

SOCIALIST TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE EAST GERMAN PUBLISHING FIELD (1956–1989)

The forced integration of European socialist states following WWII is usually viewed as a history of political misunderstandings and genuine social failures. Since the early modernism and avant-garde times, socialism has also been a common experience to the whole of East and Central Europe. Since the late 1950s, the densifying network of relations among culture departments of socialist parties, culture ministries of individual countries, writer associations, publishers or literary journals has resulted in the so-far unknown transnational literature circulation.

International writer associations, translator, literary intermediaries, publishing editors regularly groups met for regular consultations in Moscow, Berlin, Warsaw, Budapest or Sofia. Ideological control over the whole of the socialist book market was the most important aim of such events. However, as a side effect, exchange of expertise, knowledge collection on censorship systems, transnational process of socialist literature canon negotiation and common editorial projects abounded. In other words, a political utopia of socialist community generated a fully real literary space, a common literary field. A historiographic and theoretical description of this field is the objective of this project.

Documents preserved in East German archives are the basis for the study. The grounds for this decision are twofold. First of all, following WWII, the GDR was an industrialised country with a perfectly profiled publishing market. In the postulated approximation of socialist cultures and national literatures, the GDR played, next to the Soviet Union, a coordinating part. Secondly, East German archives enable a reconstruction of cooperation and communication among nearly all the actors of the East European publishing field. The degree of preservation and ordering is far better than in the other countries of the former Eastern Block. Thanks to this they may serve as a laboratory for research into processes of literature circulation in the areas of European socialist states.

As a result of the project, a historiographic description of common transnational literary and publishing space of socialist states and the role played by the GDE in it. The activities of specific associations and groups, organisation of conferences, the role of international literary bodies and international book fairs, as well as of specific common editorial projects are the focus of research. Archival data also constitutes a prerequisite for methodological reflections: How did the East European publishing field function? Did its network character result in institutional unification, i.e. the so-called isomorphism? How were the concepts of „new community of socialist literatures” put into practice?

Research outcomes in the form of papers will be published in prestigious journals of international reach.