Summaries

Stefan Berger/Norman LaPorte, The contact of British Parliamentarians to Eastern Europe from 1945 to 1989. Between Fellow Travelling and Eastern Political Renewal

This article examines the contacts and attitudes of British MPs to Eastern Europe, especially the Soviet Union and the GDR with occasional glances at other East European countries. Especially Labour Party MPs were active in engaging representatives of communist dictatorships, and the article explores their diverse motivations for doing this. It begins by tracing the changes in the perception of the Soviet Union after 1945. With some on the left a residual sympathy with what was still at times perceived as a socialist state remained, but for the majority of MPs their desire to prevent the outbreak of another world war, to reduce tensions between east and west and to counter the dehumanisation of the ideological enemy was far more important. A variety of diverse Ostpolitik initiatives will be discussed and the question will be pursued why, during the course of the 1960s, British Ostpolitik lost its radical bite. The initiative passed to the Brandt governments, whose Ostpolitik was widely supported by British parliamentarians who perceived it as being in line with their long-standing desire for détente. Their commitment to peaceful co-existence was not shaken by repeated suppressions of attempts to reform or abolish Communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe. This agenda seemed to become only more urgent when the outbreak of a second cold war under the presidency of Ronald Reagan threatened a return to the stand-off between the two superpowers which had characterised the 1950s. Only small groups on the left campaigned strongly against the human rights abuses of Communist dictatorships behind the Iron Curtain. The majority of parliamentarians throughout the 1980s were happy to maintain a dialogue with those in power and support the reforms of Communist regimes from above, as championed by Mikhail Gorbachev. When these efforts led to the collapse of Communism across Eastern Europe, British MPs were torn between their enthusiasm for the velvet revolutions and their fear of renewed instability after the end of the Cold War.

Arnd Bauerkämper, An Asymmetric Relationship. Societal and Cultural Contacts Between Britain and the German Democratic Republic from the 1960s to the 1980s

In general, the societal and cultural contacts between Britain and the German Democratic Republic from the late 1950s until German re-unification can be characterised as sporadic and asymmetric. Whereas the leadership of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) insisted on close control over the organised exchange of visitors, even those Britons who sympathised with the East German state preferred spontaneous and unofficial meetings. These contrary attitudes reflected the cultural and political differences between a state socialist dictatorship and a Western democracy. However, the town twinning, the academic and cultural exchange and the publication of statements from the independent East German peace movement – most notably the Berlin Appeal – indicated that the contacts which went beyond the official political sphere had their own dynamics. They transcended borders and could not be fully controlled or permanently suppressed by the SED regime.

In regard to methodology, this study of the societal and cultural contacts between Britons and East Germans suggests a necessity to integrate questions of political and cultural history into a transnational historiography, and to supplement comparative historical analysis with case studies of social and cultural relationships and networks.

Translated by Gerrit Schäfer
Peter Haslinger, An Option in the Direction of Europe? Austria in the Foreign Policy Calculations of the Hungarian Communists, 1956–1989

The extraordinarily dynamic relation between Hungary and Austria from 1956 to 1989, which made an essential contribution to the softening of the Iron Curtain, rested on two factors: on the one hand, it may be traced to the wish of the Hungarian political leadership to profit from the developing transnational economic and technological integration of Western Europe; and on the other hand, to Austrian political neutrality and the failure of the 1968 reforms in Czechoslovakia, the hitherto favoured partner of the new Austrian Ostpolitik. At first, the Hungarian Communist reformers conceived of the co-operation with Austria as a run-up to an intense economic exchange with other Western European states. The symbolic value that accrued to good relations which crossed the boundaries of the political blocks and took place within an international context, however, was then politically exploited and found a correspondence down the line in the area of international civil relations in everyday life (as, e.g., regional contacts, city partnerships, or distinctly heightened travel). After 1987, as before in 1956, Austria advanced for a short time, on account of its neutrality, to the position of a model for foreign policy. In consequence of the historical autumn of 1989, however, the previous Hungarian-Austrian special relationship rapidly lost in importance: both sides shifted to a policy favouring the soonest possible integration into the European Union.

Translated by Jonathan Uhlman

Schlarp, Karl-Heinz, The Economic Underpinning of Détente. Visions and Realities of a German-Soviet Economic Co-operation under the New Ostpolitik

The partition of Europe and the unrestricted option of the Federal Republic of Germany for the West caused the extensive loss of Eastern European markets and hindered all efforts to gain a foothold there. After two decades of fruitless confrontation, the general policy of détente and the Eastern treaties of Brandt’s government in the 1970s made possible a heyday for trade with the East. The economic engagement of the Federal Republic in Eastern Europe found its reflection in long-term co-operative agreements, above all with the Soviet Union and Poland, and often led in practice to problematic compensation deals. The natural gas/piping deal, which took on colossal dimensions and remained controversial until the beginning of the 1980s, was looked upon as a classic example of successful co-operation. Yet in spite of major Soviet projects and the transfer of technology from the West, Eastern European markets played only a marginal role, nor could the decline of the communist planned economy be halted. Especially Soviet contracts, however, were of central importance for several branches of West German mechanical and plant engineering.

Translated by Jonathan Uhlman

Guido Thiemeyer, ›Change through rapprochement‹. West German Journalists in Eastern Europe 1956–1977

Whereas historical research took an immediate interest in the diplomatic background of Bähr’s and Brandt’s Ostpolitik, it limped behind with respect to the social and cultural dimensions, although these played a central role in the conception of the policy’s authors. This article takes up an aspect of the social contacts between the German Federal Republic and Eastern Europe. It treats the work of West German journalists in Eastern Europe, their working conditions and experiences, the patterns of perception which underlay their reporting, and their understanding of themselves as representatives of a Western European state. The article shows that journalists already made essential contacts to Eastern Eu-
Dieter Bingen, Ostpolitik and Democratic Change in Eastern Europe. The Test Case of Poland

In its narrow sense, the term Ostpolitik refers to the so-called policy of normalisation towards the Warsaw Pact states, including the German Democratic Republic. It was pursued by the coalition government of Social Democrats and Free Democrats under Chancellor Willy Brandt and foreign minister Walter Scheel between 1970 and 1973, and resulted in a series of treaties with Eastern European states (Ostverträge). In a wider sense, it also refers to the policies towards the Eastern bloc before and after this period. These policies were part of a foreign policy that aimed at the eventual re-unification of the German states on the premise that West Germany remained firmly integrated into the West through NATO and EC membership.

In retrospective, one can perceive an underlying tension between the two components of West German Ostpolitik. On the one hand, there was the dimension of Realpolitik. Here the aim was to enlarge West Germany’s room for manoeuvre and to make its presence felt in Eastern Europe according to its geographical location, its economic power and the cultural and historical ties. On the other hand, there was the moral dimension, which included Germany’s historical role and responsibility in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the obligation to explore opportunities for the promotion of liberalisation and democracy in the Eastern states.

In this situation, the Federal Republic’s Ostpolitik could support the democratic movements in Central and Eastern Europe in just one important respect. It reduced anxieties about German retaliation and revisionism, which had been used to legitimize Communist rule and Soviet hegemony, and gave credibility to a new peaceful and neighbourly Germany. However, the democratization of the Eastern European societies and political systems had to be achieved by the democratic forces within the socialist states themselves.

In the end, it was the democratic movements of 1989/1990 that removed the fundamental dilemmas of German policy towards Eastern Europe, which confronted all governments from the Chancellorships of Adenauer, Kiesinger, Brandt and Schmidt until the first years of the Kohl government.

Translated by Gerrit Schäfer

Robert Zurek, The Role of the Polish Catholic Church in the German-Polish Reconciliation, 1966–1972

Between 1966 and 1972, the relation between the German and the Polish Catholic Church was strained. Apart from an impressive gesture of the Polish Primate and the Polish congregations on May 3, 1966 in Czestochowa, the leadership of the Polish Church undertook no promising initiatives towards reconciliation; on the contrary, it endeavoured to qualify the revolutionary statement of its letter of 1965. The causes of this attitude were multiple, of which the most important were two: the extremely slight scope of action available to the Church in view of the Communist reprisals after the correspondence of 1965, and its profound disappointment with the posture of the German Church.

The ZNAK milieu’s treatment of the German-Polish question was more differentiated. At first ZNAK media disseminated a view of the history of the German-Polish relationship that was dominated by anti-German fears and complexes, and that was bound to work counter-productively on the process of reconciliation. The representatives of ZNAK
judged the West German policy and the posture of German Catholicism towards Poland very critically. The hopes and attempts at understanding of ZNAK members were directed above all to the minority among German Catholics who shared the Polish view of the German-Polish controversies. It was the initiatives of this minority, especially the Bensberger memorandum, but also the political changes in the Federal Republic, that brought about a recognisably more positive picture of Germany among ZNAK representatives. With the passage of time, ZNAK developed its contacts to German partners and increasingly published the works of German authors in its media. All in all, it may be observed that there was no break-through in the relationship of the German and the Polish Church during the period between 1966 and 1972, although this was perhaps to be expected after the courageous letter of the Polish bishops in 1965. Instead the opportunity provided by the letter remained unused for the time being. Geopolitical problems and the Polish and German Churches diametrically opposed treatments of the Oder-Neisse question represented the principal hindrances. The process of reconciliation initiated by the Churches with the correspondence of 1965 really made progress only after the ratification of the Treaty of Warsaw in 1972.

Translated by Jonathan Uhlner

The gradual resumption of bilateral contact between Germany and Poland after 1945 began not on the great diplomatic stage but is mainly indebted to the engagement of individual Christians and smaller groups (e.g., Gertrud Luckner, Günter Särchen, Alfons Erb, the Benberger Circle, Cardinal Döpfner, Cardinal Kominak, the ZNAK group). This avant-garde of reconciliation prepared the political ground for the political-diplomatic contacts of the new Ostpolitik in the 1970’s. The development of the relationship between German and Polish Catholics was also dependent on the prescriptions of the Vatican’s pastoral politics. Under the conditions of German partition, the internal German dialogue needed constantly to seek special co-ordination in its relationships to Poland and to the Vatican. Without the intensified personal contacts that took place among bishops through the Second Vatican Council, the Polish-German correspondence of 1965 would not have been possible. Close examination of contemporary sources shows that this (from the present point of view) great step forward was an initiative which was repeatedly threatened by failure, which was not sufficiently prepared by either side, and whose important influence developed only in the medium term. Astute observes such as Otto B. Rögele pinned great hopes on the observation that, with the Polish Bishops’ Conference of 1965, an independent national spokesman made itself felt for the first time in a Communist-ruled state and Party apparatus and could join in the international conversation. From 1965, through the conflicts over the Eastern treaties at the beginning of the 70’s, up to the first visit of Polish Bishops in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1978, the discussions surrounding the policy of détente then shaped the course of events. Sometimes the goal was uncontroversial, and yet it could come to rather fierce disagreements about the right course in the 1970’s, as was shown by the conflict between the leading representatives of the German Catholics and the Vatican State Secretary.

Translated by Jonathan Uhlner

Arkadiusz Stempin, The Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk. Building Bridges Between Germany and Poland in the Years of Détente
The Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk emerged from the international Catholic peace movement Pax Christi. Both organisations aimed at reconciliation and partnership with former Polish
inmates of concentration camps. From the early 1960s to 1989, it was their groundbreaking activities across the Iron Curtain which lead the way to a revision of Germany’s relationship with its Polish neighbours. The presence of the Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk and its predecessor over more than three decades increased the sensitivity and awareness of matters concerning Poland throughout West Germany, including the non-Catholic sections of society. It broke the taboo that was on the German atrocities in Poland during the war and the question of compensations for Polish citizen. Thus it deepened the political debate and enabled West Germans to view the relationship with Poland from a different perspective.

Even though this was not a stated objective of Pax Christi and the Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk, their activities contributed to a gradually growing acceptance of Poland’s new Western border and to a willingness to recognise it permanently. This continued after the ratification of the Warsaw Treaty of 1972. With their evident Poland-friendly stance, the activities of Pax Christi and the Kolbe-Werk were one of the factors behind the long-term change of attitudes in West German society in regard to the policy towards Poland. Its impact finally became evident at the beginning of the 1970s.

The fact that Germans were trying to build bridges increased the number of Poles who were willing to reconsider their position towards the Federal Republic and its citizens. Their experiences with Pax Christi and the Kolbe Werk contrasted sharply with the communist propaganda of the post-war years. The official positions were manifestly undermined and exposed as mere indoctrination.

After martial law had been imposed on December 13, 1981, and Poland was on the verge of economic collapse under the Jaruzelski government, the Kolbe Werk set up its own scheme to deliver food aid to major Polish cities. The food was handed over to registered associations and informal groupings of former concentration camp inmates, and thus initiated the foundation of even more of these groups. This food aid unexpectedly provided the framework for an intensive personal encounter between Germans and survivors of the concentration camps.

Translated by Gerrit Schäfer


This article examines the lengthy process that led to the creation of the German-Polish School-Book Commission. This process is divided into three phases. The first attempt was made in 1937/1938. There were exploratory talks on how the two countries should be portrayed in their school-books. Further work towards an agreement was prevented when the relations between Poland and Nazi Germany, which up to this point had been fairly good, deteriorated rapidly at the end of 1938. This first effort finally came to an end with the outbreak of the Second World War.

The second phase encompasses the years from 1956 to 1960. It started with 47 theses on the teaching of history drafted by Dr. Enno Meyer, who was a teacher of geography, history and German in Oldenburg. His ideas were published by Georg Eckert and started a vigorous debate among German historians and educationists. There was much surprise on the German side that historians from Poland and Polish exiles took part in the discussions as well. This was one of the reasons why Meyer’s publication became quite well-known in the Federal Republic.

The third phase was from 1969 to 1971. It owed much to the president of the Evangelineische Akademie in West-Berlin, Günter Berndt, who organised a conference on the treatment of German-Polish issues in school-books. The declarations drawn up on this occasion stirred up much interest and debate both in Poland and the Federal Republic, making
it clear that there was considerable demand for a common commission for the revision of school-books.

*Translated by Gerrit Schäfer*


The 1972 German-Polish Textbook negotiations, which were later institutionalised in the form of the Joint German-Polish Textbook Commission (*Gemeinsame deutsch-polnische Schulbuchkommission*), took place in a climate of rapprochement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the People’s Republic of Poland. Dozens of Polish and German historians and geographers worked for years and decades in an honorary capacity on assessments of textbooks in their specialties and on consolidating the subject of German-Polish history and reconciling different points of view at scholarly conferences. Because the Commission made an important contribution to the improvement of the German-Polish relationship, it became a model of successful scholarly dialogue that surmounts national boundaries. The influence of this model radiated far beyond the scholarly community into the societies of both countries.

The author presents the results of his research project at the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (*Georg-Eckert-Institut für Internationale Schulbuchforschung: GEI*). In addition to providing a short history of the German-Polish Textbook Commission, he describes important traits of its work. Among these were the non-partisan organisational basis, for the establishment of which the umbrella of UNESCO was helpful. At a time of less marked contact between Poland and the Federal Republic, the Commission was an important bridge between both countries and served as a hinge between civil society and politics. Further, the author makes clear that the Commission could not work in a vacuum but was obliged to acknowledge the political realities which arose from the East-West conflict and the differences in the systems of Poland and the Federal Republic.

*Translated by Jonathan Uhlner*


This essay treats the role of Auschwitz in the relationship between Poland and the West, with particular consideration of Israel, the USA and the Federal Republic of Germany. The significance of Auschwitz is analysed by means of the conflict over the foundation of the State *Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum* and over the work of the International Auschwitz Committee (IAK). The essay illuminates above all the motives of the Polish decision-makers.

Beginning in the mid-1950’s, memorial sites underwent an ever greater internationalisation. With this development, foreign influences gained an increasing importance in their design. At the same time, the Polish Communists acquired more extensive possibilities for instrumentalising Auschwitz for their political goals in the Cold War. Thus the United Polish Workers Party (PVAP) fell into a considerable inner conflict. The more it attempted to subordinate the memorial and the IAK to its purposes and use them as instruments of political propaganda, the more these institutions lost their international reputation and influence.

Whereas in the 1960s the Polish Communists attempted to use Auschwitz as a moral club in the political struggle, they came themselves under fire in the 1970’s. Because of the anti-Semitic campaign of 1967–68, Poland forfeited a good deal of its international standing. In his effort to acquire Western credit, the First Secretary of the PVAP, Edward
Hieronim Gierek, sought to rehabilitate Poland in the eyes of the West. The pressure exerted by foreign governments and organisations on the Polish leaders finally led to changes in the presentation of the Auschwitz memorial.

Translated by Jonathan Uhlauer

**Natalie Bégin, Contacts between trade unions in the East and West. The foundation of Solidarność and its repercussions in Germany and France**

The greater part of the public opinion, as well as the majority of the population, followed the Solidarność movement closely and showed much sympathy for the developments in Poland. The trade unions and many intellectuals expressed different forms of this sympathy. Those differences originated from the individual Germany and French political cultures. The Polish authorities were also more open to accept help from the French trade unions, but were very suspicious of German aid, which they tried to prevent. This explains why it was, for internal political reasons, easier for Lech Walesa to travel to France than to the German Federal Republic.

The reactions of many intellectuals to the Solidarność movement differed due to the varied evaluations of the global political situation and very different political cultures.

The German discussion, which started with the publication of Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1974 and was further pursued by a debate of the advantages and disadvantages of the policy of détente, also played an important role in the way the Solidarność movement was received. A contrasting development was seen in France, where the unanimous approval of Solidarność by French intellectuals led to their separation from the influence of the French Communist Party. This process started in 1956, followed by the incidents of 1968 in the CSSR and the expatriation of Solzhenitsyn in 1974, and finally the Solidarność movement.

Within the German and French trade unions, reactions to the movement were also determined by internal and domestic affairs. The CFDT saw the Solidarność as a model for its vision of *codetermination*, as well as a means to promote its identity over its competitor, the CGT, a trade union influenced by the communists. In the case of the DGB, the actions of Solidarność had no influence on the political program of the union, but demanded a large amount of material support.

**Dorota Dąkowska, The Work of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Poland between 1971 and the Peaceful Revolution**

This article is an attempt to place the work of foundations in Poland within the history and context of the *Ostpolitik*. The various perceptions of participating actors, especially the representatives of German foundations and their Polish partners, are considered. Also taken into account are the political and administrative hierarchies and, in passing, the East German and Polish secret services with their particular view and language.

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation (*Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung; FES*) receives the main share of attention because it was the first of the German foundations that began its activities in Poland during the initial phase of the *Ostpolitik*. The discussion, however, also includes the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (*Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*), which entered into a certain competition with the FES in the 1980s. This article investigates not only the resultant affinities and loyalties but also the complications and tensions that have troubled many relationships up to the time after 1989. The approach affords a more qualified view of the change of system.

The article rests on previously unresearched written sources from the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (*Institut für Nationales Gedächtnis; IPN*), materials
of the United Polish Workers Party (PVAP) from the archives of the New Records (AAN) in Poland, and the archives of the political foundations.

*Translated by Jonathan Uhlner*

**Pertti Ahonen,** German Expellee Organizations. Between Revisionism and Reconciliation

This article analyzes the contributions of German expellee organizations to the development of East-West détente in general and the process of reconciliation between Germany and Eastern Europe in particular since the early 1960s. The expellee groups have sought political influence on the interaction between Germany and its eastern neighbours throughout this period. They have typically couched their demands in a rhetoric of international reconciliation, but their underlying goals have remained revisionist, or at least self-seeking, and the discrepancy between the universalist rhetoric and the underlying interests had dented the credibility of their pronouncements. The expellee organizations’ direct influence on German policies towards Eastern Europe has remained small, but their actions have caused repeated disturbances in the broader policy environment and complicated the process of East – West détente, often in unanticipated ways. At the level of high politics, their role in German – East European reconciliation has therefore been overwhelmingly negative.

But at lower levels the organizations have also made many positive contributions. Most fundamentally, they played a key role in facilitating the long-term societal integration of millions of expellees into post-war Germany. In addition, particularly since 1989, they have promoted social and cultural contacts across the former Iron Curtain, especially through a range of small-scale initiatives, thereby building a basis for what could become more extensive bridge-building between Germans and their eastern neighbours.

**Lawrence S. Wittner,** About the Peace Movements and Their Relations. A Comparison of their Development and Impact in East and West

In the years from 1970 to 1989, the most powerful peace groups in the West remained divided from the most powerful peace groups in the East by serious political differences. Genuinely independent and non-aligned, the Western peace organizations condemned the militarism of both Cold War camps and demanded nuclear disarmament. By contrast, the Eastern peace organizations, dominated by the Soviet government and its creature, the Soviet Peace Committee, were proponents of Soviet foreign and military policy in the Cold War. As a result of these differing approaches, the Western groups attained substantial popularity and had a significant impact upon public policy, while the Eastern groups – although well-funded by the Soviet government – ultimately found themselves discredited, unable to affect public opinion, and ineffective in their efforts to cripple Western military programs.

**Anke Stephan,** Between East and West. The Independent Women’s Movement in Leningrad, 1979–1982

In the autumn of 1979, a so-called ›independent women’s movement‹ was formed in the Leningrad dissident milieu. Its followers called themselves ›feminists‹ and published a new journal in samizdat (self-published) form: Woman in Russia. This journal took up for the first time the consequences of women’s emancipation on the Soviet model. The dissidents criticised everyday problems and misogyny not only in society at large but also in their own milieu. The subject of this article is the genesis and development of the women’s initiative within the Leningrad dissident milieu, which was previously concen-
trated rather on cultural questions or on civil and human rights. A decisive factor for the emergence and development of the "independent women's movement" was the influence of Western European and American feminism. The Leningrad dissidents came into touch with Western feminist writings and their unofficial movement was logistically supported by Western European women's and human rights organisations. Western ideas, however, were not simply taken over by the Leningrad group. The "independent women's movement" soon developed its own dynamic. The group split into two camps: one oriented itself by expressly Western models; the other sought a "Russian way" for women's liberation in a combination of feminism and the Russian Orthodox faith. This transformation of Western ideas is considered within the historical context of the "independent women's movement". The context makes apparent lines of continuity to the discussions of Perestroika and the period of transition.

Translated by Jonathan Uhlmaner

Jan C. Behrends/Friederike Kind, From the Underground into the West. Samizdat, Tamizdat and the Re-invention of Central Europe in the 1980s

With a case study of the discourse on Central Europe, this article analyses the role of underground and exile literature and of Western newspapers and journals in the communication between East and West in the last decade of the Cold War. The debate on Central Europe developed into a transnational project among intellectuals in the East and the West during the 1980s. Against this background, various characteristic features of East and Central European literature are examined, most notably samizdat and tamizdat, i.e. underground literature published at home and abroad respectively.

The constant process of negotiation about what you can say in a dictatorship and what can only be published abroad gives insights into the structure of the public sphere in the last years of communist rule. A comparative perspective makes it possible to assess the significance and the interaction between the various publics created by different methods of publication. Each avenue to publication required a different social network, whose analysis brings into view an area of East-West relations that existed beyond the sphere of diplomacy and official contacts between governments and other institutions.

It was the identity of Europe that was being re-negotiated in these transnational epistemic communities. In the discourse on Central Europe, intellectuals from both sides of the Iron Curtain were able to criticise both the Cold War mental maps and the détente policies of the West, which favoured co-operation with the communist regimes and paid less and less attention to the opposition groups in Eastern and Central Europe.

It also becomes clear that no discourse on Europe is possible without a discussion of its geographical and cultural borders, and that the historical watershed of 1989 and the continuing integration of Europe can only be explained with reference to the historical phenomena of samizdat and tamizdat.

Translated by Gerrit Schäfer

Sonja Häder, Self-assertion Against Party and State. Western Influence and Eastern Autonomy in Young People Cultures Behind the Iron Curtain

The German Democratic Republic and other states in the Eastern bloc have often been described as "closed societies". Constitutionally, these states were indeed dictatorial social systems, but the power of the communist dictatorships had its limitations. This was partly an inherent feature of these systems, and partly due to the influence of Western societies, which remained the point of reference for the people in Eastern Europe. Attempts by governments and ruling parties to change this pattern of perception did not
succeed. Even the Iron Curtain and the Cold War could not prevent a continuous cultural transfer.

This transfer was particularly significant with regard to youth cultures. Youth in the Eastern bloc participated intensively in the development of Western youth cultures and subcultures. Adopting elements of Western culture and insisting on cultural self-determination, these young people circumvented the socialist states’ monopoly of education and culture. Often the only response available to those in power was repression and persecution. However, the governments’ repressive strategies failed to keep the youth cultures in check, but rather resulted in a growing politicisation and a consolidation of the countercultures.

Taking as an example the East German punk scene, this study shows how a youth culture that had had its roots in the West underwent a transformation and acquired meanings that referred to life in a socialist dictatorship. It was used by adolescents to assert their individualism, autonomy and control over their own lives against pressures for conformity and the demands of the ruling elites.

Translated by Gerrit Schäfer