

Das polnische Fenster. Deutsch-polnische Kontakte im staatssozialistischen Alltag Leipzigs 1972-1989

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Daniel Logemann is an architect. In his dissertation, his house, he has taken blueprints and built spaces for the family. There are two neighbors living in this communal apartment: East Germans and Poles. Their personal apartments are by-and-large equitable: the East Germans got the apartment with a garage to park their car and bicycle, while the Poles got the one with a balcony to see the city. In other words, East Germans got the economy, Poles got political liberalism.

Logemann's house is in Leipzig and was built in 1972. This marked the beginning of a period of relative liberalization in the East bloc, and particularly in Poland. Poland's reputation extended beyond its borders: Leipzigers frequented the Polish Cultural Institute in the 1970s on the search of the exotic. On the factory floor, Polish guest workers spoke relatively openly with their German counterparts, but also exhibited a higher degree of truancy, drunkenness and listlessness. Tenuous friendships were made, although they were usually cut short due to limits on the duration of working contracts or student exchanges. In general, East Germans were liked by their neighbor—at least in the 1970s. But with the raise of Solidarity in 1980, the friendship soured.

Diplomatically, this transformation is well-known, and many historians have published toms both on Polish-East German relations as well as cultural contacts after the imposition of Martial Law.[i][1] Readers will not reference Logemann's work due to its narrative of political history. Instead, it is his methodological use of *Alltagsgeschichte* and his acumen in constructing new interpretations of late state socialism which strikes the reader.

The core of Logemann's stimulating investigation is source analysis. At a fundamental level, he is giving a case study of how researchers of post-War East Central Europe—bound to the records of totalitarian systems—should read the primary document. Historians will be familiar with the problem in archives: hundreds of pages of formulaically written protocols detailing how one committee or group met with another and everything "was held in a friendly and productive atmosphere." The newspeak of late state socialism was so prevalent that getting to true motives and "Eigen-sinn" seems impossible. But Logemann has done so with finesse: focusing first on friendship between political functionaries, he moves on to analyze workers, students, tourists and smugglers.

Perhaps due to his decision to focus on one city (with the exception of tourism, where he focus is more general) he has a fine sense of what to read out of documents. Logemann shows how both the state and ordinary people reflected and defined policy between East Germany and Poland. In 1981, for example, mandatory visas and invitations were re-imposed for travel into the GDR. Obviously, that would cut the number of travelers from Poland. But Logemann argues that it was as much individual agency as it was state policy which brought East German citizens to invite a mere twenty-thousand Poles to come visit the GDR.[p. 61-2] That was a far cry from the millions of Poles that came in 1979 or 1980. But importantly, it was just as much individual Germans as it was Erich Honecker and his political cronies which drastically cut the number of Poles in the GDR.

In later chapters, the writer reveals how society reacted and cooperated with the secret police in Leipzig. People of all ranks were willingly to report intimate details about their Polish colleagues, friends and lovers. "In the [Stasi's] fixation on human intelligence, they did not leave out the private sphere." [p. 342] At the same time that Logemann makes more complex the daily role of accusations and providing information on individuals, he also creatively uses both official and Stasi documents to show how representatives of the state made genuine friendships and deep contacts with Polish counterparts. Although everyday Germans and Poles willingly assisted in enforcing state policy, there were also a plethora of attempts to create private spheres. Workers and students were able to create them, and there they spoke relatively freely.

One point of critic is obvious from the title: his focus on Leipzig limits his ability to generalize. And it is not only his focus merely on Leipzig in the 1970s and 1980s, but also his geographic myopia. He compares Leipzig to other East German and Polish towns (most notably Cracow, Leipzig's sister city), but readers will be distracted by the (lack of) comparison to other towns. Was Leipzig really unique in state socialism? Was it not similar to Debrecen and Oradea, Komárno and Komárom, or the half dozen twin towns on the East German-Polish border? Logemann is by no means the only researcher whose gaze fixes on the East-West axis. But the lack of comparison makes his societal study incomplete. Keep in mind that Leipzig was not only a center with intense Polish-East German exchange on all levels, it was a center which was geographically closer to Czechoslovakia. For individuals leaving on the spur of the moment, a trip to Prague was light-years closer than Cracow, and more people spoke German in Prague than in Cracow. Indeed, as the work of Volker Zimmermann and my own dissertation reveal, Leipzigers were criticized by the Czechs in Carlsbad for smuggling, for mass-buying in Ustí nad Labem, for dressing like hippies and punks and singing Western songs in Most.[ii][2] To put it bluntly, East Germans were Czechoslovakia's Poles: they came in masses, they bought hard-to-find goods in excess, and they enjoyed greater freedoms than the native population.

In his study of everyday life in Leipzig, I found his qualitative analysis of *the system as a whole*—that is, late state socialism as civilization—occasionally one-sided. He is best at revealing how daily routine allowed greater room for maneuver (even in politically controlled situations), but he does not forcefully enough show the contrast: how state socialism was a machine which trained ordinary citizens to be suspicious and disingenuous. It was not only Germans who learned to hate Poles: as Jerzy Kochanowski has shown, everyday encounters were tinged with tension—regardless of race or ethnicity.[iii][3] Since Logemann's focus is on the creation of "free space," he at times relativizes the extensive social and political control exerted by the state.

Perhaps for that reason one should view Logemann's fine work as a corrective. Life in state socialism was not *only* about repression and political injustice. There was also latent potential to create friendship despite an obtrusive state. Daniel Logemann has constructed a fascinating exhibition of one German metropolis in the 1970s and 1980s, showing how "spheres of contact between Germans and Poles could be re-functionalized as free spheres, even though they fell in the sensitive realm of politics." [p. 199] He has offered researchers new perspectives on daily life in late state socialism. But there is a darker side: recognizing that ordinary citizens had more agency in daily life threatens to lead us in a moral cul-de-sac, where people at once created niche societies, but at the same time maintained the system which taught them to hate.

[i][1] Olschowsky, Burkhard. *Einvernehmen und Konflikt: das Verhältnis zwischen der DDR und der Volksrepublik Polen 1980-1989*. Osnabrück: fibre, 2005. Print.

[ii][2] Zimmermann, Volker. *Eine sozialistische Freundschaft im Wandel: die Beziehungen zwischen der SBZ/DDR und der Tschechoslowakei (1945-1969)*. Essen, Ruhr: Klartext, 2010. Print.

[iii][3] Kochanowski, Jerzy. *Tylnymi drzwiami: "czarny rynek" w Polsce 1944-1989*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "Neriton," 2010. Print.

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