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FOREIGN BUSINESS TRIPS OF RIGA MEDICAL INSTITUTE ACADEMIC STAFF FROM 1950 TO 1990

Abstract. The scientific novelty *of this study is due to the fact that it presents a new perspective on foreign travels of Riga Medical Institute (RMI) staff during the period from 1950 to 1990, which is an understudied aspect of Latvian medical history. It has been emphasized that international communication, despite bureaucratic and political constraints, played a key role in the professional development of medical staff and the evolution of medical education in Soviet Latvia. This study reveals the impact of different political periods – Stalinism, Khrushchev's thaw, Brezhnev's stagnation and the collapse of the Soviet Union – on international academic communication.* ***The purpose*** *of this study is to analyse the foreign academic contacts of RMI faculty members and how their international travels contributed to the development of medical education in Latvia, especially in the context of the political and historical constraints of the Soviet era.* ***The study employs historical and comparative analysis methods*** *and utilizes primary archival documents, including personal files, travel reports, and official documents from the Soviet era from the Latvian State Historical Archives. International trips in different historical periods have been analysed in detail in order to identify factors that influenced their frequency and effectiveness.* ***As a result,*** *the analysis shows that international travel provided significant opportunities for professional development, it was often constrained by political control and limited access to capitalist countries. Despite these challenges, however, RMI staff were exposed to new technologies, scientific knowledge, and work practices in the countries such as the United States, Canada, Japan, Finland, and Switzerland. This experience contributed to the improvement of medical education and scientific development in Latvia.* ***The study suggests*** *that international trips, although limited in number, played a crucial role in the development of professional competencies of RMI faculty. These trips facilitated the exchange of medical knowledge and scientific experience, influencing the development of Latvian medical education during the Soviet period. This study offers a valuable perspective on the role of international academic relations in shaping the medical education system in Soviet Latvia.*

Key words: *higher education, scientific and academic staff, internationalisation, primary archival sources, professional training, higher medical institutions.*

ЗАКОРДОННІ ВІДРЯДЖЕННЯ ПРОФЕСОРСЬКО-ВИКЛАДАЦЬКОГО СКЛАДУ РИЗЬКОГО МЕДИЧНОГО ІНСТИТУТУ У 1950 – 1990 рр.

Анотація. ***Новизна дослідження*** *полягає у тому, що воно представляє новий погляд на закордонні подорожі викладачів Ризького медичного інституту (РМІ) в період з 1950 до 1990 р., що є маловивченим аспектом латвійської медичної історії. У ньому підкреслюється, що міжнародне спілкування, незважаючи на бюрократичні та політичні обмеження, відігравало ключову роль у професійному розвитку викладачів-медиків та еволюції медичної освіти в радянській Латвії. Це дослідження розкриває вплив різних політичних періодів – сталінізму, хрущовської відлиги, брежнєвського застою та розпаду Радянського Союзу – на міжнародну академічну комунікацію.* ***Метою дослідження*** *є аналіз закордонних академічних контактів викладачів РМІ і того, як їхні міжнародні подорожі сприяли розвитку медичної освіти в Латвії, особливо в контексті політичних та історичних обмежень радянської епохи.* ***Методологія***. *У дослідженні застосовуються методи історичного та порівняльного аналізу, а також використовуються первинні архівні документи, зокрема особисті справи, звіти про подорожі та офіційні документи радянської доби з Латвійського державного історичного архіву. Детально розглядаються міжнародні поїздки в різні історичні періоди з метою виявлення факторів, що впливали на їх частоту й ефективність.* ***Висновки***. *У результаті проведеного дослідження встановлено, що міжнародні поїздки надавали значні можливості для професійного розвитку, проте вони часто стримувалися політичним контролем і обмеженим доступом до капіталістичних країн. Однак, незважаючи на ці труднощі, співробітники РМІ мали змогу ознайомитися з новими технологіями, науковими знаннями та методами роботи в таких країнах, як США, Канада, Японія, Фінляндія і Швейцарія. Цей досвід сприяв поліпшенню медичної освіти та наукового розвитку в Латвії. Дослідження показує, що міжнародні поїздки, хоча і обмежені за кількістю, відіграли вирішальну роль у розвитку професійних компетенцій викладачів РМУ. Вони сприяли обміну медичними знаннями та науковим досвідом, впливаючи на розвиток латвійської медичної освіти в радянський період. Це дослідження пропонує цінний погляд на роль міжнародних академічних зв'язків у формуванні системи медичної освіти в радянській Латвії.*

Ключові слова*: вища освіта, науково-педагогічні працівники, інтернаціоналізація, первинні архівні джерела, професійна підготовка, вищі медичні навчальні заклади.*

The Problem Statement. International interaction is a vital component in the professional development of specialists, the advancement of educational institutions, and the growth of a state and its sectors. International cooperation is also important in the development of scientific and pedagogical staff and scientific progress. In the 21st century, there are numerous opportunities for international knowledge exchange, and innovative technologies facilitate this process even online. However, understanding the historical roots of international interaction, when overseas business trips were one of the few methods for knowledge exchange, is crucial for comprehending the establishment of medical education and the development of outstanding professionals. The evolution of higher medical education in Latvia occurred against the backdrop of political events in the Soviet Union, which impacted the development of academic staff and educational institutions and the opportunities for international interaction.

The Review of Recent Research and Publications. The development of academic staff during the Soviet era was researched by Nuriza Kadyralieva (Kadyralieva, 2021), who highlighted the features of research personnel training from 1932 to 1991. The role of international communication in the development of academic staff was covered by Eva Liu and Ethan Hutt (Liu & Hutt, 2021), who analysed the potential of international communication in enhancing diplomatic relations between countries. Yu Chiao Yang and Cnung-Yi Lee (Yang & Lee, 2024), who conducted a comparative analysis of international

exchange programmes, Edward Agbai et al. (Agbai, Agbai & Oko-Jaja, 2024), who did the research on international communication and its impact on global understanding.

During the Soviet era, practical experience and research beneficial to the state were crucial for the development of academic staff. However, the method of professional development through international business trips was limited. This limitation impacted not only the quality of professional training but also the building of relations with other countries. International communication forms essential competencies, new knowledge, and skills of specialists and aids in establishing diplomatic relations. International business trips enhance intercultural understanding, reveal new perspectives for international research, and reduce political tensions between countries.

International business trips were equally significant for medical professionals and academic staff in medical educational institutions, as the medical field requires continuous improvement to safeguard citizens' health and lives. Kala Mehta et al. (Mehta, Petersen, Goodman, et al., 2023) explored the role of international communication in the medical field, researching exchange programmes in the development of medical professionals. The advantages of international interaction for medical professionals include increased motivation to work, acquisition of new experiences applicable in practice, and the formation of knowledge regarding innovative technologies in the medical field and their potential applications.

The characteristics of the educational process and aspects of international interaction in the field of education during the Soviet times were examined by Christopher Markosian et al. (Markosian, Shekherdimian, Badalian, et al., 2020), who explored the problems of medical education in the Soviet Union, Kara Janigan (Janigan, 2020), who determined the features of gender education in the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras, Juris Salaks and Kaspars Antonovičs (Salaks & Antonovičs, 2021), who revealed the specifics of scientific international trips of staff from Riga Medical Institute (RMI) in the last decade of the Soviet Union, Brian Lanahan (Lanahan, 2023), who did the research on post-Soviet education features, and Liz Shchepetylnykova and Anatoly Oleksiyenko (Shchepetylnykova & Oleksiyenko, 2024), who analysed de-Sovietisation in higher education and science. Researchers noted that in the Soviet Union, all state sectors were under a strict political control. Political structures also controlled the RMI, a leading medical educational institution, and all international scientific connections between the Soviet Union and Western countries. This affected the quality and accessibility of international interaction for academic staff.

Although the 21st century offers numerous ways and methods of international interaction, the historical roots of international communication should be analysed to understand the aspects and stages of the development of Latvian medical education. This understanding is important for professionals preparing for future professional activities to ensure quality practice. The necessity of examining historical roots in the medical field was studied by Su Hyun Park and Pyeong Man Kim (Park & Kim, 2022), who demonstrated the possibility of developing medical professionalism through the knowledge of medical history, and Ji-Young Park and Seungmann Park (Park & Park, 2023), who analysed methods of teaching the history of medicine in medical educational institutions. Researchers emphasise that acquainting medical students with historical studies, particularly the history of medical education and the challenges encountered during this process, can motivate them to learn, help them understand the importance of their field, and encourage their own scientific inquiries, which demonstrates the necessity of conducting this study.

Analysis of academic sources has demonstrated that the stages of development of medical education in the Soviet Union, particularly in the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), have not been sufficiently studied. Furthermore, aspects of international communication, as one of the primary methods for gaining experience and improving the academic competencies of scientific and pedagogical staff, have not been fully researched. **The purpose** of the study is to analyse the features of international scientific communication among academic staff during the Soviet times. **The objectives** are to conduct a comparative analysis of the opportunities and limitations of international scientific communication across different historical periods and to elucidate the role of international trips in the formation and development of Latvian medical education.

This study is based on historical sources and the chronological and comparative analysis of the obtained data to reveal the aspects of international trips of academic staff during various historical periods of the Soviet era. Uncovering the features of these trips during different historical periods of the Soviet era helped to analyse the changes in international scientific communication and identify factors that hindered its development and those that accelerated the growth of global interaction. To determine the opportunities for international communication in the Soviet Union during different historical periods, the regularity and available methods of international interaction were analysed owing to primary sources (documents, protocols, reports). For example, the document from the Latvian State Historical Archive stored in fund 7427 (description 13, case number 196, certificate No. 132 dated 5.06.1965) was examined, along with two personnel records from the Riga Medical Academy stored in fund 507 of the Latvian State Historical Archive (description 3-2, case number 213 and description 3, case number 605) (RMI Personnel Record Sheet).

Through the analysis of primary sources, data was obtained on international trips in the Latvian SSR during various historical periods and the factors influencing the feasibility and effectiveness of international communication. The main aspects of the international trips of the RMI academic staff were correlated across different historical periods, allowing conclusions to be drawn about the evolution of international scientific communication, its impact on the development of medical education, and the enhancement of professional skills. This provided more detailed information on the influence of the Soviet educational system and international trips of academic staff on the formation of post-Soviet education.

The Research Results.

Foundation and functioning of the RMI and opportunities for international communication

The wartime and post-war years were marked by the decline of Latvian medical education. The medical faculty of the University of Latvia was destroyed, and a substantial number of academic staff and students were either lost or repressed. However, the Soviet Union needed to restore higher medical education institutions. During the war, many medical professionals were lost, the educational process was partially suspended, and its quality was questionable, necessitating the training of a new generation of medical professionals. Thus, in the early 1950s, the medical faculty of the University of Latvia was transformed into a separate higher education institution – the RMI. The establishment of this new medical education institution was accompanied by several challenges, including the destruction of the building, losses among students and academic staff, and the Soviet authorities' rejection of the existing higher education model.

One factor preventing the immediate establishment of a new medical education institution after the end of the war was a poor condition of the damaged building. The

building was gradually repaired under the leadership of P. Stradins, then-dean of the medical faculty. However, the main problem remained the shortage of academic staff and students. While the number of students wishing to enrol in the newly established institute in the restored building gradually increased, the problem of the shortage of academic staff remained unresolved. The Soviet authorities deemed the faculty of the newly formed RMI politically unreliable, and they called into question the academic staff's qualifications and competencies and their ability to teach according to the new requirements and ideology. Academic staff, particularly those in leadership positions, were gradually replaced by new specialists from other regions of the Soviet Union. This method was an attempt by the authorities to implement a system characteristic of Soviet educational institutions: fully controlled and ideological.

The RMI included faculties such as medicine, paediatrics, dentistry, pharmacy, and a faculty of advanced training (Samsons, 1968). The duration of studies varied across different faculties. For instance, the pediatric faculty required six years of study, the dental faculty five years, and the pharmaceutical faculty 4.5 years. The faculty of advanced training was created for medical professionals who wanted to improve their competencies and expand their knowledge in fields such as paediatrics, surgery, and physiotherapy. Enhancing the competencies of academic staff was necessary for several reasons: in the post-war years, the standards for training medical professionals changed, new specialisations emerged, and consequently, new disciplines were introduced, necessitating the upskilling of the teaching staff. The World Health Organization, founded in 1948, also noted the need for the professional development of medical specialists in the post-war years (Ko & Kim, 2012; Li, 2021). The integration of the Soviet Union into the international community and the access of specialists to international interaction could have expanded the opportunities for Soviet medicine and the educational process in medical institutions. However, professional development methods such as global communication, internships in other countries, and foreign trips were not seriously considered then. Trips and internships were available in the cities such as Moscow, Leningrad, or Kyiv. Among the faculty of the RMI there were specialists who had studied medicine in other countries (notably in Germany and Switzerland) and had access to foreign trips, allowing students and other academic staff to be somewhat exposed to global practices and knowledge in the field of medicine. These specialists included R.R. Shuba, who visited Czechoslovakia, France, and Austria, V. Bilenky, V. Kalnberzs, and A. Bezin (Cho & Robert, 2024).

Over time, these academic staff either emigrated or were removed from their positions and replaced by domestic specialists who had obtained higher education diploma in Riga or other universities within the Soviet Union, limiting the acquisition of information about foreign medicine and its possibilities. The authorities closely monitored academic staff, with controls extending beyond professional activities to personal lives. The primary objective of available internships and educational events was not the enhancement of specialists' qualifications or the broadening of their knowledge and skills but rather their ideological re-education, eradicating the influence of the bourgeois past and the capitalist world. Thus, postgraduate studies abroad, which lasted for the period from the 1920s to the 1930s, were replaced by mandatory courses in Moscow and Leningrad. Having an academic title became less essential for professional activities in leadership positions; instead, it was more important for academic staff to endorse the Soviet ideology and to train future specialists within its framework.

Features of international interaction of academic staff at RMI during the Stalinist era (1950 – 1953)

The Stalinist era in the activities of the RMI was characterised by a strict control over academic activities and the Soviet authorities' negative attitude towards the local faculty. Medical and scientific degrees of academic staff were often not recognised, and there was a policy of ideological re-education, which adversely affected their ability to travel abroad. The RMI implemented a policy to educate and train students according to the Soviet standards. One method of maintaining international communication and popularising their scientific ideas beyond the Latvian SSR was publishing research results in medical journals. However, all publications underwent strict censorship, limiting opportunities for scientific communication and the effectiveness of studies. The primary method of exchanging experience was the participation of academic staff from the RMI in medical conferences in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kyiv. Representatives from neighbouring republics could also attend these conferences, but their activities were also controlled, restricted, and censored.

The post-war years, particularly during the Stalinist era, saw limited opportunities for international travel, generally restricted to those with ideologically "correct" backgrounds. The activities of academic staff were subjected to scrutiny and criticism, with Soviet authorities doubting their qualifications, competence, and ability to educate and train youth in the spirit of communism. Consequently, opportunities for international travel for academic purposes were curtailed, and experience exchange was limited to visits to Soviet republics. Exceptions included L. Linovitska, who in 1946 managed to travel to Bulgaria, and Y. Sleydins, who went on an overseas trip to Switzerland in the same year (RMI Personnel Record). However, these cases were precedents in the history of the RMI during that period, as the majority of academic staff had no access to international communication in the Stalinist era. The main methods of maintaining international communication were publications in scientific journals and participation in medical conferences.

Revival of international engagement during the "Khrushchev Thaw" (1953 – 1964)

The Khrushchev Thaw period was characterised by the relaxation of the political regime and an increase in international interaction. One measure aimed at establishing international relations and opening the Soviet Union to the world after the Stalinist era was the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students, held in 1957 (Koivunen, 2009). The festival resulted in opportunities for cultural exchange with foreigners, understanding other cultures and worldviews, and demonstrating to the world the changes that had taken place in the Soviet Union. During the same period, active educational interaction with representatives from foreign countries took place. For instance, a meeting between specialists from the RMI and a delegation of Latvian doctors from the United States highlighted the positive evaluation of the Soviet Union's free healthcare system and its capabilities.

The new policy of the Soviet Union regarding international cooperation, the relaxation of the ideological political regime, and the high appraisal of the medical sector by foreign colleagues influenced the desire of medical professionals from other countries to engage with Soviet experts. The Soviet academic staff and medical professionals also showed a keen interest in interacting with their foreign counterparts. This broadened their understanding of medicine in other countries and provided information about medical innovations that had previously been dismissed in the Soviet Union. Scientific communication began to develop, and academic staff expressed a desire to travel abroad to gain new knowledge and experience.

However, overseas trips in the late 1950s and early 1960s remained rare. Travel to the so-called "capitalist countries", including Western European nations, North and Latin America, Oceania, and parts of Asia, was particularly restricted. This was due to the disparity between

the scientific advancements of these countries and those of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union did not utilise certain technologies and methods that were prevalent abroad, and foreign literature was not always accessible to the Soviet scientists, making international communication difficult and not always productive. Falling behind global trends and showcasing this internationally could discredit the Soviet government and its medical sector. Consequently, international communication continued to be controlled and limited. The Soviet authorities criticised capitalist world medicine, emphasising that although foreign scientists had certain achievements in the medical field, these were often expensive and not accessible to all population segments. Furthermore, the Soviet authorities argued that while capitalist countries held the belief in the incurability and irreversibility of many diseases, the socialist society's primary belief was the opposite. With these assertions, the Soviet authorities aimed at proving the superiority of socialist medicine and demonstrate the lack of a pressing need for international communication.

The list of foreign trips from 1955 to 1990 reveals restrictions on travel to capitalist countries. The smallest number of trips occurred during the Khrushchev Thaw. In subsequent years, the number of trips increased, but travel to capitalist countries remained restricted and was fully controlled by the Soviet authorities (Table 1).

Table 1

The number of business trips to socialist and capitalist countries during different historical periods

Years	Business trips to socialist states	Business trips to capitalist states
1955 – 1964	6	10
1965 – 1982	36	4
1983 – 1990	48	21

Source: concluded by the author.

During the Khrushchev Thaw, international communication became more relevant due to the relaxation of the political regime, international cultural events, and the acceptance of international delegations by the Soviet Union. However, medicine in capitalist countries was still criticised, and the possibility of foreign trips remained limited despite the interest in such interaction from both foreign specialists and Soviet scientists and medics. At that time, the main methods of international scientific communication were interactions with delegations from other countries, while obtaining international knowledge and experience through foreign trips was still challenging.

The development of the RMI and the features of international communication of scientific and pedagogical workers during the period of Soviet stagnation (1965 – 1985)

For the Latvian SSR and the RMI, the period of Soviet stagnation was the most stable and active era of the Soviet history in terms of research activities. In the 1960s and 1970s, fields such as pharmaceuticals, microbiology, biochemistry, surgery, molecular biology, oncology, disease prevention, occupational health and hygiene, and the fight against infectious diseases actively developed in the Latvian SSR. From 1966 onwards, scientific activity in the field of medicine intensified: research was conducted, and studies (monographs and articles) were published outside the Soviet Union (Loeber, 1999). Unlike the publications of the Stalinist era, during the period of the Soviet stagnation, studies were subject to less censorship and control, and the state facilitated the conduct of research and the demonstration of its

results. Studies in fields essential for the development of the Soviet Union were particularly encouraged. The prestige of scientists in society increased gradually, research associations were founded, and scientific programmes were developed.

At the RMI, the number of scientific and pedagogical staff, particularly those with doctoral and candidate degrees, increased, the number of departments and areas of training expanded, and the duration of studies changed. Mandatory disciplines were added, including biology and parasitology, biological and analytical chemistry, physics, physical education, physiology, histology, embryology, infectious diseases, microbiology, inorganic chemistry, social hygiene, health care and health care organisation, traumatology and orthopaedics, pharmaceuticals, surgery, and paediatrics. Additional mandatory disciplines included foreign languages, Marxism and Leninism, the history of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, dialectical and historical materialism, political economy, the "scientific" foundations of communism and atheism, and military training. At that time, Latvian scientists were highly valued, both in the Soviet Union and abroad. Their contributions to medical science and practice were recognised with 500 orders and medals from the Soviet Union, 14 of which were awarded to distinguished scientists of the Latvian SSR and 182 to meritorious doctors of the Ukrainian SSR. The expansion of medical institutions and the promotion of scientific activities allowed Latvian scientists to actively participate in addressing global medical issues. This included research into malignant tumours, leukaemia, atherosclerosis, hepatitis, tuberculosis, rheumatism, allergic diseases, organ and tissue transplantation, resuscitation measures, space medicine, the possibility of creating artificial organs and artificial circulation, and the development of new drugs. Some studies of Latvian scientists were known even outside the Soviet Union.

The early to mid-1960s saw an expansion of opportunities for international communication for academic staff, which also applied to specialists at the RMI. Scientific trips to institutes in Moscow and Leningrad became more regular, and foreign trips became more accessible to a wider category of academic staff. Exchange trips of foreign researchers to the Latvian SSR and vice versa – Latvian researchers to foreign countries – were initiated. Although foreign trips became more accessible, they were accompanied by bureaucratic challenges. For a trip abroad, it was necessary to write an application addressed to the faculty dean requesting permission for a scientific trip, specifying the purpose of the trip, the destination (specific country), and the duration of the trip. The application was reviewed by a responsible person, such as the rector, and approved with a resolution. Furthermore, the academic staff member had to obtain a foreign passport issued by the Latvian SSR and a visa. Despite bureaucratic difficulties and political restrictions, the academic staff of the RMI gained access to foreign trips, as they had strategic significance for Soviet medicine. The experience gained was integrated into Soviet medicine, particularly in the military field (Priedīte, 1997).

During the period of stagnation, the scientific activities of the RMI intensified. The number of departments increased, resulting in a higher number of students and academic staff. The teaching staff received well-deserved academic titles and degrees and were given the opportunity to travel abroad to exchange experiences and gain new knowledge, although political and bureaucratic difficulties still accompanied the process.

International scientific communication during the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the republic's restoration (1985 – 1990)

In the early 1980s, the Soviet "Iron Curtain" could not withstand the competition from capitalist countries and acknowledged their achievements in the scientific and technical fields, particularly in the medical sphere. The quality of medical education at the beginning

of the 1980s was significantly better than in previous periods. However, Soviet medical professionals were not competitive in the international labour market (Loeber, 1999).

Foreign countries actively developed innovative technologies that improved disease prevention and treatment and modernised medical education, hospitals, and approaches to public health. In contrast, the scientific and technical process in the medical field in the Soviet Union had hardly developed and had not undergone significant changes in recent years. This forced the Soviet authorities to recognise the achievements of capitalist countries and open access to foreign trips, particularly to capitalist states, to gain the necessary experience for the Soviet Union. Among the countries to which academic staff travelled for scientific trips were Cuba, Vietnam, Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Japan, and later the USA, Canada, Italy, France, and Spain. Although foreign assignments became more accessible, and the Soviet government facilitated international communication, the process continued to be accompanied by political and bureaucratic difficulties. However, within the RMI, there was an increasing inclination towards publishing in international journals and recognised collections abroad. Moreover, books by foreign specialists, translated into languages accessible to the Soviet readers, began to appear, and conversely, the works of Soviet specialists were translated into English. In the late 1980s, academic staff members had the opportunity to intern abroad for the first time.

The situation changed after 1990 when the Soviet Union collapsed, and Latvia regained its independence. While the presence of international scientific representations steadily increased, the advancement of research activity at the RMI was constrained by a lack of material and technical resources and the need to establish connections with other countries. In 1990, the RMI was renamed the Latvian Medical Academy, which gained international recognition thanks to the high achievements in medicine by its academic staff, characterised by high-quality work, responsibility, and the presence of global experience gained through international scientific communication (Jain et al., 2023). It is advisable to analyse the characteristics of international communication of the RMI academic staff from 1950 to 1990 to understand the development of global interaction, academic staff, and the educational institution (Table 2).

Throughout the history of the Latvian SSR, medical education and opportunities for international collaboration underwent regular changes. Beginning with the post-war years and the Stalinist era, and continuing through the dissolution of the Soviet Union, interest in international interaction and research activities gradually increased, and the possibilities for fulfilling these opportunities expanded. Opportunities for international communication included: publications in international journals, interactions with representatives of international delegations, short-term business trips and conferences, and longer-term internships, which positively influenced the experience of Soviet medical professionals and the medical field in general.

Many outstanding professionals were denied the opportunity to travel abroad. Despite significant achievements in scientific and educational activities, well-developed competencies, extensive experience, and knowledge of foreign languages, many specialists were refused international travel due to political and ideological unreliability in the eyes of the Soviet authorities. The criticism of the medical field in capitalist countries and the restrictions on gaining international experience negatively impacted the development of Soviet medicine and, as a result, the development of 21st-century medicine in post-Soviet countries. However, during the Soviet stagnation and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, international communication intensified as the authorities recognised the necessity of gaining foreign colleagues' experience for the development of the state and the medical field.

Table 2

Features of international scientific communication of RMI staff in different periods

Period	Opportunities for international scientific communication	Restrictions on international cientific communication
"Stalinist Era" (1950 – 1953)	− publications in medical journals; − participation in medical conferences in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kyiv.	− all publications were strictly censored; − conferences were controlled and limited, with typically only representatives from neighbouring republics participating; − only emigrants with an ideologically "correct" background could travel abroad.
"Khrushchev Thaw" (1953 – 1964)	− international events held within the Soviet Union; − communication with representatives of delegations from other countries; − access to information from Western literature.	− the medical field of Western countries was criticised; − foreign literature was very limited and censored; − international travel opportunities remained restricted, available only to academic staff with an ideologically "correct" background.
Period of Soviet stagnation (1965 – 1985)	− broader opportunities for international travel for a wider range of academic staff.	− international travel was accompanied by political and bureaucratic difficulties.
Period of the Soviet Union dissolution	− greater access to international travel for more academic staff; − expanded list of countries for international travel; − increased number of foreign experts' books translated into languages accessible to Soviet specialists; − Soviet, including Latvian, specialists' works were translated into foreign languages; − expanded opportunities for publication in international collections; − opportunities for internships abroad were opened.	− bureaucratic difficulties in travelling abroad for scientific purposes.

Source: concluded by the author.

During international trips, specialists had the opportunity not only to gain new knowledge and experience but also to become acquainted with the culture and traditions of other countries, observe the higher medical education system of other states from within, learn about innovative medical technologies and their practical application, and integrate into the international scientific community. Moreover, international trips were a means of establishing international relations and enhancing the prestige of Soviet medical education on the international level. Academic staff's international business trips were the foundation for the development of Latvian medical education in several areas, including improving the quality of education, advancing science, and fostering technical progress.

International trips immensely enhanced the quality of Soviet medical education. Academic staff from the RMI had the opportunity to observe teaching processes in foreign educational

institutions, adopt innovative methods and teaching techniques, and suggest changes to existing curricula. Soviet students gained access to information about international scientific achievements and developments, which influenced their preparation for and conduct of professional activities. The international trips of academic staff also facilitated the development of science. The commencement of international scientific communication and the integration of Soviet academic personnel were pivotal in the creation of research programmes and scientific associations in the Soviet Union. International scientific communication spurred the initiation of domestic research and the creation of indigenous developments, many of which became the foundation for further analysis in the former Soviet states.

International trips by academic staff contributed to technological progress. While innovative technologies were actively utilised abroad in the medical field, in disease prevention and treatment, and in research, the Soviet Union was not competitive in this aspect. The Soviet authorities had to acknowledge the backwardness of scientific and technological progress in the medical field and opened up access to international trips, which spurred technological progress: the introduction of new methods and technologies in the medical field and the development of new approaches, many of which are still used today. These international trips and other forms of international scientific communication allowed RMI specialists to gain new experience and introduce new methods and technologies into the medical field of the Soviet Union. Current specialists have inherited some of these methods and technologies and serve as the basis for 21st-century research and scientific pursuits.

The Soviet system of higher medical education and the role of international travels by the RMI academic staff in the development of Latvian medical education

In the post-war years, the medical field became a priority for the Soviet Union, which led to the development of higher medical education and the preparation of academic staff for quality teaching and conducting their own scientific research for the benefit of the state. International interaction was an effective method for preparing the teaching staff to conduct the educational process and research work, as the technological advance of Western countries was much faster. Despite this, for a long period (from 1950 to 1965), international interaction, particularly scientific travels abroad, was inaccessible to most academic staff, limiting the exchange of experience. From 1965 until the beginning of the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1990 – 1991), international interaction intensified, and opportunities for foreign travel became available to a wider circle of academic staff, which influenced the development of Latvian medical education and the scientific and technological progress of the Soviet Union.

In his study of medical education, J. Vaughn (1970) noted that the development of the medical field in the post-war years was important for the Soviet Union, which is consistent with the results of this study. According to the researcher's findings, there were several reasons for this. Firstly, the role of medics in the society increased: wartime demonstrated that having qualified medical assistance was an advantage on the battlefield. Secondly, a large number of medics were lost, necessitating the training of new, qualified, and modern medical personnel. There was an increased need to create new medical education institutions. In the study of the establishment of medical academies in the 1950s, P. Svobodný (2018) concluded that at the beginning of the 1950s, many medical faculties were transformed into separate medical educational institutions to ensure quality teaching, conduct research, and train competitive specialists, which aligns with the findings of this study.

However, the results of this study demonstrated that the educational process and international interaction in these newly established institutions were controlled by the Soviet

authorities, making the training of future medical professionals less effective. D. Barr and R. Schmid (1996), who examined medical education in the Soviet Union, arrived at similar conclusions. The researchers noted that admission to medical educational institutions in the Soviet Union, the curriculum, and pedagogical policy were controlled by Soviet authorities and had to conform to Soviet ideology, which was the main drawback of the Soviet education system, limiting the development of academic staff and the training of future professionals, restricting opportunities to acquire all necessary knowledge and skills. Additional drawbacks of the Soviet educational system, according to researchers, included early specialisation, an excess of specialists, and the need to ensure equal opportunities for all medical professionals. In 21st-century medical education, specialists receive basic knowledge in the early years of study and later choose a narrow specialisation in senior years. In the Soviet medical education system, students had to choose their specialisation from the first year, which led to a lack of basic knowledge and skills, difficulties in training and preparing specialists. Moreover, due to the active development of medical education, the number of graduates was much higher than the state's needs, resulting in some medics being unable to find work in their field or being sent to other cities or countries within the union. There were also issues of equal opportunities for medical professionals: medics from remote regions, certain social or ethnic groups had limited opportunities for professional activity and development. Umsunai Omurbekova , who analysed the educational and cultural policy of the Soviet Union, reached similar conclusions. According to her research, a substantial part of the educational process in the Soviet Union was aimed at the communist upbringing of academic staff and future medics in line with Soviet ideology rather than acquiring substantial medical knowledge and improving qualifications, which aligns with the results of this study (Omurbekova, 2023).

A significant role in the communist indoctrination of future professionals was played by academic staff. In examining the state of education and science in the healthcare sector during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, George Gotsadze et al. (Gotsadze, Mirzikashvili, Kekelidze et al., 2022) concluded that Soviet ideology restricted the freedom of academic staff, prohibited international communication, and limited access to international literature to impose its vision on the educational and scientific process. As the study of foreign languages was not mandatory for a certain period and only began to flourish during the Soviet stagnation period, international communication and access to international research and its results were restricted. This had a negative impact on higher medical education and the training of future professionals.

The onset of international interaction and the development of foreign missions marked the beginning of changes in the higher medical education system of the Soviet Union. This aligns with the findings of Yu Jiao Zhang et al. (Zhang, Cao, Xia et al., 2022), who explored aspects of Chinese students' education in the Soviet Union; Nguyen Thi Phuc (2023), who examined the partnership between Vietnam and the Soviet Union; and Chengzhang Zou (Zou, 2023), who interpreted Soviet-Chinese relations. These researchers noted that after the political regime relaxed and international interaction began, interest in the Soviet Union, particularly in the medical and educational sectors, gradually increased. The number of specialists sent to study in medical educational institutions in the Soviet Union grew, which corresponds with the results of this paper. Similarly, the number of Soviet specialists sent for training and international missions to other countries, including the United States, Cuba, Vietnam, Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Japan, Canada, Italy, France, and Spain, increased. There was also a rise in publications in international journals and an increase in international

conferences, forums, and congresses. However, foreign missions remained the primary and most effective method of international communication.

RMI, as a leading institution of higher medical education in the Soviet Union, played a crucial role in the development of both Latvian and Soviet medical education. The opportunities for international scientific communication evolved alongside the broader changes within Soviet society. Despite the political, ideological, and bureaucratic challenges that accompanied foreign assignments throughout various periods, the persistence, experience, and dedication of the academic staff at RMI resulted in enhanced educational quality, technological advancement, and the establishment of a foundation for the future development of medical education.

The Conclusions. In this study there have been analysed the characteristics of international communication among the academic staff of RMI between 1950 and 1990. It has been determined that international interaction is vital for both academic staff and the state. Academic staff benefit by gaining new experiences and improving their knowledge and skills. The state, in turn, can explore new areas in international research and reduce tensions in international relations by establishing diplomatic connections. RMI was a leading medical educational institution in the Soviet Union, and the academic staff had access to foreign assignments. However, these opportunities came with certain restrictions. From 1950 to 1990, all branches of the Soviet Union, including the education sector, were subject to a strict control. Foreign business trips were available to talented University teachers and promising scientists with impeccable reputations and the necessary political and ideological perception.

In the era of Stalinism (1950 – 1953), foreign assignments were available only to immigrants with impeccable political reputations, and the activities of academic staff were subject to scrutiny. Some immigrants had access to foreign travel among the teaching staff of RMI. However, the Soviet authorities believed that the teaching staff of RMI were incapable of educating future generations in the spirit of communist ideology, which led to their gradual removal from their positions. During the "Khrushchev Thaw" (1953 – 1964), the political regime was relaxed, and the Soviet Union resumed international communication. RMI hosted delegations from leading world powers, including the United States, which contributed to the acquisition of new experiences, knowledge, and insights into medical education. An increase in the number of academic staff at RMI, new departments, and specialisations marked the period of Soviet stagnation (1965 – 1985). These changes in the educational process promoted the intensification of international communication: foreign assignments became more accessible, short-term exchange programmes were established, although political and bureaucratic challenges still accompanied foreign travel. During the collapse of the Soviet Union (1985 – 1990), the Soviet authorities acknowledged the backwardness in technological progress in medicine and the necessity of exchanging experiences with foreign scientists. Exchange programmes, internships, and research programmes were developed.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of the independence of Latvia were characterised by an increase in international scientific communication, particularly in terms of foreign assignments. Despite the lack of modern material and technical resources in Latvia, the foundation established during the Soviet era became the basis for the further development of medical education. RMI, renamed the Latvian Medical Academy in 1990, is now Riga Stradins University. Therefore, foreign assignments contributed to the improvement of the educational and scientific activities of RMI, promoting the development of science and technological progress, which had a positive impact on the medical field in the Latvian SSR and the Soviet Union in general.

The limitations of this study may include the inaccuracy or distortion of historical data in the sources analysed. Prospects for further analysis could include the development of medical education in independent Latvia since 1991 and the role of international interaction in this process.

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