***Citizen Diplomacy***

***A Project of Soviet-American Exchange and Understanding in the 1970s and 1980s***

In the past two decades the history of the Cold War, which was always dominated by political scientists, has become a topic of cultural history, maybe because some of this history is currently returning. There is still an imbalance with respect to the Soviet side of Cold War historiography. Although there have been several recent publications on the history of science, the technology and culture of the Soviet Cold War period, sociocultural aspects, the history of perception between confrontation and cooperation on both sides of the superpowers, including comparative perspectives, all are still widely unknown.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, thousands of American citizens began to establish personal relations with citizens of the Soviet Union; beyond the frozen relations of official diplomacy they wanted to get to know the face of the enemy, *the Evil Empire* according to president Reagan*,* for which effort the term of *Citizen Diplomacy* was found. The *Space Bridges* (1982-1989), the first live-encounters of Soviet and American people made possible by satellite technology, became a new format of direct communication. But numerous contacts and projects, private as well as institutional, developed among people of all social strata of both superpowers. Scientists and businessmen, artists and journalists, private persons and diplomats were equally involved in this network, which in 1985 comprised already more than 230 organizations. The projects ranged from book fairs of independent publishers in Moscow to encounters of writers, physicians, sportsmen and parapsychologists. They included Soviet-American youth-theatre performances, Rock-concerts and alternative Olympic games, as well as the first personal meetings of Soviet cosmonauts and American astronauts. Playing a leading role in this was the California Esalen-Institute, a private center of the *Human Potential Movement*, experimenting with alternative holistic ways of life, while also scientifically exploring them, aiming at social change. In 1980, under the name of *Track II*, the *Soviet-American Exchange Program* was founded at Esalen, which was followed by the *Soviet-American Physicians Group* and the *Association of Space Explorers.* Perhaps the most visible successful projects of this program, which lasted until 2004, and in reduced form still continues, were the invitation and arrangements for Boris Yeltzin’s first journey to America in 1989, who would later become the first president of Russia, the consolidation of American astronauts and Soviet cosmonauts, and preparation for the Soviets to enter the international PEN-Center for writers.

Within the past decade the *Citizen Diplomacy Archive Project* has managed to integrate the majority of more than 100 private archives, under the leadership of Anatol Shmelev, which has been integrated into the Hoover Library of Stanford University and thus made accessible for scholarly research.

My research project is to reconstruct the hitherto unknown history of the Soviet-American relations of *citizen diplomacy* from the American as well as the Russian side. The study of both sides with the eyes of a German opens up a third perspective of a participating observer, open and critical to both sides. Also, this trifocal analysis shall be grounded with empirical material and enriched by present day interviews with former participants lending the project a topical dimension. By this way, questions of continuity and changes with relation to present initiatives of Citizen Diplomacy will be addressed. Conversations with former participants of events and projects in California and in Moscow present some evidence for the assumption that that this cooperation was an early form of democratic engagement for many participants reaching out into present day activities. The question whether and if so how far this cooperation which is forgotten or invisible today has had a long-term impact, will only be answered after the history of Citizen Diplomacy has been written. The project of its reconstruction is seen as a contribution to the culturally entangled history of the Cold War and options to overcome the conflicts, but it can also be seen as a contribution to intercultural, transdisciplinary Russian Studies.