

Review

Sheila M. Puffer, Daniel J. McCarthy & Daniel M. Satinsky, *Hammer & Silicon. The Soviet Diaspora in the US Innovation Economy. Immigration, Innovation, Institutions, Imprinting, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, xxi + 411pp., £29.00 p/b.

A BOOK ABOUT RUSSIA IN A BLUE COVER, INSTEAD OF THE UBIQUITOUS RED, has the immediate promise of innovation. *Hammer & Silicon* is a collaboration between accomplished and prolific scholars (Puffer/McCarthy) and a practitioner (Satinsky) and is far from conventional. The book is about post-communist entrepreneurship unleashed on US soil. Its intention is to explore the contribution to the US technology and innovation sector of the migrants who came to the United States during the years just before and shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A solid and original foundation of the book consists of 157 interviews conducted in two main US innovation hubs, Silicon Valley on the West Coast and Boston–Cambridge on the East. In these interviews, professional and personal stories are entwined. This allowed the research team to take a comparative approach to exploring the interplay between cultural ‘imprints’ and the actual business environment as forces shaping the entrepreneurial identities and business drive of the representatives of the ‘Soviet diaspora’ in the United States, which has become a notable force in the country’s innovation economy, in particular, the technology sector.

The book is formally divided into three parts, but Part III, at only about 20 pages, reads more like a short concluding chapter. The other two parts are far more substantial. Part I (Chapters 1–4) introduces the analytical framework, and Part II (Chapters 5–9) delivers the main contribution by presenting the rich evidence and its analysis.

There are five themes that shape the structure of the narrative and guide the analysis: immigration; innovation; institutions; ‘imprinting’; and identity. These themes are studied through the examination of the views of the interviewees whom the authors gather into (sometimes overlapping) analytical clusters based on, for example, ethnic identity, immigration waves and age. Such a multi-layered presentation enables deeper insights into the motivation, socio-economic and cultural drivers, personality traits, professional identity, risk propensity and assimilation potential of Soviet and post-Soviet migrants to the United States.

The theoretical foundations of the book (Chapters 1 and 2) are derived from scholarly insights on institutions, imprinting and identity. These were used as critical lenses for exploring the background of the interviewees, the complexities of the immigration process, and the contextual features that served as catalysts for emigration, first, from the Soviet Union and later, from its successor states.

Appropriately, as the book deals with a particular cohort of highly educated individuals, Chapter 3 offers an informative and competent overview of the Soviet educational system. The effects of this system and its tradition of instruction on the adaptive capacity of ‘Soviet’ migrants and their ability to make their skills relevant to the requirements of the US high-tech sector are discussed further in other chapters, when the authors unpack the personal experiences of the interviewees. Specifically, Chapters 7 and 8 provide extensive details about how the intellectual foundations established by the Soviet education system influenced individual career trajectories as they strove to overcome the inertia of social path dependency and adapt to an alien social and business environment when they left their motherland.

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Chapter 4 provides a historical overview of the three waves of emigration. All have distinct significant characteristics: the first (early 1970s to 1986) was predominantly Jewish emigration; the second (1987 through 1999) was a 'brain drain', resulting from the relaxation of emigration controls and economic hardship in the home country; and the third (2000 through 2015) was 'emigration precipitated more by choice than necessity' (p. 16).

Part II of the book (Chapters 5–9) consists mainly of case studies accompanied by a brief commentary from the authors, and draws on the interviews, grouped according to the sectors in which the respondents operated: biotech; pharma; medical; software; IT; communications; and other sectors. Chapter 6 specifically builds a case for the importance of the contribution to the US innovation economy made by immigrant scientists and researchers working in US academia and industry and as managers.

The evidence obtained through interviews reveals how the Soviet cultural and identity 'imprints' have been overwritten in the process of entrepreneurial self-realisation by Soviet and post-Soviet migrants. These personal stories illustrate vividly how the immigrants found individual ways to come to terms with the unfamiliar work environment and cultivate new perceptions of trust, teamwork, leadership, communication, managerial skills and competency. Chapter 9 emphasises the complexity and the dramatic nature of the changes in the life circumstances and personal identities as felt by the interviewees.

Summarising the contribution of the book (Chapter 10), the authors take credit for adding original data to advance debates on the relationship of immigration and innovation. Their findings add to an understanding of the importance of the motivation to migrate for the potential to contribute to the economy of the receiving country. The propensity and readiness of the migrants either to integrate professionally or to pursue entrepreneurial avenues are closely linked to these motives. In this regard, among many interesting insights that the study contains, the emphasis on the importance of cultural imprinting in forming the motivation for emigration is particularly notable. However, initial social imprints appear to have been less important and influential in guiding the entrepreneurial drive of the migrants once they arrived in the United States.

Based on its findings, the book argues that US immigration policy should take an enlightened approach, given that immigration is crucial to sustaining an innovation economy. This work will be of particular interest to scholars of post-Soviet socio-economic transformation and researchers with an interest in migration studies and global talent recruitment. While the subjectivity of the collected opinions remains a substantial limitation on their generalisability, the book's ethnographic component can still inform analytical reflections on the transformation of professional identities in response to changes in contextual and operational constraints. Rich ethnographic data based on personal narratives make this book stand out but also have a downside. Some facts and statements coming from the interviews come across as idiosyncratic, which is understandable considering that they represent the personal memories and views of the interviewees. Unfortunately, the comments accompanying the interviews occasionally fail to pick this up. Therefore, caution is recommended for readers who want to use this book as a reference resource on life in the Soviet Union, modern Russia and the post-Soviet region more in general.

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