

The project proposes a comparative analysis of how trade union confederacies in Poland (OPZZ), Ukraine (FPU), and East Germany (DGB) have constructed May Day rituals after 1989. Using qualitative methods including desk research, archival queries, and interviews with trade unionists, the project will investigate the evolution of these rituals in countries representing distinct types of postsocialist trade union transformations: institutional continuity (Ukraine), break of continuity within continuity (Poland), and total rupture (East Germany) (Deppe 1994). **The study will analyse how these trade union confederacies use May Day rituals to reinforce social identities, frame narratives of postsocialist transformation, and express their organisational identities.**

The research will cover a 35-year period from 1989 to 2024. The project aims to answer four main research questions: What kinds of social identities are reinforced by trade union confederacies through May Day rituals? How have May Day rituals been used by trade union confederacies to frame narratives of transformation? How do trade union confederacies use May Day to express their organisational identities? What are the similarities and differences in the construction of May Day rituals among the studied confederations?

The main theoretical framework is informed by two theories. Firstly, Bernhard's and Kubik's (2014) framework for comparative research on postsocialist transformations. This approach involves an actor-centred conceptualisation of the postsocialist field of memory, understood as consisting of regimes of memory shaped by interest-driven actions of memory actors within structural and cultural constraints. Secondly, William Sewell's (2005) constructivist paradigm of eventful historical sociology, which emphasises the interplay between event, structure, and agency, highlighting the importance of understanding historical narratives in relation to the social context within which they are articulated and transmitted by specific social actors. **Within this framework, I view 1989 as a *transformative event* that actualises the cultural structures within which May Day rituals are performed.**

The project aims to deepen the understanding of the transformations of memory cultures in postsocialism. Although this topic has been researched from various angles, there is a lack of systematic studies that analyse the transformation of postsocialist memory cultures from the perspective of the main economic actors of this period.

Additionally, the project will engage with three subfields of social sciences: memory studies, labour history, and industrial relations.

In the field of industrial relations, **the project will contribute to the debate on trade union renewal strategies and the changing identities of trade unions** (see Fairbrother 2015). This will be approached through the so far not addressed lens of May Day rituals.

In the field of labour history, **the research aims to contribute the growing body of work on May Day rituals and their history.** While the topic has been studied in the context of Western Europe and pre-1989 Central and Eastern Europe (e.g., Hobsbawm 1984, Krakovsky 2004, Tartakowsky 2005, Dytman-Stasieńko 2006, Reiter and Peterson 2016), **surprisingly little attention has been paid to the development of the ritual after the collapse of authoritarian socialism.**

In memory studies, **the research will contribute to the novel research program developed within COST Action Slow Memory: Transformative Practices for Times of Uneven and Accelerating Change, of which I am a member.** This approach calls for research on the mnemonic dimension of slow-moving cultural, political, and economic change as well as understanding them within the socio-economic context where specific memory narratives are articulated and transmitted (Wüstenberg 2023).