

Cultural Legacies and Innovation Barriers: Comparative Lessons from Post-Soviet Research Institutions for American Innovation Policy

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This paper examines the lasting effects of the so-called “*homo sovieticus*” mentality on innovation ecosystems in post-Soviet countries, with particular focus on research institutions in East Central Europe and offering a cautionary perspective for American research institutions facing their own emerging threats to innovation. The term *homo sovieticus* has been both embraced and contested as a framework for understanding post-communist cultural legacies. While some scholars argue it oversimplifies complex historical patterns that predate communism, the concept remains valuable for examining how specific attitudinal syndromes developed under communism continue to shape institutional behaviors decades after transition. Drawing on both recent literature on this malleable concept and my own first-hand interviews with technology transfer offices across Slovak universities, my analysis reveals how deeply embedded cultural factors—including hierarchical power structures, risk aversion, and resistance to open collaboration—continue to impede innovation despite significant investments in research infrastructure.

Through comparative analysis, this research identifies parallel concerns emerging within American research institutions, where changing political landscapes threaten to introduce similar structural and cultural impediments to innovation. While the American and post-Soviet contexts differ substantially in their historical development, the similarities in emerging patterns of research constraint, funding politicization, and limitations on academic freedom suggest common vulnerabilities in innovation ecosystems when open exchange and institutional autonomy are compromised.

The findings suggest that successful innovation ecosystems depend not merely on financial investment and technical capacity, but on cultural foundations that encourage risk-taking, protect researcher autonomy, and facilitate knowledge exchange across institutional and national boundaries. By examining the struggles of post-Soviet research institutions to overcome cultural legacies that stall and at times inhibit innovation, this paper offers a cautionary perspective for American policymakers and academic leaders on protecting the cultural foundations that have historically supported American research excellence and technological leadership.

¹ Marquette University Law School. This research was supported by a 2024-2025 U.S. Scholar Fulbright Grant to Slovakia (Comenius University, Faculty of Law & Institute of IT & IP). The views, findings, and conclusions expressed in this paper are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Fulbright Program, the U.S. Department of State, or any partner institutions.