followed online via ZOOM.

If you are interested, please register by contacting us at lorencova@flu.cas.cz