

DIVIDED MEMORY: DEALING WITH THE PAST IN THE EAST GERMAN TOWN OF EISENHÜTTENSTADT AFTER THE UPHEAVAL OF 1989–90

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Abstract

This paper explores perceptions of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in Eisenhüttenstadt, the “first socialist town of Germany,” following the collapse of the state socialist dictatorship in East Germany. Despite its being the most well-known “socialist town” in Eastern Bloc, no systematic research has been done into how the town dealt with its troubled past. By analyzing discussion and representation of the town’s past in the public space through the year 2010, this study investigates how a town like Eisenhüttenstadt, which has no pre-socialist history, dealt with its past as East Germany transitioned away from state socialism. It also examines the impact of the town’s unique past on its current identity. The author argues that *Diktaturgedächtnis* [the memory of dictatorship], the lack of a pre-socialist past, and the town’s rejection of radical strategies for dealing with the past have led to complex collective memories and town identity in Eisenhüttenstadt. This complexity manifests itself in the embrace of different symbolic representations of history in different parts of the town and in splits in the public and private, and internal and external, collective memories.

Keywords: socialist town; divided memory; mnemonic hegemony; GDR; Eisenhüttenstadt

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Introduction

A town without a past but with a great future.
(*Neue Zeit*, on Eisenhüttenstadt, 1960)¹

The home of the “new people” is now just another beleaguered place in eastern Brandenburg. One in five inhabitants is unemployed. The local radio station holds lotteries where people can send in their unpaid bills. Those who can, move away.
(*Die Zeit*, 2003)²

In the radical political and social upheaval of 1989–90 in East Germany, the transformation of urban identity and the symbology in civic spaces was on the agenda everywhere in the former GDR. At the same time, interest in the Eastern Germany’s pre-socialist past was revived in some instances. In many cities, the GDR was derided and accused of the destruction of genuine, uncorrupted tradition. Streets and even entire cities were given back their old names, some GDR-era buildings were demolished to allow the resurrection of “old” buildings, and some decaying buildings were lavishly restored and renovated.³ The problem with Eisenhüttenstadt was and still is that the town has no pre-socialist history. Stalinstadt – the name it bore until 1961 – was founded in 1950 as a model town of the GDR.

In this article, I explore how the town dealt with its state-socialist past in the post-1989 context and the impact its specific history has had on the town’s identity. The focus of my research is on the period from 1990 to 2010. The latter year was marked by a big celebration of 60 years since the town’s founding. I chose this period somewhat arbitrarily, but it is sufficient to demonstrate the changes in the approach to the past that took place in the town. It was a time when the crisis of transformation of the 1990s gave way to relative stability and certainty. It is also important to note that it was before the rise of right-wing populist movements, which have introduced new motifs into the politics of memory in Eastern Germany. As I show, the mnemonic hegemony of *Diktaturgedächtnis*

¹ “Zauberworte des Erfolges,” *Neue Zeit*, August 14, 1960.

² Michael Allmaier, “Namensänderung: die verbotene Stadt,” *Die Zeit*, February 27, 2003, https://www.zeit.de/2003/10/Eisenh_9fttenstadt/komplettansicht.

³ See e.g. Pierre Nora, “Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory,” *Eurozine*, April 19, 2002, <https://www.eurozine.com/reasons-for-the-current-upsurge-in-memory/>; Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 11–30; Aleida Assmann, “Geschichte findet Stadt,” in *Kommunikation – Gedächtnis – Raum*, ed. Moritz Csáky and Christoph Leitgeb (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), 23–27.

(the memory of dictatorship) and the absence of a pre-socialist past led to multiple splits in the town's collective memory and perceived identity after the upheaval of 1989–90. They also resulted in the revival of different symbolisms in districts that were incorporated into the town in 1961, a split between public and private memories of the town's past, and yet another split between internal and external collective memories.

After the reunification of Germany, Eisenhüttenstadt became the focus of a number of academic studies. Researchers were primarily concerned with the architecture and public art of the planned town, but also with its general history and development. Nevertheless, the public treatment of the GDR's past in the town after reunification has not been given sufficient attention, especially in a way that places that public treatment in historical perspective. An exception are essays by Andreas Ludwig that recounted the development of the town's image in local histories of Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt and press accounts.⁴ I build upon some of Ludwig's ideas and expand upon them. Some of the texts accompanying a museum exhibition, *Aufbau west – Aufbau ost* (1997), which compared the towns of Wolfsburg and Eisenhüttenstadt, also shed light on the politics of the memory of the socialist state shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but they are mainly focused on the GDR period.⁵

My interest in Eisenhüttenstadt is not primarily about what has happened in the minds of individuals, but about what has happened in the public sphere, as defined by civil society and the state.⁶ There is no single "town memory," but

⁴ Andreas Ludwig, "'Traum der Zukunft – Wirklichkeit'. Stadtgeschichte, Selbstbild, Fremdbild in Eisenhüttenstadt," in *Eisenhüttenstadt*, ed. Valérie Lozac'h (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 1999), 9–20; Ana Kladnik and Andreas Ludwig, "Cultural Heritage of Post-Socialist New Towns. A Comparison of Eisenhüttenstadt and Velenje," *Mesto a dejiny* 5, no. 2 (2016): 50–67; Andreas Ludwig, "Wo die Zukunft Gegenwart war: Phasen der Selbstbeschreibung Eisenhüttenstadts," in *Schattenorte: Stadtimages und Vergangenheitslasten*, ed. Stefanie Eisenhuth and Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2017), 157–171.

⁵ Gottfried Korff, "Mentalität und Monumentalität im politischen Wandel. Zur öffentlichen Namengebung in Wolfsburg und Eisenhüttenstadt," in *Aufbau West. Aufbau Ost*, ed. Rosmarie Beier (Berlin: DHM, 1997), http://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/katlg24.htm#navob; Jörn Schütrumpf, "'Wo einst nur Sand und Kiefern waren...' 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' im Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost," in *Aufbau West. Aufbau Ost*, ed. Rosmarie Beier (Berlin: DHM, 1997), https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/katlg15.htm; Jörn Schütrumpf, "'Young Town on an Old River'. Selbstverständnis und Selbstdarstellung von Stalinstadt," in *Aufbau West. Aufbau Ost*, ed. Rosmarie Beier (Berlin: DHM, 1997), https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/katlg26.htm.

⁶ Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (November 1999): 333–348, doi: 10.1111/0735-2751.00083.

rather a multiplicity of different narratives, which are dialogically connected.⁷ Some of these memories have achieved dominance over others and become hegemonic. In this case I adopt Berthold Molden's concept of mnemonic hegemony.⁸ Molden bases his concept on the discourse and hegemony theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, which insists that the links between discursive elements have a contingent and incomplete character.⁹ Such poststructuralist approaches tend to exaggerate the pliability and elasticity of the past in the hands of contemporary actors.¹⁰ Some authors have criticized this approach by pointing out that the past can in fact be resistant to contemporary interpretations. For example, Michael Schudson has emphasized that the way contemporary people deal with the past is not entirely arbitrary, but is constrained by "the structure of available pasts."¹¹ Jeffrey Olick adds that the "past includes not only the history being commemorated but also the accumulated succession of commemorations, as well as what has occurred between those powerful moments."¹² A socialist town with no prior history is an opportunity to confirm or refute the validity of this critique.

First, I look at the hegemony of the memory of dictatorship in the reunified Germany and its role in Eisenhüttenstadt's crisis of identity. Then I will analyze

⁷ Valentin Voloshinov, *Marksizm i filosofija iazyka* (Moskva: Labirint, 1993), 104–5.

⁸ Berthold Molden, "Mnemonic Hegemony? The Power Relations of Contemporary European Memory," in *EUTROPEs. The Paradox of European Empire*, ed. John W. Boyer and Berthold Molden (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2014), 104–130; Berthold Molden, "Resistant Pasts versus Mnemonic Hegemony: On the Power Relations of Collective Memory," *Memory Studies* 9, no. 2 (2016): 125–142, doi: 10.1177/1750698015596014. For other adaptations of the concepts of hegemony to the study of collective memory and memory politics, see Oliver Marchart, "Das historisch-politische Gedächtnis. Für eine politische Theorie kollektiver Erinnerung," in *Gedächtnis im 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. Ljiljana Radonic and Heidemarie Uhl (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), 43–77, doi:10.14361/9783839432365-003; and Günther Sandner, "Hegemonie und Erinnerung: Zur Konzeption von Geschichts- und Vergangenheitspolitik," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 30, no. 1 (2001): 5–17.

⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (London: NLB, 1977), 92–115; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2014).

¹⁰ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 162; Molden, "Resistant Pasts," 139. For a critique of the voluntarist skew in the theory of Laclau and Mouffe, see Benjamin Opratko, *Hegemonie. Politische Theorie nach Antonio Gramsci*, 2nd ed. (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2014), 143–145. See also Perry Anderson, *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (London: Verso, 2017), 96.

¹¹ Michael Schudson, "The Present in the Past versus the Past in the Present," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 287–290.

¹² Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 58.

the local controversy surrounding the politics of memory in the 1990s: the renaming of the town and many of its streets, and the replacement of the town's coat of arms. These controversies revolved around the question of how the town should deal with the omnipresent legacy of the GDR after it disappeared. After that, I will address splits in the collective memory and perceptions of the town's identity, some of which I have already mentioned. These splits arose because in Eisenhüttenstadt it was impossible to ignore the GDR's past, and because some alternative narratives that were critical of the state-socialist past suffered from inherent weaknesses. Finally, I turn to celebrations of the town's founding, which logically should also celebrate a collective identity. However, I show how difficult it is for the town's inhabitants to cope with its past.

Because I am interested in the public treatment of the past, my sources consist mainly of the local and national press and published histories of the town and the steelworks. Other sources include archival materials from the town council such as reports, minutes, and resolutions. These documents shed light on the tension between memory and politics and the conflicts that arose between representatives of different political parties. Finally, Erich Opitz has published some documents of the opposition movement Neues Forum that are fruitful for analysis.¹³

Mnemonic Hegemony and Identity Crisis

Since 1990, the prevailing narrative in the German public space has portrayed the GDR as a dictatorship – remembering an *Unrechtsstaat* [unconstitutional, unjust state] characterized by inefficiency, shortages, oppression, and resistance.¹⁴ Martin Sabrow calls this memory *Diktaturgedächtnis*.¹⁵ Diktaturgedächtnis served to legitimize and stabilize the new political and economic order in Germany.¹⁶ It amounted to what Antonio Gramsci calls a hegemony based on the intellectual and moral leadership of a dominant class.¹⁷ A particular

¹³ Erich Opitz, ed., *Wende – Papier(e) – Wende* (Eisenhüttenstadt: Bürgervereinigung “Fürstenberg (Oder)”, 2010).

¹⁴ Pamela Heß, *Geschichte als Politikum. Öffentliche und private Kontroversen um die Deutung der DDR-Vergangenheit* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014), 208; Michael Meyen, “Wir haben freier gelebt”. *Die DDR im kollektiven Gedächtnis der Deutschen* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 71–159.

¹⁵ Martin Sabrow, “Die DDR erinnern,” in *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 18.

¹⁶ Heß, *Geschichte als Politikum*, 23–29.

¹⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Klaus Bochmann, Wolfgang Fritz Haug, and Peter Jehle, vol. 8 (Hamburg: Argument, 2012), 1947.

mnemonic hegemony is constructed by favoring certain memories over others. A hegemony determines what is acceptable and unacceptable, which memories are legitimate and which are illegitimate, and what is worth remembering and what can be forgotten. Molden states, “Hegemony thus establishes one particular narrative as a quasi-natural universality and delegitimizes alternative forms of reasoning.”¹⁸ However, this is not done through mnemonic violence as in dictatorships, where entire layers of memory are officially consigned to oblivion, but through the organization of consent in and through civil society.¹⁹ Counter-narratives challenging the hegemonic memory do exist.²⁰ So can communities of passive memory, so long as the communities’ distinct memories remain unarticulated and do not challenge the hegemonic memory.²¹ Jenny Wüstenberg’s and Pamela Heß’s research shows that Diktaturgedächtnis is not imposed solely by the state, but is shared and driven by much of civil society, particularly by the victims of the Soviet rule and by other critics of the SED regime. These opponents of the former regime played a significant role in post-reunification Germany by exerting pressure from below and creating new sites of memory.²²

For a brief period, the citizens of the former GDR seemed to broadly share the Diktaturgedächtnis – after all, they had just seen off a repressive regime and were finally united with the democratic Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). However, the costs of transition to a new economy and continuing divisions between East and West Germany led to disappointment and more positive reassessments of the GDR past. Although certain aspects of the GDR were idealized, it never went so far as to result in a “restorative nostalgia.”²³ A split emerged between public and private memories of the GDR.²⁴ The structure of civil society

¹⁸ Molden, “Resistant Pasts,” 126.

¹⁹ Antonio Gramsci, “Letter to Tatiana Schucht (September 7, 1931),” in *Letters from Prison*, ed. Lynne Lawner (London: Quartet Books, 1973), 204–205; Antonio Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Klaus Bochmann and Wolfgang Fritz Haug, vol. 4 (Hamburg: Argument, 2012), 873–874.

²⁰ Gramsci describes the process of creating hegemony as the constant formation and superseding of unstable equilibria. Antonio Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Klaus Bochmann and Wolfgang Fritz Haug, vol. 7 (Hamburg: Argument, 2012), 1561.

²¹ Molden, “Resistant Pasts,” 135.

²² Jenny Wüstenberg, *Zivilgesellschaft und Erinnerungspolitik in Deutschland seit 1945* (Bonn: LIT Verlag, 2020), 240–288; Heß, *Geschichte als Politikum*.

²³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41–49; Katja Neller, *DDR-Nostalgie: Dimensionen der Orientierungen der Ostdeutschen gegenüber der ehemaligen DDR, ihre Ursachen und politischen Konnotationen* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 183–187.

²⁴ Where the dictatorship memory does not dominate, a less radical way of dealing with the socialist past is possible. In the capital cities of Belarus (especially) and Kazakhstan (to a lesser extent),

in eastern Germany is not entirely clarified. Naïve Tocquevillian claims about the triumph of democracy do not take into account the extent to which civil society represents a population and the extent to which the links between civil society and the population are “organic.” They generally obscure the relationship between memory, power, and the population.²⁵

Most likely, there was a crisis of representation in the East, in which the leaders of civil society were more united with the West German political elites than with the people of the former GDR.²⁶ Most people in the GDR were not victims of the regime, so they could not recognize themselves in stories of dictatorship and repression.²⁷ Many mnemonic actors were aware of this gap between public and private memories. The later inclusion of the theme of everyday life under state socialism was not intended to discourage Diktaturgedächtnis, but to reinforce it by creating a compromise.²⁸ By recalling not only the repressive experience of a limited number of people, but also the more widespread and understandable experiences of everyday life,²⁹ the promoters of the hegemonic anti-GDR memory tried to make it more palatable to East Germans and thus prevent the spread of “Ostalgie.”³⁰

the Soviet past was not rejected but was recycled by the newly independent republics and accepted as part of their identity. Nelly Bekus, “Ideological Recycling of the Socialist Legacy. Reading Townscapes of Minsk and Astana,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 5 (May 2017): 794–818, doi: 10.1080/09668136.2017.1350259.

²⁵ Although Wüstenberg makes important points in her introduction to the concept of civil society, she does not address the matter of how representative of the population was the movement to remember the victims of repression in the GDR. See Wüstenberg, *Zivilgesellschaft und Erinnerungspolitik*, 21–25, 232–288. For a general critique of Tocquevillian approaches to civil society, see Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870–1945* (London: Verso, 2019).

²⁶ This crisis of representation was observed before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. See Volodymyr Ishchenko and Oleg Zhuravlev, “Post-Soviet Vicious Circle: The Crisis of Hegemony and the Crisis of Revolution,” in *The Anthem Companion to Gramsci*, ed. Dylan J. Riley and Marco Santoro (London: Anthem Press), forthcoming.

²⁷ Thomas Ahbe, *Ostalgie: Zum Umgang mit der DDR-Vergangenheit in den 1990er Jahren* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Thüringen, 2005), 42.

²⁸ Andrew H. Beattie, “The Politics of Remembering the GDR: Official and State-Mandated Memory since 1990,” in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic*, ed. David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30–33. According to Gramsci, this compromise can never concern the essential. In his case it concerns the material foundations of the bourgeoisie. This is also true in the case of the dictatorial character of the GDR. See Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte*, vol. 7, 1567.

²⁹ Returning to Gramsci, he explicitly describes the struggle for hegemony as working with the contradictions in everyday consciousness. Opratko, *Hegemonie*, 44–45.

³⁰ Heß, *Geschichte als Politikum*, 217–222; Wüstenberg, *Zivilgesellschaft und Erinnerungspolitik*, 272–274.

The hegemonic post-reunification mode of remembrance shattered the official, fundamental myths of the old GDR that Eisenhüttenstadt was the first truly socialist town, a town of the future built from nothingness, and the town of the “new man.”³¹ As early as 1990, the local history museum’s exhibition about Eisenhüttenstadt’s “difficult beginning” was taken down. Instead, visitors were offered a nostalgic look at everyday objects of the 1920s and 1930s.³² The *Heimatkalender*, a magazine about local history, published in the last days of the regime, on the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the GDR, was filled to the brim with commemorations of communist heroes and important events. The next edition of the calendar was completely devoid of all that.³³ From 1991 to 1999, no celebrations of the founding of Eisenhüttenstadt were held.³⁴ The town’s identity crisis was aggravated by the fact that it was experiencing severe economic difficulties accompanied by heavy out-migration.³⁵ Unemployment and insecurity about the future replaced the GDR’s official recognition of the town’s importance and its privileges as a model socialist town inhabited by well-paid workers.³⁶ This was an identity crisis that required a way out.

³¹ Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der SED, ed., *Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1966), 115; Schüttrumpf, “Young Town on an Old River”; Schüttrumpf, “Wo einst nur Sand und Kiefern waren...”

³² “Nostalgie aus der Kommode,” *Stadtspiegel*, February 1991; Beate Melzer, “Was erwartet der Besucher von seinem Heimatmuseum?,” *Stadtspiegel*, May 1991, 6–7; see also Thalia Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore. Wie Heimatmuseen in Ostdeutschland an die DDR erinnern* (Berlin: Be.bra Verlag, 2013), 56.

³³ Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore*, 54.

³⁴ In a way, those celebrations were replaced by a new tradition, the multi-day “Oderfest,” which was held every October between 1991 and 1993. October 3, the Day of German Unity, was the highlight of the Oderfest folk festival. Maria Luise Stahl, “Gemeinsam mit ihnen neue Kulturtradition aufbauen,” *Stadtspiegel*, September 1991, 28–29; Sylvia Schulz, “Eisenhüttenstadts 2. Oderfest vom 1. bis 4. Oktober,” *Stadtspiegel*, September 1992, 15; “3. Oderfest – Programm,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 1993, 13–14.

³⁵ While the population of Eisenhüttenstadt was 52,393 in 1989, only 23,878 people lived there in 2019. *Statistisches Jahrbuch 2019* (Beeskow, Landkreis Oder-Spree, Amt für Personal und Organisation, 2019), 33–34. See also an ethnological study of the shrinking of the town’s population: Thomas Gottschalk, “Eisenhüttenstadt. Ein Phänomen schrumpft,” *Berliner Blätter. FrauenAlltag im östlichsten deutschen Osten: Eisenhüttenstadt*, no. 47 (2008): 129–139.

³⁶ Klaus-Dieter Gansleweit, “Zum Geleit,” *Heimatkalender für den Stadt- und Landkreis Eisenhüttenstadt* 9 (1991), 3–4; Schüttrumpf, “Young Town on an Old River”; Peter Weichhart, Christine Weiske, and Benno Werlen, *Place Identity und Images. Das Beispiel Eisenhüttenstadt* (Wien: Institut für Geographie und Regionalforschung der Universität Wien, 2006), 138–139.

The Controversies of the 1990s: Debate about Renaming the Town and Its Streets and Other Reminders of the GDR in the Public Space

Socialist city names often carry a highly symbolic charge.³⁷ When Eisenhüttenstadt was founded in 1950, SED party organs discussed different possibilities for naming it, such as Thälmannstadt and Karl-Marx-Stadt. Stalin's death on March 5, 1953 determined the choice however, and the town was named Stalinstadt.³⁸ That name did not last very long. After the XXII Party Congress of the CPSU in 1961 intensified de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union, Stalinstadt was renamed Eisenhüttenstadt. The name change was accompanied by the incorporation of a small neighboring town, Fürstenberg, and a village, Schönfließ into the town limits. The name change was thus presented to the public as a logical bureaucratic change, rather than something motivated by politics.³⁹

In the early 1990s, there were heated discussions in Eisenhüttenstadt about renaming the town once again.⁴⁰ Gerd Krüger, a member of the Neues Forum, recalls with regret that the change was never made. His arguments in favor of changing the name are a good example of the changing themes of the prevailing discourse at the time. He first argued that goods from a town named simply for an industry would not sell well (a market economy argument). Second, he argued that the name Eisenhüttenstadt was not arrived at democratically but rather by fiat of the SED (an appeal to democracy). He added a condemnation of the incorporation of the town of Fürstenberg, saying that "over 700 years

³⁷ Rasa Balockaitė, "Coping with the Unwanted Past in Planned Socialist Towns: Visaginas, Tychy, and Nowa Huta," *SLOVO* 24, no. 1 (2012): 47; Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, "Die sozialistische Planstadt Eisenhüttenstadt im Vergleich mit Nowa Huta und Ostrava Kuncice," in *Von der "europäischen Stadt" zur "sozialistischen Stadt" und zurück? Urbane Transformationen im östlichen Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Thomas Bohn (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 103.

³⁸ Andreas Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt. Wandel einer industriellen Gründungsstadt in fünfzig Jahren* (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2000), 51; Jenny Richter, Heike Förster, and Ulrich Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt: Von der Utopie zur Gegenwart* (Marburg: Schüren, 1997), 34–35.

³⁹ Maoz Azaryahu, *Von Wilhelmplatz zu Thälmannplatz: Politische Symbole im öffentlichen Leben der DDR* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1991), 171.

⁴⁰ Klaus Käthner, "Für alle Neuen nun Büros mit Telefon und Schreibmaschine," *Neuer Tag*, January 18, 1990; "Eisenhüttenstadt: Wird daraus bald Fürstenberg?," *Berliner Zeitung*, January 4, 1991, 17; "Fürstenberg?," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, January 4, 1991, 1; Gerd Krüger, "Name schadet der Wirtschaft," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, January 19, 1991, 9; Manfred Schieche, "(K)ein Beitrag für einen neuen Stadtnamen," *Stadtspiegel*, June 1992, 26; Günter Fromm, "Vor zehn Jahren: Runde Tische und demokratische Volkskammerwahlen," *Stadtspiegel*, March 2000, 24–25.

of tradition should weigh more than 40 years of propaganda” (tradition).⁴¹ In a document of the Neues Forum from 1990 it was suggested that the name of the town did not promote love of the homeland and would not attract tourists (market economy again). The claim was made that for “historical reasons” and “by tradition” it would be better to “restore” the old name of Fürstenberg (tradition again).⁴² The proposal to “rename the town back” to Fürstenberg would apply not only to the former small town but to all of Eisenhüttenstadt. Fürstenberg, however, would not be a democratically chosen name either. The power of these arguments, both for and against, was ultimately based in opposition to Stalinist economic logic and rule.

The opponents of the name change were represented strongly in the steelworks’ newspaper. They appealed to the close association of the town with the steelworks and to the costs of renaming the town, arguing that the funds could be used more productively. They also argued that Eisenhüttenstadt was widely known as a place of steel production and that this reputation was good for both the company and the town. A renaming could only have a detrimental effect. They did not use explicitly ideological arguments.⁴³ But it did imply a struggle between two visions for the town. The supporters of renaming wanted to break away from the town’s exclusive focus on steel production, which they saw as a Stalinist, GDR legacy. The opponents saw no future for the town other than in connection with the steelworks.

Because the renaming debate was causing such a stir, a town councilor for the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Veronika Schneider, issued a statement in the company newspaper emphasizing that there were no such plans and that the majority of town councilors were against renaming the town.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the idea resurfaced several times over the next few years.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Gerd Krüger, “Zur Erinnerung,” in *Wende – Papier(e) – Wende*, ed. Erich Opitz (Eisenhüttenstadt: Bürgervereinigung “Fürstenberg (Oder)”, 2010), 103.

⁴² Neues Forum, “RTL oder N3, Fürstenberg (Oder) oder Eisenhüttenstadt,” in *Wende – Papier(e) – Wende*, ed. Erich Opitz (Eisenhüttenstadt: Bürgervereinigung “Fürstenberg (Oder)”, 2010), 132.

⁴³ Bernd Koop, “Warum soll Eisenhüttenstadt umbenannt werden?” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 2 (January 1991): 1; Jürgen Loose, “Ein neuer Name für unsere Stadt?,” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 3 (January 1991): 6; “Aktuelle Information in der bewegten Zeit,” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 4 (February 1991): 3; Simone Krüger, “Warum Eisenhüttenstadt umbenennen?,” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 4 (February 1991): 6.

⁴⁴ Veronika Schneider, “Wer will Eisenhüttenstadt umbenennen?,” *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 5 (February 1991): 6.

⁴⁵ Christian Arns, “Ein Museum mit lebendigem Inventar,” *Taz. Die Tageszeitung*, August 31, 1993, <https://taz.de/!1602427/>; Wolfgang Anton, “Ein neuer, würdiger Name. Wohnstadt Fürstenberg – Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt,” in *Eisenhüttenstadt: “erste sozialistische Stadt Deutschlands,”*

As can be seen from the debate over giving the town the name of Fürstenberg, the lack of a pre-socialist past did not mean that one could not be “invented.”⁴⁶ However, the “invented” past did not emerge out of nowhere, but through a shift in the representation of the actual past. Something that was peripheral to the official GDR narrative can be moved to the center and articulated anew. I call this process *Verschiebung* [a shift or displacement]. Although I am not reasoning in psychoanalytic terms, this strategy was not simply a shift in focus of attention but resulted from some “uncomfortableness” with the object of the *Verschiebung*.⁴⁷ This strategy helps to overcome an identity crisis by emphasizing continuity with the pre-socialist past. The Hungarian “new town” of Dunaújváros followed this path.⁴⁸ Although less active in pursuit of the strategy, the Nowa Huta Museum in Poland pursued much the same strategy, organizing exhibitions to commemorate the town’s “forgotten heritage.”⁴⁹ The town of Horishni Plavni in Ukraine’s Poltava region, founded in 1972 and known as Komsomolsk until 2016, followed a similar pattern. Horishni Plavni was originally a village located adjacent to, but not within, the town limits of Komsomolsk. It was swallowed up by an open-pit mine as iron ore mining expanded. However, local advocates of “decommunization” and the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance portrayed the town’s new name as a restoration of the “historical” name for the new town.⁵⁰

ed. Arbeitsgruppe Stadtgeschichte Eisenhüttenstadt (Berlin: Be.bra Verlag, 1999), 137; “Umbe-nennung vorgeschlagen: Eisenhüttenstadt soll Fürstenberg heißen,” *RP Online*, March 31, 2004, https://rp-online.de/panorama/eisenhuettenstadt-soll-fuerstenberg-heissen_aid-16917447; Jürgen Schwenkenbecher, “Im Schatten des Stahlwerks,” *Berliner Zeitung*, April 14, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050123185733/http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2004/0414/lokales/0006/index.html>.

⁴⁶ See Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–14.

⁴⁷ For the use of the Freudian notion of *Verschiebung* in the analysis of ideology and the ideological, see Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Elemente einer Theorie des Ideologischen* (Hamburg: Argument, 1993), 57–61.

⁴⁸ The Hungarian town formed a continuity of history from a Roman settlement of the 1st–5th centuries, through its existence as a village, to its socialist construction and up to the present. The socialist history of the town is thus only an episode or moment in a much longer national history. See Katarzyna Zechenter, “The Repositioning of Postsocialist Narratives of Nowa Huta and Dunaújváros,” *Revue des Études Slaves* 86, no. 1–2 (September 2015): 146–149, doi: 10.4000/res.691.

⁴⁹ Kinga Pozniak, “Reinventing a Model Socialist Steel Town in the Neoliberal Economy: The Case of Nowa Huta, Poland,” *City and Society* 25, no. 1 (2013): 126–128, doi: 10.1111/ciso.12009.

⁵⁰ A significant number, if not the majority, of Horishi Plavni’s residents opposed the renaming. The final decision on renaming the town was imposed by a resolution of the Parliament in Kyiv, i.e. from the outside. “Klub im. O. Tsarenka stvoriv unikal’ni istorychni karty,” *Kremenjuh tudei*,

The renaming initiative in Eisenhüttenstadt did not work out, in part because of the opposing positions of the residents of Fürstenberg and the main part of the town new-built by the GDR. The residents of the new town were rather pragmatic about the town name. The dissatisfaction of the residents of Fürstenberg and Schönfließ was at least partially offset by the fact that both names were reflected in the names of the town districts.⁵¹

The elements of *Verschiebung* strategy are reflected in claims that Eisenhüttenstadt did not emerge from nothing, that in this area there was more than just “sand and pine” before. By contrast, in the old GDR the push for industrialization and the assertion that the region on the banks of the Oder River only developed thanks to socialism were important tropes. The new discourse of historical continuity emphasized the fact that there were industrial enterprises in the region well before the GDR, but that they were dismantled by the Soviets or did not survive the shortcomings of the planned economy.⁵² Some histories of the town and the town’s museum begin their historical narratives with the founding of Fürstenberg.⁵³ It is possible to observe the tendency to *Verschiebung* in the attention paid to the rich prehistory of the region, which includes prehistoric settlements, Germanic graves from the Roman period, the medieval Fürstenberg and the Neuzelle monastery, and the beginnings of industrialization in the region.⁵⁴

May 23, 2017, <http://kremen.today/2017/05/23/klub-im-o-tsarenka-stvoriv-unikalni-istorichni-karti/>; Iurii Loza, “Chomu Horishni Plavni?” *Ukrains’kyi Instytut Natsional’noi Pam’iati*, 2016, <https://old.uinp.gov.ua/news/chomu-gorishni-plavni>; Mykola Stakhiv, “Istorychna dovidka pro budivnytstvo, status ta naimenuvannia v istorii mista Horishni Plavni,” *Svichado Prydnipriv’ia – mis’kyi kraieznavchyi al’manakh*, no. 10 (2016): 36–40; Mar’iana P’ietsukh, “Iak misto Komso-mol’s’k ob’iednalosia proty sela Horishni Plavni,” *Ukrains’ka Pravda*, May 30, 2016, <https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/05/30/7110126/>.

⁵¹ “Hauptsatzung der Stadt Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Amtsblatt der Stadt Eisenhüttenstadt mit Bekanntmachungen aus dem Rathaus und der Stadtverordnetenversammlung* 1, no. 1 (January 1991): 1; Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 173–174.

⁵² Axel Drieschner and Barbara Schulz, “Ausstellung des Städtischen Museums ‘Feuer und Sand. Die Glasindustrie in Fürstenberg (Oder) 1864–1852,’” *Stadtspiegel*, December 2001, 30–31; Barbara Schulz and Axel Drieschner, “Rüstungswirtschaft und Zwangsarbeit in Fürstenberg (Oder). Sonderausstellung im Städtischen Museum Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Gedenkstätten-Rundbrief*, No. 144 (2008): 32–37.

⁵³ Helmut Ohl, *Städte im Aufbruch* (Fürstenwalde/Spree: Bock und Kübler, 1995), 61–62; Andreas Ludwig, “Kurze Geschichte Eisenhüttenstadts,” in *Eisenhüttenstadt. Architektur – Skulptur, Stadtbilder*, ed. Abteilung Presse- und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit Stadtverwaltung Eisenhüttenstadt (Eisenhüttenstadt: Fürstenberger Druck u. Verlag, 1998), 5–12; Hartmut Preuß, “Schirme, Scherben, Schiffe,” *Stadtspiegel*, February 2003, 18.

⁵⁴ Lara Bartscherer et al., *EisenhüttenStadt 2030. Abschlussbericht* (Berlin, 2005), 254.

Disputes arose over renaming streets in Eisenhüttenstadt at the same time as the debate over renaming the town, as in many other East German localities.⁵⁵ More than a year and a half passed between the founding of a working group on street names in November 1990⁵⁶ and the town council's final decision on the new names in May 1992.⁵⁷ This was a time of intense disputes between political parties, individual deputies, and residents. The atmosphere was filled with mutual recriminations,⁵⁸ a boycott of the vote by the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS),⁵⁹ the annulment of the council's first decision,⁶⁰ a crisis in the coalition between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Free Democratic Party (FDP) and SPD,⁶¹ a massive campaign to collect signatures against the renaming of some streets, and a demand for a referendum.⁶² A town councilor

⁵⁵ Maoz Azaryahu, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names: The Case of East Berlin," *Political Geography* 16, no. 6 (1997): 481; generally on the modern functions of street names, see Maoz Azaryahu, "Naming the Past: The Significance of Commemorative Street Names," in *Critical Toponymies: The Contested Politics of Place Naming*, ed. Lawrence D. Berg and Jani Vuolteenaho (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 55.

⁵⁶ Ganschow, Fraktionsvorsitzender der FDP, "Antrag zur Stadtverordnetenversammlung am 14. November – Bildung einer Arbeitsgruppe 'Straßennamen,'" Stadtverordnetenversammlung (14.11.1990), Stadtarchiv Eisenhüttenstadt (hereafter StA EHS); "Beschluß-Nr. 82/5/90. Beschlußprotokoll der 5. Sitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (14.11.1990), StA EHS.

⁵⁷ Ganschow, "Antrag zur Stadtverordnetenversammlung am 14. November"; "Beschluß-Nr. 82/5/90"; Rainer Werner, Bürgermeister und Leiter der Arbeitsgruppe "Straßennamen," "Ergebnis der 2. Beratung der AG 'Straßennamen' vom 27.04.1992," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (20.05.1992/26.05.1992), StA EHS; "Beschlußprotokoll der 23. Sitzung der SVV am 20.05.1992," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (20.05.1992/26.05.1992), StA EHS.

⁵⁸ "Wortprotokoll zum Antrag Nr. 038/Protokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (27.11.1991), StA EHS; "Harte FPD-Vorwürfe an PDS und Sozialdemokraten," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 20, 1992.

⁵⁹ "[Abschrift einer] Tonbandaufzeichnung. Top 4. Umbenennung von Straßen und Plätzen in Eisenhüttenstadt," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (23.10.1991), StA EHS.

⁶⁰ Christa Kraft, "Alte Straßennamen wieder allein gültig," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 12, 1992; Dagmar Püschel, "PDS: nicht enthalten, sondern abgelehnt," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 27, 1992.

⁶¹ "Beschlußprotokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV am 27.11.1991," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (27.11.1991), StA EHS; Klaus Rachow, "Antrag Nr. 038 auf teilweise Aufhebung des Beschlusses der SVV zur Umbenennung der Straßen der Neustadt in Eisenhüttenstadt (30.10.1991)," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (27.11.1991), StA EHS; "Wortprotokoll zum Antrag Nr. 038/Protokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV"; "Diskrepanz in vielen grundsätzlichen Fragen?," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 19, 1992.

⁶² Waltraud Bartsch, "An die Stadtverordneten der Stadt (01.11.1991). Um-Benennung der Helmut-Just-Straße," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (23.10.1991), StA EHS; Büro der SVV, "[Bericht über Zuschriften zu den Straßenumbenennungen]," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (18.12.1991), StA EHS; "Beschlußprotokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV am 27.11.1991"; "Protest gegen die

from the political party Bündnis 90/Die Grünen even resigned his mandate because he did not agree with the procedure and renaming. He claimed that some names were put on the list only because of “left-wing bias.”⁶³

These battles were fought over redefining the town’s symbolic space. The FDP and the CDU wanted to remove all signs of the “first socialist town” from the urban space, or as many as possible. The SED’s successor party, the PDS, wanted to keep many of them, although it did not oppose renaming as such. The SPD took a middle position. The idea of changing street names associated with the SED itself or functionaries of foreign Communist Parties who were in power was not controversial. However, changing the names of streets named for prewar communist luminaries like Ernst Thälmann, John Schehr, Fritz Heckert, and even Helmut Just, a GDR policeman allegedly murdered by West German anti-communists, were hotly debated.⁶⁴ The town council’s decision triggered a protest movement seeking a “citizen survey.” The survey’s proponents managed to collect signatures from more than 10% of the town’s eligible voters but their demands were ignored.⁶⁵ Thus, a crisis of hegemony was taking place at the urban level. The decisions of the town administration conflicted with the wishes of significant parts of the broader population. The struggle was an expression of identity crisis, because many street names not only reflected the history of the GDR and socialism, but also the local identity. Unsurprisingly, a SPD town councilor, Klaus Rachow, advocated canceling some of the newly chosen names, arguing that “tolerance of political dissent, the special history of the town, which is part of cultural history and forty years of lived and experienced history, demand extremely thoughtful and tactful approaches to renaming.”⁶⁶ Although all the changes proposed by the working group were ultimately enacted,

undemokratische Verfahrensweise der SVV am 23.10.1991 zur Umbenennung von Straßen in Eisenhüttenstadt (26.10.1991),” in Stadtverordnetenversammlung (23.10.1991), StA EHS.

⁶³ At the next meeting, the deputy stated that he would retain his seat on the town council but would no longer serve on committees. “Abschrift (Auszug) der Tonbandaufzeichnung von der SVV am 23.10.1991,” Stadtverordnetenversammlung (23.10.1991), StA EHS; “Beschlußprotokoll der 16. Sitzung der SVV am 27.11.1991.”

⁶⁴ “[Abschrift einer] Tonbandaufzeichnung. Top 4.”; “Abschrift (Auszug) der Tonbandaufzeichnung von der SVV am 23.10.1991”; “Protest gegen die undemokratische Verfahrensweise der SVV am 23.10.1991”

⁶⁵ “Die Bürgerinitiative fordert ihre Mitbestimmung,” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, February 29, 1992; “Beschlußprotokoll der 17. Sitzung der SVV am 18.12.1991,” Stadtverordnetenversammlung (18.12.1991), StA EHS; Andreas Wendt, “Bis auf eine Änderung mit erstem Beschluß identisch,” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, May 21, 1992.

⁶⁶ Rachow, “Antrag Nr. 038.”

that was still the result of some compromise. Many leftist and communist symbols enshrined in street names were left untouched. Gottfried Korff explains this by saying that “they [the old names] were legitimized according to general historical-cultural criteria.”⁶⁷

Jani Vuolteenaho and Guy Puzey note that “naming practices ... often mirror covert cultural strategies to win popular consent for the prevailing political order.”⁶⁸ Incidentally, this also applies to decisions not to rename a street. Usually, the new names of the streets were politically neutral: Klement-Gottwald-Straße became Alte Ladenstraße, Otto-Grotewohl-Ring became An der Holzwohle, Marchlewskiring became Brunnenring, and General-Walter-Straße became An der Schleuse. In two cases where streets were renamed to honor famous people (poet Joseph von Eichendorff and pioneering doctor Ignaz Semmelweis), the choice seems to have been random, but it was not controversial.⁶⁹ The central street of Eisenhüttenstadt, formerly named Leninallee, was just slightly modified to become Lindenallee. Thus, the center lost a place-name with a strong ideological charge. The spirit of the “post-ideological” era in Germany was expressed in the neutrality of the new names.

A similar “de-ideologization” can be observed in the names of various institutions in the town. In the GDR, as is well known, not only streets but also factories, work brigades, schools and many other institutions were given commemorative names. In this instance, “decommunization” was almost complete. By 1993, almost all schools, even those named for politically neutral personalities, lost their former names and had them replaced by numbers.⁷⁰

The renaming of Straße des Komsomol was yet another symbolic revamping of the town’s identity. Even before the working group on renaming finished its work, the street was renamed Saarlouiser Straße, as proposed by Eisenhüttenstadt’s

⁶⁷ Korff, “Mentalität und Monumentalität.”

⁶⁸ Jani Vuolteenaho and Guy Puzey, “‘Armed with an Encyclopedia and an Axe’: The Socialist and Post-Socialist Street Toponymy of East Berlin Revisited through Gramsci,” in *The Political Life of Urban Streetscapes: Naming, Politics, and Place*, ed. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek H. Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahu (London: Routledge, 2018), 93.

⁶⁹ “Neue Städte – Neue Leitbilder,” Aufbau West, 1997, https://www.dhm.de/archiv/ausstellungen/aufbau_west_ost/asstlg08.htm.

⁷⁰ Korff, “Mentalität und Monumentalität.” The Ernst Thälmann Children’s Home, which kept its name at first, lost it due to a change of sponsors in 1995. Some schools got nicknames (new ones or their old ones) back after a while. Thus, one elementary school went by the name of the German communist writer Erich Weinert. Ulrike Schiller, “Neuer Träger für das Kinderheim in Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Stadtspiegel*, March 1995, 28–29; *Eisenhüttenstadt (Stadtplan)*, 9th ed. (Fellbach: Städte-Verlag, 2015).

CDU mayor Wolfgang Müller on the occasion of the town's Oderfest. The Oderfest took place on the first anniversary of German reunification and the fifth anniversary of the partnership between Eisenhüttenstadt and the city of Saarlouis in western Germany. That was the first such partnership established between East and West German towns, in 1986.⁷¹ The twinning of the towns was a harbinger of the ultimate unification of Germany. The idea, however, can be traced back to good relations between Erich Honecker and Oskar Lafontaine, then Minister-President of West Germany's Saarland.⁷²

According to Korff's accounts, only about 11% of all the street names in the town were changed.⁷³ Had not Fürstenberg been incorporated into Eisenhüttenstadt, this figure would have been considerably smaller. Eisenhüttenstadt, like Berlin and Leipzig, took a "moderate-minimalist approach" to renaming streets rather than a "radical-maximalist approach" (as did Rostock, for example).⁷⁴ The town council rejected a radical transformation of the town's symbolic space, although it was demanded by some actors.⁷⁵

One could say that some parts of the GDR symbolic canon have become part of Germany's popular memory. Nevertheless, that does not mean that the meaning of the names of monuments and streets in the former GDR is unchangeable. They can be articulated in different ways.⁷⁶ Because street names lack a narrative structure but do possess a narrativity, they are much more amenable to rearticulation than some other relics of the GDR.⁷⁷

Names such as Friedensweg, Friedenstraße, and Platz der Jugend have lost their ideological dimension. Divorced from historical context, they seem quite

⁷¹ "Beschluß Nr. 108/S/91. Beschlußprotokoll der Sondersitzung der Stadtverordnetenversammlung," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (28.08.91), StA EHS.

⁷² Jörg Fischer, "Abenteuer Ost-West: 25 Jahre deutsch-deutsche Städtepartnerschaften," *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*, June 2, 2011, <https://www.mz.de/deutschland-und-welt/politik/abenteuer-ost-west-25-jahre-deutsch-deutsche-stadtepartnerschaften-2261414>; similar renaming also took place in other East German cities after reunification. See Azaryahu, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names," 485.

⁷³ Korff, "Mentalität und Monumentalität."

⁷⁴ Azaryahu, "German Reunification and the Politics of Street Names," 484–485; about other East German cities, see Johanna Sängler, *Heldenkult und Heimatliebe: Straßen- und Ehrennamen im offiziellen Gedächtnis der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2006), 206–215.

⁷⁵ For example, Erich Opitz, a leading figure in the Bürgervereinigung Fürstenberg, proposed naming streets after Franz Thielenberg (1850–1924) and Heinrich Collina (1844–1919), who were honorary citizens of Fürstenberg. His proposal was rejected. Erich Opitz, "Ehrenbürger der Stadt Fürstenberg/Oder," *Stadtspiegel*, June 1991, 36–37.

⁷⁶ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*.

⁷⁷ Maoz Azaryahu, Marie-Laure Ryan, and Kenneth Foote, "Street Names as Story and History," in *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2016), 141.

apolitical and nonideological. In the GDR, however, they were closely linked to SED policy.⁷⁸ As World War II and the Cold War slipped further into the past, rhetoric focused on peace no longer seemed so relevant. The cult of youth, which was characteristic of state socialism, and youthfulness as a representative metaphor for the town, are things of the past. An aging population and the exodus of young residents has robbed such street names of their meaning.⁷⁹ It is also no longer obvious which republic is meant by the name Straße der Republik.

However, the enthusiasm for renaming streets left the outdoor sculptures (at least those that were in the public space) and other art on the town's buildings untouched.⁸⁰ Walter Womacka was one of the leading artists of the GDR and created several artworks for Eisenhüttenstadt.⁸¹ In 2004, tensions arose when Womacka's name was proposed for inscription in the town's "Golden Book." Shortly thereafter his name was withdrawn because of his uncritical statements about repressive GDR policies. The controversy was a bone of contention between the PDS and the town's SPD mayor.⁸²

The situation surrounding the town's coat of arms is also instructive. At the turn of the twenty-first century, a town logo supplanted Eisenhüttenstadt's coat of arms. The coat of arms was created in 1973 and combines the red silhouette of a high-rise residential building with that of the steelworks and the blue outline of a dove of peace. Below the silhouettes are three blue waves. Thus, the coat of arms communicates clear associations with the GDR. Although the coat of arms was never rescinded or replaced, the town preferred to use the new logo with a cursive "e" above a blue or gray line.⁸³

There were some initiatives to design a new coat of arms.⁸⁴ In April 1998, for example, the CDU parliamentary group introduced a design that included the coat of arms of Fürstenberg next to the old Eisenhüttenstadt coat of arms,

⁷⁸ Elisabeth Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt und die Idealstadt des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Weimar: VDG, 2000), 192; Herfried Münkler, *Die Deutschen und ihre Mythen* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2009), 422.

⁷⁹ Schütrumpf, "Young Town on an Old River"; see also Harry Hoffmann and Ernst Oldenburg, *Stalinstadt* (Dresden: Sachsenverlag, 1960), 18.

⁸⁰ Martin Maleschka, ed., *Architekturführer Eisenhüttenstadt Stalinstadt* (Berlin: DOM publishers, 2021), 7–9, 152–155, 158–159, 166–169, 172–173, 180–181.

⁸¹ Hartmut Preuß, "Walter Womacka. Malerei – Grafik – Keramik," *Stadtspiegel*, June 2004, 24–25.

⁸² "Nicht jeder darf ins Goldene Buch," *Lausitzer Rundschau*, October 2, 2004, <https://www.lr-online.de/lausitz/guben/nicht-jeder-darf-ins-goldene-buch-33330352.html>.

⁸³ Ludwig, "Wo die Zukunft Gegenwart war," 269; "Das vergessene Stadtwappen," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, March 31, 2015, <https://www.moz.de/lokales/eisenhuettenstadt/das-vergessene-stadtwappen-49851016.html>.

⁸⁴ Andreas Ludwig, "'Traum der Zukunft Wirklichkeit'. Stadtgeschichte, Selbstbild, Fremdbild in Eisenhüttenstadt," *Comparativ* 9, no. 3 (1999), 19.

as well as the eagle of Brandenburg on a smaller, lower field. In that proposal, the old coat of arms would not be completely replaced, but de-emphasized. The “roots” of the town would have been symbolized and Fürstenberg would have gotten equal recognition with the new town.⁸⁵ The town council finally decided to refer the CDU proposal to the town’s cultural committee.⁸⁶ After that, the topic disappeared from the town’s agenda.⁸⁷

Thus, the strategy of “decommunizing” the public space was applied only to a limited extent. Despite all the efforts of the town’s conservatives, liberals and some Fürstenbergers, the socialist past was not completely eliminated or discarded. However, the town’s attitude toward its past remained ambivalent. Even where streets were renamed, a desire to de-ideologize and depoliticize the public space predominated. Although some elements of a *Verschiebung* strategy can be observed, its radical application was largely rejected. Ultimately, it was difficult to dismiss the socialist past entirely. The moderate approach to change had implications for future challenges and ruptures in the town’s identity.

The Symbolic Separation of the Town Districts

Under SED rule, the town of Fürstenberg did not play much of a role in the general image of Eisenhüttenstadt.⁸⁸ Ludwig writes that there were two different discourses about Eisenhüttenstadt before 1989: “the reminiscence of the ‘difficult early years’ on the one hand and the representation of the sociopolitical achievements in the young town on the other.”⁸⁹ Eisenhüttenstadt’s self-image

⁸⁵ CDU-Fraktion, “Antrag 006/98 zur Stadtverordnetenversammlung vom 08.04.1998,” Stadtverordnetenversammlung (08.04.1998), StA EHS.

⁸⁶ “Beschluß Nr. 1003/60/98. Niederschrift der 60. öffentlichen Sitzung der SVV,” Stadtverordnetenversammlung (08.04.1998), StA EHS.

⁸⁷ There is no research on efforts to change the coat of arms of the other socialist cities, which makes it impossible to draw comparisons. Nevertheless, I found out that Dimitrovgrad, a Bulgarian town twinned with Eisenhüttenstadt, adopted a new coat of arms in 2001. It was designed by the coat of arms artist Hristo Tanev. It no longer contains symbols of socialism and workers, but rather of three villages from which the consolidated town was founded. Obshtina gr. Dimitrovgrad, “Reshenie No. 504 Ot 19.9.2001 G.,” *Dimitrovgrad. Oftsialen ueb sayt*, September 19, 2001, <https://www.dimitrovgrad.bg/bg/posts/view/2873>; “Dimitrovgrad smenil tri gerba za 63 godini,” *Dimitrovgrad.bgvesti.NET*, April 28, 2010, <https://www.dimitrovgrad.bgvesti.net/news/61146/dimitrovgrad-smenil-tri-gerba-za-63-godini>.

⁸⁸ Fritz Kracheel, *Eisenhüttenstadt (4-sprachiger Bildband)* (Dresden: Rat der Stadt Eisenhüttenstadt, 1968); Hellmut Opitz and Werner Bauer, *Eisenhüttenstadt* (Leipzig: VEB F. A. Brockhaus, 1975); Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost Betriebsparteiorganisation des VEB Bandstahlkombinat “Hermann Matern”, ed., *Unser Friedenswerk*, vol. 1 (Neustrelitz: Druckerei “Erich Weinert”, n.d.).

⁸⁹ Ludwig, “Traum der Zukunft Wirklichkeit,” 14.

became more diverse in the late GDR period, but, as Ludwig notes, this was expressed not only in a de-emphasis of the political and social pathos of the years of postwar reconstruction, but also “deep uncertainty about the town’s self-image.”⁹⁰ Thus, in part, the roots of the crisis of transformation in the 1990s could be found in the exhaustion of the potential of the SED’s future-oriented rhetoric in the 1970s. This situation already fostered interest in the region’s pre-socialist past in the GDR.⁹¹ Fürstenberg and Schönfließ began to cultivate their own identities intensively in the 1990s. Articles appeared in the local press about the need to write more about the history of Fürstenberg and the surrounding villages and to preserve their cultural heritage.⁹² On July 5–6, 1991, Fürstenberg held its first Old Town Festival.⁹³ An annual Bridge Festival later took its place.⁹⁴ An annual festival was also initiated in Schönfließ in 1991.⁹⁵ Sylvette Lemke describes the mood in Schönfließ as follows:

If, years ago, a stranger in Eisenhüttenstadt had asked about the village of Schönfließ, he would probably have received the correcting answer that Schönfließ was an old village, but that in reality it now belonged to Eisenhüttenstadt as normal. However, this fact was not so normal for the people of Schönfließ. In a survey among the inhabitants of the small village on the river, the basic tenor of the answers corresponded to a great local patriotism ... This was also reflected in the jubilee celebration, which began on June 20, 1991 and lasted for four days with the exuberant hustle and bustle of a folk festival character. To a non-Schönfließer, the impression was already awakened that in what was now officially recognized as a district of Eisenhüttenstadt, something that had slumbered for decades erupted like a volcano with joy of life in the festival days.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹¹ Klaus-Dieter Gansleweit, ed., *Beiträge zur Geschichte Eisenhüttenstadts. Regionalgeschichtliche Veröffentlichung des Städtischen Museums Eisenhüttenstadt*, vol. 1 (Städtisches Museum Eisenhüttenstadt, 1986), 9; Ludwig, “Traum der Zukunft Wirklichkeit,” 165.

⁹² See e.g. Detlef Fechner, “Eine alte Wurzel von Fürstenberg – Nikolaikirche und Evangelische Nikolaigemeinde,” *Stadtspiegel*, January 1991; Gansleweit, “Zum Geleit,” 4.

⁹³ Sylvia Schulz, “Das war es, das 1. Altstadtfest in Fürstenberg/Oder,” *Stadtspiegel*, August 1991, 15.

⁹⁴ The bridge festival celebrates the Neue Deichbrücke, inaugurated on August 17, 1996, which plays an important role in Fürstenberg. Martina Lagemann, “Interview mit Bertram Kahlisch, dem Verantwortlichen für Organisation des Brückenfestes,” *Stadtspiegel*, July 1996, 2–4; “Impressionen zum Geburtstag der Neuen Deichbrücke,” *Stadtspiegel*, September 1996, 6–7; “2. Brückenfest in Fürstenberg/O.,” *Stadtspiegel*, July 1997, 26.

⁹⁵ Maria Minew, “675 Jahre Schönfließ,” *Stadtspiegel*, March 1991, 16–17.

⁹⁶ Sylvette Lemke, “Jubiläumsfeier in Schönfließ,” *Heimatkalendar für den Stadt- und Landkreis Eisenhüttenstadt* 10 (1992), 47.

Since the 1990s, numerous publications have appeared about the history of Fürstenberg in different eras, but mostly before its incorporation into Eisenhüttenstadt.⁹⁷ A civic association has erected several memorials to honor Fürstenberg's suppressed and all but forgotten past.⁹⁸

Fürstenberg now occupies a disproportionate place in the area's general constellation of urban cultural memory. Its symbolic importance has increased, although its share of Eisenhüttenstadt's total urban space has decreased.⁹⁹ This has not led to the integration of the whole town into a single long history in which socialism was only one element. Rather, the older districts of the town acquired a relatively independent identity and linking them to the "new town" was viewed somewhat negatively. This is especially true for Fürstenberg. The Soviet occupation, the GDR period, and especially the town's incorporation into Eisenhüttenstadt are all commented upon with an unmistakable negative slant in post-1990 publications.¹⁰⁰ The publications frame unrealized plans of the late 1960s for demolition of a large part of Fürstenberg as a hostile act by the GDR and the new town directed against the older town, which amounted to no less than an existential threat. In an essay about the planned demolitions,

⁹⁷ See e.g. Klaus-Dieter Gansleweit, Erich Opitz, and Manfred Schieche, *Das Alte Fürstenberg (Oder)* (Erfurt: Sutton, 1998); Gemeindegemeinderat der Nikolaikirche Fürstenberg, ed., *Auferstanden. Die Wiedereinweihung der Nikolaikirche zu Fürstenberg* (Jacobsdorf: Die Furt, 1999); Bürgervereinigung "Fürstenberg (Oder)" e. V., ed., "Die russische Kommandantur verlangt...": *Eine regionale Quellensammlung der ersten Nachkriegsjahre für Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung 1945–1949* (Eisenhüttenstadt, 2003); Martha Schulze, "Hoffentlich überstehen wir diese böse Zeit": *Das Fluchttagebuch*, ed. Erich Opitz (Eisenhüttenstadt, 2009); Bürgervereinigung "Fürstenberg (Oder)" e. V., ed., *Fürstenberger Blätter. Beiträge zur Geschichte von Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung*, vol. 1, 2011; Bürgervereinigung "Fürstenberg" e. V., ed., *Fürstenberger Blätter. Beiträge zur Geschichte von Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung*, vol. 2, 2017; Hagen Bernard, "Als Deutschlands schönste Tierheimchefin in den Fürstenberger Blättern – Jana Feister," *Märkische Oderzeitung*, April 5, 2021, <https://www.moz.de/lokales/eisenhuettenstadt/geschichte-als-in-fuerstenberg-russen-gegen-russen-kaempften-56085818.html>.

⁹⁸ See e.g. Erich Opitz, "Heinrich Pritzsche – ein verdienstvoller Bürgermeister unserer Stadt," *Stadtspiegel*, August 1998, 22–23.

⁹⁹ Wolfgang Anton, "Pendler und Zuzügler. Eine Industriegesellschaft formiert sich," in *Eisenhüttenstadt: "erste sozialistische Stadt Deutschlands,"* ed. Arbeitsgruppe Stadtgeschichte Eisenhüttenstadt (Berlin: Be.bra Verlag, 1999), 128; Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Klaus-Dieter Gansleweit and Erich Opitz, "Fürstenberg (Oder) im Wandel der Zeiten (Zeittafel)," *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung (Festschrift zur 750-Jahr-Feier von Fürstenberg/Oder)* 23 (2005), 51; Wolfgang de Bruyn, "Grußwort von Dr. Wolfgang de Bruyn," *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 23 (2005), 8–9; "Grußwort von Paul Jurrack," *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 23 (2005), 10–11; Norbert Brose, "DDR-Alltag und Nachwendzeit aus der Sicht eines Fürstenbergers," *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 23 (2005), 113–120.

Opitz went so far as to use the term “Final Solution,” which inevitably evokes associations with the Holocaust.¹⁰¹ These negative assessments of the relations between Eisenhüttenstadt and Fürstenberg were not held only by Fürstenberg’s active mnemonic actors. They represented the broader mood among Fürstenbergers.¹⁰² The authors of *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt* [1997] quote an employee of the Oder shipyard who says that Fürstenberg has “a completely different history, it has nothing to do with the town, it’s as old as the hills.”¹⁰³

As the *Verschiebung* strategy did not dominate, Eisenhüttenstadt’s neighborhoods continued to reinforce their historically separate identities, resulting in a split between their memories and those of the inhabitants of Eisenhüttenstadt proper. In this case, the term “split” does not refer to a competition for hegemony between different narratives of memory, rather to their dissociation and divergence. For example, the memory narratives promoted by the *Heimatvereins*, or local heritage associations, do not attempt to assert a distinct version of Eisenhüttenstadt’s identity, but simply to promote their own identity. The separateness of the new town and Fürstenberg is visible in the urban space, especially after the demolition of some empty GDR-era apartment buildings.¹⁰⁴

The former village of Schönfließ also maintains its own identity, although it is less salient than that of Fürstenberg. The Heimatverein in Schönfließ describes the village as an agro-industrial village (where brown coal has been mined since the nineteenth century) with distinct, rich traditions of its own that deserve to be revived, preserved and continued. The Heimatverein holds an annual local festival, organizes a carnival in accord with old village customs, and hosts other, smaller events. They also keep a chronicle of the village.¹⁰⁵ The participation of the inhabitants of Schönfließ in the construction of the steelworks and of the town of Eisenhüttenstadt is remembered rather fondly, in contrast

¹⁰¹ Erich Opitz, “‘Endlösung’ für Fürstenberg (Oder)? Zur Bauplanung in der zweiten Hälfte der sechziger Jahren,” *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 19 (2001), 47–51.

¹⁰² Bartscherer et al., *Eisenhüttenstadt 2030. Abschlussbericht*, 128.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 174.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 98–100; Ruth Klawun, “Eisenhüttenstadt, eine Planstadt nach den ‘Sechzehn Grundsätzen des Städtebaus’ – Erhaltung und Perspektiven,” in *Kommunismus unter Denkmalschutz?*, ed. Jürgen Danyel, Thomas Drachenberg, and Irmgard Zündorf (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2018), 164–166; Stefan Lötsch, “Weitere 205 Wohnungen in Eisenhüttenstadt stehen 2021 auf der Abrissliste,” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, January 6, 2021, https://www.moz.de/lokales/eisenhuettenstadt/stadumbau-der-vii.-wohnkomplex_in-eisenhuettenstadt-schrumpft-weiter-49390826.html.

¹⁰⁵ Hans-Joachim Hübner, “Der Schönfließener Heimatverein e. V.,” *Stadtspiegel*, May 1994, 27.

to Fürstenberg.¹⁰⁶ The small village of Diehlo, which was annexed by Eisenhüttenstadt in 1993, preserves its separate village character but is not active in self-promotion.¹⁰⁷

A *Lieu de Mémoire* of the GDR? Marketing and Privatization

Eisenhüttenstadt had to live down a negative reputation after the *Wende* [turn] and reunification. The town presented itself as having favorable conditions for industrial development and high recreational and residential value. At the same time, the specialness of the town as the “first socialist town” in Germany, its architecture, and city planning were neglected because its socialist roots were part of its negative image.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, the first four residential complexes built for the steelworkers in the 1950s were given heritage status by the unified Germany.¹⁰⁹ This allowed the town to modernize and renovate the buildings with the help of various subsidies. Redevelopment of the rapidly shrinking town mainly focused on upgrading those four housing complexes.¹¹⁰ The monumentality of the complexes’ architecture was a challenge because it was associated with totalitarianism and lacked a human scale.¹¹¹ In local publications, the subject of architecture or urban planning is either depoliticized or presented with an emphasis on aesthetics. The gap between utopia and reality is discussed in critical discourse terms.¹¹² Criticism of socialist monumentalism is most evident in discussions of the failure to complete construction of the city’s center, which was

¹⁰⁶ Heinz-Joachim Hübner, “Schönfließer Geschichte von damals,” *Stadtspiegel*, June 2000, 28–29.

¹⁰⁷ Gabriele Urban, “Alte und neue Ortsteile Eisenhüttenstadts,” *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 18 (2000), 31.

¹⁰⁸ Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 176; Klawun, “Eisenhüttenstadt, eine Planstadt,” 162.

¹⁰⁹ Parts of the residential complexes were already placed under protection in the GDR in 1977 and 1984, see Klawun, “Eisenhüttenstadt, eine Planstadt,” 162.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162–166.

¹¹¹ Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 38–39.

¹¹² See e.g. Beate Melzer, “EKO-Wohnstadt 1951/1952: ursprüngliche Stadtbebauungspläne,” *Stadtspiegel*, no. 4 (March 1992), 7–8; Günter Fromm, “Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt: die ursprüngliche Pläne für den Aufbau der Stadt und des Zentralen Platzes,” *Stadtspiegel*, March 1993, 18–20; Joachim Palutzki, “Die ‘Architektur der Nationalen Bautraditionen’ in Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* (1995), 28–33; Axel Drieschner, “Sonderausstellung des Städtischen Museums ‘Planstadt Stalinstadt – StadtBauKunst,’” *Stadtspiegel*, August 2006, 20–21; Axel Drieschner, “Eine Stadtkrone für Stalinstadt,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 2006, 28–30; Marina Wehlisch, “Großgaststätte ‘Aktivist’ in Eisenhüttenstadt – ein Denkmal?,” *Kreiskalendar Oder-Spree*, 1995, 36–37.

intended to serve as the dominant feature of the entire town.¹¹³ Comparisons of Eisenhüttenstadt's socialist-era architecture with that of the Nazi era advanced by some conservative actors are immediately rejected.¹¹⁴

The desire of the town administration to attract tourists was there at the beginning of the 1990s, but it was not exactly clear what would attract the tourists. Initially, emphasis was placed on nature in the surrounding area or on Fürstenberg, rather than on the new town.¹¹⁵ The idea of consciously marketing the heritage of the GDR was met with criticism from a CDU faction leader, Lothar Richter. He feared the town would become a pilgrimage site for old Stalinists.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, it was soon clear that the town's unusual history was attractive to tourists, the media, and academics.¹¹⁷ Attracting tourists by marketing the town's socialist heritage has been a recurring motif over the years, raised in various ways by the town administration.¹¹⁸ In many ways, Eisenhüttenstadt's socialist legacy is now seen as a commodity or a "soft" factor for attracting investment and tourists. Ludwig talks about the town's splintered image: "There is the self-perception of being an industrial town with favorable living conditions on the one hand ... and, on the other hand, a perception from the

¹¹³ Drieschner, "Eine Stadtkrone für Stalinstadt."

¹¹⁴ Fromm, "Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt: die ursprüngliche Pläne"; Herbert Härtel, "Eine notwendige Anmerkung zum Beitrag des Herrn Fromm," *Stadtspiegel*, March 1993, 21–22.

¹¹⁵ Hans Ness, Landrat, "An alle Fraktionen der SVV und des Kreistages vom 22.10.1990 – Bürgervotum Stadt- und Landkreismen," Stadtverordnetenversammlung (14.11.1990), StA EHS; "Fremdenverkehrsverband wirbt für Tourismus. Interview mit Silvia Schulz," *EKO Stahlreport*, no. 22 (August 1991): 7.

¹¹⁶ Arns, "Ein Museum mit lebendigem Inventar"; the CDU expressed the same objections with regard to the documentation center "Alltagskultur der DDR". See Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 180; Klaus Rachow, "Kunst ist schön, macht aber viel Arbeit (Karl Valentin)," *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 13 (1995), 71.

¹¹⁷ Ludwig, "Wo die Zukunft Gegenwart war," 170–171; Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt*; Ruth May, *Planstadt Stalinstadt: Ein Grundriss der frühen DDR, aufgesucht in Eisenhüttenstadt* (Dortmund: IRPUD, 1999); Wolfgang Kil, "Der letzte Monolith. Baudenkmal Stalinstadt," *Bauwelt*, no. 10 (1992): 497–505; Marco Schmidt, *Eisenhüttenstadt – die erste sozialistische Planstadt der DDR: eine Analyse zur Umsetzung der 16 Grundsätze des sozialistischen Städtebaus* (Hamburg: Diplomatica Verlag, 2012); Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*; Andreas Ludwig, "Eisenhüttenstadt," in *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 128–138.

¹¹⁸ Klaus Rachow, "Mit Selbstbewusstsein ein neues Bild der Stadt aufbauen," *Stadtspiegel*, February 1993, 7; Maria Minew, "Interview mit Sylvia Schulz, Beauftragte für Stadtmarketing," *Stadtspiegel*, February 1995, 6–7; Jörg Ihlow, "Stadtmarketing als neue Aufgabe in der Stadtentwicklung Eisenhüttenstadts," *Stadtspiegel*, June 2005, 5–7; In the final report of the project "Eisenhüttenstadt 2030" (2005), tourism was again mentioned as an important factor in economic development. The main focus of the report was on architecture, industry and nature. See Bartscherer et al., *Eisenhüttenstadt 2030. Abschlussbericht*, 145–146.

outside that the urban and industrial heritage of Eisenhüttenstadt is something special in comparison to new towns elsewhere and with the industrial landscape of Germany.”¹¹⁹

The private sector has also come up with marketing initiatives. One example is from Timo Schön, a business consultant from Braunschweig. In 1993, he promoted the idea of building an open-air museum on a town’s island, a popular recreational area for residents. The museum would exhibit “curiosities of the GDR” and be a kind of GDR in miniature. As correspondent Christian Arns of *Die Tageszeitung* noted: “[T]he few people Schön has taken into his confidence are not enthusiastic about it. The idea of one day living in a museum doesn’t appeal at all.”¹²⁰

In 1993, the Alltagskultur der DDR documentation center was founded under the direction of the West Berlin historian Andreas Ludwig.¹²¹ This was not meant to be a museum of “Ostalgie.” According to Ludwig’s conception, the dictatorship and everyday life should not be thought of as opposites, but as complementary, dialectically connected things. The documentation center’s exhibitions were expected to encourage a critical examination of the past.¹²² The town itself and the building (a former nursery) that houses the documentation center provide a good backdrop for a museum of everyday life in the GDR.¹²³ However, the history of Eisenhüttenstadt was not the center’s main focus.¹²⁴ On the one hand, the documentation center provides the town with a unique museum of everyday life based on a scientific concept and a unique collection; on the other hand, it reinforces the idea of the town as an open-air museum of the GDR and a “reflection of a completed social epoch.”¹²⁵ Various researchers and observers documented the

¹¹⁹ Kladnik and Ludwig, “Cultural Heritage,” 58.

¹²⁰ Arns, “Ein Museum mit lebendigem Inventar.”

¹²¹ Regina Göschl, *DDR-Alltag im Museum: geschichtskulturelle Diskurse, Funktionen und Fallbeispiele im vereinten Deutschland* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2019), 107.

¹²² Andreas Ludwig, “Das Gewohnte wird Fremd. Ein Dokumentationszentrum der Alltagskultur entsteht,” *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 14 (1996), 24–27; Göschl, *DDR-Alltag im Museum*, 138–173, 312–313; Kerstin Langwagen, *Die DDR im Vitrinenformat: zur Problematik musealer Annäherungen an ein kollektives Gedächtnis* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2016), 220–221.

¹²³ For details see Göschl, *DDR-Alltag im Museum*, 130–138.

¹²⁴ This was one of the criticisms raised in 2012–2013 during the controversy over cutting municipal funding for the center. The main reason for the cuts was the municipality’s overindebtedness. See *ibid.*, 122–123; Sabine Rennefanz, “Eisenhüttenstadt: Streit um die DDR-Erinnerung,” *Berliner Zeitung*, December 2, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210420185735/https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/eisenhuettenstadt-streit-um-die-ddr-erinnerung-li.39837>.

¹²⁵ Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 235.

reluctance of Eisenhüttenstadt's inhabitants to live in a GDR museum and their feeling at the same time that they were already living in one.¹²⁶

Surveys done for the EisenhüttenStadt 2030 project showed a clear gap between the perception of the town by external observers/visitors and the perception by its inhabitants. When asked what they would show visitors from out of town (multiple answers were possible), 83% of the townspeople answered "the green environment" and 59% said "the island." Only 46% of the answers mentioned the "historic new town."¹²⁷ There is a discrepancy between how the outside world sees the town and what its people consider important about it. This clear split in the inside and outside perceptions of the town can also be explained by the weight of the hegemonic memory of the GDR. Citizens do not want their town to be reduced to a mere relic of the GDR past, although that does not mean that they completely reject that past or feel no connection to it at all.¹²⁸

The History Workshop existed in Eisenhüttenstadt from 1994 to 2004. It was established at the initiative of historian Dagmar Semmelmann, who wanted to introduce a more subjective, individual, and at the same time multi-layered view of the past. Semmelmann attempted to look at the town's past from the perspective of the people who lived in it and their feelings and experiences.¹²⁹ The workshop held and recorded about 40 "big" round tables. About 200 residents participated, speaking on such topics as the years in which the steelworks and the town were constructed, popular education, trade and supply, and the relationship between the state and the church.¹³⁰ The plan was that that the workshop would record and preserve memories and facilitate discussion. Consequently, it would be a kind of collective *Aufarbeitung* [working through] of the

¹²⁶ Tino Kotte and Rita Finkbeiner, "'Heimatismuseum' in der Zukunft? Versuch einer Konzeption für das Städtische Museum Eisenhüttenstadt," *Heimatkaleender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 19 (2001), 61; Bartscherer et al., *EisenhüttenStadt 2030. Abschlussbericht*, 36–37; Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore*, 7.

¹²⁷ Bartscherer et al., *EisenhüttenStadt 2030. Abschlussbericht*, 231–232.

¹²⁸ Semmelmann describes some of the logic of rejection and resignation that she uncovered in the course of the history workshop's activities. See Dagmar Semmelmann, "Nachwort," in *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch: Geschichte/n der ersten sozialistischen Stadt Deutschlands*, ed. Dagmar Semmelmann, Gudrun Prengel, and Ursula Krüger, vol. 1 (Berlin: Ed. Bodoni, 2000), 291–293; it corresponds with what Meyen writes in Meyen, "Wir haben freier gelebt," 13, 225–227.

¹²⁹ Helga Boehm, "Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt e. V. stellt sich vor," *Stadtspiegel*, October 1994, 28–29.

¹³⁰ Dagmar Semmelmann, Gudrun Prengel, and Ursula Krüger, eds., *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Ed. Bodoni, 2004), 7.

past.¹³¹ By involving various citizens of the town, the workshop gave a voice to those who did not have access to public resources otherwise.¹³² As Semmelmann writes, the intent was to document “[the] diversity of ways of experiencing and evaluating the GDR’s past, including critical voices that remained unarticulated or even suppressed during GDR times.”¹³³

The meetings offered a very different perspective than the hegemonic memory. It remembered the GDR mainly for its positive aspects. The focus was not on social and political power but on life experiences. The reminiscences people presented reflected an *Arrangementgedächtnis* (a memory of arrangements) and sometimes a *Fortschrittsgedächtnis* (a memory of progress), while the aspects that constituted the *Diktaturgedächtnis* were hardly ever mentioned.¹³⁴ The sense of nostalgia¹³⁵ was so strong that the initiators of the history workshop themselves regretted that the participants’ perspectives were so one-sided.¹³⁶ The work of the group highlighted the split between the public memory and the private memories of the residents of Eisenhüttenstadt.

The initiators of the workshop regarded this split between public and private memories as a problem that needed to be solved.¹³⁷ The most important result of their work was the publication of two volumes of the *Eisenhüttenstädter*

¹³¹ Boehm, “Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt e. V. stellt sich vor”; Günter Fromm, “Die subjektive Sicht auf die Stadtgeschichte,” *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 14 (1996), 28–30.

¹³² Group Popular Memory, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method,” in *Making Histories. Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, ed. Richard Johnson et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 207.

¹³³ Semmelmann, “Nachwort,” 289.

¹³⁴ Sabrow, “Die DDR erinnern.”

¹³⁵ Although the concept of nostalgia is often criticized for how commonly it appears in Eastern European memory politics, I consider it useful because it denotes something that people do actually feel. I understand “nostalgia” to be a cultural, polysemous, and affective practice that expresses a longing for something that has been lost. It is built on a person’s memory of the past and awareness of the impossibility of reliving that past, in short, on the presence of the absent. See Maya Nadkarni and Olga Shevchenko, “The Politics of Nostalgia: A Case for Comparative Analysis of Post-Socialist Practices,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2004): 490–493, doi: 10.1353/imp.2004.0067.

¹³⁶ Boehm, “Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt e. V. stellt sich vor,” 29; Semmelmann, “Nachwort,” 291.

¹³⁷ Within the workshop itself, there was great diversity in the participants’ views of Eisenhüttenstadt’s history and its present. Occasionally, sharp conflicts developed from those differences. They nearly led the workshop to collapse. Of the 14 people active in the work of the history workshop, about eight of them were either members of the PDS or close to the PDS. Author’s conversation with Dagmar Semmelmann on January 18, 2022, Berlin; Dagmar Semmelmann, Gudrun Prengel, and Ursula Krüger, eds., *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch: Geschichte/n der ersten sozialistischen Stadt Deutschlands*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Ed. Bodoni, 2000), 494–495; about two active co-creators see Dagmar Semmelmann, *Porträts von drei Lehrerinnen aus Eisenhüttenstadt. Drei*

Lesebuch.¹³⁸ The two volumes are filled with excerpts from conversations with contemporary witnesses to Eisenhüttenstadt's history, grouped according to themes and edited for better readability. The selection of testimonies was aimed at providing a critical view of the past and avoiding its idealization, but interpretation and evaluation are left to the reader. The work of the History Workshop represented a dialogue in which people with different experiences and points of view listened to each other. In selecting texts, the editors, who themselves held a critical view of the GDR, curated a dialogue with their interlocutors. The result is a negotiated, complex, and balanced version of local history.

The attention the workshop organizers paid to private memory and the plurality of experiences made it possible to avoid apologizing for the former regime and its slogans without devaluing people's experiences and aspirations. But this created two problems: how to construct a collective memory and a collective identity out of the inhabitants' many fragmented experiences, and how to deal with nostalgic motifs that from the hegemonic point of view were considered as trivializing the old regime, or at least how to encourage self-reflection from the workshop participants.

A similar divide between the actors' attempts to construct a critical narrative of the GDR and the nostalgic feelings of some residents was apparent in the activities of the town museum.¹³⁹ Thalia Gigerenzer, who visited the museum in 2008, quotes two visitors' entries from the museum's guest book: "And then someone comes along and says it was all worth nothing! Thank you!" And: "As a participant in the name planning and a resident of the town since 1954, I would like to thank everyone involved in the exhibition for this journey through the memory of the years of reconstruction, pride, and pioneering. It helps us to endure the present."¹⁴⁰ The split between the public, hegemonic memory and private memories is characteristic of eastern Germany and has been discussed several times already. For other cities, local narratives and the split in the memories of the GDR are not so important because they are subsumed into a longer

Varianten einer engagierten Identifikation mit der DDR und ihrem Schulsystem [Marthel Sturm, Helga Boehm, Ursula Krüger], vol. 2–3 (Berlin, 2014).

¹³⁸ Semmelmann, Prengel, and Krüger, *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch*; some excerpts from conversations also appeared earlier in the *Stadtspiegel* and the *Heimatkalender*. "Auskünfte über die Arbeit der 'Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt,'" *Stadtspiegel*, November 1994, 28–29; "Auskünfte über die Arbeit der 'Geschichtswerkstatt Eisenhüttenstadt,'" *Stadtspiegel*, December 1994, 24–25; Fromm, "Die subjektive Sicht auf die Stadtgeschichte."

¹³⁹ Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore*, 58–64.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore*, 61 and another example 145–146.

local history. In Eisenhüttenstadt, however, the split has led to difficulty in normalizing the town's identity.

None of the actors studied were able to construct a mythology that would override the old myth of reconstruction yet would be appealing enough so as not to dismiss the lived experiences of locals. On the one hand, there is the rather bleak image of the town as a museum of the GDR (which is how the town is presented to the outside world). This image reduces the town to a relic of an anti-human dictatorship that is long gone. On the other hand, there have been attempts to construct a critical narrative that reflects human experiences and creates some distance from the town's past. This new narrative is contradictory and complex. It recognizes the past but offers no collective identity or anything to unite citizens across generations. It treats the past as something external to today and outdated, no longer a reference point and model for the present as it was under the GDR.

The history of the town's development can today be presented as a contradictory, zigzag course and not as a continuous upward trajectory as it was under the GDR. However, this approach creates unease and instability among the inhabitants, which the myth wants to avoid because it should promote a clear orientation and confidence.¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, their approach to the history of Eisenhüttenstadt does not provide the townspeople with the affection that is needed for construction of a new identity.

Sometimes post-reunification texts can be found in the local media where the founding myth is repeated almost unchanged. However, it is completely depoliticized. The role of the SED is practically ignored and an allegedly widespread covert opposition to its rule is constructed.¹⁴² This strategy on the part of the authors of those texts involves a decoupling of the founding myth from its origins in the state socialist regime. However, it is not very convincing and has not been pursued much further. It does, however, point out some of the difficulties the town faces in constructing its identity.

¹⁴¹ Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C. H. Beck, 2006), 40; Roland Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 296; Münkler, *Die Deutschen und ihre Mythen*, 11.

¹⁴² See e.g. Herbert Nicolaus, "55 Jahre EKO Stahl," *Stadtspiegel*, October 2005, 4–6. In another article, Hans Bentzien, once a high SED functionary who fell out of favor during the GDR era, describes GDR Minister Fritz Selbmann as a covert critic of the regime. See Hans Bentzien, "Ein Mann der ersten Stunde: Fritz Selbmann," *Heimatkalender Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 20 (2002), 75–81.

Narratives of Victimhood and Resistance

Narratives of victimhood and resistance to state socialism have occupied a significant part of the public sphere since the 1990s. In the local press, in museums, and in public memorials, narratives emphasizing the violence, arbitrariness, and political oppression of Soviet occupation and the SED government have replaced the old GDR narratives of Soviet-German friendship, liberation, and the victories of socialism. Victims have replaced heroes.¹⁴³ Numerous articles appear in the local press, mostly on important anniversaries like those of the June 17, 1953 uprising and the Wende in 1990. Early on in the construction of the new history of the town after 1990, the 1953 uprising was recognized as a popular uprising. The celebration of it reached a peak in 2003 when a commemorative plaque was unveiled in the Fürstenberg town hall.¹⁴⁴ Most of the articles about the revolution and reunification published in Eisenhüttenstadt were penned by a single author.¹⁴⁵ They follow a “schematic narrative

¹⁴³ “Ausstellung ‘Umschulungslager existieren nicht,’” *Stadtspiegel*, November 1999, 28–29; Günter Fromm, “Wie war das in Fürstenberg/Oder? Von der Schaffung der Einheitspartei 1946 bis zur Verkündung der Einheitsliste 1950,” *Kulturspiegel Eisenhüttenstadt*, September 1990, 18–20; Günter Fromm, “Als Fürstenberg Festungsstadt war...,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 1995, 4–5; Katrin Jänisch, “Fluchterlebnisse einer Heimatvertriebenen,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 1995, 22–23; Dieter Sichtung, “Kriegserreignisse 1945 bei Fürstenberg/Oder,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 1995, 26–27; Günter Fromm, “Im KZ Buchenwald, aber nach Kriegsende,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 1998, 24–26; Erich Opitz, “Dokumente aus dem Stadtarchiv. Die Befreier brachten nicht nur Brot,” *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 12 (1994), 58–59; Günter Fromm, “Volkstrauertag,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 2003, 14–16; Günter Fromm, “Vor 60 Jahren,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 2005, 2–4; Erich Opitz, “Ereignisse der Nachkriegszeit in Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung,” *Fürstenberger Blätter. Beiträge zur Geschichte von Fürstenberg (Oder) und Umgebung* 1 (2011): 71–84; Günter Fromm, “Volkstrauertag,” *Stadtspiegel*, November 2010, 17–20; Heinz Bräuer, “In Memoriam Reinhard Gnettner,” *Stadtspiegel*, August 1994, 4–5; Anna Kaminsky, ed., *Orte des Erinnerns: Gedenkzeichen, Gedenkstätten und Museen zur Diktatur in SBZ und DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2016), 183.

¹⁴⁴ Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 49–58; Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 63–66; Günter Fromm, “Vor 50 Jahren,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 2003, 19; Günter Fromm, “Vor 50 Jahren – Juniaufstand,” *Stadtspiegel*, June 2003, 10–13; 1953. *Ein Jahr in Politik und Alltag. Presseberichte aus Ost und West. Begleitpublikation zur gleichnamigen Ausstellung im Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR* (Eisenhüttenstadt: Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR, 2003); Kaminsky, ed., *Orte des Erinnerns*, 163–164.

¹⁴⁵ Günter Fromm, “Rückschau im November 92 auf den November 1989 in Eisenhüttenstadt,” *Stadtspiegel*, no. 11 (November 1992): 19–20; Günter Fromm, “Wende und basisdemokratische Bewegung in Eisenhüttenstadt seit 1989,” *Kreiskalendar Oder-Spree. 10 Jahre danach*, 1999, 27–34; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Das letzte Zetelfalten,” *Stadtspiegel*, May 1999, 26–28; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Wende in der DDR,” *Heimatkalendar Eisenhüttenstadt und Umgebung* 17 (1999), 33–41; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Forum (SED-) Medienpolitik und Meinungsfreiheit,” *Stadtspiegel*, October 1999, 30–31; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Das Gesicht zum Volke,” *Stadtspiegel*, November 1999, 12–13; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren:

template”¹⁴⁶ filled with local facts that support a “narrowing of the revolution and reunification.”¹⁴⁷ The oral histories Semmelmann collected show that as a result of the Wende, the ideas promoted by the GDR about what happened on June 17, 1953 were substantially revised. After the Wende, many former SED members renounced their previous understanding of the uprising and embraced a new hegemonic framework for the memory of the protests – that they were a popular uprising favoring political democracy.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the process of change and rethinking took place in communicative memory among individuals as well as on the cultural level.

I have already mentioned examples of how the victims of the SED regime are remembered, but nevertheless they play a subordinate role in the general constellation of the town’s memory. The memorials to victims and resistance are not located in the center of the new town, but in Fürstenberg. Moreover, they are very small in size. Only one exhibit in the city museum is dedicated to the 1953 uprising. The protests of 1989 are not commemorated in any way in the urban space. A search for a monument or a street dedicated to the resistance or the people involved in the opposition is hopeless, although such resistance did take place.¹⁴⁹ The only street (named in 2002) whose name can be connected in some way with the resistance is named for Eisenhüttenstadt’s first parish priest, who long fought for the construction of a church in the “first socialist town.”

Eisenhüttenstädter Stasiobjekte wurden aufgelöst,” *Stadtspiegel*, December 1999, 24–25; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Demos, Runde Tische und Wahlkampf,” *Stadtspiegel*, 2000, 24–25; Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Runde Tische und demokratische Volkskammerwahlen”; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: Vorbote der Marktwirtschaft, ehrenamtliche Stadträte und Stasiobjekte,” *Stadtspiegel*, April 2000, 24–25; Günter Fromm, “Vor zehn Jahren: rasante Veränderungen in der Kommunalpolitik und im Alltag,” *Stadtspiegel*, July 2000, 10–11; Günter Fromm, “Der 17. Juni 1953 und der November 1989 in Eisenhüttenstadt,” in *Orte der Freiheit und der Demokratie in Deutschland*, ed. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V. (Sankt Augustin, 2010), 48–50.

¹⁴⁶ James Wertsch, “The Narrative Organization of Collective Memory,” *Ethos* 36, no. 1 (2008): 122–124.

¹⁴⁷ Martin Sabrow, “Mythos 1989,” *Deutschland Archiv*, November 28, 2019, <https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/300737/mythos-1989/>.

¹⁴⁸ Dagmar Semmelmann, “*Schauplatz Stalinstadt/EKO*” *Erinnerungen an den 17. Juni 1953*, vol. 2 (Potsdam: Brandenburger Verein für politische Bildung “Rosa Luxemburg”, 1993), 5–39; Dagmar Semmelmann, “Der 17. Juni in der Erinnerung ehemaliger Betriebsangehöriger des Eisenhüttenkombinates Ost in Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt,” in *Das unverstandene Menetekel – Der 17. Juni 1953* (Potsdam: Brandenburger Verein für politische Bildung “Rosa Luxemburg”, 1993), 38–50.

¹⁴⁹ Günter Fromm, “Gedanken zu unseren Eisenhüttenstädter Straßennamen,” *Kulturspiegel Eisenhüttenstadt*, November 1990, 9; Werner, “Ergebnis der 2. Beratung der AG ‘Straßennamen’ vom 27.04.1992.”

That street is also located in Fürstenberg.¹⁵⁰ This dearth of recognition cannot be compared with Nowa Huta in Poland, where memories of the resistance against the former communist regime take center stage.¹⁵¹ In Dunaújváros in Hungary, a monument to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution is located right on the main square.¹⁵²

The economic difficulties of the 1990s, the persisting divide between East and West Germany, the burden of the memory of the Nazi past, and the unfinished debate about what the SED regime actually represented might partly explain Eisenhüttenstadt's relative lack of commemorative names and monuments.¹⁵³ However, it does not explain why most of the memorials to the 1953 resistance and repression are located in Fürstenberg and not the center of Eisenhüttenstadt.

There are a number of possible explanations for that. The people who actively participated in the 1953 uprising probably left the town and even the GDR after it took place, since most of them were new to the town anyway.¹⁵⁴ Most of today's residents and their parents came to Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt in the years after the uprising. The 1953 protests and those in the fall of 1989 were not as massive in Eisenhüttenstadt as they were elsewhere in the GDR. The church there did not play a role as a platform for opposition groups. The first dialogue between the 1989 protesters and the SED was initiated by the SED's district leadership on October 25, 1989. "Monday demonstrations" did take place, but they were not as large, relatively speaking, as in other cities in the GDR.¹⁵⁵ The town's SED mayor, Ottokar Wundersee, is reputed to have said, "The revolution

¹⁵⁰ Jörg Niendorf, "Eine Straße für den Missionar," *Berliner Morgenpost*, April 9, 2006, <https://www.morgenpost.de/printarchiv/wwbm/article104425789/Eine-Strasse-fuer-den-Missionar.html>.

¹⁵¹ Zechenter, "The Repositioning of Postsocialist Narratives," 143–146; Pozniak, "Reinventing a Model Socialist Steel Town," 115–116, 122, 125–126.

¹⁵² Sándor Horváth, "New Towns, Old Spaces? Hidden Paths of Memory and Representations of City Spaces in Sztálinváros, Hungary," in *Neue Städte. Vom Projekt der Moderne zur Authentisierung*, ed. Andreas Ludwig (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021), 82.

¹⁵³ These factors are enumerated by David Art. See David Art, "Making Room for November 9, 1989? The Fall of the Berlin Wall in German Politics and Memory," in *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, ed. Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 195–212.

¹⁵⁴ This is probably true for other places as well. See Myriam Renaudot, "Der Siebzehnte Juni," in *Erinnerungsorte der DDR*, ed. Martin Sabrow (München: C. H. Beck, 2009), 518; Fromm, "Vor 50 Jahren – Juniaufstand."

¹⁵⁵ Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 105; Fromm, "Vor zehn Jahren: Eisenhüttenstädter Stasiobjekte wurden aufgelöst," 24–25.

would not have started from Eisenhüttenstadt.”¹⁵⁶ Election results in the town show above-average support for the leftist PDS/Die Linke – between 25.5 and 35.9 percent of the vote in 1990, 1993, 1998, 2003, and 2008.¹⁵⁷ So it is not just a matter of retrospective nostalgia for GDR. The poll results indicate that a significant number of residents, many of whom were involved in the construction of the GDR, still feel connected to it, the ideals of socialism, and the image of the “first socialist town.” However, that does not mean that they identify completely with the old GDR regime and its policies of oppression.¹⁵⁸ Nor does it mean that those who vote for other contemporary parties do not have warm feelings for the past and pride in what was built under state socialist rule. Their feelings are not as obvious as those of the residents who still vote for socialism because they can have various motivations for voting as they do.¹⁵⁹

Celebrating the Founding of the Town: Desacralization and Emptying Out

Eisenhüttenstadt’s green spaces, the absence of dark tenement courtyards, and the availability of kindergartens and schools are essential, if not the most important, advantages the town offers in the daily lives of its residents. But the elements of everyday routine do not constitute an identity.¹⁶⁰ Because they contrast with everyday life, local festivals contribute to the formation of civic identity

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Christian von Ditfurth, “Das schwarze Loch. Wie die CDU aus der Geschichte floh,” in *Blockflöten. Wie die CDU ihre realsozialistische Vergangenheit verdrängt* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1991), 137. I say “reputed to have said” because I could not find the original source of this quotation. The earliest mention of it I found is in von Ditfurth’s text, but he does not give the source.

¹⁵⁷ “Vorläufiges Ergebnis der Kommunalwahlen am 6. Mai 1990,” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, May 8, 1990, 3; “Endgültiges Ergebnis der Volkskammerwahlen vom 18.3.1990 im Bezirk Frankfurt (Oder),” *Märkische Oderzeitung*, March 24, 1990, 5; Landesamt für Datenverarbeitung und Statistik Brandenburg, ed., *Kommunalwahlen 1993* (Potsdam, 1994), 114; Landesamt für Datenverarbeitung und Statistik Brandenburg, ed., *Kommunalwahlen 1998* (Potsdam, 1998), 247; Landesbetrieb für Datenverarbeitung und Statistik Brandenburg, ed., *Kommunalwahlen 26.10.2003* (Potsdam, 2003), 172–173; Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg, ed., *Statistischer Bericht. Kommunalwahlen im Land Brandenburg am 28.09.2008* (Potsdam, 2008), 86; Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 117.

¹⁵⁸ Neller, *DDR-Nostalgie*, 293.

¹⁵⁹ On the connection between contemporary pro-socialist political orientation, GDR nostalgia, and attachment to the GDR, see *ibid.*, 299–300.

¹⁶⁰ Jan Assmann, “Der zweidimensionale Mensch: Das Fest als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisses,” in *Das Fest und das Heilige. Kontrapunkte des Alltags*, ed. Theo Sundermeier (Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1991), 15.

more than any other medium for transmitting collective memory.¹⁶¹ A town's festivals construct the group identity of its inhabitants and affirm it by reference to its founding myths, invocation of its great past, and the opportunities they offer for collective action.¹⁶²

The first major celebrations of Stalinstadt's founding were held in 1960 to mark its tenth anniversary. The *Hüttenfestspiele* lasted for a whole week. At that time the town and the steelworks were magnificently decorated. Various events and mass displays of physical culture were organized to involve and attract as many residents to the festivities as possible. A sort of "passion play," *Blast das Feuer an* [Stoke the Fire], was performed every evening. It staged the founding myth of the construction of the town and the steelworks over and over again. The play set the tone for the week of celebrations and even years later was remembered fondly.¹⁶³ The official founding day was fixed as August 18, 1950, the day the "first blow of the axe" began the felling of the surrounding forest. One constantly repeated story told of how the then-Minister of Heavy Industry, Fritz Selbmann, traveled to the region following a decision of the Third Party Congress and announced to assembled spectators that a new industrial area and a new town would be built on the site. He then symbolically struck a tree with an axe and cut it down, giving the signal to start clearing the area.¹⁶⁴

The Hüttenfest was held regularly. High-ranking guests were always invited to the anniversary events.¹⁶⁵ Newspaper articles glorified the legendary "blow of the axe." They lauded the first builders as heroic role models and praised the role of young people in building the first socialist town.¹⁶⁶ They highlighted the constant growth and development of the town. Of course, they insisted that the town's growth would not have been possible without the leadership of the Party and the kind support of the Soviet Union. A parade down Leninallee was

¹⁶¹ Kazimierz Żygulski, *Święto i kultura* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych, 1981), 7–8; Assmann, "Der zweidimensionale Mensch," 24.

¹⁶² Żygulski, *Święto i kultura*, 159–160.

¹⁶³ Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 71–74; Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 190–192; Andreas Ludwig, "50 Jahre Eisenhüttenstadt: Stadtjubiläen und Geschichte im politischen Kontext," *Die alte Stadt. Vierteljahresschrift für Stadtgeschichte, Stadtsoziologie und Denkmalpflege* 28, no. 1 (2001): 44–46.

¹⁶⁴ See e.g. Heinz Colditz and Martin Lücke, *Stalinstadt. Neues Leben – neue Menschen* (Berlin: Kongress-Verlag, 1958), 5–6; Hoffmann and Oldenburg, *Stalinstadt*, 7; Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost Betriebsparteiorganisation des VEB Bandstahlkombinat "Hermann Matern": 11–10.

¹⁶⁵ See e.g. "Prominente Gäste," *Unser Friedenswerk*, no. 33 (August 26, 1965).

¹⁶⁶ See e.g. Dieter Essler, "15 Jahre Werk und Stadt: Von Anfang an dabei," *Unser Friedenswerk*, no. 31 (August 12, 1965).

the central event of the celebrations.¹⁶⁷ “Formal” traditions like the Hüttenfest fostered a communal bond among the town’s residents.¹⁶⁸ The identity crisis of the 1990s was manifested in the fact that the town’s founding days were not celebrated after reunification until the year 2000. The last time Eisenhüttenstadt held a festival in honor of its founding before that was in 1990, when it was still in the GDR. Judging by the photos, it was a rather more modest celebration than previous ones, and already lacked the paeons to socialism and explicit socialist messaging.¹⁶⁹

After 1990, official distaste for the state-socialist past made it difficult to hold such celebrations in Eisenhüttenstadt.¹⁷⁰ The first major post-reunification celebration occurred in 2000, representing a “return of the repressed.” It took place from August 24 to August 27 (not a week earlier, which would have required direct attention to the legendary “first axe blow”). The celebration was held along Lindenallee under the banner, “Walk Through History and the Future.” Individual sections of the route corresponded to each of the five decades of the town’s history. The section closest to the steelworks was labeled “a nostalgic shindig” on the festival map. The last section of the route represented 2010. The main festival stage was located there and the town’s mission statement “Eisenhüttenstadt 2010” was presented there.¹⁷¹ Each section of the route exhibited successively older motor vehicles (not only from the GDR and the Eastern Bloc). On August 27, a classic car parade and a historical fashion show were held.¹⁷² Popular music from the past decades accompanied the whole festival. The Friedrich-Wolf-Theater presented films produced by the GDR’s DEFA studio.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ 15 Jahre Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost, *Unser Friedenswerk (Festausgabe)*, no. 32 (August, 19, 1965); *Unser Friedenswerk*, no. 25 (July 9, 1970); 20 Jahre Werk und Stadt, *Unser Friedenswerk (Festausgabe)*, no. 22/23 (June 25, 1970); *Unser Friedenswerk* 75, no. 23 (June 2, 1975); Im Zeichen des 25. Jahrestages, *Unser Friedenswerk* 75, no. 26 (July 1, 1975) 8; *Unser Friedenswerk* 75, no. 27 (July 2, 1975); *Unser Friedenswerk* 75, no. 25 (June 4, 1975); see also Andreas Ludwig, “50 Jahre Eisenhüttenstadt: Stadtjubiläen und Geschichte im politischen Kontext,” *Die alte Stadt* 28, no. 1 (2001): 46–49.

¹⁶⁸ Richter, Förster, and Lakemann, *Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt*, 178–179; Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt*, 192.

¹⁶⁹ “Impressionen vom Volksfest ‘40 Jahre Werk und Stadt,’” *Kulturspiegel Eisenhüttenstadt*, no. 9 (September 1990): 14–15.

¹⁷⁰ The case of Nowa Huta shows how problematic it can be to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of a socialist town. See Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 179; Pozniak, “Reinventing a Model Socialist Steel Town,” 129.

¹⁷¹ “Eisenhüttenstadt wird 50,” *Stadtspiegel*, July 2000, 2.

¹⁷² “50 – IFA-Oldtimer zum Stadtjubiläum!,” *Stadtspiegel*, August 2000, 27.

¹⁷³ “Kino Friedrich-Wolf-Theater,” *Stadtspiegel*, August 2000, 35.

The Eisenhüttenstadt 2010 mission statement for the future was devoid of ideology. It referred to very practical things such as work, leisure, quality of life and bringing town administration closer to the citizenry.¹⁷⁴ However a glimmer of a new ideological orientation can be gleaned from Mayor Rainer Werner's greeting to festival goers. He wrote, "Eisenhüttenstadt sees itself as a town in Europe and this thought should flow into our anniversary."¹⁷⁵ For the most part, however, the structure of the festival itself indicated a boom of nostalgia.

Ludwig notes that although the town's 50th anniversary was celebrated with a lively week of festivities, a critical examination of the town's history was not carried out by the town itself, but in publications by the steelworks and private citizens.¹⁷⁶ A planned revision of the permanent exhibits in the city museum, which would include the history of the "new town" to a greater extent, was not realized.¹⁷⁷ Nevertheless, there was commentary in the town's magazine, the *Stadtspiegel*, that was at least sanctioned by the town. Together with the festival's program, the *Stadtspiegel* published a chronology of the town's development, which united different historical tendencies. On the one hand, it contains a heroic but wholly depoliticized remembrance of the town's construction; on the other hand, there is discussion of the residents' orientation towards the West and their disbelief in the GDR's official ideology. The magazine's chronicle ended in the 1990s, when freedom brought with it difficulties that the town began to overcome when the steelworks were successfully privatized.¹⁷⁸

Suddenly, the festival became an annual tradition with considerable attendance.¹⁷⁹ An analysis of the programs of all the subsequent celebrations up to 2010 shows some atypical characteristics of that year's festival.¹⁸⁰ In no other

¹⁷⁴ "Chronologie – Eisenhüttenstadt im Spiegel der Zeit," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2000, 7.

¹⁷⁵ "Grußwort des Bürgermeisters Rainer Werner," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2000, 2.

¹⁷⁶ Ludwig, "Wo die Zukunft Gegenwart war," 169; he means the following publications Herbert Nicolaus and Lutz Schmidt, *Einblicke – 50 Jahre EKO Stahl* (Eisenhüttenstadt, 2000); Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt*; Anton, "Ein neuer, würdiger Name. Wohnstadt Fürstenberg – Stalinstadt – Eisenhüttenstadt"; Semmelmann, Pregel, and Krüger, *Eisenhüttenstädter Lesebuch. Geschichte/n der ersten sozialistischen Stadt Deutschlands*.

¹⁷⁷ Ludwig, "50 Jahre Eisenhüttenstadt," 51.

¹⁷⁸ "Chronologie – Eisenhüttenstadt im Spiegel der Zeit."

¹⁷⁹ According to the organizers, 180,000 visitors attended the festival in 2004 and more than 200,000 in 2006. See 5. Stadtfest Eisenhüttenstadt vom 27. bis 29.08.04, Stadtfest Eisenhüttenstadt, 2004, <https://web.archive.org/web/20050316160626/http://dasstadtfest.de/aktuelles.php>; „Mit dem Herzen dabei“ – Ostbrandenburg feierte in Eisenhüttenstadt, Stadtfest Eisenhüttenstadt, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070205050142/http://www.dasstadtfest.de/website/aktuelles.php>.

¹⁸⁰ The festival program was published every year in a special August edition of the *Stadtspiegel*. See *Stadtspiegel* from 2001 to 2010.

year were the decades of the GDR recalled in similar form. The striking feature of the subsequent festivals was an increasingly eclectic combination of various entertainments for children and adults, including concerts by country, pop, and rock bands, children's shows, amusement rides, and raffles, which became the focal point of the entire festival. The only element with a clear historical reference that remained was the classic cars. However, they too were more a form of "retro" entertainment than a manifestation of a deep *Ostalgie*. Veronika Pehe uses the term "retro" for a non-affective nostalgia: "The term 'retro' is used to designate a memory regime devoid of affect or lived memory, a pick-and-mix attitude capitalizing on the stylistic repertoires of the past, which lends it to various irreverent and ironic iterations, while feasting on the colors, sounds and textures of socialism."¹⁸¹ In contrast to nostalgia, it is a view on the past from the perspective of an established and triumphant liberal democracy. This approach to the past differs from what is typical of town foundation celebrations, anniversaries, and jubilees. According to Sabrow, jubilees (and other anniversaries of founding), illuminate the past positively, emphasize success, and serve to celebrate a particular legitimacy.¹⁸²

Greetings published in the *Stadtspiegel*, delivered by Eisenhüttenstadt's former SPD mayor Werner and his successor, PDS/Die Linke mayor Dagmar Püschel, did not contain any specific historical reference to the GDR.¹⁸³ Püschel's greeting, however, was somewhat different from Werner's. It focused on moments of community solidarity demonstrated in the 1990s in the struggle to preserve the steelworks and the organization of the first festival after unification.¹⁸⁴

Rogers Brubaker and Margit Feischmidt distinguish two different ideal types of commemorative mood: the sacralized and the desacralized. The first, sacralized type demands a serious, sublime tone and pathos, which is achieved

¹⁸¹ Veronika Pehe, *Velvet Retro: Postsocialist Nostalgia and the Politics of Heroism in Czech Popular Culture* (New York: Berghahn, 2020), 11.

¹⁸² Martin Sabrow, "Jahrestag und Jubiläum in der Zeitgeschichte," in *Historische Jubiläen*, ed. Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: AVA, 2015), 19.

¹⁸³ Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2005, 3; Werner, "Grußwort des Bürgermeisters Rainer Werner"; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2002, 2; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2003, 3; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2004, 3; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2001, 2; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2006, 3; Rainer Werner, "Vorwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2007, 3; Werner, "'Hütte, auf geht's' – Kultursommer in unserer Stadt"; Rainer Werner, "Grußwort," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2009, 3; Dagmar Püschel, "Grußwort – Eisenhüttenstadt lebt seine Geschichte," *Stadtspiegel*, August 2010, 5.

¹⁸⁴ Püschel, "Grußwort – Eisenhüttenstadt lebt seine Geschichte."

by resorting to heroic language and mythopoetic narrative forms. The second type relies more on spectacle and entertainment.¹⁸⁵ Jubilee celebrations in the GDR were quite close to the first type. Town festivals in the FRG, on the other hand, were more in line with the second type. It is important to point out that such celebrations can never be completely desacralized, because this robs them of their festivity, their difference from everyday life, and reduces them to a simple entertainment.¹⁸⁶ Such festivals are characterized by their celebration of “historical becoming and presumed significance for the future.”¹⁸⁷

The organizers of the celebrations after 2000 in Eisenhüttenstadt minimized their “seriousness.” They downplayed the city’s history and what they did allow was more “retro” than not. They did not represent a living tradition, and considered the past to be something exotic rather than a template for the future. They focused on entertainment rather than memory, although focusing on memory would provide the town with certainty and an orientation. A local blogger suggests:

The town festival as a spectacle, admittedly successful in promoting its aims so far, can be a building block in the formation of a self-understanding of the people of Eisenhüttenstadt, but at its predominantly consumer and event-oriented core it ultimately satisfies mainly private needs. In addition, one must also make clear that the success of the event is based predominantly on attendance by city escapees and other out-of-towners who come and just want to have a good time.¹⁸⁸

In the GDR, the festival celebrated the “axe blow” and the heroism of the builders. The history of the town was directly linked to ideas of peace, socialism, and the superiority of the socialist system over the capitalist system. Nothing of that is left today. The festival is supposed to celebrate unity and identity, but it is no longer filled with that content. It has been “eventized.”¹⁸⁹ It fails to reconcile

¹⁸⁵ Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*, 168–170.

¹⁸⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaia kul'tura srednevekov'ia i renessansa* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1990), 13–14.

¹⁸⁷ Sabrow, “Jahrestag und Jubiläum in der Zeitgeschichte,” 13.

¹⁸⁸ Ben, “Stadtwappenpflege – in der Diskussion,” Weblog für eine alternative Stadtwahrnehmung, November 29, 2006, <http://eisen.huettenstadt.de/archives/426-Stadtwappenpflege-in-der-Diskussion.html>.

¹⁸⁹ “Eventized” means that festivals and celebrations are deinstitutionalized (i.e., official sponsors forfeit their role), destructured (more inclusive from the social and design points of view), profanized (everything is meant to be a “nice experience”), multiplied, and economized (subjected to profit maximization). See Winfried Gebhardt, “Feste, Feiern und Events. Die etwas andere Freizeit,” in *Handbuch Freizeitsoziologie* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2015), 415–429.

the town's founding myth with its new reality, and no strategies have been found for eliminating or rearticulating the old mythology in favor of a new one.

This is not simply a matter of covering up the GDR past, as happened with Nazism in Wolfsburg after the war.¹⁹⁰ The GDR past is mediated through other sites of memory and commemorative practices. Narratives that relativize the founding myth have their limits. An exhibition or a book can be both complex and critical because of its narrative character. In those cases, the dialectic of form versus content allows for different strategies for dealing with the past. On the other hand, festivals or celebrations of a city's founding require comprehensive and positive identification with the town and its history. Fractures in a town's identity can be discerned where in other media they remain hidden. A festival is a place for evoking a myth and not building complicated representations. At the same time, depoliticization and de-ideologization have their limits. This explains the festival greeting of PDS/Die Linke mayor Püschel. Her greeting was an "assertion of an identity" based in the 1990s, in years of difficulty and uncertainty. Unlike the memory of the GDR, the struggle to preserve the steelworks in the 1990s was not something contradictory and divisive in Eisenhüttenstadt.

Conclusion

The hegemony of the *Diktaturgedächtnis* and the absence of a pre-socialist past have led to splits in Eisenhüttenstadt's collective memory and identity. In contrast to some other Eastern European new socialist towns, Eisenhüttenstadt did not adopt radical strategies to come to terms with its past. The debate over renaming the town and streets in the early 1990s resulted in a moderate, depoliticized and de-ideologized approach to transforming the public space. Many remnants of the socialist past in the urban landscape were retained because of their perceived significance to the local identity.

The inability of those who sought to construct the town's identity to fully implement their strategy of *Verschiebung* and shift a new hegemonic narrative to the center of civic consciousness resulted in later-incorporated communes asserting their symbolic independence and reviving memories of their past that were suppressed in the GDR. Meanwhile, the town's transformation into a museum of the GDR was met with criticism from some residents. While Eisenhüttenstadt attracts researchers and tourists with its socialist past, external and internal

¹⁹⁰ Alexander Kraus, *Stadt ohne Geschichte?: Wolfsburg als Demokratielabor der Wirtschaftswunderzeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2021), 17–26, 429–440.

memories of that period are different. There was also a discrepancy between public and private memories of the GDR. The new, critical narrative undermined the old, established myths without offering viable alternatives.

The lack of an alternative narrative was evident in the town's founding celebration, which lacked any reference to the past beyond its formal acknowledgment.

A distance to the GDR has led to the "cooling" of mnemonic conflicts – especially as the older generation passes – but also to solidification of *Diktaturgedächtnis* among those who no longer have a personal connection to the GDR.¹⁹¹ Although the town's image as an open-air museum continued to solidify and the town festival was not filled with "content," some changes can be noted. A narrative of overcoming the difficulties of post-reunification economic and social transition is beginning to take hold as a new basis for the identity of the town.¹⁹² However, the rise of the right-wing AfD party in Eisenhüttenstadt indicates that the socio-economic effects of transformation in the 1990s are still weighing heavily on the town's inhabitants despite a relative economic upturn. The crisis of representation in Eisenhüttenstadt continues.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Meyen, "Wir haben freier gelebt," 225.

¹⁹² Sonderausstellung 'Ohne Ende Anfang. Zur Transformation der sozialistischen Stadt' (04.07.21–29.05.22), Das Museum Utopie und Alltag, accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.utopieundalltag.de/ohne-ende-anfang-zur-transformation-der-sozialistischen-stadt/>.

¹⁹³ Philip Manow and Hanna Schwander, "Eine differenzierte Erklärung für den Erfolg der AfD in West- und Ostdeutschland," in *Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland: Wahlverhalten in Zeiten politischer Polarisierung*, ed. Heinz Ulrich Brinkmann and Karl-Heinz Reuband (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2022), 163–191, doi:10.1007/978-3-658-33787-2.