

Institution: University of Bristol
Unit of Assessment: 28, Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: <i>East Meets West: Raising Awareness of Post-Socialist Communities in a British Context</i>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The impact of this on-going project has been to raise cultural awareness of Eastern European history and life behind the Iron Curtain by bringing together communities of former Eastern European citizens in Bristol. It has given those communities the opportunity to share their stories with a group with many common experiences. The project has also given them the opportunity to increase their awareness of other Eastern European countries. Public awareness has been raised through a series of events which have allowed project participants to voice their views and experiences, including a museum exhibition, a series of school workshops, and a set of resources for secondary school teachers.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This impact case study has grown out of the German Department's long-standing research interests in the former German Democratic Republic (1949-1990) and the Eastern Bloc more generally. It draws on the research of four colleagues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr Debbie Pinfold (Senior Lecturer in German), a literary / memory studies scholar specialising on the literature and representations of childhood in the GDR. • Dr Mark Allinson (Senior Lecturer in German), a historian specialising on social and political life in the GDR. • Dr Sara Jones (Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Bristol, 2009-2011, now University of Birmingham), who worked on the representations of the GDR / former Eastern Bloc in different cultural media. • Dr Claire Hyland (Teaching and Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, 2011-2012), who completed her doctoral thesis on perceptions of 'East-Germanness' in Berlin at the University of Bath in Spring 2012. <p>All of those named were founder members of the AHRC-funded 'After the Wall' network (http://afterthewall.bangor.ac.uk, Pinfold as CI) and have contributed to a collective publication that presents the underpinning research for this case study.</p> <p>The research approach shared here focuses on the ways in which countries from the former Eastern Bloc, in particular East Germany, are remembered and represented today. Allinson's work takes a historical perspective, exploring the politicised nature of everyday life in the GDR. Pinfold and Jones analyse processes of remembering in autobiographical literature and in public representations, such as museums and exhibitions. Hyland focuses on the identity construction of these post-socialist groups. All four researchers have contributed academic work on the multiple perspectives held within and about post-socialist states, and the ways in which these perspectives are influenced by dominant discourse, which frequently corresponds to conventional stereotypes about socialism and communism. This dominant discourse all too frequently uses simplistic binaries (victim / perpetrator; the oppressive state / private lives) that are inadequate to explain the politicised nature and complexity of individual citizens' everyday lives. By focusing on a range of individual memory narratives from a range of different socialist states, the 'East meets West' project challenges conventional western images of life under state socialism and contributes to a more nuanced public understanding of the post-socialist community living in Bristol and beyond.</p> <p>The underpinning research was collaborative in its nature and dissemination. Pinfold was Co-Investigator (with Dr Anna Saunders, Bangor University) on the interdisciplinary network 'After the Wall: Reconstructing and Representing the GDR' (http://afterthewall.bangor.ac.uk), funded by the AHRC, which ran from 2009 to 2011 and applied a memory studies approach to the GDR. Pinfold has co-edited a network volume entitled <i>Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple</i></p>

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Perspectives and Plural Authenticities (published in 2013, after a rigorous peer-review process, by Palgrave Macmillan; cf. [1], [2], [3] below). Underlying research by Pinfold and Jones was also published in two leading peer-reviewed journals (see [4] and [5] below). The research project unearthed views from multiple perspectives still held about the GDR by those who experienced it first-hand. It also brought researchers at Bristol into contact with a well-defined group of eyewitnesses, creating a symbiotic relationship between researcher and research subject. This contact with eyewitnesses was consolidated and extended by a conference co-organised by Pinfold and Jones in summer 2011, entitled 'Remembering Dictatorship: Socialist Pasts in Post-Socialist Presents'. Pinfold and Jones conducted an introductory meeting for those interested in participating in the 'East meets West' project as the final event of this conference, which had also provided a number of public engagement events to secure the interest of a wider Bristol and immigrant community. (For full details, see <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/german/events/dictatorship.html>).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Debbie Pinfold and Anna Saunders, eds, *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)
Includes introduction by **Pinfold** and Saunders, and chapters by **Allinson**, **Jones** and **Hyland**
- [2] Claire Hyland, "The Era Has Passed, But It's Nice to Remember": Eastern Identifications with the GDR Past and Unified Germany', in David Clarke and Ute Wölfel, eds, *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 144-56
- [3] Sara Jones, 'At Home with the Stasi: Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen as Historic House', in David Clarke and Ute Wölfel, eds, *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 211-22
- [4] Sara Jones, 'Staging Battlefields: Media, Authenticity and Politics in the Museum of Communism (Prague), the House of Terror (Budapest) and the Gedenkstätte Hohenschönhausen (Berlin)', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 4.1 (2011), 97-111
- [5] Debbie Pinfold, "Erinnerung ideologisch entschlacken" or Lost in Translation: Reflections on Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder* and its American translation', *German Life and Letters*, 60 (2007), 133-48. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0483.2007.00377.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The 'Remembering Dictatorship' conference held in Bristol in summer 2011 was intended to expand the organisers' research interests beyond their shared roots in GDR studies into memories of the Eastern Bloc, and to provide a launch-pad for the further research and impact set out below. Our research suggested that migrants to the UK from the post-socialist sphere often feel that their voices are not heard or understood by their new local community, which increases the difficulties they experience in becoming integrated. We applied the findings of our research in order to further multi-cultural awareness in the face of considerable prejudice against such migrants; prejudice exacerbated by significant economic difficulty and sometimes linked to anxieties over British identities. The project has had, and continues to have, impact on three user-groups:

(1) The Participants

Forty-two Eastern European migrants, from eight different post-socialist states, have participated in the project. Initially, they were asked to share their memories in written narratives, which were posted onto the project website for others to view and comment on (January-February 2012). They then attended two social events, the first focused on objects from the past (March 2012) and the second on British perceptions of Eastern Europe (July 2012). The participants completed a questionnaire after each event, describing their experiences of discussing their memories with other Eastern Europeans. Following the events, ten participants took part in semi-structured interviews where they discussed their overall experience of participating in the project and how

they would like to its outcomes to be disseminated (August-October 2012).

The impact within this group is visible in two ways; first, their experiences of sharing their stories with others of a similar background, and second, the chance for them to shape and take part in the dissemination of their views to the wider public. In their feedback, participants typically commented that they had enjoyed discussing their memories with a group who had similar experiences, and that this was a rare opportunity in the UK. One participant wrote, 'exchanging experiences and thoughts is important and gives the feeling of similar experiences in different Eastern European countries', and another, 'I love talking about my life in East Germany because I am really worried that people are just going to forget about it. [...] I was just so happy that somebody is interested and very, very happy to keep it alive'. The majority of participants claimed that they now felt better informed about other Eastern European countries. Typical comments included: 'that's the interesting part as some experiences were very similar to mine and some completely different', a comment on new insights into the differences between Eastern Bloc political cultures ('I thought they had the same ideology'), reflections on differences in perspective that participants had not previously been aware of, and 'I could see something that we couldn't see in Hungary because we didn't have much experience with other Eastern Europeans'.

The participants' enthusiasm for helping to organise the public events associated with the project reflects their keenness to air their stories publicly. As well as working alongside the researchers to design the format of the public exhibition and schools workshops, they donated an impressive number of objects to be displayed at the exhibition, and frequently suggested other ways in which their stories could be shared. When discussing the idea of producing a documentary, for example, one participant stated: 'I am sure there are plenty who would be willing to talk about their story [...], and say, "okay, when I speak to my English friends they avoid that topic, they always think that"...they'll all have that English person saying I thought this, not that'.

(2) The local community

In May 2012, Pinfold and Hyland curated a public exhibition at the MShed, the new museum of Bristol life. This showcased the outcomes of the project to date, a range of objects donated by the participants, and a selection of findings from our individual research (Pinfold, for example, exhibited a number of socialist children's books, each accompanied by a description providing historical and social context). This event was intended to encourage people to think beyond media stereotypes about Eastern European migrants by providing an insight into the ways in which the group remembers their state socialist past and views Britain. The one-day event was visited by eighty-seven members of the public, who were able to view the exhibits, participate in interactive activities (e.g. a quiz testing their knowledge of Eastern Europe), and talk to the researchers and participants (at least one researcher and one participant were present throughout the day).

Every visitor was asked to complete a questionnaire on the event. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive; the majority commented on how much they had learned about Eastern Europe and migrant communities living in Bristol, and how much they had enjoyed talking to someone with first-hand experiences of state socialism. Remarks about the educational aspect of the event ranged from comments on specific details to more general insights, such as, 'it was interesting to find out about the positives in communist societies, also interesting to see an "outside" view of capitalist society' – or, conversely, the 'opportunity to see how life was in the former Eastern Bloc, not from the Western point of view, but from the Eastern one!', and 'it was interesting to be made to think more about engagement (or not) with official politics before 1989, and about mixed attitudes pre-and post-1989 towards communism. Also interesting to think about Western attitudes'.

(3) Secondary schools

An important activity for delivering the project's impact of raising awareness of Eastern European life are a series of workshops at local secondary schools based on the material provided by the participants and the underpinning research. The first workshop was successfully piloted at the University of Bristol's 'Languages Day' in June 2012 in the 'East Meets West' session attended by sixteen A-level pupils. The feedback highlights the development of the students' knowledge of everyday life under state socialism, and in particular, of the experiences and perceptions of Eastern European migrants in Bristol. The ideas students took away from the session typically

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included, 'contrasts between socialist and capitalist societies', and, 'first-hand opinions of people who lived in Eastern European cultures' (cf. letters of support).

In June 2013 Pinfold spoke about post-1990 representations of GDR childhood at an event attended by 45 pupils taking A-level history at 5 local schools. Participant narratives from the 'East meets West' website were used in interactive small group work following Pinfold's talk, in order further to challenge the students' stereotypical preconceptions about life in the former Eastern Bloc. Feedback from both pupils and their teachers was extremely positive. A number of pupils referred to acquiring 'new' and 'interesting' perspectives, with one noting that he was surprised at 'how [...] normal daily life was under communism and how it was better, in some respects, than western society.' Several teachers also requested further resources and information about future workshops for their own schools.

On 9 July 2013 Pinfold and Allinson conducted a full day school workshop for year 7 pupils at Bristol Metropolitan Academy. The event was run in collaboration with staff from the modern languages and humanities departments and consisted of formal presentations, group discussion, and role plays on everyday activities in both capitalist and socialist societies, including shopping and voting. Feedback from staff and students was highly enthusiastic: comments on student questionnaires included 'I didn't know what communism was but now I do and how it was like'; 'I learned about the differences between socialism and capital that the capital had more luxuries but some jobs were not paid well'; 'we got to see what it was like to shop in both capitalism + socialism. It was the best thing ever!'; [I learned] 'the East side was not so bad'; and 'It was fantastic!'

A series of secondary school resources for teachers of Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE), history, German and Eastern European languages has been made available on the project's website. The website will provide statistics on the number of downloads, and teachers have been asked to comment on the webpage to ensure a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence of impact arising from the resources created.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [a] 'East Meets West' website: www.eastmeetswestbristol.com
- [b] Questionnaires provided by the participants after the social events (available from Pinfold)
- [c] Transcripts from interviews with participants carried out after both social events (available from Pinfold)
- [d] Questionnaires provided by members of the general public who attended the exhibition (available from Pinfold)
- [e] Questionnaires from the school workshop piloted at the University of Bristol's 'Languages Day' (available from Pinfold)
- [f] Mr Richard Kennett (rkennett456@redlandgreen.bristol.sch.uk) – History teacher at Redland Green High School)
- [g] Mr Holger Laux (translations@99computing.co.uk) – Project participant, witness of life in the GDR)