

Research in Russian archives on Soviet economic and social history

In 1992, I returned to fundamental research in Russian economic history when the archives from the former Soviet Union finally, and unexpectedly to my generation, opened up to foreign researchers. In the 1970s, I was fortunate to receive my research education at Stockholm University and Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. However, no primary sources for my intended Ph.D. thesis turned out to be available on the economic transformations in the 1920s – early 1930s. My new doctoral project concerned a different subject: the origins of the Soviet military-industrial complex and the methodology of military-economic planning. My Ph.D. thesis (defended in March 1996 at the Stockholm School of Economics) revealed the paramount role of General Mikhail Tukhachevskii and others in the Red Army for the formulation of the five-year plans (1928–32, 1933–37) and the importance of assessing not only current production results, but also the scale of economic preparedness for total war when judging the results of Soviet industrial planning.

Since that time, my research projects have covered a number of related fields in the history of Stalinism. At the Russian State Archive (GARF) and Russian State Archive of the Economy, I investigated the economic significance of the Gulag camps and the evolution of the special prisons – the so-called “sharashki” – for scientists and technicians in the 1930s – early 1950s.

In 2001, professor Viktor Danilov (1925–2004), Russia’s foremost expert on the collectivization of the countryside in the early 1930s, invited me to participate in a project on the secret police reports, delivered exclusively for the supreme political leadership and based on internal intelligence surveys, concerning the conditions in the countryside, the mentalities of the peasantry and the evolution of the kolkhoz system in the 1930s (*Sovetskaia derevnia glazami OGPU-NKVD, 1930–1934//Les Campagnes Soviétiques vues par OGPU-NKVD, 1930–1934*).

In 2002, jointly with Oleg Ken (1960–2007), Aleksandr Rupasov, both professors in history in St. Petersburg, and specialists on the foreign policy of the Soviet Union in the interwar period towards its Western neighbor states, I started a project on Moscow’s policy towards Sweden from the 1930s to the early 1950s (*Shvetsiia v politike Moskvy, 1930e – 1950-e gody*, abridged Swedish translation *I stormaktspolitikens periferi: Sverige I Moskvas politik på 1930-talet*).

Since 2001, I have done extensive research in the United Regional Archives of Cheliabinsk Province (OGACHO) for a monograph on the formation of that company town in the southern Urals, centered on the production of tractors for the kolkhozy in peacetime, and – after conversion of the factory – of tanks in case of war. The monograph *Tankograd* (2007 in Swedish, 2010 in Russian and 2011 in English) presents a complex history of the whole region from the turn of the last century to the early 1950s. My present research project is a continuation of this book and covers the Cold War era in the same region, with emphasis on the military-economic as well as social and cultural history of Soviet modernization.