

May 2026

Call for Papers:

Into the larger world: global ventures of the Eastern Bloc automotive industry in late socialism & early post-socialism

As the tractor came to play a major symbolic and practical role in the postcolonial world, and by taking advantage by the global demand for agricultural tractors sparked in the 1970s by the Green Revolution of the developing world (Perkins, 1997), starting with the 1970s Braşov Tractor Factory (Uzina Tractorul Braşov) massively reoriented its production for exports, mainly destined to Global South countries from Africa, Asia and South America. For doing this, UTB learned to adapt, to innovate, to improve, to use local knowledge and connections, to bribe and to navigate the complicated foreign markets and cultures, in order to succeed in a fierce international competition. UTB worked closely with Fiat Trattori, its longtime companion (the first contract of cooperation btw UTB and Fiat Trattori was signed in 1965, and renewed several times afterwards), which in turn could find in UTB a reliable ambassador to address markets such as India or Pakistan. In spite of marked political, ideological and economic differences, the European enterprises managed to complement each other in conquering new markets and clients in the Global South.

Recent research pointed toward the existence of a “soviet globalization” (Sanchez-Sibony 2014) and of “socialist globalization(s)” — alternative globalizing processes that structured, rearranged, and reshaped the postwar world under the spell of decolonization and de-Stalinization, and allowed for multiple and multilayered interconnections between the “Second World and the ‘Third World’” (Mark et al. 2019; Mark et al. 2020; Engerman 2011; Babiracki and Jersild 2016). Research showed that during the détente of the 1970s, a broader process of European integration started (Pula 2018), nourishing “interdependence between the capitalist (which includes neutral) and socialist European countries” (Romano and Romero 2021, 31).

Under the spell of this global turn, the transnational history of the ECE automotive industry during State socialism emerged vigorously in the last two decades. Various research has successfully addressed several dimensions of the Europeanisation process of the automotive industry in Europe, underlining the mutually constitutive exchanges and joint ventures of East-Central European and Western car enterprises (see especially Fava & Gătejel, eds., 2017). Local variations and adaptations of production processes, differences in labor cultures, regulations and managerial dynamics, technological transfers, licensing agreements, integration in European supply chains and knowledge flows emerged as key tropes of this transnational history. They succeeded to portray a more nuanced perspective upon the dynamics of the West–East transfer of technology, and to recast the agency of different socialist automotive enterprises (such as Polski Fiat, Dacia or Škoda).

Building on this expanding scholarship and starting from the case of the Braşov Tractor Factory (Uzina Tractorul Brasov), the present conference explores the globalization of the state socialist automotive industry (and as such of the East-West cooperation) on a different scale of analysis, focusing on the globalization strategies of the ECE and Western European automobile enterprises and on their (often joint) ventures into the Global South, before and after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc. The reunion aims to map and discuss different sides of this story, to explore the dynamics of the globalization strategies of the socialist automotive enterprises, in the interpretative framework built under the global and postcolonial historiography. We'll explore questions such as:

- Socialist automotive industry in the developing world: products, enterprises & markets
- Socialist automotive enterprises: export strategies & export solutions
- Economic diplomacy, (in)formal practices and strategies to secure contracts
- Mechanized agriculture in the Eastern Bloc and the developing countries
- Postcolonial planning & automotive industry, state-led mechanization campaigns
- Joint ventures (socialist & Western automotive) in the Global South
- Local knowledge, local experts, local enterprises: circulation of experts and expertise
- Licensing agreements & Assembly lines
- European cooperation in automotive industry across the Iron Curtain: integration of state socialist automotive enterprises into global trade, supply chains and production networks

The conference language is English. Proposals may address, but are not limited to, the abovementioned questions. Contributors should send an abstract of 200-300 words outlining their proposal, together with a short bio of 200 words (in a single document), until **30th of June 2026**. All proposals should be submitted as email attachments to corina.dobos@totalitarism.ro and secretariat@totalitarism.ro. For questions regarding the conference or submissions, please contact the organizers at corina.dobos@totalitarism.ro.

The conference is a hybrid event, organized by the National Institute for the Study of Totalitarianism of the Romanian Academy (www.totalitarism.ro) in cooperation with the Villa Noel-CEREFREA of the University of Bucharest (<https://villanoel.unibuc.ro>), within the research project *Managing productivity challenges: a glocal story of Braşov in late socialism (GloBv.)*, <https://sites.google.com/view/globv/home>. The organizers can offer accommodation for eligible participants (subject to available funding).

The deadline for abstract & bio submission: **June 30, 2026.**

Notification of acceptance: July 10, 2026.

Conference date: October 5-6, 2026

Venue: Villa Noel-CEREFREA, 6 Émile Zola Street, Bucharest.