

Cultural Policy and Culture in Transformation. Central and Eastern Europe since 1989. An Introduction¹

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The collapse of the state-socialist states in 1989/90 led to a transformation of the societies in Central and Eastern Europe. This is evident in the change of political systems and economic structures and, in addition, in the field of culture. Although, especially in the 1990s, culture and cultural policy were fundamentally reshaped both institutionally and conceptually in the course of the transformation, transformation research has long focused primarily on the areas of politics and economics.² In fact, however, culture and cultural policy have played a central role in creating new integrative offers of identification in the former state-socialist states and in the initiation of international cooperations and opening as well. Despite this significance of culture as an integrative instrument, above all for nation states in transition, and as the most important field of soft power³ in international cooperation, the number and breadth of research on cultural policy and cultural production after 1989 in the Central and Eastern European countries is still very

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- 2 R. Kollmorgen, *Postsozialistische Transformationen des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts*, in: R. Kollmorgen/W. Merkel/H.-J. Wagener (eds.), *Handbuch Transformationsforschung*, Wiesbaden 2015, pp. 421–440. This handbook does not treat cultural policy or culture with a separate article. If culture has been addressed in transformation research, it has mainly been with regard to economic-cultural change or change in political culture. See H.-H. Schröder (ed.), *Kultur als Bestimmungsfaktor der Transformation im Osten Europas*, Bremen 2001; C. Meier/H. Pleines/H.-H. Schröder (eds.), *Ökonomie – Kultur – Politik. Transformationsprozesse in Osteuropa*, Bremen 2003.
- 3 J. S. Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York 2004, on the role of culture especially pp. 44–55; R. Los, *Soft Power in Contemporary International Relations*, Lodz 2017, pp. 65–100.

limited; especially systematic comparative studies and studies examining international transfers and interconnections are almost non-existent.

In the 1990s, the transformation of culture and cultural policy in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 gained comparative attention with a practical orientation chiefly by cultural policy-makers and cultural managers. The analyses were based on a limited social-science research design and mostly stated an increasingly convergent development in the cultural sector, as a result of which market-economy and liberal Western European principles became guiding at many levels.⁴

When the East-Central European countries joined the European Union in 2004, the first studies began to pay firm attention to cultural policy developments from a comparative perspective. The focus was essentially on educational and science policy in East-Central Europe. In this course, Peter Bachmaier has determined a growing adaptation to neoliberal Anglo-American standards.⁵ It was a sociological study from 2006 that, for the first time, systematically compared the transformation process in the cultural sector in the East-Central European countries. This study was dedicated to the “third system” in Central and Eastern European cities, i.e., associations, foundations, and non-profit societies in the cultural field acting as non-profit organisations independent of the public and commercial system.⁶ It comes to the conclusion that the pressure of global transformation processes and the simultaneous system transformation led to an approximation to Western standards definitely incorporating local structures. Overall, the authors consider the “third system” a cornerstone of democratisation.⁷

However, the systematic comparison of the transformation of cultural policy in four former state-socialist states after 1989 by Maria Davydchik in 2012 establishes that the cultural policy was substantially shaped exclusively based on the national traditions within society, without transnational or inner-European transfers of cultural policy models and instruments, although this may also be due to the study’s limited source base. It finds an extensive adoption of West German institutions for East Germany only.⁸

The study of the East German transformation in the cultural sector after 1989 was not comparative in most cases, despite the common general structural conditions of the former state-socialist countries after 1989 including the GDR; at most, the East German development was measured starting from West German structures and institutions. The GDR was treated as a special case since the transformation was effected by the accession to the Federal Republic; its institutions and structures were evidently adopted

4 See the contributions by V. Nitulescu, L. Scott, and A. Palka, in: S. Wesner (ed.), *Herausforderungen an Kulturpolitik und Kulturmanagement in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Leipzig 1997.

5 P. Bachmaier, *Der Wertewandel in Ostmitteleuropa*, in: P. Bachmaier/B. Blehova (eds.), *Der kulturelle Umbruch in Ostmitteleuropa*, Frankfurt am Main 2005, pp. 19–23.

6 P. Ostermann/K.-S. Rehberg/K. Voigt, *Transformationsprozesse im Kulturbereich*, Leipzig 2006.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 121–127.

8 M. Davydchik, *Transformation der Kulturpolitik. Kulturpolitische Veränderungen nach dem Zusammenbruch des sozialistischen Systems in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Wiesbaden 2012. The study is based on the evaluation of official government documents and interviews with a few selected cultural managers in a city in each of the nations studied.

quickly and to a large extent. It was only in light of the refugee crisis and an increasing renationalisation that the significance of supranational structural breaks for the transformation in the cultural and cultural-political sphere has come to the fore roughly during the last decade.⁹ What has also come into focus now were the specific design and the new contents of cultural policy that allow more for the needs of social integration and identification in times of rapid social change and rising migration.¹⁰ Questions were also increasingly asked about the repercussions and impulses of the cultural restructuring in the new German federal states for the development of the cultural policy in the Federal Republic as a whole after 1990. Furthermore, the question arose to which extent the transformation process in the Central and Eastern European countries was part of the structural change since the 1970s.

This thematic issue focuses on cultural policy strategies in Hungary, Poland, and East Germany based on the objectives of the different actors at the local or national level. It is not based on normative objectives, though, that take up certain obligatory tasks to cultural policy.¹¹ During the transformation of the state-socialist cultural regimes, the influence of political actors was pushed back, in particular their active intervention in artistic canons, contents, forms, and reception processes. Nonetheless, even in the liberal cultural regime, politics decisively determines the development and the social use of arts and culture by some means or other. Moreover, the contributions address the international transfer and the interconnections in the transformation of cultural policy instruments, ideas, and models, too. In doing so, transformation is not understood as the restructuring of cultural infrastructure only, but also as the change of interpretive patterns, rules, ideas, and narratives. The articles here examine both the transformation of state, regional, and local cultural policy and the developments in individual fields and media of art and culture.

The contributions brought together in this thematic issue originated from a conference cancelled at short notice due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The conference had been planned for March 2020 and with the support of the Federal Foundation for the Study of the SED-Dictatorship at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe (GWZO). The articles show that the transformation of the cultural regimes in East Germany, Poland, and Hungary in the 1990s followed similar premises and was characterised by comparable demands and restraints. The cultural sector was under

9 For example, the *Jahrbuch für Kulturpolitik 2015/16* explicitly dealt with the topic "transformational cultural policy": *Jahrbuch für Kulturpolitik 2015/16*, vol. 15: Transformatorische Kulturpolitik, Bielefeld 2016.

10 See especially the pioneering study by Antje Dietze (*Ambivalenz des Übergangs. Die Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz in Berlin in den neunziger Jahren*, Göttingen 2015), which uses the example of the development of the Volksbühne in Berlin after 1989 to make clear the role culture played in the social debates after reunification about identity, cultural funding, and left-wing utopias, and how a critical, alternative contemporary theatre was associated with new elements of event culture and thus gained integrative power, social relevance, and attractiveness.

11 This is what Maria Davydchyk demands for the cultural policy in the Eastern European countries after 1989 or, for example, Alexander Endress for the federal cultural policy. Davydchyk, *Transformation der Kulturpolitik*, pp. 211–213; A. Endress, *Die Kulturpolitik des Bundes*, Berlin 2005, pp. 231–237.

considerable funding pressure in the decade following 1989. Thus, restructuring the cultural landscape in the former GDR and in Poland, Hungary, and the other former state-socialist countries as well, was shaped by privatisation tendencies, the renegotiation of the political mandate of state-funded cultural institutions, and a reorganisation of their financing under neoliberal conditions.¹² This was quite similar to what has already been determined for the education sector.¹³ The transfer of New Public Management¹⁴ approaches to cultural institutions led to a reorientation of the institutions on economic and content-related level: the consequence was their increased self-reliance, which, however, was often associated with less funding from the public sector, as the texts by *Przemysław Czapliński*, *Antje Dietze*, and *Torben Ibs* reveal. *Kristóf Nagy* and *Márton Szarvas* identify such tendencies in Hungary as early as the 1970s; and this development can, in rudiments, also be evidenced for Poland in the 1970s.¹⁵ Therefore, the structural change of the 1970s could already be noticed in the cultural production in state-socialist countries, especially in Hungary. The fundamental restructuring of cultural regimes after 1989 accelerated this development. This was associated with a shift from supply orientation to demand orientation, a change in consumer or cultural user behaviour, and a certain erosion of high-cultural forms, since the boundaries between high and popular culture became more fluid with regard to the artistic, institutional, and discursive levels. Although the cultural regime's transformation opened up new possibilities and freedoms for artists, irrespective of whether they tended to conform to the state-socialist system or rather belonged to the oppositional or subcultural scene, the upheaval of 1989 also forced them to reorient themselves fundamentally, as *Christian Saebrendt's* contribution on the art exhibitions of East German artists in the USA in 1989 and 1990 shows. The "social capital" they had accumulated before 1989 fell in value rapidly after the political upheaval.

The municipalities gained cultural policy competences while the state, especially in Poland and Hungary, withdrew to a certain extent as a cultural policy actor and financier of culture after 1989 and, on a neoliberal maxim, increasingly left culture to demand. *Thomas Höpel's* contribution makes clear with the examples of Leipzig and Krakow that large cities and metropolises in particular developed a committed and active cultural policy in the 1990s, building on local traditions and incorporating Western European concepts in the restructuring of urban cultural institutions. Thus, contrary to what could be established for small municipalities and rural areas¹⁶, the cultural infrastructure in the metropolises was not dismantled substantially, but rather restructured. Even if economic

12 Concerning the Czech Republic, Ivo Bock gives a good overview of the development of cultural policy up to 2002. He also reveals that state cultural funding in the Czech Republic during this period was significantly higher than in the other East-Central European countries: I. Bock, *Die Kulturpolitik Tschechiens nach der Wende von 1989*, in: Bachmaier/Blehova (eds.), *Der kulturelle Umbruch in Ostmitteleuropa*, pp. 107–129.

13 Bachmaier, *Der Wertewandel in Ostmitteleuropa*, pp. 15–31.

14 K. Schedler and I. Proeller, *New Public Management*, Stuttgart 2011.

15 T. Höpel, *Kulturpolitik in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2017, pp. 236–238.

16 In 2015, Klaus Hebborn, a councillor of the German Association of Cities and Towns (*Deutscher Städtetag*), spoke of a "serious dismantling of cultural infrastructure". K. Hebborn, *Kommunale Kulturpolitik und deutsche*

considerations were decisive in the larger cities as well, expenditures on culture there did not decline in the course of the 1990s and even grew again in the second half of the 1990s.

In addition, the contributions by *Thomas Höpel* and *Antje Dietze* also point out that traditions from the state-socialist period were by no means completely devalued but had a continued effect in the reshaping of urban culture. The increasing renationalisation of culture in Poland and Hungary since the second decade of the twenty-first century also tied in with an unease in large parts of society about the arbitrariness of neoliberal cultural policy after 1989, which had devalued national traditions to some extent.

Torben Ibs shows that in East Germany, on the one hand, administrative structures in the cultural sector were taken over from the old Federal Republic, though there was a tendency to more neoliberal models in restructuring theatres. These models had previously been applied mainly in Great Britain, but also in France.¹⁷ Hence, East Germany became a testing ground for the restructuring of cultural institutions subsequently carried out in the old federal states, too. The transformation in the cultural sector in the 1990s therefore led to an adaptation to Western European ideas and models of cultural policy in many areas. Nonetheless, *Antje Dietze's* contribution on the cultural policy transformation in Berlin after 1989 also illustrates that a simple adoption of Western models in the area of cultural funding, but also in the area of artistic aesthetics and concepts, would be a false notion. Traditions from East and West were interwoven with new concepts in order to be able to meet the requirements of a cultural show window role for the new German capital. Eventually, the development in East Germany also had lasting effects on the promotion of culture in the old federal states and in national German cultural policy in general. Furthermore, it was also a matter of integrating Berlin into European and global networks, an orientation generally moved forward in the large metropolises after 1989. In the second half of the 1990s, Berlin, like Leipzig and Krakow before, joined the "Eurocities" network of cities and, among other things, was active in its cultural forum: in 2010, Berlin was head of the working group "Resources for Culture".¹⁸ Culture became more and more relevant as a locational and economic factor, which fits in with global trends starting, for instance, in the 1980s in the USA and Great Britain.¹⁹ Therefore, the narrative of Germany's special path of transformation after 1989 definitely has to be scrutinised.

However, since the first decade of the twenty-first century, divergent tendencies have been on the rise again in East-Central Europe, initially in Poland, then in Hungary. The paradigm of a neoliberal state cultural policy that had dominated the 1990s was replaced

Einheit, in: *Jahrbuch für Kulturpolitik 2015/16*, vol. 15: Transformatorische Kulturpolitik, Bielefeld 2016, pp. 77–83, at 77.

17 On the transformation of the major French opera houses see Höpel, *Kulturpolitik in Europa*, p. 295.

18 E. Völkel, *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen europäischer Städtenetzwerke für die städtische Kulturpolitik*, BA thesis, Leipzig 2010, p. 43.

19 Höpel, *Cultural Policy in Europe*, pp. 324–326; F. Bianchini, *Remaking European Cities: The Role of Cultural Policies*, in: F. Bianchini/M. Parkinson (eds.), *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration*, Manchester 1993, pp. 1–19.

or supplemented in both countries by a cultural policy placing national identification offers in the foreground and developing a new “national” cultural canon, as is described in the contributions by *Przemysław Czapliński* and *Kristóf Nagy/Márton Szarvas*. This policy was secured by directing state subsidies and a staff change in the governing bodies of cultural institutions that were important for the dissemination of a national and nationalist idea of culture. In Hungary, this has resulted in a broad wave of protest since 2012. Young artists and art students have upheld the ideals of liberal cosmopolitan modern art and have been supported by international organisations such as the foundation Erste Stiftung.

Nevertheless, the example of Hungary also makes clear that the liberal mechanisms in sub-areas of cultural production, especially in the mass cultural sector and the creative industries, certainly remained valid. At the same time, this made the social situation of young cultural workers increasingly precarious. In Hungary, liberal economic elements went well together with a state cultural policy oriented towards national representation. The result was, as *Kristóf Nagy* and *Márton Szarvas* underline, that Hungarian politics attempted to integrate young artists with a liberal cosmopolitan understanding of art in the field of popular and mass culture while giving preference to conservative nationalist intellectuals and artists in high culture.

The two authors predict that the Covid-19 pandemic will reinforce the hegemonic penetration of culture by the Orban regime because it will make cultural workers even more dependent on state structures. The situation is similar in Poland, where the PiS government put a tax on advertisements into play at the beginning of 2021 as a “solidarity contribution” to finance anti-corona measures and culture, but which critics interpret as a means of exerting pressure on independent media. At the same time, the public media have received a renewed state subsidy of two million zlotys in 2021. Thus, Polish cultural policy is clearly moving away from the values and rules of European cultural policy, which, in addition to European networking, increasingly focuses on the liberalisation in the area of art production, competition law, and media concentration in the member states.²⁰

The contributions show that the transformation in the field of culture and cultural policy in the former state-socialist states of East-Central Europe can neither be explained solely by the continued effects of earlier influences from the first half of the twentieth century or the state-socialist period, nor that it was oriented towards a normative end point. Rather, the cultural and cultural policy actors combined traditional influences with new instruments and models in an open transformation situation. As a result, new cultural policy structures emerged at municipal and state level. They cannot be depicted by only referring to the convergence or divergence of European cultural policy ideas, as each of them found specific political answers to specific challenges. The role of culture and cultural policy for collective identification, having always maintained an important func-

20 T. Höpel, *Geschichte der Kulturpolitik in Europa: vom nationalen zum europäischen Modell*, in: M. Middell (ed.), *Dimensionen der Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, Leipzig 2007, pp. 200–203.

tion at the local level, increasingly came into focus again at the state level after the turn of the millennium; this could happen with a very one-sided national, even nationalistic orientation, as in Hungary and Poland. But the discussion about how cultural policy can contribute to the internal cohesion of a society received renewed impetus also in the Federal Republic, as the 8th Federal Congress on Cultural Policy in 2015 demonstrated, where, for instance, the President of the Bundestag Norbert Lammert called for a “fundamental consensus in need of canonisation” that must be negotiated in a “continuous reflexive discourse among all citizens of a society”.²¹ The contributions in this volume also focus on the level of international associations and cooperations of municipal and state cultural policy as well as on the level of art producers. It is to be hoped that they will help to initiate further research in this field.

21 N. Lammert, Kulturnationen in einer globalisierten Welt, in: Jahrbuch für Kulturpolitik 2015/16, vol. 15: Transformatorische Kulturpolitik, Bielefeld 2016, pp. 143–148, at 148.