
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Between Federal Frameworks: The Slovak and Serbian Dimensions of Czechoslovak–Yugoslav Academic and Cultural Relations during Late Socialism

Ivana Čirić

The Nikola Tesla Museum, Serbia

Corresponding Author: Ivana Čirić, **E-mail:** ivana.ciric@tesla-museum.org

| ABSTRACT

This article examines the cultural, scientific, and historiographical dimensions of cooperation between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia during the late socialist period, with particular attention to the 1980s. Although the institutional and political framework examined is formally that of two federal socialist states—the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR) and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ)—the analysis concentrates on the Slovak and Serbian dimensions of this bilateral relationship. This focus reflects the available archival evidence: the study draws primarily on the fond *Riadiace orgány SAV I* at the Central Archive of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava, which documents Slovak institutional participation in bilateral cooperation, and on Fond 465 of the Archives of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, whose holdings predominantly reflect the activities of Serbian-based federal institutions. The article reconstructs the institutional architecture, intellectual ambitions, and practical limitations of bilateral scholarly exchange across three interrelated domains: scientific-technical cooperation, cultural diplomacy through joint programmes and museum networks, and historiographical collaboration through the Czechoslovak–Yugoslav Commission of Historians. The study argues that these frameworks simultaneously served scholarly, ideological, and diplomatic purposes, and that formal institutional inclusion within inter-academic agreements was the decisive factor determining the depth of bilateral scholarly relations in this period.

| KEYWORDS

Slovakia; Serbia; Czechoslovakia; Yugoslavia; cultural cooperation; historiography; Slovak Academy of Sciences; Archives of Yugoslavia; late socialism; Commission of Historians; federal frameworks; socialist internationalism

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 12 December 2025 **PUBLISHED:** 29 December 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61424/ijah.v3i3.900>

1. Introduction

The relationship between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia during the socialist era constitutes a distinctive and underexplored chapter in the broader history of East European interstate relations. Yugoslavia's non-aligned political position, its model of workers' self-management, and its federal multi-ethnic structure made it a singular interlocutor for the states of the Soviet bloc. Yet the two countries maintained extensive cooperative frameworks across science, technology, culture, and historical scholarship throughout the postwar decades—frameworks whose workings can now be reconstructed in detail through archival sources that have not previously received systematic scholarly attention (McDermott & Stibbe, 2022; Wolchik, 1991).

A methodological clarification is essential at the outset. Although this article is situated within the formal diplomatic and legal context of Czechoslovak–Yugoslav bilateral relations, the analysis concentrates wherever possible on the Slovak and Serbian dimensions of this relationship rather than treating either federal state as a homogeneous actor.

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This focus reflects the composition of the available archival evidence. The primary Slovak source, the fond *Riadiace orgány SAV I* at the Central Archive of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (ÚASAV) in Bratislava, documents the activities of Slovak institutions and scholars operating within—and often negotiating with—the broader federal Czechoslovak framework. The primary Yugoslav source, Fond 465 of the Archives of Yugoslavia (AJ) in Belgrade, predominantly captures the perspective of Serbian-staffed federal institutions operating from Belgrade, which served as the principal administrative center for bilateral cooperation on the Yugoslav side.

This dual focus responds to a broader historiographical problem. Studies of Czechoslovak–Yugoslav relations have tended to treat both states as unitary actors, obscuring the degree to which republican and institutional particularity shaped the practical conduct of cooperation. By attending specifically to Slovak institutions, scholars, and cultural actors as the Slovak component of the Czechoslovak federal framework, and to Serbian-based institutions as the primary Yugoslav interlocutors, this article attempts a more granular and analytically precise reconstruction of bilateral scholarly and cultural exchange. The relationship between the federal framework and the republican level of participation is not merely a methodological caveat but a substantive finding: the asymmetry between formal political agreements and actual institutional participation defined much of the practical experience of cooperation during this period (McDermott & Stibbe, 2022; Renner, 1989; Skilling, 1991).

Although the institutional and political framework examined in this article was formally that of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, many of the archival sources and documented cooperative activities relate specifically to institutions located in Serbia, particularly in Belgrade. Consequently, the analysis pays particular attention to the Serbian dimension of Yugoslav participation in scholarly and cultural exchanges. This distinction matters because the federal Yugoslav framework often obscures the role played by individual republics and their institutions in shaping international academic and cultural cooperation.

The article is organized around three principal thematic domains: formal scientific-technical cooperation, cultural and artistic exchange, and historiographical collaboration through bilateral historian commissions. A concluding section situates the evidence within the wider context of socialist normalization and cultural transformation in the late 1980s. Throughout, the analysis attends to the structural relationship between ideological instrumentalization and genuine scholarly productivity—a tension that defined academic life across the socialist bloc during this period (Bren & Neuburger, 2012; Kiliánová, 2017).

2. Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Scientific-Technical Cooperation

Cooperation between Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia rested on a formal legal architecture that evolved across several decades. The foundational instrument was the Agreement on Scientific and Technical Cooperation between the governments of the SFRJ and the ČSSR, signed on 3 July 1956 (AJ, Fond 465, Fascicle 15). This agreement established the basic institutional framework within which all subsequent cooperative activities were situated. It was supplemented in 1978 by the Agreement on the General Conditions for the Implementation of Scientific-Technical Cooperation, which provided more detailed procedural guidance for joint projects.

The administrative coordination of scientific-technical cooperation fell to the Mixed Commission for Scientific-Technical Cooperation, operating as a working body of the broader Mixed Committee for Economic and Scientific-Technical Cooperation. On the Yugoslav side, this commission was staffed and administered predominantly through institutions located in Belgrade, reflecting Serbia's central administrative role within the Yugoslav federal structure. On the Czechoslovak side, Slovak institutions participated within a framework formally coordinated from Prague, a structural arrangement that would create recurring tensions regarding the degree to which Slovak scholarly and institutional priorities were adequately represented at the federal level (AJ, Fond 465, Fascicle 15; Archival Unit 2799 [43]).

The archival records in Fond 465 document the functioning of this commission through planned development cycles: cooperation was organized in successive five-year plans, and after 1980 a discernible shift occurred toward long-term institutional forms involving direct linkages between enterprises and research centers (AJ, Fond 465,

Fascicle 15; Archival Unit 2799 [43]). A significant institutional moment was the visit of J. Obzina, Vice President of the Czechoslovak Government, to Yugoslavia in October 1980, during which the Czechoslovak side proposed amendments to the 1956 agreement with the aim of establishing a more efficient legal framework (AJ, Fond 465, Fascicle 15). The proposed revisions reflected a broader recognition that the original agreement required modernization to accommodate the increasingly complex demands of an interconnected socialist research environment (Wolchik, 1991).

Despite this ambitious legal architecture, the archival record reveals significant administrative difficulties. A memorandum by M. Peševski dated 26 February 1987 identified persistent inconsistencies between responsible institutions and noted inefficiency in the implementation of certain cooperation programmes (AJ, Fond 465, Fascicle 15, Memorandum of M. Peševski, 26 February 1987). The Agreement on Scientific-Technical Cooperation for the period 1986–1990 encompassed 180 topics across 14 fields, placing considerable strain on available personnel and organizational capacities. The correspondence of A. Pavlović from January and February 1987 illuminates the bureaucratic complexity involved in sustaining these frameworks (AJ, Fond 465, Fascicle 15; Archival Unit 2799 [43]).

The 30th session of the Mixed Yugoslav–Czechoslovak Commission for Scientific-Technical Cooperation, held in Skopje from 22 to 24 October 1986, addressed many of these challenges directly. Pavlović's report of 25 December 1986 provides a detailed account of the discussions held during that session and reveals the persistent gap between institutional aspiration and operational reality that characterized the final years of socialist bilateral cooperation (AJ, Fond 465, Fascicle 15). The challenges documented in these later records point toward the broader institutional exhaustion that would accelerate toward the end of the decade.

3. Cultural Diplomacy, Museums, and Artistic Exchange

Alongside scientific-technical cooperation, the archival materials document an extensive programme of cultural relations between Yugoslav and Czechoslovak—and more specifically, Serbian and Slovak—institutions. The key instrument was the Programme of Cultural Cooperation between the SFRJ and the ČSSR for the period 1980–1982, signed in Belgrade on 8 February 1980 (AJ, Fond 465, Archival Unit 2800 [44]). This programme established the formal basis for exchanges in art, theatre, literature, music, and museum activity. The Yugoslav delegation included Darinka Zimić, head of department at the Federal Institute for International Scientific, Educational, Cultural and Technical Cooperation in Belgrade, who specifically proposed a separate agreement on cooperation between fine artists of the two countries.

The cultural dimension of bilateral cooperation was conceived as ideologically significant from the outset. A memorandum from the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Socialist Republic dated 14 February 1982 stated that the task of socialist culture was 'the systematic formation of the socialist citizen through coordinated educational, artistic, and commemorative activities in accordance with the principles of Marxism-Leninism' (Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Socialist Republic, Circular No. 17/1982, Slovak National Archive, Bratislava). This ideological framing was common to both federal states and shaped the selection of cultural content approved for bilateral exchange. However, within this shared ideological vocabulary, Slovak institutions within Czechoslovakia operated according to their own institutional priorities, cultural traditions, and administrative relationships, just as Serbian institutions within Yugoslavia brought their own institutional perspectives to the cooperative activities they coordinated (Kiliánová, 2017).

In practice, cultural exchange frequently occurred in conditions of institutional ambiguity and ideological surveillance. Archival materials from the Slovak National Gallery—a Slovak institution within the Czechoslovak framework—reveal that curators regularly negotiated with ideological commissions regarding exhibition content; a 1985 internal report explicitly noted concerns regarding 'excessive formal experimentation' in contemporary visual art exhibitions (Archive of the Slovak National Gallery, Exhibition Committee Records, 1985). Theatre was subject to comparable scrutiny: an internal review from the Cultural Commission of Bratislava in 1984 criticized one production for presenting 'an excessively pessimistic interpretation of socialist social relations and insufficient ideological

optimism' (Bratislava Municipal Cultural Commission Records, 1984, Slovak National Archive). These examples illuminate the specific conditions under which the Slovak component of Czechoslovak cultural diplomacy operated.

Ćirić Pavlović (2020) has emphasized that cultural memory institutions in socialist Yugoslavia and East-Central Europe frequently negotiated between official ideological narratives and the preservation of minority cultural heritage, particularly in relation to Jewish collections, archival material, and memorial practices. Her further analysis underscores that archival and exhibition practices connected to Jewish heritage became spaces through which questions of identity, trauma, and cultural continuity were renegotiated after decades of ideological framing (Ćirić Pavlović, 2021). These observations apply with particular force to the Serbian and Yugoslav side of the bilateral cultural relationship, where the management of multiethnic cultural heritage—including Jewish, Hungarian, and other minority heritages—constituted a permanent institutional challenge within the federal Yugoslav framework.

The library sector provides a complementary lens on cultural dynamics in this period. A report from the Slovak State Library in 1987 noted increasing public demand for contemporary foreign literature and philosophical texts, reflecting the growing distance between the preferences of Slovak audiences and the prescriptions of official cultural policy (Slovak State Library Archive, Annual Reader Statistics Report, 1987). Beňušková (2021, p. 18) has noted that 'civil ceremonies in socialist Czechoslovakia represented an attempt to create ideologically appropriate alternatives to religious ritual while simultaneously preserving collective social cohesion'—a dynamic evident in the joint commemorative events that formed a regular component of the bilateral cultural programme.

From the 1960s onward, Slovak libraries introduced automated approaches to bibliographic processing and cataloguing. During the 1970s, Slovakia became one of the first countries within the former socialist bloc to implement an automated bibliographic system through Matica slovenská, and the development of the Integrated Library and Information System (IKIS) during the 1980s brought emerging information technologies to the management of Slovak cultural collections (Steinerová et al., 2010). These technical modernizations, while embedded within the broader Czechoslovak federal framework, reflected specifically Slovak institutional priorities and capacities.

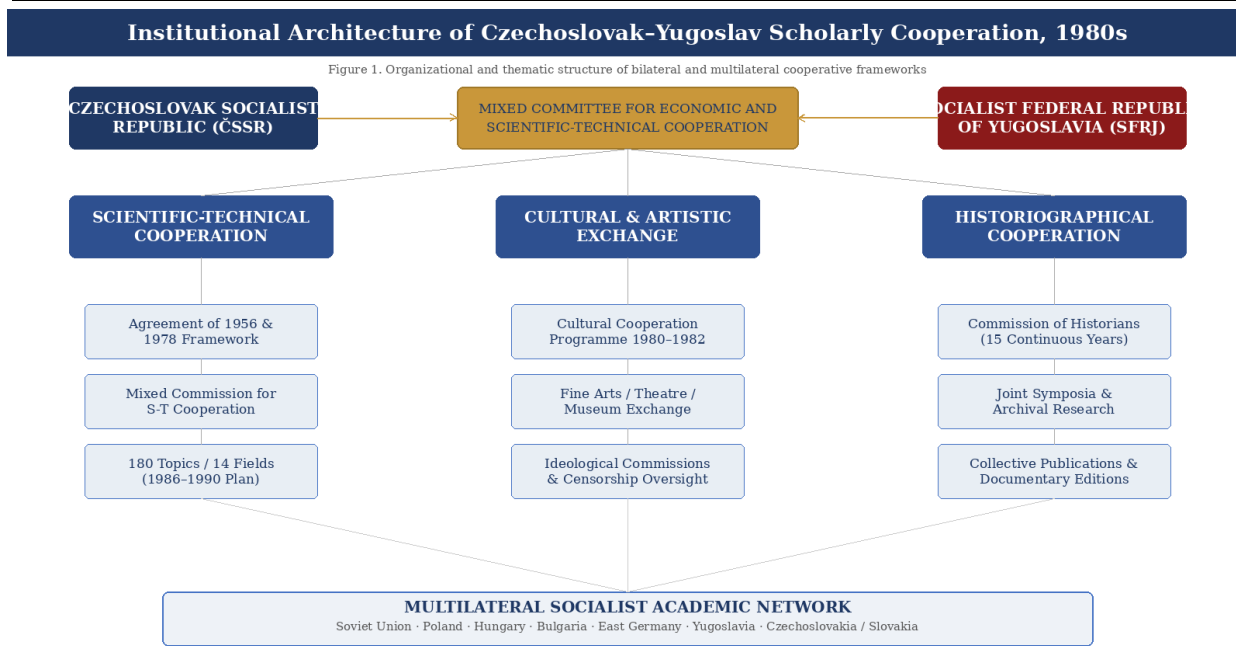


Figure 1. Organizational architecture of Czechoslovak–Yugoslav scholarly and cultural cooperative frameworks during the 1980s, highlighting the Slovak and Serbian institutional dimensions within their respective federal frameworks.

Sources: AJ, Fond 465; ÚASAV, Fond RO SAV I.

4. Historiographical Cooperation and the Commission of Historians

Perhaps the most intellectually productive domain of cooperation was the work of the Joint Commission of Historians, which brought together academic historians from both countries for regular symposia, archival research exchanges, and collaborative publications. By the period under examination, the commission had been operating continuously for fifteen years, generating substantial scholarly output (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033, č. kr. 2480–139). Although formally constituted as a Czechoslovak–Yugoslav body, the commission's Slovak dimension was prominent and, as the archival record makes clear, largely self-organized: Slovak historians within the Czechoslovak delegation played leading roles in shaping the commission's scholarly agenda, managing its organizational logistics, and producing its research outputs.

The Slovak component of the Czechoslovak commission was anchored at the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (ÚDESK SAV) in Bratislava. Professor Jozef Hrozičiek led the Slovak section, with V. Bystrický serving as secretary. Among the key Slovak historians involved were Miroslav Kropilák, Kvetoslava Kučerová, L. Deák, P. Ratkoš, and Milan Krajčovič, each contributing to both the organizational and intellectual dimensions of the commission's work (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, Correspondence of J. Hrozičiek, October 1980). Their Yugoslav counterparts were drawn primarily from Serbian and Croatian institutions: the Historical Institute of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade, the Institute for Croatian History at the University of Zagreb, and the State Archives in Zagreb.

The 14th session of the commission, which took place in Yugoslavia in 1980, offers a detailed record of how these scholarly exchanges functioned in practice. Kučerová's official report on her research visit from 29 September to 8 October 1980 documents the delegation's activities across several Yugoslav cities and institutions (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033, č. kr. 2480–139, Report of K. Kučerová, 1980). The delegation visited the Historical Institute of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Institute for Croatian History at the University of Zagreb, the State Archives in Zagreb, and the Institute for the History of the Workers' Movement. Kučerová records meetings with prominent Yugoslav historians including Nikola Petrovič and Todor Stojkov from Belgrade, and I. Kampuš, J.

Adamček, and academician Ljubo Boban from Zagreb—illustrating the degree to which both Serbian and Croatian scholarly institutions were engaged as partners in these exchanges.

The symposium organized during this visit focused on the theme: 'Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia from 1929 until the collapse of the bourgeois social, political, and economic systems.' The Yugoslav side prepared presentations on the beginnings of the national liberation movement among Yugoslav peoples, while the Czechoslovak side—represented in practice chiefly by Slovak historians participating in the Czechoslovak delegation—oriented its contributions toward the approaching 60th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The papers were evaluated as of high scholarly quality, contributing meaningfully to the clarification of historical relations between the two countries after the First World War (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033, č. kr. 2480–139, Report of K. Kučerová, 1980).

A recurring and important concern in the archival documentation involves the formal institutional inclusion of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in inter-academic agreements between Czechoslovak and Yugoslav academies. The official institutional report for 1980 states directly that cooperation during that year was unsatisfactory because no research visits to Yugoslavia had been realized, identifying as the principal obstacle the exclusion of the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences from the formal inter-academic agreements governing archival access and research visits (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033, č. kr. 2480–139). This finding is significant: it reveals that the gap between the federal Czechoslovak level—at which formal agreements with Yugoslav academies were concluded—and the Slovak republican level—at which much of the actual scholarly interest in Yugoslav history was concentrated—had direct and damaging consequences for research.

The report identified three researchers at the Institute of History directly engaged in projects dealing with Yugoslav history and Czechoslovak–Yugoslav relations, and emphasized that the lack of institutional access negatively affected the quality and pace of their work. As a pragmatic interim measure, it proposed extending the duration of Yugoslav scholars' research visits to Czechoslovakia from seven to fourteen days in order to provide a measure of reciprocity while formal institutional inclusion was sought (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033, č. kr. 2480–139). The fact that this problem required such a workaround is itself revealing of the structural asymmetry between the federal framework and the Slovak institutional experience.

The correspondence from October and November 1980, written by Jozef Hrozičák to Vladimír Cirbes and to Štefan Krivuš of Matica slovenská respectively, documents preparations for the 15th session of the commission, planned for 1981 in Smolenice and Martin, Slovakia (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, Correspondence of J. Hrozičák, October and November 1980). The choice of Martin—the home of Matica slovenská, the oldest Slovak cultural institution—as a co-venue was not incidental: it reflected the Slovak historians' intention to frame the commission's activities within the context of Slovak cultural memory and national scholarly tradition, not merely the broader Czechoslovak federal framework.

5. Overview of Cooperative Frameworks

Table 1 provides a systematic overview of the principal cooperative frameworks, institutions, archival sources, and outputs documented in this study. Institutional affiliations are specified at both the federal and republican level wherever the available sources permit, in order to reflect the article's methodological emphasis on the Slovak and Serbian dimensions of bilateral cooperation.

Table 1. *Principal domains of Slovak–Serbian scholarly and cultural cooperation within Czechoslovak–Yugoslav federal frameworks, 1956–1990.*

Domain of Cooperation	Key Institutions	Period	Key Archival Source	Main Scholarly / Policy Output
Scientific-Technical Cooperation	Federal Institute for International Cooperation, Belgrade (Serbian staff); Mixed Commission for Scientific-Technical Cooperation	1956–1990	AJ, Fond 465, Fascicle 15; Archival Units 2799–2800	Agreement on Scientific-Technical Cooperation (1956, revised 1978); 180 joint research topics across 14 fields (1986–1990 Plan)
Cultural and Artistic Exchange	Ministry of Culture, Slovak SR; Slovak National Gallery (Bratislava); Federal Institute, Belgrade; Darinka Zimić (Yugoslav/Serbian delegation)	1980–1989	AJ, Fond 465, Archival Unit 2800 (44); Slovak National Archive, Bratislava	Cultural Cooperation Programme, SFRJ–ČSSR, 1980–1982; joint fine arts, theatre, and museum exchanges between Slovak and Serbian institutions
Historiographical Cooperation (Commission of Historians)	Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences (Bratislava); Historical Institute, Yugoslav Academy of Sciences and Arts (Belgrade/Zagreb); Institute for Croatian History, Zagreb	1965–1985 (15 continuous years)	ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033–5036; Reports of K. Kučerová and J. Hrozičnik (1980)	Fifteen joint symposia; Collective Security in the Past and Present (1977); Studies in the History of World Slavdom (1979); signed protocols (1980, 1981)
Multilateral Socialist Academic Networks	Slovak Academy of Sciences (Bratislava); Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (Prague); Yugoslav institutes (predominantly Belgrade-based); Soviet, Hungarian, Polish, Bulgarian, East German	1970–1989	ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5036, č. kr. 2481; Record 121 II 4	Long-term Programme of Multilateral Cooperation (1981–1985); comparative projects on socialist law, self-management, and constitutional systems

Domain of Cooperation	Key Institutions	Period	Key Archival Source	Main Scholarly / Policy Output
	institutes			
Library Modernization and Information Cooperation	Matica slovenská, Martin; Slovak State Library; Czech-Slovak Library Information Network (CASLIN)	1960s–1990s	Slovak State Library Archive, Annual Reader Statistics Report, 1987	Automated Bibliographic System (IKIS, 1980s); Czech-Slovak Library Information Network (CASLIN); regional cooperative system KOLIN

Note. AJ = Archives of Yugoslavia (Belgrade); ÚASAV = Central Archive of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Bratislava); ČSSR = Czechoslovak Socialist Republic; SFRJ = Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Institutional affiliations at the republican level (Slovak/Serbian) are indicated where the archival record permits.

6. The Commission of Historians: Documented Sessions and Outputs

Table 2 below provides a detailed record of the Commission of Historians' documented sessions and their principal outcomes, based on the archival sources examined in this study. The table distinguishes, wherever the evidence allows, between the Slovak component of the Czechoslovak delegation and the Yugoslav participants drawn from Serbian and Croatian institutions. This distinction is important because it reveals that what was formally constituted as a Czechoslovak–Yugoslav commission was in practice often a Slovak–Serbian and Slovak–Croatian scholarly exchange, shaped by the specific archival interests, institutional cultures, and professional networks of scholars from these republican contexts (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033–5036; Hrozičnik correspondence, 1980).

Table 2. Documented sessions and scholarly outputs of the Czechoslovak–Yugoslav Commission of Historians (Slovak and Serbian/Croatian dimensions), 1977–1981.

Session	Year / Venue	Symposium Theme	Key Slovak Participants	Documented Outcomes
14th	1980, Stubičke Toplice and Zagreb, Yugoslavia (Serbian/Croatian institutions)	Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia from 1929 until the collapse of the bourgeois social, political, and economic systems	K. Kučerová, J. Hrozičnik, V. Bystrický, M. Krajčovič (Slovak historians within the Czechoslovak delegation)	Signed protocol (5 October 1980); agreement to pursue formal Slovak Academy inclusion in inter-academic agreements; archival research in Croatian State Archives
15th (planned)	1981, Smolenice and Martin, Slovakia (Czechoslovakia)	Economic, political, and social questions of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia from 1929 to the collapse of the bourgeois	J. Hrozičnik (chair), M. Kropilák, K. Kučerová, L. Deák, P. Ratkoš, M. Krajčovič (Slovak component of the	Planned proceedings volume; venue request at Matica slovenská, Martin; excursion to Slovak National Uprising

Session	Year / Venue	Symposium Theme	Key Slovak Participants	Documented Outcomes
		political system; linked to 60th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia	Czechoslovak commission)	memorial sites; approximately 60 historians expected
Multilateral, 1977	1977, multilateral (socialist countries)	Collective security and socialist international relations in historical perspective	Institute of History, Slovak Academy of Sciences (multiple contributors representing the Slovak component)	Collective Security in the Past and Present (1977): contributions from nine scholars across socialist countries, including Yugoslav participants
Multilateral, 1979	1979, multilateral (seven countries)	History of World Slavdom to the mid-nineteenth century	Czech, Slovak, Soviet, Polish, Yugoslav, Bulgarian, and East German Slavists	Studies in the History of World Slavdom until the Mid-Nineteenth Century (1979): seven-country collaborative volume
Congress preparation, 1980	1980, Bucharest (International Congress of Historical Sciences)	Socialist internationalism, Soviet relations, Yugoslav peoples, and Slavic history	V. Bystrický, D. Čierna, K. Kučerová (Slovak historians representing Czechoslovakia)	Package of Slovak scholarly publications submitted to the International Congress; scholarly and ideological representation of Czechoslovak socialist historiography at a major international forum

Note. Sources: ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033–5036; Official Reports of K. Kučerová (1980) and J. Hroziencič (October–November 1980); Letter of 26 March 1980 regarding International Congress of Historical Sciences, Bucharest. Slovak participants are identified as the Slovak component of the formally Czechoslovak delegation.

The tensions between ideological instrumentalization and genuine intellectual exchange visible in Table 2 were not contradictions to be resolved but structural features of socialist academic diplomacy that persisted throughout the period. The commission functioned simultaneously as a scholarly forum and as a vehicle for cultural diplomacy, a dual identity that shaped both the topics it addressed and the manner in which its outputs were framed and received (McDermott & Stibbe, 2022; Skilling, 1991). Crucially, the Slovak historians who dominated the

Czechoslovak side of these exchanges were not simply representatives of a unitary Czechoslovak scholarly tradition: they brought to the commission specifically Slovak historical concerns, archives, and interpretive perspectives, which found their natural counterparts in the specifically Serbian and Croatian scholarly traditions represented by their Yugoslav interlocutors.

7. Multilateral Frameworks and Yugoslavia's Distinctive Position

Bilateral Czechoslovak–Yugoslav cooperation did not exist in isolation but was embedded within a broader architecture of multilateral socialist academic exchange. The research-planning documents preserved in the Central Archive of the Slovak Academy of Sciences reveal a dense network of collaborative projects connecting the Slovak Academy—as the Slovak republican component within the broader Czechoslovak academic framework—with historical and legal research institutes across the Soviet bloc (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5036, č. kr. 2481).

Yugoslavia's participation in these multilateral frameworks was notable given its non-aligned political status. The documents indicate that Yugoslav institutions—predominantly those based in Belgrade and therefore reflecting the Serbian institutional presence within the federal Yugoslav academy—were active partners in several major comparative research programmes. These included studies on problems of socialist state and law, constitutional development and federalism, socio-economic development of socialist countries, and—most distinctively—questions of management and self-management in socialist society (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5036, č. kr. 2481). This last theme was directly connected to Yugoslavia's unique model of workers' self-management, which attracted sustained scholarly attention from across the socialist academic world precisely because it represented an alternative to Soviet-style centralized socialism (Bren & Neuburger, 2012).

The Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences participated in an international research framework focused on the 'World Socialist System,' with researchers from several socialist countries collaborating within specialized working groups. Professor Hrozičák served on an international commission dealing with the history of the October Revolution and socialist revolutions in Central and Southeastern Europe, and in 1980 prepared an assessment of a collective publication on this theme for a meeting of vice presidents of academies of sciences from socialist countries (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033, č. kr. 2480–139).

Important publications resulted from this multilateral cooperation. Among the collective scholarly works produced through these institutional networks were *Collective Security in the Past and Present* (1977), including contributions from nine foreign scholars from socialist countries, and *Studies in the History of World Slavdom until the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (1979), bringing together Czech, Slovak, Soviet, Polish, Yugoslav, Bulgarian, and German Slavists (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033, č. kr. 2480–139). These publications represented genuine scholarly achievement alongside their function as performative demonstrations of socialist internationalism.

The Slovak Academy's international cooperation also extended to bilateral commissions with Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany, Poland, and the Soviet Union. Major conferences documented in the archival record addressed topics including the general crisis of capitalism in Central Europe, the place of Munich in the histories of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, the 60th anniversary of the Slovak Soviet Republic, the 30th anniversary of the Victorious February, and the 1000th anniversary of the liberation of Bulgaria (ÚASAV, fond RO SAV I, Record 121 II 4). Slovak researchers from the Institute participated not only as delegates but as organizers, speakers, and authors, consistently representing the Slovak component of the Czechoslovak academic contribution to socialist multilateral scholarship.

8. The Late 1980s: Institutional Strain and Cultural Transformation

By the late 1980s, the cooperative structures analyzed in this article were experiencing pressures that reflected broader shifts in both Czechoslovak and Yugoslav societies. The administrative difficulties documented in the 1987 memoranda were symptomatic of a wider institutional exhaustion, in which the ambitious cooperative frameworks of the early 1980s had generated organizational burdens that existing structures could no longer sustain (Renner, 1989). The gap between the formal federal frameworks—within which both Slovak and Serbian institutions operated—and the actual capacities and interests of those institutions was becoming increasingly visible.

In the cultural domain, the relationship between official ideology and actual cultural practice was becoming increasingly strained. A 1988 report from the Socialist Youth Union expressed concern regarding 'the excessive fascination of young people with Western consumerist aesthetics and individualistic lifestyles' (Socialist Youth Union Report, 1988, Slovak National Archive)—a formulation that acknowledged the degree to which Slovak cultural audiences had developed preferences diverging from official norms. By March 1989, an internal Ministry of Culture report acknowledged declining public participation in officially organized ideological events and noted the increasing popularity of independent cultural initiatives (Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Socialist Republic, Internal Evaluation Report, March 1989). These developments, rooted in the specific conditions of Slovak society within the broader Czechoslovak federal structure, had their parallels in the Yugoslav republics, where the relationship between federal cultural policy and republican cultural life was equally complex.

Bren and Neuburger (2012) have argued that the relationship between socialist citizens and consumer culture was far more complex than official discourse acknowledged, with consumption serving as a site of both conformity and subtle resistance to socialist norms. The Slovak and Yugoslav cases confirm this observation: cultural audiences in both countries developed sophisticated strategies for navigating between official cultural provision and their own preferences, strategies that became increasingly visible as the decade progressed and as the political authority of federal socialist institutions weakened.

Kiliánová (2017) has observed that Slovak ethnology in this period occupied an ambiguous position between engagement with official ideological frameworks and the maintenance of disciplinary integrity, a tension resolved only gradually after 1989. The same structural ambiguity characterized historical scholarship, archival research, and museum practice in both countries. The Commission of Historians was simultaneously a genuine scholarly forum and an instrument of ideological representation, and the archival evidence does not support treating either function as merely subordinate to the other.

The Velvet Revolution of November 1989 marked the formal end of communist political authority in Czechoslovakia, while Yugoslavia's disintegration unfolded across the following years. Many of the cultural and institutional transformations that defined the post-socialist period had already been developing quietly during the preceding decade. The 1980s therefore represented not merely the final phase of socialist normalization but also an incubation period for the cultural and institutional alternatives that would emerge after 1989 (McDermott & Stibbe, 2022; Skilling, 1991). For Slovak institutions within Czechoslovakia, the post-1989 transformation would bring a new set of questions about the relationship between republican and federal frameworks—questions that the dissolution of the federation in 1993 would ultimately resolve in the creation of an independent Slovak state.

The implications of 1989 for the cooperative structures documented in this article are complex. The formal bilateral frameworks between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia ceased to exist as both federations dissolved. However, many of the scholarly relationships, archival connections, and institutional networks that had been built through fifteen years of Commission of Historians activity and decades of cultural cooperation did not simply disappear. They transformed, gradually and unevenly, into new forms of scholarly exchange between independent Slovak and successor Yugoslav states—a transformation that lies beyond the scope of the present study but which the archival evidence examined here helps to illuminate.

9. Conclusion

The archival record of Czechoslovak–Yugoslav cultural, scientific, and historiographical cooperation during late socialism reveals a relationship that was simultaneously more productive and more problematic than either its official representations or its subsequent neglect in the scholarly literature would suggest. The cooperative frameworks established through bilateral legal agreements, joint historian commissions, cultural exchange programmes, and multilateral academic networks generated genuine scholarly output and created durable institutional connections across more than three decades of sustained engagement. As this article has argued, however, an accurate understanding of these frameworks requires attention to the republican and institutional

dimensions of cooperation—specifically, the Slovak and Serbian dimensions—that are obscured when Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia are treated as unitary actors.

The analysis demonstrates that the formally Czechoslovak–Yugoslav relationship was in practice substantially shaped by Slovak institutions, scholars, and cultural actors on one side, and by Serbian-staffed federal institutions based in Belgrade on the other. This finding is not merely a methodological observation: it speaks to the fundamental tension between federal frameworks and republican realities that characterized both socialist states throughout the period under examination. Slovak institutions within Czechoslovakia repeatedly encountered the consequences of operating within a federal framework that prioritized Prague-based coordination, while Serbian institutions within Yugoslavia occupied a position of federal centrality—as the headquarters of federal cultural and scientific coordination—that was itself contested by other Yugoslav republics.

A particularly significant finding concerns the decisive role of formal institutional inclusion in determining the depth and sustainability of bilateral scholarly cooperation. The difficulties experienced by the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in accessing Yugoslav archives and establishing regular research exchanges were directly attributable to its exclusion from the formal inter-academic agreements governing such access (ÚSAV, fond RO SAV I, inv. č. 5033, č. kr. 2480–139). Scholarly ambition, however genuine, could not compensate for the absence of institutional standing. This finding illuminates the structural conditions under which transnational academic cooperation could function effectively within socialist federal frameworks, and has implications extending well beyond the specific bilateral relationship examined here.

The cultural transformations of the late 1980s increasingly exposed the limits of ideologically prescribed cultural production and revealed the degree to which both Slovak and Serbian cultural institutions had developed modes of cultural engagement that diverged from official federal norms. By 1989, the institutional frameworks analyzed in this article had become vessels through which a different kind of cultural relationship was beginning to take form. Future research would benefit from systematic comparison with analogous bilateral cooperative frameworks elsewhere in the socialist bloc, as well as from closer examination of Serbian and other Yugoslav republican archival holdings for evidence of Yugoslav perceptions of their Czechoslovak and specifically Slovak scholarly partners. Such research would further illuminate the history of academic and cultural cooperation during late socialism—a history whose full complexity is only beginning to come into view.

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