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**Bringing Culture to the Masses:
Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR**

A Case Study of *Bezirk* Potsdam

Esther Eugénie von Richthofen

University College London

PhD thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines cultural life that was organised in state institutions, factories and mass organisations in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Controlling people in their free time was an instrumental part of SED policy, but in spite of the party's attempts to direct and channel cultural life, people's cultural activities developed a dynamic of their own. The analysis of organised cultural life is therefore an interesting angle from which to explore the nature of dictatorial rule. The main focus of this thesis is the middle period of the GDR. Compared to the 1950s and 1980s, the 1960s and 1970s were characterised by a greater willingness to exercise cultural inclinations by participating in the organised cultural structures, and by communicating with different levels of authority in order to secure the fulfilment of personal interests.

This study challenges current assumptions about the GDR's social and institutional history, which do not place enough emphasis on the interaction and inter-dependence between 'rulers' and 'ruled', primarily because they do not sufficiently accentuate the important role of functionaries. The analysis of this thesis identifies three groups of 'agents' in the cultural sphere. The first group consists of cultural functionaries, who operated at various organisational and administrative levels. They ensured that organised cultural life appealed to those who participated in it through compromises and extensive dialogue. The second group encompasses the participants. They were willing to integrate into the organised cultural structures in order to fulfil their own interests and they relied on the effective communication with functionaries in local, intermediate and central organs in order to realise their aims. The third group consists of the leaders of the central party organs. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, they increasingly abandoned idealistic and utopian policies in favour of a more pragmatic approach that aimed to satisfy people's cultural interests more broadly. In short, cultural life encompassed complex forms of agency, it exhibited various forms of communication and it highlights that reciprocal influence existed between different actors.

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List of Abbreviations

AG	<i>Arbeitsgruppe</i> (Working Group)
BArch	<i>Bundesarchiv</i> (Federal Archive)
BfK	<i>Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit</i> (Bezirk Cabinet for Cultural Work)
BGL	<i>Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung</i> (Factory trade union leadership)
BLHA	<i>Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv</i> (Brandenburg State Archive)
CFWP	<i>Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz</i> (Synthetic Fibre Factory Premnitz)
CPSU	<i>Communist Party of the Soviet Union</i>
DAF	<i>Deutsche Arbeitsfront</i> (German Workers' Front)
DDR	<i>Deutsche Demokratische Republik</i> (German Democratic Republic)
DEFA	<i>Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft</i> (German Film Studios)
DFD	<i>Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands</i> (Democratic German Women's Association)
DSF	<i>Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft</i> (Society for German-Soviet Friendship)
DVP	<i>Deutsche Volkspolizei</i> (German People's Police)
FDGB	<i>Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund</i> (Free German Trade Union)
FDJ	<i>Freie Deutsche Jugend</i> (Free German Youth)
GDR	<i>German Democratic Republic</i>
GO	<i>Grundorganisation</i> (Ground Organisation)
GRWT	<i>Geräte und Reglerwerke in Teltow</i> (Appliance and Regulator Works in Teltow)
KB	<i>Kulturbund</i> (Culture Association)
KPD	<i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i> (German Communist Party)
LkO	<i>Landkreis Oberhavel, Kreis- und Verwaltungsarchiv</i> (State District Oberhavel, District and Government Archive)
LPG	<i>Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft</i> (Agricultural Collective)
Nazi	<i>Nationalsozialist</i> (National-Socialist)
NES	<i>New Economic System</i>
NÖS	<i>Neues Ökonomisches System</i> (New Economic System)
NSDAP	<i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
RdB	<i>Rat des Bezirkes</i> (Bezirk (large district) Council)
SAPMO	<i>Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen</i> (Foundation for Parties and Mass Organisations)
SED	<i>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands</i> (Socialist Unity Party)
SMBHR	<i>Schwermaschinenbau "Heinrich Rau" in Wildau</i> (Heavy Machinery Construction "Heinrich Rau" in Wildau)
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland</i> (German Social-Democratic Party)
StA	<i>Stadtarchiv</i>
Stasi	<i>Staatssicherheitsdienst</i> (State Security)
SWWB	<i>Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg</i> (Steel and Rolling Mill Works Brandenburg)
SWWH	<i>Stahl- und Walzwerk Henningsdorf</i> (Steel and Rolling Mill Works Henningsdorf)
VEB	<i>Volkseigener Betrieb</i> (People's Own Factory)
VdgB	<i>Verein der gegenseitigen Bauernhilfe</i> (Farmers' Association)
ZK	<i>Zentralkomitee</i> (Central Committee)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In 1983, Günter Gaus, the former head of the West German permanent representation in East Berlin, wrote: “Even tearing down the Berlin Wall could not rectify the problems of German division”.¹ Gaus was frustrated about what he perceived to be the refusal of many West Germans to accept that life across the Wall had been deeply affected by years of division. He argued that every-day life in East Germany had its own rules, rules that were not solely determined by oppression, suffering and greyness, but were shaped by clearly developed conceptions of sociability, social security and fulfilment.² When the Wall came down in 1989, Gaus had not only predicted a difficult process of growing together, but he had also pinpointed what was at the heart of these difficulties: on both sides, there was an unwillingness to let go of a particular way of life. West Germans, on the one hand, were surprised that the ‘other’ Germans did not seem to feel liberated from the SED dictatorship for long, and started to engage in nostalgic portrayals of life in the GDR. After 40 years of division, East Germans, on the other hand, had become accustomed to their own lifestyle and did not want to be told what to think about their lives ‘behind the Wall’. Regardless of the political constraints that had been a part of their lives, they missed the established patterns of socialisation that they had become used to.

This thesis studies cultural life in the GDR, and particularly focuses on the 1960s and 1970s. People’s engagement with cultural activity in the GDR is a particularly interesting area through which to explore how individuals succeeded and failed to realise their personal interests within the dictatorship. In Western societies, it is assumed that individuals engage in cultural activities out of their own free will and according to their own choosing.³ In a dictatorship, the situation is more complex. The controlling bodies try to restrict and control cultural life where possible to ensure that people do not engage with activities that could challenge or undermine the leadership. Nevertheless, cultural life in the GDR was not solely

¹ Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983), p.185.

² *ibid.*, pp. 158-166.

³ Rüdiger Henkel, *Im Dienste der Staatspartei: Über Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1994), p. 236.

determined by 'politics'. Those who participated in cultural life shaped and determined its character just as much as the party's repressive and controlling organs. Reducing cultural activity in the GDR to repression, coercion and control is not an adequate reflection of the nature of cultural life in the 'Workers' and Peasants' State'.

In the analysis of cultural life in the GDR, the term 'culture' will be interpreted quite liberally, in order to draw attention to the diverse activities that people engaged with in East Germany. The analysis encompasses 'highbrow' cultural activities, which means artistic or intellectually engaging activities, and includes going to the theatre, or engaging with the creative arts, with literature and with classical music. It also refers to 'lowbrow' activities like going on boat outings, playing card games or spending evenings dancing. Finally, it refers to 'hobby' activities, like stamp collecting.

Cultural Mass Work: Intention and Reality

Organising Culture

Being 'culturally active' can mean a variety of things: it can entail reading a book, going to the theatre, joining a creative writing circle or singing in a choir. Rather than offer a descriptive depiction of all possible forms of cultural activity in the GDR, this thesis concentrates on two particular questions: what was the nature of cultural life when it was organised in the state-run cultural facilities, and how did people engage with these organised activities?

The state-organised cultural facilities were wide-ranging. To begin with, there were certain cultural institutions. For example, there were 'cultural houses', which were designed to provide a large number of people with highly differentiated cultural activities. They offered wide-ranging facilities for lay artistic endeavours and even accommodated semi-professional stages for theatrical performances. They were either tied to a large factory, or they were designed to be a cultural centre for the inhabitants of a particular regional area. Some of the larger cultural houses, called '*Kreis* cultural houses', exercised administrative functions and coordinated the

cultural development of a certain district.⁴ Apart from the cultural houses, there were other cultural institutions like theatres, concert halls and museums. Furthermore, there were numerous clubs, such as youth clubs, worker's clubs, village clubs and clubs for intellectuals. As their names indicate, these clubs were designed to provide a specific population group with cultural organisation. Aside from cultural institutions, there were also various mass organisations that offered cultural activities to the population. The best-known cultural mass organisation was the *Kulturbund*, which looked after hobby groups and lay artistic circles. The *Kulturbund* was designed to provide these groups and circles with the necessary facilities and with the requisite finances. Aside from the *Kulturbund*, there were other mass organisations in charge of cultural life. There was the *Nationale Front*, which was responsible for organising cultural events in areas that other mass organisations had not reached, like the 'Wohnbezirke' (units of accommodation). Organising cultural life was also a responsibility of the GDR's women's organisation (DFD), the youth organisation (FDJ), the farmer's association (VdGB), and the organisation promoting German-Soviet friendship (DSF).⁵ These latter four mass organisations, however, played only a comparatively small role in cultural life. Finally, cultural activities and festive events were meant to be a continuous aspect of life in the factories of the GDR. All factory trade union leaderships (FDGB or BGL) were instructed to ensure that the workers engaged with culture even within the smallest organised work units, called brigades.

Throughout this study, this wide-ranging network of institutions and organisations that oversaw the development of cultural life in the GDR will be referred to as 'organised culture'. In SED terminology, the organisation of cultural activities in institutions, mass organisations and factories was called *cultural mass work*, a term that will also be used in the subsequent analysis. Theoretically, those who participated in cultural life had little control over the organisation and development of cultural life within these cultural structures. The reality, however, was quite different, as this study shows. This thesis concentrates on showing how the

⁴ For an overview of the history of cultural houses see Simone Hain 'Die Salons der Sozialisten: Geschichte und Gestalt der Kulturhäuser in der DDR', in Simone Hain, Michael Schroedter, Stephan Stroux, *Die Salons der Sozialisten: Kulturhäuser in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996), pp. 89-149; see also Horst Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR: Vorläufer, Konzepte, Gebrauch. Versuch einer historischen Rekonstruktion', Thomas Ruben, Bernd Wagner (eds.) *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg, Eine Bestandaufnahme* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 1994), pp. 97-178.

⁵ For an overview of the mass organisations, see Ulrich Mählert, 'Die Massenorganisationen', in Rainer Eppelmann, Bernd Faulenbach, Ulrich Mählert (eds.), *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR Forschung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), pp. 100-106.

participants and functionaries determined the nature of cultural activity. When they moved within these organised cultural structures, they did all they could to secure the fulfilment of their interest.

Creating the New Person

Why was the SED so keen to regulate the cultural field and to provide such a wide range of cultural institutions and organisations for the cultural life of the population? This had its roots deep in the ideology of the party. In Marxist-Leninist thought, cultural life in capitalist societies was seen as a means of oppressing the working class. The bourgeoisie and upper classes were portrayed as restricting access to intellectual and cultural pursuits in order to keep the working classes in an uneducated and controllable state. In contrast to this, the 'Worker's and Peasant's State' had the duty to bring culture to the masses, in order to fully establish the working class as the ruling class.⁶ Since the socialist ideal was based on equality, the cultural network had to be accessible to all, financially as well as geographically. Consequently, cultural activities were subsidised in order to make them affordable, and to ensure that even the most remote areas were provided with cultural facilities.⁷

These ideological reasons were not the only motive behind the SED's provision of wide-ranging cultural structures. The party leaders also believed that the GDR's workers needed to be educated so that they pursued only the 'right' kind of cultural activity. The idea of a Western-style free cultural development based on personal choice seemed abhorrent to the party leaders.⁸ Culture was a tool in the process of establishing Socialism and had to be rooted in the Humanist tradition and in Socialist Realism. The SED hoped that by furthering and controlling cultural life, it would be possible to re-educate the East German population and to turn people into 'socialist personalities': the pursuit of cultural activities was designed to equip people with the 'right' characteristics, such as morally upright behaviour, dedication

⁶ Leo Fiege, *Erlebnis Kultur: Zur Rolle der kulturellen Massenarbeit* (East Berlin, 1981), p. 16, pp. 28-31.

⁷ Archiv Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen, Bundesarchiv (SAPMO BArch) DY 30/IV 2/9.06/114, *Begründung zur Verordnung über die Umbildung für Kulturfonds der DDR 1960 und Verordnung*, pp. 1-2.

⁸ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1.01/407, *Kulturkonferenz 23-24. Oktober 1957, Referat von Alexander Abusch*, pp. 73-75. A longer extract from Abusch's speech is in Chapter 7, p. 175.

to the socialist model, the willingness to work and a strong belief in the Marxist-Leninist teachings.⁹

Aside from these key considerations, there were secondary deliberations that fuelled the SED's desire to guide and control cultural life. In the effort to win the upper hand in the Cold War, the party leaders regarded culture as a 'weapon' in the fight against the 'Imperialist West'. In the eyes of the party leaders, a rich and diverse cultural life in the GDR illustrated the advantages of Socialism and pinpointed the weaknesses of the Imperialist system, where culture was a privilege of the rich.¹⁰ There was also an economic argument that warranted the development of cultural life. By providing the workers with cultural activities, they could engage with intellectually demanding endeavours, they could take their minds off the daily tasks of work, exercise their bodies, relax and enjoy themselves. The workers would go back to work the next day more focussed, more clear thinking, even more dextrous and more refreshed. They would consequently be far more productive and happy at their workplace, which would enhance the economy as well as social stability, the SED leaders believed.¹¹

The SED's utilisation of culture as a tool for social control was by no means a new concept. It tied into long standing traditions in German history. During the Third Reich, the Nazis aimed to establish a strict control mechanism over people's free time and over their cultural activities. All cultural activities were to be organised in the National Socialist trade union movement (the DAF). Within the DAF, the Nazis instigated the 'Strength Through Joy' movement, which was designed to provide the population with organised leisure time.¹² Leisure activities had also been subject to institutional control in the early part of the 20th century, because disreputable working class behaviour roused fears of social unrest.¹³ This was even evident in the working class movement during the Imperial and Weimar period, particularly within

⁹ This argument was particularly evident in the earlier decades. Cf. Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR', p. 100: Between the late 1940s and early 1960s, the cultural houses were designed to educate people and create the 'new person'. This focus changed over the course of the 1960s, as will be explored in Chapters 7 and 8, though some elements of these ideas remained in the 1970s: SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV B 2/9.06/46, *Die Aufgaben der Literaturverbreitung und Literaturpropaganda im Jahre 1973, Oktober 1972*, p. 2.

¹⁰ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV 2/1.01/407, *Kulturkonferenz 1957, Referat Abusch*, p.13; Hans Koch, *Kulturpolitik in der DDR* (East Berlin, 1976), p.12.

¹¹ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/2.024/7, *Letter from Hochmuth to Kurt Hager, 13.10.70*, attached: *Ziele und Wege*, by Hans Koch and Helmut Hanke, pp. 1-2.

¹² Shelly Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 5-7, pp. 40-43.

¹³ Lynn Abrams, *Worker's Culture in Imperial Germany: Leisure and Recreation in the Rhineland and Westphalia* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 92-97, pp. 139-142.

the socialist party (the SPD). The SPD encouraged workers to take part in cultural activities.¹⁴ In doing so the party leaders largely referred to activities of a 'highbrow' nature and sought to undermine the workers' desire to relax after work by drinking and engaging in 'debauched' celebrations.¹⁵ The SPD's practices attracted criticism from the communist party (the KPD), who believed that workers should spend their free time preparing for the revolution. The KPD argued that the SPD's cultural policy was harming the workers: not only was it encouraging them to engage with bourgeois culture (one of the many symbols of the oppression of the working classes) but it was actually undermining the workers' revolutionary zeal, because it made their lives too comfortable.¹⁶ To summarise, before 1945, Germany had encountered many forms of cultural control; this was not something that the SED had newly introduced. The pre-War precedent becomes all the more evident when considering that West German politicians also showed tendencies of narrow-mindedness and intolerance in the 1950s as far as modern cultural trends were concerned. The opinions of some conservative politicians were remarkably similar to those expressed by SED Party Leaders.¹⁷

The SED party leaders showed similar petit-bourgeois attitudes towards cultural activity as their left-wing, centrist and even right-wing predecessors. The SED leaders desired orderliness, wholesomeness and intellectual stimulus in people's cultural activity. According to the official ideology, the bourgeoisie had been overthrown, and in the new state, the worker was in the process of 'conquering the heights of culture' by pursuing 'decent' leisure time activities.¹⁸ The SED's cultural model, hence, tied into educational and personality-building ideals that were similar to those of the former SPD. These expectations placed extensive demands on the East German population, and on the workers in particular. The workers were

¹⁴ Wilhelm Leo Guttsman, *Workers' Culture in Weimar Germany: Between Tradition and Commitment* (Oxford: Berg, 1990), pp. 57-65.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the SPD's attitude in Imperial Germany, see Abrams, *Workers' Culture in Imperial Germany*, p. 53, p. 83, p. 181. For a discussion of the SPD's approach in the Weimar period, see Guttsman, *Workers' Culture in Weimar Germany*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁶ Guttsman, *Workers' Culture in Weimar Germany*, pp. 72-81.

¹⁷ Axel Schmidt, 'Zwei Staaten, eine Hörfunk- und Fernsehgeneration. Überlegungen zur Bedeutung der elektronischen Massenmedien in der Geschichte der Kommunikation zwischen Bundesrepublik und DDR', in Arnd Bauernkämpfer, Martin Sabrow, Bernd Stöver (eds.), *Doppelte Zeitgeschichte: Deutsch-deutsche Beziehungen 1945-1990* (Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz, 1998), p. 63.

¹⁸ This term was introduced at the *Bitterfeld Conference* in 1959. In the early 1960s, the phrase was frequently used. See for example Alfred Kurella, *Erfahrungen und Probleme der sozialistischen Kulturarbeit, Referat auf der Kulturkonferenz 1960 in Berlin* (Ost Berlin, 1960), p. 11; Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA), Rep. 503 VEB Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz (CFWP) Nr. 3268 *Perspektivplan der kulturellen Arbeit des VEB Chemiefaserwerkes "Friedrich Engels" Premnitz/Kreis Rathenow, 11.3.65*, p. 1.

expected to engage in state-organised cultural activity regularly and they had to be happy to do so.¹⁹

Having outlined the general underlying assumptions that fuelled the SED's desire to provide cultural activities for the population within the organised cultural structures, it also has to be said that the SED's cultural model changed over time. Initially, the SED's policy towards *cultural mass work* focussed primarily on people's pursuits of 'highbrow' culture, meaning the patronage of the arts and 'intellectual' pastimes, and on educating people through these endeavours. Over the course of the late 1950s and 1960s, however, it became clear that only a minority of the East German population had a deep interest in 'highbrow' culture. In the late 1960s, the understanding of what constituted cultural activities was therefore broadened considerably. It now included a variety of 'lowbrow' activities as well as hobby activities, and the focus on the educationalist aspect declined. This development was reinforced when Honecker officially took over power from Ulbricht, and announced his policy of 'Unity of Social and Economic Policy' at the eighth party congress in 1971.

Conquering the Heights of Culture?

The reality of cultural life at the grassroots looked quite different to how the SED had envisaged it. To begin with, throughout the 40-year history of the GDR, cultural life suffered from severe under-funding. Not everyone could access the cultural facilities with ease. In the countryside, for example, many communities had little or no access to organised cultural structures.²⁰ The lack of funds affected most cultural institutions in the GDR. For example, the cultural houses frequently experienced financial shortages and were sometimes unable to carry out even the most basic and urgent repairs.²¹ If the cultural houses were already having financial problems, then there was little hope for the remaining cultural institutions: the factories, such as the

¹⁹ Alfred Kurella, *Erfahrungen und Probleme der sozialistischen Kulturarbeit, Referat auf der Kulturkonferenz 1960 in Berlin* (Ost Berlin, 1960), pp. 4-10.

²⁰ The examples in the following seven footnotes have been selected from the 1960s and 1970s to show that this was a continuing problem: BLHA Rep. 538 Kulturbund der DDR, Bezirksvorstand Potsdam (KB) Nr. 25, *Von E. W., Kreis Neuruppin, an die Bezirkskommission Philatelie des Deutschen Kulturbundes*, 23.11.66.

²¹ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Bezirksvorstand Potsdam (FDGB) Nr. 1682, *Protokoll über den Erfahrungsaustausch mit Klubhausleitern und Sekretären für Kultur der Kreisvorstände des FDGB*, 21.5.63, p. 7, representative from *Kulturhaus Neuseddin*.

Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz, also suffered from lack of funding for cultural life.²² The funding problems extended to the smallest cultural institutions. Various clubs had trouble securing even the small range of facilities that they were meant to provide. In some cases, cultural activities could not take place because there were no available rooms to hold meetings in.²³ In other cases, people could not carry out their hobbies because of lacking materials. Painting circles, for example, could experience an under-supply of colours, and textile circles could find it hard to get hold of the necessary materials for their creations.²⁴ Financial shortfalls were not the only problem plaguing cultural life in the GDR. There were also constant personnel shortages, which resulted in poor organisation and neglect from the institutions and organisations that were in charge of cultural life.²⁵ In this state of affairs, it was very difficult to co-ordinate cultural activities at the grassroots.²⁶

In Western societies, poor government funding for cultural life is not unusual. If people want to be culturally active, they bring their own materials, or fund all the necessary supplies through membership fees. In the GDR, however, the situation was different. The SED had raised people's expectations by pledging to provide the funds and facilities for cultural life. The failure to meet such promises meant that the culturally active population felt let down.²⁷

Some historians who looked at cultural life in the GDR have argued that cultural activities in East Germany were a lot better frequented, particularly by workers, than in West Germany.²⁸ It is certainly true that there were a lot of efforts to stimulate cultural life in the GDR, and provide interesting and varied pastime activities for workers. The levels of funding that existed for cultural life in the GDR were, on the whole, greater than they are in unified Germany, and many East

²² BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1685, *Protokoll der Beratung mit den Sekretären für Bildung und Kultur des Kreisvorstandes des FDGB*, 8.12.64.

²³ BLHA Rep. 401 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam (RdB) Nr 23984/1, *Rat des Kreises, Meldung der Anzahl der Jugendklubs, Dorfklubs und Klubs der Werktätigen*, 7.2.79, p.18.

²⁴ BLHA, Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 23984/2, *Rat des Kreises an den Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam, P. to Dr.G.* 11.1.1980.

²⁵ This will be discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 7.

²⁶ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 23984/1, *Einschätzung der kulturpolitischen Aktivitäten* 19.6.77.

²⁷ This was not only evident in cultural life: levels of discontent were high overall, and people frequently complained about many aspects of life in the GDR. In German, this is referred to as 'die Meckerkultur' (a culture of complaining/whinging); Jochen Staadt, *Eingaben: Die institutionalisierte Meckerkultur in der DDR: Goldbrokat, Kaffee-Mix, Büttchenreden, Ausreisanträge und andere Schwierigkeiten mit den Untertanen* (Berlin: Forschungsverbund SED-Staat, vol. 24, 1996), p. 1.

²⁸ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (ed.), *Freizeit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1981), pp. 36-43.

Germans today lament the absence of organised and state-funded cultural activities.²⁹ While more people engaged with cultural activities in the GDR compared to West Germany, however, it also has to be realised that levels of participation in organised cultural life hardly corresponded to the SED's ideological notion that socialist culture in the GDR was the bastion of the working class.³⁰ Membership statistics from the *Kulturbund*, for example, show that only a small percentage of the population was involved in this organisation. In 1974, the *Kulturbund* only had around 9500 members in *Bezirk*³¹ Potsdam (less than one per cent of the total population of the *Bezirk*). Only 1300 of these members were workers – whereas 3255 members were intellectuals and 2520 were white-collar workers. This was, moreover, a male dominated organisation: only one third of the membership was female. Furthermore, it increasingly seemed to be an organisation for older generations: while 1192 members were under 30, 1332 were 'non-working people' (a figure mostly made up of retired people - students and pupils were listed separately and there was, officially, no unemployment in the GDR).³² These statistics do not indicate that the working classes had truly 'conquered the heights of culture'. They show that middle-class, ageing men were the dominant group whom the *Kulturbund* represented. This was also evident in cultural groups that were not tied to the *Kulturbund*.³³ Even in the factories, the statistics for the level of worker participation at highbrow cultural activities are hardly overwhelming. The *Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz*, for example, a factory that employed about 7000 workers, had only 24 cultural groups with 429 members in 1977.³⁴ This shows that it was very difficult to enthuse the workers about

²⁹ Simone Hain, 'Ausgraben und Erinnern', p. 53; See also Ruben, Wagner, *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg*, 'Ein Betriebskulturhaus, z.B. Küstrin-Kietz. Interview mit Frank Kuchina, dem ehemaligen Leiter des Kulturhauses Küstrin-Kietz', p. 192.

³⁰ Sandrine Kott, 'Zur Geschichte des kulturellen Lebens in DDR-Betrieben, Konzepte und Praxis der betrieblichen Kulturarbeit', in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), pp. 184-194; Annette Schuhmann, 'Veredelung der Produzenten oder Freizeitpolitik? Betriebliche Kulturarbeit vor 1970', in *Potsdamer Bulletin*, Nr. 28/29 (Januar 2003), pp. 76-78; Simone Barck, "'Ankunft im Real-Sozialismus" Anno 1970. Anmerkungen zu sozialen Irritationen und kulturellen Diffusionen am Beispiel der Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter', in *Potsdamer Bulletin*, Nr. 28/29 (Januar 2003), pp. 64-71.

³¹ This thesis will attempt to use English terminology where possible. Nevertheless, there are a few German terms that are difficult to translate and consequently, the German term is used throughout the study. For example, the GDR was divided into large administrative districts, called *Bezirke*, which were sub-divided into smaller districts, called *Kreise*.

³² BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 294, *Statistischer Jahresbericht 1974*.

³³ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 Bezirksbehörde Deutsche Volkspolizei, Bezirksbehörde Potsdam (DVP) Nr. 940, *Männerchor S., Protokoll EA 2/61, 12.7.61*; BLHA, Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 6436, *Konzeption zur Entwicklung des kulturellen und künstlerischen Volksschaffens sowie der Künste im Bezirk Potsdam bis 1975*, p.5.

³⁴ BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 5188, *Abrechnung des Jahreskultur- und Sportangebotes des Chemiefaserwerkes Premnitz und der Stadt Premnitz 1977, 21.10.1977*.

attending 'highbrow' cultural activities.³⁵ 'Highbrow' cultural activity was frequented by individuals with a higher standard of education, whereas members of the working class tended to prefer 'lowbrow' activities that centred on sociability, entertainment and enjoyment.³⁶

Some historians argue that people engaged with cultural activity in the GDR because it had a 'replacement' function: it made up for the lacking freedoms in other areas of life.³⁷ In my view, focussing on the 'replacement' argument too much contains certain hazards. It threatens to reduce cultural life to 'Politics' and consequently ignores the personal dimension. As will be seen in the following chapters, people's personal interest and their individual motivations were a more important factor that determined the nature and development of cultural life in the GDR. Hence, this thesis places most emphasis on people's personal interest, which explains the nature and extent of their involvement in cultural life far better than the 'replacement' theory.

Historiographical Context

Assessing Current Debates

In 1990s, the concept of 'totalitarianism' resurfaced in historical debates about the GDR. This concept had been used in the early period of the Cold War to find a common ground for analysing, and condemning, the National-Socialist and Communist dictatorships. Over time, historians had abandoned this concept. They argued that neither the SED, nor the NSDAP exerted total control over the population, and that the Nazi dictatorship was better described by using the term 'polycratic' rather than 'totalitarian'. After unification, nevertheless, some historians began to revert back to the totalitarian theory in order to highlight the repressive and controlling nature of the socialist dictatorship. These historians portrayed the SED as

³⁵ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 7490, *Kulturelle Betreuung der Bauarbeiter im Bezirk, Nauen, 16.9.69*; BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 24009, *Komplexinformation – Erfüllung des Jugendgesetzes im kulturellen Bereich 1979*, p.2.

³⁶ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 24015/3, *Ministerium für Kultur, Komplexe Aufgabe zur Befriedigung der wachsenden kulturellen Bedürfnisse der Bevölkerung, vor allem der Arbeiterklasse, und die dafür erforderliche Entwicklung der materiell-technischen Basis des kulturellen Bereichs Mai 1975*, p. 17; see also Chapters 5 and 6.

³⁷ For example Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis, 'Die DDR – eine verhinderte Literaturgesellschaft?', in Jürgen Kocka, Martin Sabrow (eds.), *Die DDR als Geschichte: Fragen – Hypothesen – Perspektiven* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), p. 154.

a party fully in control of state and society and argued that it successfully imposed its all-encompassing social model on a passive and powerless population. The East German population was characterised as fully homogenised, without any forms of social differentiation and as a society that was gradually dying off.³⁸ In unified Germany, these portrayals did not only do grave damage to the integration process of the East Germans, whose lives before 1989 had supposedly been emptied of meaning, but this view was also a distortion of life and rule in the GDR. Social historians once again had to disprove the totalitarian model. They showed that life in East Germany had attributes other than cowering before total party control, and that the stability of the GDR depended on more than on Soviet tanks.³⁹

In the developments of social history of the GDR, there were many commendable attempts to find an alternative way of characterising the GDR, but not all of these characterisations have stood the test of time. Concepts developed during the early 1990s, like the *durchherrschte Gesellschaft* (a 'ruled' society, but one where rule cannot extend everywhere because of certain boundaries)⁴⁰, reproduced the same top-down approach as the totalitarian model. Social historians continued to search for a way of analysing everyday life in the GDR.⁴¹ They wanted to portray the complexity of life in the dictatorship at the micro level without restricting people's behaviour patterns to the bi-polar 'either/or' model, which dictated that people could

³⁸ For an overview of the totalitarian theory and its flaws, see Konrad Jarausch, 'Care and Coercion: the GDR as Welfare Dictatorship', in Konrad Jarausch (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp.52-54; see also Mary Fulbrook, *The Two Germanies 1945-1990: Problems of Interpretation* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1-10. One of the most well-known historians who applied the totalitarian theory to the GDR is Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat. Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft 1949-1990* (München: Hanser, 1998). The theory of de-differentiation was introduced by Sigrid Meuschel, in *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR, Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1992), p.10.

³⁹ The theory that the GDR's stability depended on the presence of Soviet tanks, was put forward by Stefan Wolle and Armin Mitter in *Untergang auf Raten: Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR Geschichte* (München: Bertelsmann, 1993), pp. 480-481. Martin Sabrow, for example, disagrees with this narrative and argues that the GDR was not merely an 'embodiment of occupation': in 'Der Konkurs der Konsensdiktatur. Überlegungen zum inneren Zerfall der DDR aus kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive', in Konrad Jarausch, Martin Sabrow (eds.), *Weg in den Untergang: der innere Zerfall der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1999), p. 86.

⁴⁰ The term 'durchherrschte Gesellschaft' was explored in different contributions to Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, Hartmut Zwahr (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994) see Jürgen Kocka's summary of the debate: 'Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft', pp. 547-554.

⁴¹ Alf Lüdtke, *Eigensinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1993), p.14; Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London, New York: Arnold, 2002), p.50.

only either bow their heads in obedience or engage in resistance.⁴² This research was spurred on by general debates in historiography regarding the understanding of power and authority. In the early-to-mid 1990s, historians explored the concept of 'rule as social practice'. Alf Lüdtke, for example, reflected on Weber's theory of authority, and concluded that it is not advisable to concentrate solely on the rulers in historical analysis. Power and authority, he argued, should be considered as an interaction between 'ruler' and 'ruled'. Lüdtke believed that there is a strong interdependence between these two actors. The 'ruled' are by no means simply passive subjects at the mercy of the ruler's whim.⁴³

How was this model going to be translated to GDR history, however? Here, social historians turned to the concept of *Eigen-Sinn*. The *Eigen-Sinn* concept had been introduced by Lüdtke in his study of workers in German factories of the early 20th century. Lüdtke had discovered peculiar patterns of behaviour in these factories: during the working hours, the workers played physical tricks on one another, such as rubbing their stubble painfully against someone else's cheek. Also, the workers refused to respond to their superiors if these did not address them with the courteous 'Sie', but used the more familiar 'du'. Lüdtke called this behaviour *Eigen-Sinn*. Lüdtke argued that, in the face of authority from above, but also in the face of the numerous colleagues whose presence had to be endured day in, day out, the workers carved out individual spaces for themselves. *Eigen-Sinn* was a short moment in which the individual managed 'to be with oneself' or 'to be with others'. The boundaries between *Eigen-Sinn* and resistance were blurred, but Lüdtke insists that the two were not identical. *Eigen-Sinn* was a simple form of distance and a weapon against outside limitations on one's needs. It meant that people regained a sense of meaning (*Sinn*) of their own lives. In order to emphasise the element of 'meaning', Lüdtke advocates using the old fashioned spelling of the word – 'Eigen-sinn'

⁴² Lüdtke *Eigensinn*, p. 141; Thomas Lindenberger, 'Die Grenzen der Diktatur. Zur Einleitung' in Lindenberger (ed.), *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), pp.17-18; Ross, *The East German Dictatorship*, p. 50; Ralph Jessen, 'Diktatorische Herrschaft als kommunale Praxis: Überlegungen zum Zusammenhang von 'Bürokratie' und Sprachnormierung in der DDR Geschichte', in Alf Lüdtke, Peter Becker (eds.), *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster: Die DDR und ihre Texte. Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), p. 67.

⁴³ Alf Lüdtke, 'Einleitung: Herrschaft als soziale Praxis', in Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), pp.11-14; Lindenberger, 'Die Grenzen der Diktatur'; p.22, Ross, *The East German Dictatorship*, p. 63.

(today's historians spell it 'Eigen-Sinn') – because that underlines the element of 'Sinn' even better.⁴⁴

When this concept was applied to the GDR, some of the underlying ideas were kept, but it was also altered. Thomas Lindenberger, for example, explained *Eigen-Sinn* in the GDR as an individual or collective action, which produces meaning of one's life within the dictatorship. He argued that people appropriated the structures of power and authority in everyday life and thus gave them a meaning. *Eigen-Sinn* was, therefore, a very ambivalent condition: it could run counter to the SED's totalitarian ambitions and secure spaces of autonomy, but it was also a form of accommodating to the party and therefore underpinned the internal stability of the GDR. Through exercising *Eigen-Sinn*, individuals therefore became active in shaping their own lives. In their immediate social surroundings (and only there, Lindenberger insists), people knew that there were many invisible boundaries of party control, and that they could participate in the structures at the lowest level to make a contribution to the rule and organisation.⁴⁵ The application of the *Eigen-Sinn* concept to social practices in the GDR has been advantageous in many ways. It is now accepted that it was possible to live a fulfilled life in the GDR. Despite the numerous limitations, it was possible to experience a sense of normality of life, and this produced various patterns of behaviour that stabilised the East German state.⁴⁶

The application of the *Eigen-Sinn* concept to the GDR, nevertheless, has also brought with it certain problems. The meaning of *Eigen-Sinn* has changed. According to Lüdtkke's interpretation, *Eigen-Sinn* is a term to describe specific patterns of behaviour in certain circumstances. It means creating one's own space through momentary actions that were not thought through. In historians' applications of *Eigen-Sinn* to the GDR, however, the concept has become an all-embracing tool for describing 'the numerous ways of dealing with general aims and standardizing dictates. With reference to the GDR, this means searching for personal rationale in the jungle of numerous accounts of muddling through and exploiting, adapting and refusing'.⁴⁷ It seems that now, almost every pattern of behaviour can be described as *Eigen-Sinn*. The broad application of *Eigen-Sinn* has resulted from an understandable

⁴⁴ Lüdtkke, *Eigensinn*, p.13, pp. 19-20, pp. 139-142, p. 172.

⁴⁵ Lindenberger, 'Die Grenzen der Diktatur', pp.23-32.

⁴⁶ Jan Palmowski, 'Workshop Report: Between Conformity and Eigen-Sinn. New Approaches to GDR History', *German History*, vol. 20, No. 4 (2002), p. 497.

⁴⁷ Andreas Ludwig, 'Fortschritt, Norm und Eigensinn: Vorwort', in Dokumentationszentrum Alltagskultur der DDR e.V. (ed.), *Fortschritt, Norm und Eigensinn: Erkundungen im Alltag der DDR* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 1999), p.8.

desire to find a model that offers a single, comprehensive explanation of life in the dictatorship. It means, however, that now the concept is so widely applied that it is difficult to pinpoint what it means exactly, other than generally describing processes of muddling through everyday life in the GDR. This causes several problems. For example, some historians have begun to misunderstand *Eigen-Sinn* and confuse it with resistance.⁴⁸ The problems with the *Eigen-Sinn* concept do not just lie with possible misinterpretation, however; probably all concepts that are more widely accepted will suffer from distortion and misunderstanding. There is also a more inherent difficulty. Only a few historians recall that *Eigen-Sinn* entailed a notion of 'being with oneself', not just of 'being with others'. Lüdtke clearly emphasised that individuals sought distance from other people in their immediate surroundings. *Eigen-Sinn* was, therefore, applied vertically and horizontally. In GDR historiography, however, *Eigen-Sinn* is only used to describe distance expressed by 'the people' towards an abstract 'state' – yet, this considers only the vertical aspect of *Eigen-Sinn*.⁴⁹ The *Eigen-Sinn* concept now re-affirms a long-standing dichotomy of GDR history. This dichotomy portrays a separation of the GDR into 'the state' and 'society', or into the 'centre' and the 'locality'.⁵⁰ Admittedly, Lindenberger states that he does not see the 'dictatorship' as a clearly defined territory that is separated from a delimited dictatorship-free territory.⁵¹ Yet, his conceptualisations of *Eigen-Sinn* suggest a similar bi-polarity. In his research he continually refers to the 'state' and to its counterpart, 'society'. Society, moreover, is restricted to the local level, constrained by a glass ceiling at the administrative level of the *Kreis* leadership, if not before that.⁵²

This image of the GDR leaves no room to develop some very important analyses of life in the dictatorship, however. Firstly, it does not allow an analysis of the numerous functionaries (at the local, regional and at the central level) as representatives of both the 'state' and the 'society'. Secondly, it portrays 'society' as a mass of people suffering under authority from the 'state', and it does not leave any room for analysing the tensions between individuals at the grassroots. This is,

⁴⁸ See Günther Glaser, 'Spezielle Feindproblematik von Armeeeingehörenden der DDR im Spiegel militärsoziologischer und anderer Untersuchungen', in Hans Ehlert, Matthias Rogg (eds.), *Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft. Forschungsfelder, Ergebnisse, Perspektiven* (Ch. Links Verlag, Berlin, 2004), pp. 467-469 and p. 476: Glaser seems to equate *Eigen-Sinn* with nonconformist behaviour.

⁴⁹ Jan Palmowski, 'Workshop Report', p. 495: he is one of the few historians to mention the 'horizontal' element of *Eigen-Sinn*.

⁵⁰ Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship*, pp. 64-65. Ross offers very similar criticisms

⁵¹ Lindenberger, 'Die Grenzen der Diktatur', p. 20.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 32.

however, an important aspect. Some individuals were more than ready to communicate with local, intermediate and central levels of authority when they wanted to resolve certain personal disputes. Thirdly, it does not consider people's influence beyond the local level, which seems to suggest that life at the grass roots was utterly inconsequential for central policy decisions. Finally, it does not consider changes in people's behaviour patterns over time.

The *Eigen-Sinn* concept should no longer be used as a model for describing as many patterns of behaviour as possible. Instead, this thesis will return to Lüdtkke's stricter interpretation of the concept. *Eigen-Sinn* provides historians with a tool for analysing people carving out individual spaces for themselves. These spaces existed to shield individuals from a higher authority, but also from one another. *Eigen-Sinn* is, hence, vital for understanding life in the GDR, but it existed alongside other patterns of behaviour. In different situations, people relied on different strategies, depending on what they were trying to achieve. These strategies included communication between people and functionaries. There were many forms of communication, and they were not restricted to the local level, but also involved intermediate, and even central levels of authority. This is why the role of functionaries is so important in the analysis. Before discussing these issues and the goals of this thesis further, however, it is necessary to outline developments in the historiography of the cultural field, to gain a full understanding of the theoretical background of this study.

Culture in GDR Historiography

The analysis of *cultural mass work* can make a fascinating contribution to the debate about the nature of the GDR regime. It was a field that the SED was desperate to control, but it was also an area where participants wanted to exercise deeply personal inclinations, which could run counter to the SED's cultural model. Surprisingly, little research has been done in this area so far. There has been a lot of analysis on the lives of individual artists and writers, on the impact of artistic movements, on the predicament of cultural dissidents, on the effects of state surveillance and censorship on artistic production and on various phases of 'liberalisation' and 'clampdown' in

cultural policy.⁵³ The interest in these subjects is understandable, because they highlight the repressive nature of the SED, and because after unification, they sparked off heated debates since unification about the extent of well-known artists' collaboration with the regime.⁵⁴

Cultural mass work has received little attention in comparison. Some historians who pursued the totalitarian approach have looked at the subject, but have tended not to focus on the complexities of the topic. They portrayed *cultural mass work* as a tool for the party to control the free time of the population, and argued that the state provided only the kinds of activities that the SED found acceptable, thus stifling many other cultural currents in the GDR.⁵⁵ Such an approach disregards the fact that the SED was unable to implement a system of total control over people's spare time, as it lacked the means and functionaries to ever achieve it. The approach also ignores the fact that people enjoyed taking part in organised cultural activities.

There are other analyses that have been carried out by social historians, who have looked at this topic from a social perspective. Their contribution to the field of research provides a solid foundation for the understanding of the topic *cultural mass work* and they have dealt with several different areas. To name a few of these, Sadrine Kott and Annette Schuhmann have researched cultural life in factories, Simone Hain and Horst Groschopp examined the development of cultural houses from the early 20th century until the end of the GDR, Simone Barck looked at the

⁵³ Literature, in particular has received a lot of attention: Werner Brettschneider, *Zwischen literarischer Autonomie und Staatsdienst. Die Literatur in der DDR* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1980); Günther Rüther, *Kulturbetrieb und Literatur in der DDR* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1988), James Henderson Reid, *Writing Without Taboos: The New East German Literature* (Oxford: Berg, 1990): but these texts grant the literary figures little agency. Since the mid-1990s, there have been more differentiated works, see Simone Barck, Martina Langermann, Siegfried Lokatis, „*Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*“. *Zensursystem und literarische Öffentlichkeit in der DDR bis Ende der sechziger Jahre* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), Birgit Dahlke, Martina Langermann, Thomas Taterka, (eds.), *LiteraturGesellschaft DDR. Kanonkämpfe und ihre Geschichte(n)* (Stuttgart, Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2000); see also Joachim Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur: Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der DDR* (Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage GmbH, 1996), who looked at the level of Stasi infiltration of the literary field; for information on other artistic movements, see Günter Feist, Eckhart Gillen, Beatrice Viermeisel (eds.), *Kunstdokumentation SBZ/DDR 1945-1990: Aufsätze, Berichte, Materialien* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1996); for a more detailed analysis of policy changes, see Rüdiger Thomas, 'Zum Projekt einer Kulturgeschichte der DDR', in Heiner Timmermann (ed.), *Diktaturen in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert - Der Fall DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot GmbH, 1996), pp.481-510; or Manfred Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR. 1945-1990* (Köln: Ed. Deutschland Archiv, 1995).

⁵⁴ This was called the *Literaturstreit* (literary debate); see Stuart Parkes, *Understanding Contemporary Germany* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 184-190.

⁵⁵ Henkel, *Im Dienste der Staatspartei*, pp. 221-237; Klaus Schroeder, 'Vorbemerkung', in Hannelore Offner, Klaus Schroeder (eds.), *Eingegrenzt, Ausgegrenzt. Bildende Kunst und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR, 1961-89* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), pp. 9-10.

'movement of writing workers' and Helmut Meier investigated the Kulturbund.⁵⁶ These studies have provided important insights into cultural life. They have discussed important developments in cultural policy, and they have analysed how cultural life developed over time.⁵⁷ Moreover, they give some insight into people's behaviour patterns when they participated with organised culture. These historians emphasise that the cultural sphere was not governed by total party control – people also felt that it represented their interests.

While these studies have made important contributions to the field, they also, however, do not challenge the dichotomous division of the GDR into 'state' and 'society'. The discussion of the roles of cultural functionaries has received too little attention, which means that interdependence between 'rulers' and 'ruled' is, at best, implied. For example, Groschopp's account of the changes in cultural policy portrays the cultural debates among party leaders in Berlin without considering the influence of social developments at the grass roots. Similarly, Simone Hain relies on the argument of the 'niche' society to show that people's cultural habits were not solely shaped by dictates 'from above'. Whilst the outside influences are therefore acknowledged, Hain suggests that people could carry on with their customary cultural practices regardless.⁵⁸ The levels of dialogue between participants, functionaries and party leaders have still hardly been explored.

Three Groups of Actors: Agency and Inter-Dependence

Contribution of this Research

This thesis starts from the premise that power and action do not only emanate from central party bodies in Berlin. People in the GDR had, as Johannes Huinink phrased it quite adequately, 'individual spaces for action', which meant that they 'deal with

⁵⁶ Sandrine Kott, *Le Communisme Au Quotidien, Les entreprises d'Etat Dans la Société Est-Allemande* (Paris: Belin, 2001); Kott, 'kulturelles Leben in Betrieben', pp. 167-195; Schuhmann, 'Veredelung der Produzenten oder Freizeitpolitik?', pp. 73 - 78; Barck, 'Ankunft im Real Sozialismus', pp. 60-72; Simone Hain, 'Ausgraben und Erinnern' pp. 51-55 and 'Die Salons der Sozialisten' pp. 89-149; Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR', pp. 97-178; Helmut Meier: 'Der Kulturbund der DDR in den siebziger Jahren. Bestandteil des politischen Systems und Ort kultureller Selbstbetätigung', in Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders: Leben in der DDR* (Karl Dietz Verlag: Berlin, 2000), pp. 599-625.

⁵⁷ Kott, 'kulturelles Lebens in Betrieben', pp. 184-194; Schuhmann, 'Veredelung der Produzenten oder Freizeitpolitik?', pp. 76-78; Barck, 'Ankunft im Real Sozialismus', pp. 64-71.

⁵⁸ Hain, 'Ausgraben und Erinnern', p. 50.

their personal situations in certain ways, do not just accept dictates and conditions, but also exploit them and know how to behave in a tactical way. Therefore, individual actors always have to be understood as ‘producers’ of their own lives, as actors, who, within the framework of situational circumstances ... also always have the potential to shape things themselves.’⁵⁹ The GDR was not divided into an active party and a passive mass of people, but it was a state of action and reaction. Action, moreover, was not restricted to the central party bodies in Berlin, and reaction was not restricted to the localities.

People who engaged in cultural life acted on personal motivations: they wanted to fulfil personal interests when they pursued cultural activities. In order to realise their interests, these individuals did not just withdraw into isolated niches. They fulfilled their interests by engaging with the state organised structures at their disposal, and by doing so, they actively shaped the conditions of organised cultural life in the GDR – but their interests were also shaped and altered, either when the articulation of their interests was frustrated or when they encountered other people’s norms, or an institution’s attempt at social standardisation.

Another major group that shaped and determined the nature of cultural life were the cultural functionaries who administered and organised cultural activity in the numerous state institutions and organisations. Describing these functionaries simply as those individuals who made up ‘the state’ ignores the manifold positions they fulfilled and the complex role they played. It simply cannot be argued that the further away the analysis moves from the grassroots, the more robotic and party-controlled the cultural functionaries became. The functionaries often had a high level of personal interest in the cultural field, and they wanted to see cultural life flourish. As a result, they depended on good relations with participants. The dialogue between functionaries and participants was, therefore, a prominent aspect of cultural life. The functionaries did their best to fulfil the interests and expectations of the participants in order to secure their active engagement in cultural activity. This did not mean, however, that functionaries operated in isolated niches where they only communicated with the participants. In order to fulfil their roles, they also relied on support from each other. The levels of interaction between different functionaries

⁵⁹ Johannes Huinink, ‘Individuum und Gesellschaft in der DDR – theoretische Ausgangspunkte einer Rekonstruktion der DDR-Gesellschaft in den Lebensläufen ihrer Bürger’, in Johannes Huinink, Karl Ulrich Meyer, Martin Diewald, Heike Solga (eds.), *Kollektiv und Eigensinn: Lebensläufe in der DDR und danach* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995), p.38.

were therefore also a vital factor in the organisation of cultural life. The communication between functionaries was, furthermore, not a localised affair. Grass root functionaries were more than willing to communicate with their superiors in the *Bezirk* leadership, or even with the central levels of authority.

In light of the complex picture that emerges when considering the levels of communication between functionaries and participants, the state/society dichotomy breaks down. Instead, this thesis offers a new approach. The discussion outlines that there were not two, but three groups of 'agents' in the cultural field, and that cultural life in the GDR was determined by a convergence of these three groups of actors. The first group of agents consisted of the 'participants'. They were neither passive nor powerless. They desired to fulfil particular personal interests, and they tried to realize their aims through a variety of strategies, which encompassed securing spaces of autonomy, accepting certain party dictates and communicating with cultural functionaries. The second group of agents consisted of the cultural functionaries. They entered their roles with their own ideas about cultural life, which they sought to fulfil by engaging in communication with the participants and with other functionaries. They were at the same time the people's representatives and the pillars that upheld the cultural structures of the state. The third group of agents consisted of the SED party leaders in Berlin. They became increasingly aware that they could not impose a particular cultural model on the East German population, but that they had to make certain concessions to people's interests and had to consider developments at the grassroots. The agency of the participants and of the functionaries was therefore not just restricted to shaping the conditions of cultural life in their locality. It also affected the cultural model of the SED. It is, therefore, not useful to analyse 'local' and 'central' developments in isolation from each other.

There was a high degree of communication and inter-dependence between all of these three groups during the middle period of the GDR. The individuals in these three groups articulated and realised their interests in interaction with one another. In order to secure their interests, all individuals relied on a variety of different strategies. The participants and functionaries had learned the 'rules of the game': they had internalised how the structures of the dictatorship functioned and how they could be utilised to their advantage. Of course, communication and interaction was only one side of the picture – when it benefited them, the participants also withdrew and exercised their cultural inclinations in autonomous spheres; in short, they

practised *Eigen-Sinn*, both vertically and horizontally. But even when they engaged in vertical expressions of *Eigen-Sinn*, they usually still relied on effective dialogue with grass root functionaries.

While highlighting the importance of dialogue and communication between these three groups of agents, this thesis argues that both were primarily aspects of the middle period of the GDR. In the 1960s and 1970s, people had a good grasp of how to fulfil their interest through communication and interaction, and they knew when they could withdraw. In the early 1950s, the participants' strategies were more dominated by withdrawal and nonconformity, which resulted in a heavy-handed approach from the SED. By the mid-1960s, these acts of nonconformity had largely subsided, and were replaced by processes of integration and interaction. By the 1980s, this state of affairs was uprooted again, however. The participants and the grass root functionaries increasingly felt that functionaries in higher levels of authority were no longer taking their concerns seriously. Consequently, the participants and grass root functionaries gradually chose to withdraw from the dialogue with the higher levels of authority that had once characterised the cultural field.

Methodology

A problem that was anticipated at the beginning of this study was that the topic of cultural life in the GDR is very broad. In order to conduct a comprehensive analysis, the source basis had to be narrowed down. The aim was, however, to avoid sacrificing any of the major fields related to *Cultural Mass Work*. The solution to this problem was to limit the study to one particular geographical area. The thesis will therefore examine *Bezirk* Potsdam, which is an area that extended over 12 570 km² and had a population of approximately 1 225 000.⁶⁰ *Bezirk* Potsdam was chosen for the analysis because of its interesting geographical position in the GDR: it encircled West Berlin. Berlin had been jointly occupied by the Americans, Russians, British and French after the German surrender in 1945. Even after the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1948 and of the German Democratic Republic in 1949, the three Western allies remained in the occupied Western parts of the city. The city was,

⁶⁰ *Statistisches Taschenbuch, Bezirk Potsdam*, Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik, Bezirksstelle Potsdam, Mai 1965 (available in the archive BLHA).

hence, partitioned into East and West. Until 1961, East Germans had access to the Western part of the city and could flee the GDR. With the building of the Wall on August 13th 1961, however, this possibility no longer existed. When people henceforth tried to flee the GDR, they had to cross the police-controlled borders, risking imprisonment or death. In GDR terminology, areas that immediately surrounded the borders with West Germany and West Berlin were referred to as *Grenzgebiete* (border regions) and were subject to strict police control to prevent people attempting to cross the borders illegally in order to get to the West. Consequently, only authorised persons were allowed to enter these strips of land, and its inhabitants were under constant police scrutiny. In *Bezirk* Potsdam there were heavily populated *Grenzgebiete* around West Berlin.

Apart from the existence of the *Grenzgebiete*, there are other aspects that make the analysis of the *Bezirk* Potsdam particularly interesting. It had urban, industrialised parts but also contained large rural districts. The industrial pockets were largely situated around the city of Potsdam, around West Berlin and around some of the other larger towns such as Brandenburg and Rathenow. The regions that were located around West Berlin had an established industrial history dating back to the 19th century, but there were also newly established pockets of industry. In contrast to these industrial areas, the rural parts of the *Bezirk*, located particularly to the North, had a low population density, very few large cities and suffered from poor transport connections. These factors, as well as the considerable distance from the city of Potsdam caused a feeling of isolation and remoteness in the communities of these areas, which left its mark on the cultural field.⁶¹

A final reason for choosing this particular *Bezirk* for the study is its interesting cultural history. Due to its proximity to Berlin, Frederick the Great's summer residence, Sanssouci, was located in Potsdam. The SED consequently regarded Potsdam as a bastion of the former Prussian state. The Prussian heritage was initially regarded as a danger to the GDR, as it was seen as a remnant of an oppressive, Imperialist past that needed to be eradicated. During the first decades of the GDR, the SED aimed to root out the remnants of the Prussian state, which resulted in the destruction of many historic buildings in the city of Potsdam. In 1960, Potsdam lost its prized *Stadtschloss* that had been in the heart of the city centre. Then, in 1968, the bombed foundations of the *Garnisonskirche* were fully destroyed.

⁶¹ See Chapter 4, pp. 99-102: in two examples of philatelist circles in Pritzwalk, feelings of remoteness and isolation are clearly evident.

The inhabitants of the city Potsdam were hardly convinced about the necessity of this destruction; in 1968, four of the city's representatives tried to prevent the demolition of the *Garnisonkirche*, but without any success.⁶² From the mid-1970s onwards, however, the celebration of Prussian culture went through a revival in the GDR, which resulted in increased efforts to preserve those monuments that had still been left standing.⁶³ From a cultural perspective, the administrative area around Potsdam is therefore also a highly fascinating example for analysis.

Identifying the *Bezirk* Potsdam as a good case study for the analysis of *kulturelle Massenarbeit* reduced the archive material. The remaining sources that were used for this study divided into two areas of focus. To begin with, it was necessary to establish an understanding of the ideological and political background of the SED's cultural model. This was done by looking at the archive material collected in the *Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen* (SAPMO) at the *Bundesarchiv*, which houses the sources for the central decision-making bodies of the GDR. From this archive, material of the Central Committee, the Politbüro, the Secretariat and the Ministry of Culture was examined. The greatest emphasis was placed on the analysis of the Cultural Department within the Central Committee.

The main archive that provided the material for the local analysis of *Bezirk* Potsdam was the *Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv* (BLHA). This archive contains material from the administration, the SED, the mass organisations, the factories and various cultural institutions of the *Bezirk*. The mechanisms of the cultural administration of the *Bezirk* were explored by looking at the two regional governing bodies controlling the cultural field: the Department for Culture in the *Bezirk* Council and the *Bezirk* Cabinet for Cultural Work. The files from these organs provided information about the process of implementing central policies. They also contained material for analysing state-organised cultural facilities such as youth clubs, village clubs and cultural houses. Some material related to the cultural field has also survived from the SED party leadership of the *Bezirk*, which gave important insights into the role of the regional party organisation. In order to assess the role of mass organisations in the cultural field, material was selected from seven major ones:

⁶² Thomas Wernicke, 'Potsdam 1945-1989, Stationen einer gescheiterten Gesellschaftsutopie', in Sigrid Grabner, Hendrick Röder, Thomas Wernicke, *Widerstand in Potsdam, 1945-1989* (Berlin-Brandenburg: Be.bra Verlag GmbH, 1999), pp. 177-184.

⁶³ Rüdiger Thomas, 'Zum Projekt einer Kulturgeschichte der DDR', in Heiner Timmermann (ed.), *Diktaturen in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert - Der Fall DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot GmbH, 1996), pp. 489.

the *Kulturbund*, the FDGB, the FDJ, the DSF, the DFD, the *Nationale Front* and the VdgB. The Kulturbund was the main organisation designed to provide cultural facilities for the population, and has, therefore, received the greatest attention in this study. Cultural life of workers in factories was studied by focussing on material from the area's largest and most prestigious factories: the *Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz*, the *Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg*, the *Stahl- und Walzwerk Henningsdorf*, the *VEB IFA Automobilwerke Ludwigsfelde* and the *VE Autobahnkombinat Potsdam*. One of the smaller factories, the *VEB Landbauprojekt Potsdam*, has also been included in the analysis, because of its good collection of 'brigade diaries'. Access to archive of the East German secret police (the Stasi), called the *Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, Außenstelle Potsdam* (BStU), was not granted. The Potsdam branch of the BStU claimed to contain no material that was relevant for this study. Nevertheless, it was possible to gain detailed insight into the nature of the GDR's repressive organs in cultural life by looking at the highly informative material from the *German People's Police*, which is also stored in the BLHA.

Overall, the BLHA provided excellent sources for the analysis of cultural life. There are some areas for which a larger collection of primary material is available, usually because some pastimes were particularly popular, or because of a specific political focus. Consequently, the study conducted detailed research into a few particular areas of cultural life to fully utilise the breadth of material. In terms of lay cultural groups, choirs and 'circles for writing workers' were examined in great detail. As far as hobby collectors' circles are concerned, an in-depth study of stamp collectors' groups was carried out. In order to assess cultural life in the GDR's institutions, the cultural houses and libraries were given a lot of special attention. In the factories, the organisation of cultural events at brigade level and at factory level has also been a special focus.

The material from the BLHA was supplemented by drawing on two local archives, which contained some very interesting material concerning local administration and cultural life at the grassroots: the *Stadtarchiv Potsdam* and the *Landkreisarchiv Oberhavel* in Oranienburg. The collected material from these four archives has provided an excellent basis for a wide-ranging study. This thesis has been able to explore new areas of cultural life, in particular the role of cultural functionaries and the complex behaviour patterns of participants. In some respects,

there are difficulties with regard to grasping the reasons behind people's involvement in, or disengagement from, cultural activities from the available source material. Some insight could be gained from functionary reports written at the local and intermediate level. But it is not always possible to trust these reports, because they were usually written a particular agenda. They were designed to portray cultural life in a particular way; either, they painted a rosy picture to avoid problems or they exaggerated shortcomings to get help from outside. Consequently, it was necessary to focus on other material that provided an insight into people's motivations, thoughts and strategies for interest fulfilment. There are several useful sources for this purpose. Firstly, functionaries did not only communicate with each other by writing dry reports. On some occasions, they wrote each other more personal letters, expressing exacerbation, anger, making demands or simply sending cordial greetings. Secondly, there is primary material that was written by the participants in cultural life. Among the most well-known documents of this nature are *Eingaben*, which were petitions and letters of complaint that people wrote to various levels of authority in order to get certain grievances fulfilled, or to alert the authorities to a particular situation. In chapter 6, the usefulness and the limitations of *Eingaben* will be discussed in more detail. Finally, in the factories, some brigades kept 'brigade diaries', in which the workers described their working life as well as their collective pastime experiences.⁶⁴ All of these sources have enabled a detailed discussion of mentalities, interests, motivations and attitudes at the grassroots.

Structure

The structure of this dissertation is designed to reflect the thesis's core arguments. It illustrates, for example, the underlying periodisation of cultural life. The 1950s and 1980s are briefly discussed in two separate chapters that form a frame around the core chapters of the thesis. The core chapters analyse the middle period of the GDR. They are arranged in three main parts. These three parts each consist of a theoretical introduction followed by two chapters. Each part introduces and studies one of the groups of agents in the cultural field: cultural functionaries, the participants in cultural life and the SED party leaders who directed the regime's cultural apparatus

⁶⁴ For a discussion of 'brigade-diaries', see Jörg Roesler 'Das Brigadebuch – betriebliches Rapportbuch, Chronik des Brigadelebens oder Erziehungsfibel?', in Badstübner, *Befremdlich Anders*, pp.151-166.

from Berlin. It is important to look at each of these groups separately, because this approach highlights their composition, the motivations of individuals, their role within cultural life as well as their ability to assert their agency over the development of cultural activities. At the same time as analysing these groups separately, though, each of the sections concentrates on the levels of inter-dependence and interaction between them. In order to highlight that cultural policy was deeply affected by developments at the grass roots, it is discussed last of all. Once the situation at the grassroots and at the intermediate level has become evident, its influence over changes at the centre of policy decision-making become visible. This approach is designed to refute the totalitarian perspective, where all power and control comes from the centre and filters down to the localities. Yet, this approach is not designed to replace the 'top-down' view with the 'bottom-up' view. Instead, as each of the chapters show, the thesis is designed to reflect the complexities and processes of inter-dependence on all sides.

Having given an overview over the intention behind the order of the chapters, it is now possible to look at the structure in more detail. Chapter 1, the introduction, has outlined the key arguments of this thesis and the methodological approach. Chapter 2 discusses cultural life during the 1950s. A lot of the chapter focuses on the early part of the decade, when the SED introduced and enforced structural changes to ensure that all forms of cultural activity were exercised within the confines of a regime institution or organisation. After exploring the 1950s, the discussion of the middle period begins. Part 1 encompasses Chapters 3 and 4. It explores the cultural functionaries of *Bezirk* Potsdam, who were key figures in the organisation and administration of cultural life, but who are frequently ignored in historiography. Chapter 3 discusses the backgrounds and motivations of cultural functionaries. Chapter 4 shows that cultural functionaries were of fundamental importance for the smooth functioning of cultural life, as they responded to people's interests and needs, but were also ready to liaise with higher levels of authority if this served the organisation of cultural life best. Part 2 is made up of Chapters 5 and 6. It analyses the behaviour patterns of participants in organised cultural life. Chapter 5 illustrates the personal interests that people sought to fulfil when they engaged with cultural life. Chapter 6 shows how people communicated with various levels of functionaries to realise their interests. Part 3 includes Chapters 7 and 8. It highlights the developments in cultural policy. Chapter 7 focuses on the period between 1957 and

1965, during which time there was an increasing realisation among the higher echelons of the SED party leadership that people's interests could not be moulded according to the party's ideological expectations and that the cultural model had to broaden. Chapter 8 shows that the broadening of the SED's cultural model continued in the late 1960s and dominated the political agenda before and after the regime change from Ulbricht to Honecker. The penultimate chapter, Chapter 9, concentrates on the 1980s and shows that during this decade, the communication between functionaries and participants became more tenuous, as processes of individualisation and introspection began to dominate cultural life at the grassroots. Finally, Chapter 10 forms the conclusion to this thesis by summarising the key arguments and highlighting the complexities of cultural life in the GDR, which resulted from various strategies for interest fulfilment and many forms of communication.

Conclusion

The main aim of this thesis is to portray the complex structures that dominated life in the GDR. There were three groups of agents who sought to realise particular interests but who were all forced to compromise in the face of interest-articulation of the other two groups. In the process of articulating and fulfilling their interests, there were many forms of dialogue between individuals at the central, intermediate and local level. Cultural life provides an excellent medium through which to explore the dialogue, compromise and interest-articulation at various levels. Cultural activities did not solely take place in isolated 'niches', nor was cultural policy formulated in a vacuum. There was far too much interaction and integration that undermined tendencies of isolation, withdrawal or total control. It is important to realise the interdependence of the agents in the cultural groups. It provides the key for understanding the functioning of the East German dictatorship.

Chapter 2

Nonconformity, Coercion and Alienation: the 1950s

This chapter explores the turbulent process of establishing the cultural structures of the socialist dictatorship in *Bezirk* Potsdam. The process was hindered by a population that obstinately held on to traditions and by organisational shortcomings. The difficulties that the leadership was experiencing in *Bezirk* Potsdam reflected wider problems of the SED in the 1950s. The SED aimed to restructure the entirety of the old social, political and economic order. In pursuit of Marxist-Leninist ideology, the ownership of the means of production was passed into the hands of the party-controlled state. Industry was nationalised and the owners of private enterprise were gradually dispossessed. In agriculture, a process of enforced collectivisation began in 1952, and continued until the early 1960s. The SED was thus trying to oust all 'reactionary' elites that had 'fostered working class oppression' in Imperial, Weimar and Nazi Germany. In this process, the church, which was regarded as an intransigent mechanism of working class oppression, was undermined. In 1952, the SED criminalized the church's youth organisation, the *Junge Gemeinde*. Two years later, a secular alternative to confirmation was introduced, called *Jugendweihe*. Young people were increasingly advised to undergo the *Jugendweihe* unless they were prepared to accept personal disadvantages. Because of the church's stance at the time, this meant forgoing confirmation.¹ In short, during the process of establishing the new dictatorship, Walter Ulbricht, first secretary of the SED adopted a highly inflexible, hard-line approach. Even after the XXth Party Congress of the CPSU, when Nikita Khrushchev officially broke with Stalin and condemned his style of leadership, Ulbricht remained a vigorous defender of Stalinism.

The establishment of a new social and political order was not a smooth and well-controlled process. Throughout the 1950s, the SED could not offer the East German population an economy that functioned anywhere near as well as West Germany's, which led to popular dissatisfaction. Furthermore, Ulbricht's position as leader of the SED was hardly secure – there were criticisms of his style of leadership within the party, for instance from Rudolf Herrnstadt, the chief editor of the party's daily newspaper, the *Neues Deutschland* and from Wilhelm Zaisser, the minister for

¹ Christoph Kleßmann, *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955-1970* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997), p. 397.

state security. Crucially, the population did not quietly acquiesce to the new regime. On June 17th 1953 thousands of East German workers revolted. They protested about high work norms, demanded free elections and called for unification with West Germany. The revolt was brutally crushed by Soviet tanks, which underlined the repressive nature of Germany's second dictatorship. In the aftermath of the revolt, Ulbricht ousted his opponents in the party and secured his grip of the leadership of the SED.

But brute force could not solve all problems in the GDR. A difficult question was what to do with the East German population's difficult past. The SED wanted to replace the old elites who had ruled Germany. Individuals who were untainted by the past, either because of their youth or because of their working class status, were to take over from these former elites.² This aim could not be fulfilled, however. It was impossible to replace all doctors, teachers or professors across the GDR. Consequently, established professionals had to be incorporated into the new social structures, despite their bourgeois or even Nazi backgrounds.³ In order to serve the new system, these individuals had to show that they would comply with the SED dictatorship.⁴ To a degree, they were grateful that they were not ousted or reproached too much by the new regime, and they were willing to be integrated into the new structures.⁵ The integration process did not progress smoothly on all fronts, however. Many formerly 'bourgeois' professionals were frustrated about the living and working conditions in the GDR and were attracted by the opportunities in the West. Many of these individuals decided to join the ranks of those tens of thousands who fled the GDR via West Berlin to live in West Germany.⁶ The difficulty of integrating the former bourgeoisie did not only manifest itself in the numbers of

² Heike Solga, *Auf dem Weg in eine klassenlose Gesellschaft? Klassenlagen und Mobilität zwischen Generationen in der DDR* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1995), p. 156, pp. 159-173, p. 208: as a result of the desire to replace the old elites, the possibility for social mobility was high in the 1950s.

³ Christoph Kleßmann, 'Relikte des Bildungsbürgertums in der DDR', in Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, Hartmut Zwahr (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994), pp. 254-262, p. 266; Dolores L. Augustine, 'Frustrierte Technokraten. Zur Sozialgeschichte des Ingenieurberufs in der Ulbricht-Ära', in Richard Bessel, Ralph Jessen (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur – Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), pp. 58-61; Ralph Jessen, 'Vom Ordinarius zum sozialistischen Professor: Die Neukonstruktion des Hochschullehrerberufs in der SBZ/DDR, 1945-1969', in Bessel, Jessen *Die Grenzen der Diktatur*, p. 99.

⁴ Mary Fulbrook, 'Aspects of Society and Identity in the New Germany', in Michael Mertes, Steven Muller, Heinrich August Winkler (eds.), *In search of Germany* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1999), p. 222.

⁵ Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 63.

⁶ Augustine, 'Frustrierte Technokraten', p.54, pp.62-63; Kleßmann, 'Relikte des Bildungsbürgertums', pp.259-260.

‘Republikflüchtige’ (people who fled the GDR to live in West Germany), moreover. It also manifested itself in cultural life. It is quite surprising that people’s behaviour patterns in cultural life of the 1950s have attracted so little attention, as it is here that people’s mistrust to the new state, and their desire to uphold traditions, can be seen most evidently.⁷

This chapter shows that within established cultural associations of *Bezirk* Potsdam, many people wanted to carry on with pre-1945 traditions and objected to the imposition of new cultural structures. In some cases, these individuals found that the regime’s structures provided them with a suitable platform on which to exercise their hobbies, but commonalities were limited between people’s ideas and the cultural model of the SED. Hence, cultural life in the 1950s is best described by using Martin Broszat’s term *Resistenz*. Broszat analysed villages in Bavaria during the Nazi dictatorship and found that people remained relatively immune to changes and norms introduced by the Nazis.⁸ He called this *Resistenz* (immunity). In cultural life of the 1950s, those citizens of *Bezirk* Potsdam who were members of established cultural associations, showed similar forms of *Resistenz*: they carried on with their traditional repertoire and adhered to the SED dictates as little as possible. These practices were coupled with a strong presence of *Eigen-Sinn*: people protected their cultural traditions and habits as much as they possibly could. In these early years, people’s expressions of *Eigen-Sinn*, however, frequently culminated in open displays of nonconformity. This provoked suspicion among the administrative and police units in *Bezirk* Potsdam and resulted in a harsh response. In this respect, the 1950s differed to later years, as will be shown in the remaining part of this thesis.

Erecting New Cultural Structures

Between 1945 and 1949, the Soviet administration of the Eastern zone of occupation still allowed cultural activities quite a lot of leeway. The aim of the ‘cultural officers’ of the Soviet administration was to prevent the alienation of the bourgeoisie. They also wanted to give the East German population as much positive diversion from the

⁷ There are some exceptions, for example, Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 400-403.

⁸ Martin Broszat, ‘Vorwort’, in Martin Broszat, Elke Fröhlich, Falk Wiesemann (eds.), *Bayern in der NS-Zeit: Soziale Lage und politisches Verhalten der Bevölkerung im Spiegel vertraulicher Berichte* (München, Wien: Oldenbourg, 1997), vol. 1, pp. 11-19.

bleak post-war life as possible.⁹ At the same time, they were keen to establish as much of a hold over cultural life as possible, to free it from Nazi remnants and to introduce as many aspects of Soviet culture as they could.¹⁰

As the lasting division of Germany was becoming evident in the late 1940s, the newly formed ruling party, the SED, began to establish its control over cultural life. In this process, the SED leaders adhered particularly to the goals of the Soviet cultural reforms of the 1920s, which sought to engage the population in cultural activities whose organisation lay firmly in the hands of the state.¹¹ In 1949, the SED introduced a ruling, which decreed that all cultural groups and circles, formerly called *Vereine*, had to register with an institution, with a factory or with a mass organisation. All East German cultural groups were instructed to give up their autonomous status.¹² In the *Kulturbund*, signs of a new, harsher atmosphere were also becoming evident. Initially, the mass organisation was democratically structured and was primarily aimed at the intelligentsia and at those people who pursued a particular cultural activity in individual groups. The main goal was to eradicate all remnants of 'fascism'. In the later 1940s, the main goal shifted, and now instilling Communist principles in the population stood on the foreground.¹³ The *Kulturbund* ceased to be aimed at the intelligentsia and cultural specialists. It was now concerned with incorporating as many workers as possible and with teaching the intelligentsia about working class supremacy. In this process, the *Kulturbund* was relieved of many of its former responsibilities and became much less democratic. It no longer incorporated the various groups of professional artists – these artists were now given their own individual, and centrally controlled associations.¹⁴

In theory, the East German population should not have been unaccustomed to the changes that were taking place in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The enforcement of control over the cultural sphere was nothing new. The equivalent

⁹ Anne Hartmann, Wolfram Eggeling, *Sowjetische Präsenz im kulturellen Leben der SBZ und frühen DDR 1945-1953* (Berlin: Akademie, 1998), pp. 148-162; David Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-Occupied Germany 1945-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 70.

¹⁰ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, pp. 388-440.

¹¹ Hartmann, Eggeling, *Sowjetische Präsenz*, p. 2, pp.100-107.

¹² Magdalena Heider, 'Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands', in Martin Broszat, Hermann Weber (eds.), *SBZ Handbuch: Staatliche Verwaltung, Parteien, gesellschaftliche Organisationen und ihre Führungskräfte in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1945-49* (München: Oldenbourg, 1990), p. 720: Heider implies that the process of integrating these circles was not always smooth. Her hypothesis is ratified in this chapter.

¹³ Heider, 'Kulturbund' p. 714; Pike, *Politics of Culture*, p.70; Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, pp. 400-407.

¹⁴ Jens Wehner, *Kulturpolitik und Volksfront, Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1945-49* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: P. Lang, 1992), p. 275.

Nazi organisation, *Strength Through Joy*, had taken a very similar approach to cultural life.¹⁵ What caused resentment among the population, nevertheless, were the hard-line, Stalinist overtones of the SED's cultural model, which endangered the continuation of some established traditions. The 1950s were particularly characterised by a negation of religious, private or non-purpose orientated enjoyment. Cultural houses, for example, were forbidden to house non-educational facilities like gastro-pubs because these had been used, so the SED argued, by the bourgeoisie to diminish the revolutionary potential of the working class.¹⁶ The desire to undermine such forms of cultural activity did not mean to say, the SED insisted, that the worker was to experience no 'merriment, pleasure and happiness', but these experiences were only to be gained in state organised institutions that aimed at 'entertaining people in a Socialist way'.¹⁷

'... because then, the party members would cop it': Insubordination and the Consequences

When Socialism Clashes With Tradition

The discussion will now turn to the analysis of cultural groups in *Bezirk* Potsdam, which shows that pre-GDR norms, habits and traditions were proving difficult to eradicate. It is difficult to say whether these pre-GDR norms had emerged during the Nazi era, or whether they originated in the Weimar or Imperial period; determining that would require more extensive research into associational life in the 1930s and 1940s, which has, so far, not been undertaken. There seem to have been some cultural circles whose members closely identified with some, if not all, of the Nazi ideals.¹⁸ There is, however, also evidence to suggest that during the Third Reich,

¹⁵ Susanne Appel, *Reisen im Nationalsozialismus: Eine rechtshistorische Untersuchung* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2001), p 43, pp.52-53; Shelly Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy: Consumerism and Mass Tourism in the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 7, pp.40-43: The Nazi organisation *Strength Through Joy* was created to capture people in their free time and ensure that they were politically educated, intellectually uplifted and revitalized so that they worked harder. These goals were very similar to the SED's. See Chapter 1, pp. 14-17.

¹⁶ Horst Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR: Vorläufer, Konzepte, Gebrauch. Versuch einer historischen Rekonstruktion', Thomas Ruben, Bernd Wagner (ed.), *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg, Eine Bestandaufnahme*, (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin Brandenburg, 1994), p. 151.

¹⁷ Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen, Bundesarchiv (SAPMO BARCH) DY 30/IV 2/1.01/407, *Kulturkonferenz 1957, Referat Alexander Abusch*, pp. 69-70; Jens Wehner, *Kulturpolitik und Volksfront*, pp. 272-273.

¹⁸ Magdalena Heider, 'Kulturbund', p. 720.

culturally active people ignored some of the Nazi dictates to carry on with their established practices beneath the surface.¹⁹ This indicates that an independent spirit dominated cultural associations, which had already survived the first German dictatorship. It was not going to be easy for the SED to streamline people's cultural activities under these conditions. This was particularly the case with cultural groups whose members were not inclined towards a left-wing dictatorship.

Soon after the Second World War, the cultural groups that were deemed to be 'bourgeois' were dissolved by the occupying administration. It did not take long, however, for these groups to reappear (and to be tolerated by the Soviet administration), keeping the same membership, which was keen to carry on with the old routine.²⁰ Some of these groups even kept their old names and celebrated the anniversaries of their original founding dates, which could date back to Germany's Imperial past.²¹ Many of these time-honoured cultural groups incorporated individuals who were former members of low-level members of National Socialist organisations, or had bourgeois backgrounds. As a result, the administrative, party and police units of *Bezirk* Potsdam apprehensively monitored cultural life in order to determine how many politically unreliable elements existed within the circles.²² The police investigations showed that there were many people who were suspicious to the regime purely because of their past or their profession. In the late 1950s, for example, the police carried out an investigation of rural choirs. The survey showed that no fewer than 65 choirs had members with a problematic past, or with difficult present affiliations. Each choir contained at least one former member of a Nazi organisation, such as the NSDAP, the SA, the SS or the *Stahlhelm*. Frequently, this person was the choir's leader. The presence of former Nazis was, furthermore, not the only worrisome trend: Some of the choirs also functioned as concentration points for 'bourgeois' elements. For example, in a male choir in *Kreis* Belzig, 59 out of 80

¹⁹ Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy*, p.53; Appel, *Reisen im Nationalsozialismus*, p. 52.

²⁰ Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA), Rep. 471/15.1 Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei (DVP) Nr. 308, *Einschätzung der Tätigkeit des Männerchors W., 30.7.61*, side 183; Ute Mohrmann, 'Lust auf Feste: zur Festkultur in der DDR', in Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders, Leben in der DDR* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2000), p. 418.

²¹ BLHA, Rep. 471/15.2 Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei Bezirk Potsdam (DVP) Nr. 940, *Analyse über Männerchor in B., 10.1.59*: this choir is named after its original founding date in the 19th century; Antonia Maria Humm, *Auf dem Weg zum sozialistischen Dorf? Zum Wandel der dörflichen Lebenswelt in der DDR von 1952-1969 mit vergleichenden Aspekten zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), p. 253.

²² BLHA, Rep. 472/15.1 DVP Kreis Oranienburg Nr. 268, *Textbericht E 2 a/II, 23, 12.55*, side 19.

members had been '*Großbauern*' (farmers with large estates). Finally, the police was also worried about the close connections between the choirs and the church.²³

The high level of former Nazi or 'bourgeois' membership does not, of course, mean that these choirs automatically opposed the imposition of new cultural structures. Yet, many well-established cultural groups were deeply influenced by their past affiliations. They did not necessarily celebrate the ideals of the Nazis, but they obstinately held on to past traditions. These groups' defiance of the new social order was particularly evident in terms of their repertoire. One of the cultural groups in *Bezirk* Potsdam that exhibited a very common form of insubordination was a choir in Jüterborg. Before 1945, this choir had been associated with the *Deutscher Sängerbund* (DSB), an organisation that had been banned in the East, but continued to exist in the West. The East German authorities forbade continuing contact between the DSB and East German choirs, because they feared West German 'infiltration' through this association. The members of the choir in Jüterborg were unimpressed. They started and finished each rehearsal with the song 'Grüß Gott im hellen Klange', which was the traditional song of the DSB and which also contained a strong religious element.²⁴

Choirs were not the only circles that were attached to the past. Other associations also tried to weave their established customs into the new environment. The refusal to give up traditions was also evident, for example, in a club of horse breeders in *Bezirk* Potsdam. The club had been founded in 1922, and its members had always come from better-off circles. Over a third of them were former members of Nazi organisations. These people were thus suspect to the regime in more ways than one, and as a result, the authorities forbade the celebration of the club's traditional festival in 1957. The club leadership found a way around the prohibition of its traditional feast. In the guise of a boat outing to a gastro-pub in Neuruppin, the club organised an enormous festival, which was only open to ticket holders. The men appeared in black tie and the women in ball gowns. As the festival progressed, a police report described, they sang traditional 'militaristic' riding songs, and 'forced' the gastro-pub's host to sell them his entire stock of sparkling wine (which, at a time

²³ BLHA, Rep. 530 SED Bezirksleitung Potsdam (SED) Nr. 1838, *Übersicht über kulturelle Gruppierungen, Vereinigungen und Vereine* (no date, but probably written in 1959).

²⁴ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Kreis Jüterborg Nr. 54, file section 'Chöre des Kreises Jüterborg', *Aktenvermerk Chorgesang in J.*, 11.8.67, p. 2; To see another example: BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 308, *Beschluss in der Ermittlungakte des Männerchors W.*, 16.3.61, side 169: in 1957, it transpired that this choir sang songs like 'Deutsches Vaterland' (German Fatherland), and 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles' (Germany, Germany above everything else).

of shortages, was described as outrageous behaviour in the police report). This example particularly shocked the authorities because of its blatant disregard of the new social order.²⁵

To make matters worse for the local administrative and police units, the attachment of these cultural groups to the past was often coupled with a rejection of the new social order: there were many groups who did their utmost in the early 1950s to prevent being absorbed into the new cultural structures. This was, for example, the case with a choir in B. This choir had a long tradition, and had remained active during the Third Reich. They had accepted the ideological requirements of the Nazi dictatorship by signing a decree, which stated that the choir consisted of pure Aryans. In the GDR, though, the choir's members were less willing to cooperate. Despite the SED's 1949 ruling, the choir's members refused to give up their status as an independent *Verein*. After a few months, the choir was presented with two options: either to join a mass organisation or to dissolve. Some members threatened to withdraw their membership if the choir was incorporated into a state institution. As a result, the choir leader made several attempts to register the choir as a cultural group in a factory in order to retain as much of its autonomy as possible. These attempts failed, however, and the choir, ultimately, had to concede.²⁶ Despite the eventual acquiescence of this choir, this example shows that the imposition of the new structures was often not met with submission and acceptance. There were many other cultural groups that showed a similar unwillingness to be incorporated into the new structures. They tried to carry on their work independently as long as possible, simply by not registering the circle or by not seeking permission for their meetings.²⁷

In the 1950s, there were, therefore, tensions between state authorities and culturally active people. These culturally active people, were, moreover, supported by grass root functionaries. These tensions were particularly evident in *Bezirk* Potsdam. As the *Bezirk*'s most populated areas directly bordered West Berlin, many people accessed cultural facilities there.²⁸ Some people who lived in *Bezirk* Potsdam were members of West German cultural associations (such as the DSB), or of

²⁵ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Kreis Rathenow Nr. 88, "*Spaatz*" (without a date, but probably written in 1957, which was when the event took place).

²⁶ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 930, file section 'Chor B.' VR/ I/21, *Überprüfung der Chorgemeinde B., Volkspolizeikreisamt Potsdam, 11.8.56.*

²⁷ BLHA Rep. 471/152 DVP Nr. 936, file section 'Skat Klub' Sachgebiet E, *Bericht, 2.2.60*, side 2.

²⁸ BLHA Rep. 503 VEB Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz (CFWP) Nr. 705, *Monatsbericht der Kulturdirektion für den Monat August 1951.*

cultural clubs that were based in West Berlin.²⁹ Others, who were members of East German circles, travelled to West Berlin in order to purchase the materials that they needed to exercise their hobbies, which they claimed were of better quality than those produced in the East.³⁰ Furthermore, inhabitants of *Bezirk* Potsdam also travelled to West Berlin to utilise the cultural facilities there, such as the cinemas and theatres. In the eyes of the SED, these individuals were exposing themselves to capitalism and its dangerous propaganda. Yet, until August 1961, there was nothing that could be done to prevent people seeking cultural diversions across the border.³¹

The imposition of new cultural structures was proving to be a rocky road. In the cultural associations at the grassroots, the leading functionaries and the participants engaged in manifold and repeated acts of ignoring the changes newly imposed on cultural life. In terms of membership and repertoire, there was a lot of continuity, and the frequent visits to West Berlin showed just how little of an impression SED regulations had made on these individuals.

Attempting to Bring Defiance Under Control

The analysis will now turn to the examination of how the administrative bodies and the police units sought to bring this difficult situation under control. In the early 1950s, the police units were instrumental in establishing the socialist structures. They were responsible for controlling and monitoring the civilian population. The East German secret police, called *Staatssicherheitsdienst* or Stasi, existed only in a very rudimentary form at this point. In fact, the Stasi functioned so ineffectively during this period that it failed to foresee and prevent the uprising of 17th June 1953. It was only after the June Revolt that the Stasi was fully established as a tool for social control and became more instrumental than the police forces. It took until the 1960s for the Stasi to grow into a truly sizeable and ubiquitous body.³² During the 1950s, cultural circles were primarily monitored and controlled by the police forces. If

²⁹ BLHA Rep. 472/15.1 DVP Nr. 268, *Maßnahmeplan der Abteilung Erlaubniswesen bis zum 15. Jahrestag der Deutschen Volkspolizei, 5.1.60*, p. 4, side 26.

³⁰ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Kreis Jüterborg Nr. 54, *Strafbare Handlungen im A. Verband in J, 17.8.60*.

³¹ BLHA Rep. 401 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam (RdB) Nr. 21, *Maßnahmeplan für den Landkreis Potsdam Land 1958, 26.3.58*.

³² Jens Gieseke, 'Ulbricht's Secret Police: the Ministry of State Security', in Patrick Major, Jonathan Osmond (eds.), *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945-1971* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp.41-58; Richard Bessel, 'The People's Police and the People in Ulbricht's Germany', in *ibid.*, pp. 65-71.

cultural circles were obstinate or uncooperative and came to the attention of the police forces, the response from the police was not one of measured understanding and compromise. The construction of a new society was going to be pushed through and obstacles were going to be tackled, even if this entailed intrusion into local cultural groups in order to eliminate unruly elements. The new cultural regulations were enforced vigorously, and cultural groups were given no choice but to adhere to the 1949 ruling. Even groups that were considered 'progressive' could not circumvent these measures. The gardeners' group *Kleingartenhilfe M*, for example, had been banned during the Third Reich because it had refused to comply with the regulations of the Nazis. Under the SED dictatorship, it was re-established and described as an exemplary circle because of its courageous action against the Nazis. When the group's members expressed the wish to remain an independent *Verein*, however, they were rebuffed. In 1951, they had to accede to the demands of the SED, and were fully incorporated into the FDGB.³³

Forcing culturally active individuals into the regime's new structures was an important first step for the consolidation of the cultural structures. Later on in the 1950s, the police and the local SED groups were also devising means through which to exercise greater control over these groups' internal development. If the police units, which monitored cultural groups, saw any grounds for concern, they devised means by which to 'test' the commitment of certain culturally active individuals. This 'testing' involved some very underhand measures. A male choir in *Kreis Jüterborg*, for example was suspicious to the police because it was made up of large sections of 'bourgeois' elements – out of 35 members, 8 were *Großbauern*, 3 further members were from the middle classes, and 7 were self-employed. Only 4 members came from the working class. In order to determine the political inclination of the bourgeois members of the choir, the administrative units devised the following scheme:

At the end of April 1958, a discussion was held between leaders of schools, the mayor and the party secretary of the LPG in M, in which it was decided that the male choir was to be asked to form part of the cultural programme at the May festival on May 1st 1958. On this occasion, the male choir will be asked to sing

³³ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 938, *An das Verwaltungsgericht Potsdam. Beschwerde der Kleingartenhilfe des FDGB Babelsberg gegen den Einspruch des Volkspolizeipräsidiums Potsdam vom 6.6.50 bezüglich der Eintragung in das Vereinsregister des Amtsgerichts Potsdam*, 28.10.50; *ibid. Betreff Tilgung der Kleingartenhilfe des FDGB*, 23.19.51.

fighting songs. This will be done to determine whether some of the members (the *Großbauern*) keep themselves apart during this activity.³⁴

In this case, none of the members refused to sing the Workers' songs and soon afterwards, all but two of the former *Großbauern* were willing to join collective farms. For the moment, this choir had thus successfully managed to avert the police's suspicion. Yet, this example illustrates how easy it could be to attract the mistrust of the police units. Another way in which the police units sought to determine the political atmosphere inside a suspicious cultural group was to recruit *Vertrauenspersonen* (people of trust) from in the cultural groups. These individuals were told to report the developments of the circles to the police units.³⁵ This kind of scheme was, though, not wholly successful. Many groups proved difficult to infiltrate. Often, the individuals who were approached by the regime representatives refused to become *Vertrauenspersonen*, or made their new status openly known to the rest of the group, thereby eliminating themselves as useful secret contacts of the police.³⁶

Police monitoring was not the only form of outside interference that the members of cultural groups had to contend with. There were many instances where the police and local party organisation also tried to enforce a leadership change in the groups in order to undermine the influence of the 'bourgeois' members in the group. For example, a leisure activity group in Jüterborg experienced this kind of intrusion. The police noticed this group in a negative way because some of its 'bourgeois' members, who had been active members of the NSDAP, had managed to 'seize the leadership of the group' (i.e. they had been elected). Even though at the next leadership election, an SED member managed to be voted into the leadership, the 'influence of the bourgeois members' was not successfully 'repelled'. An opportunity soon presented itself for the party members to strike: one of the 'negative elements' in the leadership fled the GDR to live in the West. As soon as this occurred, 'the members [of the group who were members] of the party took the initiative ... They highlighted the deceitful actions of the old leadership very clearly to the [other] members ... This clique had always used money from the group's cashbox for their own purposes. Thus, the clique was successfully separated from the

³⁴ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Kreis Jüterborg Nr. 54, *Männerchor W., Mitglieder*, 24.7.58 and *Aktenvermerk*, 28.7.58.

³⁵ *ibid.* *Plan zur vorgesehenen Bearbeitung des Schwerpunktes Männerchor J. N.*, 28.7.58; *Plan zur vorgesehenen Bearbeitung der Philatelisten T.*, 28.7.58.

³⁶ *ibid.*, *Beurteilung E.F.*, 21.3.57.

honest members.’³⁷ After this incident, the SED party members took over the leadership of the group without holding an election. It does not seem, however, that their ‘persuasion’ techniques had altogether succeeded. There were members of the group who resented the change of leadership.³⁸ This example highlights the problems of the way the authorities dealt with ‘suspicious’ elements in the cultural groups of *Bezirk* Potsdam: even though the group’s leadership had enjoyed the support of the other members, the SED members decided to take matters into their own hands and enforced a new order, thereby alienating some of its members.³⁹ These practices hardly endeared the SED to the culturally active population. In 1956, an active member of a different choir had become so incensed with the interference from the SED members within his group that he expressed hope for the Hungarian revolt to spill over into the GDR, ‘... because then, the party members of the choir would cop it’.⁴⁰

Potential Ground for Integration

Even though obstinate behaviour at the grassroots and an ensuing heavy-handed police response was a prevalent aspect of life in cultural circles in the 1950s, there were also gradual developments towards accepting the SED’s supremacy in cultural life. If people wanted to avoid negative consequences, they had to seek out ways to exercise their cultural inclinations in accordance with the SED’s dictates. For example, choirs could perform ‘progressive’ songs at official public events and exercise a more traditional repertoire beneath the scenes.⁴¹ In some respect, such a partial willingness to integrate was met half way: there were political developments that supported certain cultural traditions. In *Bezirk* Potsdam, German *folk* culture, including *folksong* and *folk dances*, was officially promoted by the state administration from the early 1950s onwards, in the hope of undermining

³⁷ *ibid.*, *Sachstandsbericht Verein T.*, 24.7.58, *Verfügung*, 30.7.58; *Aktenvermerk*, 6.2.59.

³⁸ *ibid.* *Sachstandsbericht Verein T.*, 24.7.58.

³⁹ Arnd Bauernkämper, ‘Kaderdiktatur und Kadergesellschaft. Politische Herrschaft, Milieubeziehungen und Wertetraditionalismus im Elitenwechsel in der SBZ/DDR von 1945 bis zu den sechziger Jahren’, in Peter Hübner (ed.), *Eliten im Sozialismus: Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), pp. 51-52.

⁴⁰ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940, *Betr. Einschätzung des Gesangsvereins in B.*, 9.4.62.

⁴¹ Humm, *Auf dem Weg zum sozialistischen Dorf?* pp. 246-268; BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 2756, *Gransee, Analyse Volkswirtschaftsplan*, p.6 side 87; for another example: Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1706, *Protokoll über die Tagung mit den Klubhausleitern*, 8.10.58.

unacceptable cultural influences from the past or from the West.⁴² The official acceptance of *folk* culture meant that the state institutions provided a platform on which people's traditional cultural inclinations could be exercised. For instance, one of the cultural groups from *Bezirk* Potsdam that was listed for the *Volkskunstpreis* (people's art award) in 1957 was praised because 'they talked about love for the *Heimat*,⁴³ of old habits and customs, of the reunification of our fatherland, of the friendship between peoples and of life in the village. Thus, the cultural group supported the goals of our state and helped to further the establishment of the GDR'.⁴⁴ This example shows that it was possible to unite some traditional values with showing support for the new social order.⁴⁵ Simultaneously, however, the greater acceptance of *folk* culture also harmed the establishment of new Socialist norms. People began to see *folk* culture as a way of evading official dictates. The cultural groups pursued *folk* events and activities, thus claiming to be fulfilling the SED's wishes, but they left little room for cultural activities that were oriented on Socialist guidelines.⁴⁶ Whilst the propagation of *folk* culture furthered the interaction with the organised cultural structures, it did not directly translate into taking on board Socialist norms.

In some respects, it was not always necessary for the SED to reach into the depths of German cultural heritage in order to find approval for its cultural model. There were certain areas that either had an established cultural tradition as part of a long-standing proletarian movement, or where there was underlying agreement with socialist ideals. These areas existed in working-class environments, such as the factories: here, the SED's cultural model could strike a chord with individuals who had their own ideas about the function of cultural life.⁴⁷ One enthusiastic report of cultural life from a cultural functionary in the factory *RAW Kirchmöser* announced, for example:

The circle of painters exhibited truly artistic works ... The lay circle for photography also showed its contributions, and every professional photographer

⁴² BLHA Rep. 502 Walzwerk Kirchmöser Nr. 40, *Kulturkonferenz in Rathenow*, 18.4.51.

⁴³ It is difficult to translate this term. It means 'home', but the English translation does not reflect the strong cultural notions and regional connection that this term encompasses.

⁴⁴ BLHA Rep. 550 VdgB Bezirk Potsdam Nr. 172, *An das Bezirkskabinett für Volkskunst, Vorschläge zum Volkskunstpreis 1957*, 28.11.56.

⁴⁵ Ute Mohrmann, 'Lust auf Feste', p. 417.

⁴⁶ BLHA Rep. 550 VdgB Nr. 172, *Über den gemischten Chor in N.*, 20.5.54.

⁴⁷ Sandrine Kott, 'Zur Geschichte des kulturellen Lebens in DDR-Betrieben, Konzepte und Praxis der betrieblichen Kulturarbeit', in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), p.116: Kott calls the atmosphere in some factories of the 1950s 'Aufbruchsstimmung' (spirit of optimism).

would have been able to marvel at this material, and realise in a self-critical manner, that even he would not have been able to take better photos. The sculptures, made by buddies, not by artists, were nonetheless works of art, because the artist creates some artworks in a formalistic way, but in the achievements of the buddies ... each sculpture portrayed something special.⁴⁸

The ideas about workers' artistic creation that are expressed in this extract were not purely a reiteration of the SED's cultural jargon. In 1952, when this extract was written, the SED was years away from announcing the *Bitterfeld Way* (the notion of workers, not artists, producing working class art). Since the ideas of this extract were years ahead of political developments, they cannot have been pure repetition of party policy. Some cultural functionaries in the factories, and probably some workers, can therefore be said to have had their own independent notions about factory-based cultural activities. These notions could be sympathetic to the SED's cultural model and they were also strongly influenced by the cultural ideals promoted by the SED: in the above extract, the functionary refers to artists' 'formalistic way' of creation. This was a reference to the SED's fervent condemnation of putting 'form' before 'content' in art.⁴⁹ The extract therefore shows that the cultural model of the SED had tied into established cultural ideas of a cultural functionary in *RAW Kirchmöser*, but, in turn, it had also influenced his frame of reference when he wrote summaries about cultural life that were intended for official ears.

The areas where the socialist cultural model fell on fertile ground were limited, however. In many factories, it was difficult to engage workers in cultural life.⁵⁰ It was, moreover, proving difficult to establish cultural structures in the factories for organisational reasons. Working class cultural associations that had existed in factories before the 1930s, had either been dissolved by the Nazis, or had been mopped up into the DAF.⁵¹ These circles had to be re-established or restructured. This task was arduous because the factories had been subject to wide-scale disruption during the war.⁵² Furthermore, because many factories were still struggling with

⁴⁸ BLHA Rep. 502 Walzwerk Kirchmöser Nr. 47, *Bericht über die Kulturausstellung der IG Metallurgie in Riesa, 12.12.52*, p.2.

⁴⁹ This was known as the 'Formalismus Debatte', which emerged in the early 1950s.

⁵⁰ Kott, 'kulturelles Leben in Betrieben', pp. 174-175.

⁵¹ Baranowski, *Strength Through Joy*, pp. 52-53.

⁵² See, for example, Kommission für Betriebsgeschichte im Auftrage der Betriebsparteiorganisation (ed.), *Polyester contra Pulver, Zur Geschichte des VEB Chemiefaserwerkes "Friedrich Engels" Premnitz* (East Berlin, 1969); Zentrale Parteileitung der Betriebsparteiorganisation des VEB Stahl- und Walzwerkes (ed.), *30 Jahre DDR- 30 Jahre VEB Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg* (Brandenburg, 1979), pp. 25-40; Geschichtskommission der Leitung der Betriebsparteiorganisation im SHR Wildau (ed.), *Woher wir kommen, wer wir sind, wohin wir gehen. Aus der Geschichte des heutigen*

fulfilling their production efforts, culture was very low on the functionaries' lists of pressing concerns. At a local cultural conference, a factory functionary pointed out: "It is all well and good to speak about the development of cultural mass work, once the conditions for it are given. ... How is it possible to speak about cultural work, when the greatest part of our colleagues still has to wash in a bucket?"⁵³ As a result of these factors, cultural life in the factories often only existed in a very rudimentary form in the 1950s, and factory cultural circles had the tendency to subside soon after their foundation.⁵⁴

The difficulty of establishing new cultural structures was not only evident in the factories. The organisational and structural shortcomings of the 1950s were just as visible in the state administration. The cultural functionaries who operated in the state administration at various levels of authority encountered major problems of under-staffing and insufficient training. They were unable to carry out their tasks in both the *Bezirk* and the *Kreis* administrations. In theory, the cultural institutions and mass organisations were meant to coordinate their work amongst each other, plan and discuss the direction of cultural life, and jointly monitor the establishment of socialist norms in the cultural sphere. They were also designed to function as a focal point that the participants and grass root functionaries could call upon. In order to be able to coordinate cultural life, the Ministry of Culture instructed the administrative functionaries to set up special institutions, such as *Kulturaktivs* (cultural work teams).⁵⁵ These *Kulturaktivs*, however, usually existed only 'on paper', because the administrations did not have the resources or organisational skills to turn them into stable and well functioning units.⁵⁶ Organisational issues such as these had a marked effect on cultural life at the grassroots. The grass root cultural functionaries

VEB Schwermaschinenbau "Heinrich Rau" Wildau, Betrieb der ausgezeichneten Qualitätsarbeit im SKET Magdeburg (Potsdam, 1988), p. 4.

⁵³ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1706, *Auswertung der Kulturaktivtagung vom 7.3.57*.

⁵⁴ BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 705, *Tätigkeitsbericht der Kulturdirektion über die Arbeit im Juli 1951*; BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 2756, *Analyse des Volkswirtschaftsplanes 1957, Stadt Brandenburg, 16.1.58*, pp. 8-9, side 31-32; BLHA Rep. 502 Walzwerk Kirchmöser Nr. 30, *Erfahrungsaustausch im VEB Willy Becher im Kirchmöser, 26.1.51*; Archiv Landkreis Oberhavel, Kreis- und Verwaltungsarchiv III 92 Gransee, *Protokoll Beratung des Kreiskulturzentrums und Erfahrungsaustausch der Dorfklubvorsitzenden, 22.11.60*, p. 4.

⁵⁵ SAPMO BArch DR 1 7906, *Abteilung örtliche Organe Inspektion und Grundsatzfragen kulturelle Massenarbeit, 23.9.58*.

⁵⁶ BLHA Rep. 401, RdB Nr. 2011, *Protokoll über die Arbeitsbesprechung der Abteilung Kunst und kulturelle Massenarbeit, Bericht über den Einsatz im Landkreis Potsdam, 23.5.53*.

frequently complained that they were not given enough support.⁵⁷ This only served to perpetrate the spirit of independence in cultural groups: reports from intermediate functionaries lamented that many grass root functionaries did not familiarise themselves with the 'correct' political line and preferred to organise cultural life 'their' way.⁵⁸

Conclusion

During the 1950s, the behaviour patterns of participants and functionaries in time-honoured cultural circles were characterised by 'immunity' to the newly imposed cultural model and by an obstinate defence of established traditions and habits. A mixture of *Resistenz*, *Eigen-Sinn* and non-conformity dominated associational cultural life. This was a potential cause of conflict because the administration and police tended to respond to this situation with a heavy-handed approach. At the same time, it was difficult to initiate cultural life in the factories, where a greater understanding of the regime's cultural norms could exist. This was partly because the workers showed a marked lack of interest and also because of structural shortcomings. There were some signs that the culturally active population was willing to integrate into the regime's structures and was ready to use certain organised platforms for exercising their cultural activity. The integration developed only very gradually over the course of the 1950s, however, and existed simultaneously with more defiant modes of behaviour. Partly, this was caused by the poorly functioning structures and by a slow process of learning the rules of the game. In *Bezirk* Potsdam, it also resulted from people's ability to access cultural facilities in West Berlin, which served as an escape route from the SED's cultural model and its overt Stalinist overtones.

Very gradually, this situation began to change. Increasing levels of conformity among members of cultural groups and circles were already becoming evident in the 1950s. Over the course of the 1960s, conformist behaviour grew. A key event that impacted cultural life in *Bezirk* Potsdam was the building of the Berlin Wall on August 13th 1961. Of course, the wall did not change the situation over

⁵⁷ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1700, *Zwischenauswertung des Wettbewerbs der Klubs und Kulturhäuser im Bezirk Potsdam*, 24. 10. 58; BLHA, Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1706, *Bezirksvorstand, Klubhaus der Energiearbeiter Potsdam, Bericht September/Oktober 1958*, p. 6.

⁵⁸ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1679, *Bezirksvorstand FDGB Potsdam Inst für kulturelle Massenarbeit, Nur die Kultur ist gut, die der Produktion dient*, 11.12.54.

night. In the 1960s and 1970s, the cultural institutions still experienced many problems and attitudes had not changed fundamentally.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in the 1960s, people in *Bezirk* Potsdam had to accommodate to the cultural structures that existed in the GDR, as there was little alternative. In the middle period of the GDR, there was a growing willingness to fulfil personal interests by integrating into the organised structures and by communicating with different levels of functionaries in the process. This is discussed in the following four chapters.

⁵⁹ Mark Allinson argues that the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 resulted in some forms of consolidation and in greater outward conformity, but that it did not produce greater political loyalty; people carried on as they had done before. The Berlin Wall, he argues, was hence no recipe for long-term stability: Allinson, *Politics and Popular opinion in East German 1945-68* (Manchester, New York 2000), pp. 130-135.

PART I

Bending the Rules While Upholding the Structures: Cultural Functionaries

What role did cultural functionaries play in the GDR? Were they the repressors' henchmen; were they merely spineless opportunists; or were they perhaps the people's only representatives? Any portrayal of functionaries along these lines will not describe them adequately. It is probably fair to say that in the cultural sphere, functionaries were simply 'ganz normale Bürger' (average citizens) with a bit more of a stake in the system than everybody else. And yet, despite such a modest formulation, this thesis regards their role in cultural life as so important that it is difficult to overestimate. Through their efforts, cultural life functioned with durability. Their contribution ensured that participation in cultural activity became tolerable for culturally active people. Simultaneously, their conduct also guaranteed that cultural life functioned without ever seriously challenging the supremacy of the SED. In order to understand cultural life during the GDR's middle period, it is necessary to look at the role of cultural functionaries in great detail. The analysis of cultural functionaries is also vital for breaking down the state/society dichotomy that still exists in GDR historiography. There were many forms of dialogue between functionaries at various levels of authority, the participants in cultural life and the central party bodies in Berlin.

Despite the immensely important role of cultural functionaries, they have received surprisingly little attention in GDR historiography. Advocators of the totalitarian theory dismissed them as the tools of an illegitimate and repressive party, driven by opportunism.¹ This interpretation of functionary work is detrimental to historical analysis of the GDR. It does not reflect the personal motivations and complex behaviour patterns of functionaries. Some historians have warned against brushing functionaries aside as mere regime representatives. They have pointed out that functionaries were not so far removed from the local situation and had close ties

¹ For example: Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat. Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft 1949-1990* (München: Hanser, 1998), pp. 407-412.

to the grassroots and to the people with whom they interacted.² To a degree, the role of functionaries has been taken into greater consideration in historiography as a result.³ While this shift has been an important advancement, it has not, however, resulted in a great deal more research into the multitude of functionary positions that existed in the GDR. There have been a few very enlightening studies about specific functionary groups; in particular, the focus has tended to rest with functionaries in higher positions of authority.⁴ On the whole, though, research in this field has remained limited. An area that has, consequently, not been explored in enough detail is the interaction between functionaries at different levels of authority and between functionaries and people. The studies of single functionary groups tend to depict them as figures operating either only in contact with higher authorities or only in contact with the population. In the cultural field, for example, grass root functionaries are portrayed as operating in autonomous spaces and evading the dictates of the regime.⁵ This was, of course, an important aspect of the work of cultural functionaries – but it was only *one* aspect. Functionaries did not just withdraw into autonomous spaces; they were also in constant dialogue and interaction with each other. A few historians have analysed the ways in which functionaries interacted with each other. In her study of a professional cabaret in Potsdam, Silvia Klötzer has made some very interesting discoveries. She found that the directors of the cabaret managed to get approval for more controversial programmes through a combination of tactical manoeuvres and exploitation of personal networks. Once the personal contact with the *Bezirk* leadership broke down, following a change in personnel, it was impossible to get approval for more critical

² Mary Fulbrook, 'Methodologische Überlegungen zu einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR', in Richard Bessel, Ralph Jessen (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), p. 283; Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-65* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 64.

³ Daniel Wilton, *Regime versus People? Public Opinion and the Development of Sport and Popular Music in the GDR, 1961-1989* (PhD thesis, UCL, London, 2004), see Chapters 2, 4 and 7, pp. 223-225: Wilton explores the roles of functionaries in sport and popular music and offers a comprehensive argument about the close connections, and 'shifting alliances' between functionaries and people.

⁴ For example, Helga A. Welsh, 'Kaderpolitik auf dem Prüfstand: Die Bezirke und ihre Sekretäre, 1952-1989' in Peter Hübner (ed.), *Eliten im Sozialismus: Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1999); Arnd Bauernkämper, 'Kaderdiktatur und Kadergesellschaft. Politische Herrschaft, Milieubeziehungen und Wertetraditionalismus im Elitenwechsel in der SBZ/DDR von 1945 bis zu den sechziger Jahren', in Hübner, *Eliten im Sozialismus*, pp. 37-65; Gisela Kyrieleis, 'Geschlossene Stadtkultur und Alltagskulturelle Nischen', in Wolfdietrich Kopelke (ed.), *Kultur und Kulturträger in der DDR* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993).

⁵ For example, Helmut Meier: 'Der Kulturbund der DDR in den siebziger Jahren. Bestandteil des politischen Systems und Ort kultureller Selbstbetätigung', in Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders, Leben in der DDR* (Karl Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 2000), p. 618.

performances.⁶ Klötzer's insistence on the importance of personal networks is a very important aspect of functionary life. However, Klötzer's study, too, focuses mainly on higher-ranking functionaries: directing one of *Bezirk* Potsdam's main cabarets was quite a high-profile position, and the functionary who filled this position had been a long serving member of the party apparatus. What is still missing is a comprehensive overview of the interaction between functionaries at the local level with those in the intermediate and central levels of authority. That is the objective of the following two chapters.

In this study, cultural functionaries are portrayed as a separate group of actors, who do not slot into either a 'state' or 'society' category. Each functionary was driven by strong personal motivations. In seeking to fulfil their motivations, functionaries developed the capacity to steer things their way. They relied on a strategy of constant compromise in two directions: functionaries depended on dialogue with the participants just as much as they depended on contacts with other functionaries. They played an intermediary role: on the one hand, functionaries at the local levels were able to secure spaces of autonomy in which they could bend the rules a little and could ensure that the organised cultural activities were acceptable for the population. On the other hand, however, these functionaries accepted that there their autonomy was restricted, because they always had to tolerate a certain amount of interference from functionaries in higher positions of authority. The local and intermediate functionaries learned to make this work for them: the cultural functionaries made their own demands on those in higher positions of authority and exploited the system for their benefit.

This very complex mixture of behaviour patterns ensured that the participants could be content with the functioning of the cultural system, but simultaneously, cultural activity never took on a life of its own that threatened SED supremacy. Of course, the behaviour patterns of functionaries also changed over time. As chapter 2 has shown, the 1950s were still characterised by obstinate grass root functionaries who supported the participants' desire to hold on to cultural traditions. The willingness of functionaries at all levels to interact with one another developed very gradually over the course of the later 1950s and 1960s. In the 1960s, this process was

⁶ Sylvia Klötzer, "'Volldampf Voraus?': Satire in der DDR. „Eulenspiegel“ und „Kabarett am Obelisk“ in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren' in Thomas Lindenberger (ed.), *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur, Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 274-291.

spurred on by policy changes. The SED increasingly sanctioned 'lowbrow' cultural activities, which meant that functionaries were more in a position to strike compromises without acting against official dictates.⁷ With the passing of time, functionaries secured just the right mixture of autonomy and integration that all sides could tolerate.

⁷ See Chapters 7 and 8.

Chapter 3

Neither Puppets Nor Opponents

Cultural functionaries were a hybrid group. This chapter explores the large variety of roles that they fulfilled, as well as their backgrounds and motivations. It is important to give such a detailed overview of cultural functionaries to understand what was driving them, and to comprehend how they secured the stability of the cultural field. This is particularly necessary, as this kind of detailed analysis has not been undertaken before.

Introductory Typology: Various Functionary Positions

There were many different cultural functionary positions in *Bezirk* Potsdam, and they each entailed varying levels of responsibility as well as different forms of work structure. To begin with the group that had least authority and responsibility, the discussion turns to the analysis of honorary functionaries. The honorary functionaries were, firstly, made up of leaders of cultural circles and groups. In some cases, these functionaries were professional artists and writers who disseminated their knowledge to the interested lay community.¹ Whilst the role of artists is the only well-documented aspect of grass root functionary work in the cultural life of the GDR, they did not have a monopoly over these positions. In *Bezirk* Potsdam, the cultural circles and hobby groups were usually directed by members of the lay community. In *Bezirk* Potsdam, specialists and artists could be brought in for a limited while to assist the circles' development, but they did not tend to stay for an extended period, and tended not to engage in the every-day tasks of running the circles.² Hence, this

¹ The role of artists has attracted most attention in historiography. For example Sandrine Kott, 'Zur Geschichte des kulturellen Lebens in DDR-Betrieben, Konzepte und Praxis der betrieblichen Kulturarbeit', in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), p. 172.

² There were some artists who supported certain circles in *Bezirk* Potsdam: Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) Rep. 401 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam (RdB) Nr. 6468, *Kreiskulturhaus Erich Weinert, Abrechnung Leistungsvergleich der Kulturhäuser, 16. 10.69*, p. 2: in this cultural house, a dramatist from the local theatre in P. was recruited to train the lay members of a circle. However, contacts between artists and people in *Bezirk* Potsdam could be tenuous, particularly in the more remote areas: *ibid. Rat des Kreises Pritzwalk, Abteilung Kultur, Kurze Einschätzung der Betriebsfestspiele des VES Zahnradwerkes Pritzwalk, der Pritzwalker Festtage und der Kooperationsfestspiele 1971, Schlussfolgerungen für das Jahr 1972, 17.9.71*, p. 4; largely, the circles received sporadic help from artists, if any at all: BLHA Rep. 426 Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit (BfK) Nr. 249, *15 Jahre Zirkel Schreibender Arbeiter in Wittstock*, pp. 9-11: A year after the formation of the circle, it still had no support from an artist; *ibid. Information zum Zirkel schreibender*

thesis concentrates on the role of those cultural functionaries who came from the lay community. The second group of honorary functionaries were the so-called *Kulturobmänner*. These individuals were workers and ordinary brigade members who had been elected to organise collective cultural activities for their brigade. The third and final group of honorary functionaries were the leaders of small-scale cultural institutions such as the clubs and smaller libraries. The work of all of these different honorary functionaries was usually performed quite infrequently: cultural groups and circles tended not to meet more often than once a week or once a month; *Kulturobmänner* did not have to organise more than six cultural events a year; and club committees tended to meet only once a month and honorary librarians worked only a few hours a week.³

Turning now to professional functionaries, who performed their roles on a full-time or on a part-time basis, they stood a level above the honorary functionaries. They were employed in the *Bezirk's* main cultural institutions, such as theatres and museums, cultural houses and libraries. In the *Bezirk's* largest institutions of this kind, such as the 'Hans Otto' theatre in Potsdam or the Hans Marchwitza cultural house, functionaries were laden with responsibility and usually performed their tasks on a full-time basis. In the smaller institutions, like small-scale libraries, for example, the cultural functionaries tended to work on a part-time basis.

The functionaries with the most wide-ranging responsibilities and the greatest authority were those who worked in the state administration. They were employed in the councils of the *Bezirk's* cities, villages and communities, or they worked in the cultural departments in the *Bezirk* and *Kreis* state leadership. Furthermore, they held positions in specialised commissions (such as the Commission for Film), which were tied to the *Bezirk* or *Kreis* leadership and oversaw specific aspects of cultural life in the *Bezirk*. They were also employed in the administrative sector of the mass organisations, such as the *Kulturbund*. Finally, they worked in the trade union leadership of factories. The work of all these functionaries varied between full-time

Arbeiter des VEB GRW Teltow, this circle was supported by Gerhard and Christa Wolf, but the continuous, daily leadership activity was performed by the circle leader. See also Jürgen Schmidt, *Ich möchte bleiben, Lebenslauf eines mittleren Kulturkaders, geschrieben nach 40 Jahren DDR* (Schkeuditz: GNN Verlag, gekürzte Fassung, 1996), p. 247.

³ BLHA Nr. 2072 Rep. 506 VEB IFA Ludwigsfelde (IFAL) Nr. 1758, see the *Kultur- und Bildungspläne* in the 1970s: this shows that there are only a few events a year that that the *Kulturobmann* had to organise; BLHA Rep. 538 Kulturbund der DDR, Bezirksvorstand Potsdam (KB) Nr. 31, BAG *Philatelie des VEB IFA Getriebwerkes Brandenburg, 17.4.74*: the group of philatelists only meets once a month and only planned three other events for the rest of the year.

and part-time. Usually, the functionaries with the highest levels of authority worked on a full-time basis but had part-time staff to support them.

In order to enable a comprehensive analysis of cultural functionaries, it is necessary to develop a typology that categorises different types of functionaries. The typology that is introduced in this thesis is highlighted in the following table:

Group	Function
1. <i>Administrative functionaries</i>	Functionaries working at various levels in the state administration, in the administrations of the mass organisations and in the trade unions. These were the 'intermediate' functionaries, who bridged the gap between the grassroots and the central leadership. They were responsible for ensuring that cultural life at the grassroots developed according to central political guidelines and they oversaw functionaries in group 2.
<u>Subgroups</u>	
a) Leadership	General Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries in the state's main organs of authority. They communicated directly with the central bodies in Berlin. Numerically this group was restricted to a few key people.
b) <i>Bezirk</i> personnel	Employees of the <i>Bezirk</i> leadership who supported the administrative leadership or worked in the specialist commissions in Potsdam.
c) Local functionaries	Functionaries working at the <i>Kreis</i> , community and city level, and in the trade unions in the factories. They oversaw grass root functionaries, analysed cultural life and reported to the <i>Bezirk</i> personnel. There were some 'borderline' cases: the <i>Kreis</i> leadership of small specialist organs, like the <i>Kulturbund</i> philatelist union, had very little authority, and their responsibilities resembled those of functionaries of group 2.
<hr/>	
2. <i>Executive functionaries</i>	These functionaries were responsible for the organisation of cultural life, they were in direct contact with the participants and they received direction from the administrative functionaries. Their tasks were to plan and provide activities for the population, to gain new members, to shape guide the population intellectually and to report to the administrative functionaries.

Subgroups

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| a) Professionals | These functionaries directed institutions like cultural houses, libraries and theatres. They usually had professional training and exercised their role as a career. |
| b) Honorary functionaries | These functionaries held functions in their spare time, like leading cultural circles, running clubs and small libraries. They could be well trained, but were usually untrained. They exercised their functions infrequently. |

Fig. 3.1: Cultural functionaries: typology

This categorization of cultural functionaries is beneficial for the analysis in more than one way. It outlines a division that was experienced by those who worked in the cultural field, because it distinguishes according to the proximity to the central political organs in Berlin and according to the level of contact with the population. It also divides functionaries according to levels of authority and responsibility. It has to be emphasised, nevertheless, that the boundaries between the groups and the subgroups were blurred. There was lot of mobility between the different groups, because cultural functionaries from one sub-group could be recruited to fill vacancies in others. There was also a lot of contact between these different groups, as will be shown in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the executive honorary functionaries (group 2b), who exercised their function in their spare time, could be people who were also employed as full-time administrative or executive professional functionaries and had taken on another functionary role in their spare time.

Becoming and Being a Functionary

Motivation and Background

It can be a very difficult to establish the personal motivations that prompted particular individuals to become cultural functionaries, because there are few written records that document such personalised thought-processes. Nevertheless, there are some determining factors through which it is possible to get a glimpse of why people decided to take up a functionary position in *Bezirk* Potsdam. What is noticeable is

that the motivations for becoming a cultural functionary varied depending on the position the functionaries fulfilled. Consequently, it is important to assess different types of functionaries separately.

The analysis begins with the leaders of cultural circles as an example of honorary executive functionaries (group 2b). The primary motivating factor for becoming a leader of a circle was a personal attachment to a particular artistic activity or a hobby. These functionaries experienced personal sense of enjoyment from being involved with a particular activity. In most cases, the functionaries who led specialist circles had engaged with the cultural direction of the circle for a long time before taking up their position, and hence had a long-standing attachment to this activity.⁴ They ended up in the leadership positions because they wanted to secure the successful continuation of their leisure time activity. These individuals moved up in the committees of the circles until it was their turn to take over the leadership of the circle. Often, they accepted the leadership upon the retirement of the previous leading functionary, when it became clear that no one else was willing to take over the position and the circle's survival was under threat.⁵ Rather than risk the circle's demise, they took on the role of the leadership under the pressure of no one else volunteering. When they entered their position, they expected that they would enjoy exercising their roles, as it encompassed their engagement with a cherished pastime. This is evident, for example, from minutes of a meeting between leaders of cultural groups in Oranienburg in 1962. Here, a functionary leading a dance group was annoyed that no one volunteered to accompany the group on a musical instrument during rehearsals. According to the minutes, she said that 'despite all setbacks, she was not going to let this spoil her cultural work any further'.⁶

There were two other possible motivating factors that could incline people towards taking on honorary functionary positions. Firstly, some cultural functionary

⁴ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35, *Schreiben Philatelistenverband Pritzwalk an das Kreissekretariat Pritzwalk des Kulturbundes*, 16.8.64: the leader of this stamp collectors' circle has been collecting stamps for 50 years. See also BLHA Rep. 426 BfK, Nr. 249, *15 Jahre Zirkel Schreibender Arbeiter in Wittstock*, p.1: the tailor who founded the circle had engaged in literary activity for over 25 years beforehand; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, *Brief von W. an K. im Bezirksvorstand Philatelie*, 7.11.73: the leader of this circle has been collecting since he was 11; BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei Potsdam (DVP) Nr. 310, *Volkspolizeikreisamt Pritzwalk, Protokoll über die Überprüfung der Tätigkeit des Männerchors M*, 14.5.65, p. 2, side 82: the conductor has been with the choir 25 years.

⁵ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Protokoll über die Sitzung der leitenden Kader der AG Philatelie des Kreises Nauen*, 6.6.70; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, *Brief von W. an K.*, 15.12.63; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35, *Schreiben an den Bezirksvorstand in Potsdam*, 18.4.70.

⁶ Landkreis Oberhavel, Kreis- und Verwaltungsarchiv, Oranienburg (LkO), LkO III 92 Gransee, *Protokoll der Kulturgruppen Vollversammlung am 13.4.62*.

positions were remunerated, particularly in the factories.⁷ Secondly, being a functionary brought with it a certain exploitable status, and could increase an individual's bargaining power with the organs of the state. These were important motivating factors in becoming an honorary cultural functionary, but they were usually secondary factors. The financial remuneration was not usually a large amount, and it was not guaranteed for all functionaries.⁸ As far as the status of a functionary position was concerned, involvement in the cultural sphere was held in less esteem than engagement with other kinds of 'social' activity.⁹ If the desire for status had been the primary motivating factor, people would have sought different functionary positions. It can be concluded that cultural functionaries acted on personal cultural interests when they took on honorary functionary positions, but that this motivation could be coupled with other, secondary considerations.

Turning now to the analysis of the executive professional functionaries (group 2a), it can be said that strong personal cultural inclinations were also the main determining factor behind their engagement in cultural life. This is evident in statements made by former professional cultural functionaries after 1989. Jürgen Schmidt, for example, who wrote about his experiences as a 'mid-range cultural functionary' (he directed a small regional theatre). He emphasises that he was attracted to his position primarily because of his love for theatrical endeavours.¹⁰ This kind of sentiment, though being a post-GDR expression, is an adequate reflection of the motivations of professional cultural functionaries during the GDR, as it can be ratified from the sources. In personal communications, these individuals expressed a particular dedication to the cultural field and to the organisation of

⁷ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Bezirksvorstand Potsdam Nr. 1700, *VEB Atomkraftwerk I Kulturhaus, Tätigkeitsbericht über die Kulturarbeit im Kulturhaus*, 6.4.62; BLHA Rep. 506 IFAL Nr 328/4, *Ausgaben auf dem Gebiet der Volkskunst* (no date).

⁸ *ibid.*, see also: BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1702, *Rat des Kreises Kyritz an den Bezirksvorstand Potsdam*, 11.2.64: The *Kreis* council wanted a long-serving functionary to receive a prize and 300 Marks. The *Bezirk* Council refused this award, however, and when the *Kreis* council turned to the *Bezirk* leadership of the FDGB, they did not reply; low remuneration of functionaries is also discussed later on in this chapter.

⁹ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940: *Männerchor O. in P., registration number 215/2, Einschätzung des Männerchors 24.10.68*: the police files remark critically that the choir leader does not engage in any social activity other than leading the choir; the same is evident in *ibid. Frauenchor S., registration number 215/16, 7.11.6 Einschätzung des Frauenchores S.*

¹⁰ Jürgen Schmidt *Ich möchte bleiben*, p.81. See also Thomas Ruben, Bernd Wagner (ed.) *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg, Eine Bestandaufnahme* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin Brandenburg, 1994). This contains pushed interviews with leaders of cultural houses, for example 'Ein Betriebskulturhaus, zb Küsrin-Kietz. Interview mit Frank Kuchina, dem ehemaligen Leiter des Kulturhauses Küstrin-Kietz', p. 179 and p. 186: this former functionary remarks that people took on the leadership of cultural houses out of a personal interest in cultural work.

cultural life.¹¹ Even though the subsequent analysis of this chapter shows that professional functionaries could become quite frustrated with their roles, this does not reflect on their dedication to the cultural element of their work. The frustrations were borne out of organisational problems. The cultural element was the one aspect of their work that they always enjoyed, and upon leaving their positions, they usually remained in the cultural field.¹²

As a result of the primary importance of personal interest in cultural activity, people with a certain kind of background were attracted to the executive positions. Few executive functionaries had working class backgrounds (apart from the *Kulturobmänner*). This was probably because members of the working classes had not received a lot of encouragement that prompted them to become engaged in the cultural field in their upbringing. The *Bezirk* leadership noted about librarians, for example: 'In most cases, the leadership of a general library is taken over by people with a literary interest. Largely, they are members of the parish council, housewives and retired people. A small percentage is made up of teachers and secondary school pupils'.¹³ Unlike recruitment from people with 'middle class', professional backgrounds, it was far more difficult getting members of the working classes to take up functionary positions.¹⁴ It seems, therefore, that people with 'middle-class' backgrounds and intellectual professions dominated executive functionary positions. These were individuals with a deep-seated cultural interest, which they gained through a certain upbringing, background, education and profession.

There is little evidence to suggest that the personal motivations for becoming honorary and professional executive functionaries changed drastically over time. The only tendency that is noticeable is that personal motivations became more important

¹¹ When functionaries resigned, they expressed very positive sentiments about some parts of their roles: StA Potsdam Nr. 5389, *Letter*, 5.5.65, side 12: this is a letter of resignation from a functionary who was employed in the workers' theatre. It concludes: 'At the same time I want to thank you for everything I have learned at the workers' theatre. I thank you also for all the lovely hours that we have spent together'. These functionaries retained an attachment to cultural endeavours after leaving their positions: *ibid.* *Letter* 22.11.66, side 55: in this example, a functionary who had to leave his position to go to the army, writes back to his old colleagues and complains that the theatrical performances he now has to watch are 'foreign wriggling without quality'; see also: StA Potsdam Nr. 2722: in 1964, the Humboldt club wrote to several societies about the redecoration of the old Rathaus, and asked the leaders of these societies whether they have an artistic preference for the interior decoration. A few of the functionaries write back with their ideas and suggestions – they seem to be quite keen to make an artistic input.

¹² BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 306, *Brief A.H aus F.*, 8.9.1952: this functionary is looking for a new job but wants to carry on being engaged in the cultural field; see also discussion below.

¹³ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 33652/4, *Konzeption zur Qualifizierung*, p. 10.

¹⁴ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB, 24009, *Komplexinformation, Erfüllung des Jugendgesetzes im kulturellen Bereich*, 1979, p. 2: only 20% of functionaries leading cultural youth clubs were workers; see also Schmidt, *Ich möchte bleiben*, p. 81.

for taking up functionary positions as time progressed. In the 1960s, executive functionaries expressed some more idealism when they took on their positions. They were more inclined to make personal sacrifices to further cultural life for the common good. In the 1970s, however, this kind of idealism was beginning to wane. Functionaries were more easily inclined to leave their positions when the personal sacrifices became too great.¹⁵ Furthermore, they increasingly expected to receive recognition for their work. Serving the 'common good' was no longer enough of a reward in itself. During the later 1960s and 1970s, it became more and more common to reward cultural functionaries. Looking at the awards in the factory *Stahl und Walzwerk Brandenburg* from 1973 to 1984, for example, shows that out of 281 awards, eleven went to professional, full-time cultural functionaries and employees responsible for the organisation of cultural life. Considering that the total number of cultural functionaries in this factory would not have been much higher than that, it seems that most cultural functionaries in the factory were given an award at one point or another in their career. One of the main functionaries was even rewarded on a regular basis: he received a very high-ranking award (the *Verdienstmedaille der DDR*), as well as an award from a prestigious mass organisation, the National Front (he had been awarded the *Ehrennadel der Nationalen Front*) and had been awarded the medal of 'Activist of Socialist Work' (*Aktivist der Sozialsitischen Arbeit*) five times.¹⁶ These awards gave the cultural functionaries the recognition they craved as well as a small sum of money. As the numbers of awards grew during the 1970, executive cultural functionaries increasingly insisted on receiving such awards, and complained bitterly if their work was not recognised.¹⁷ This development eventually culminated in the process of individualisation that is discussed in Chapter 9.

¹⁵ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22562, *Information über Kaderprobleme auf dem Gebiet der Kultur*, 13.11.73, p. 2: in the early 1970s, there was high fluctuation of functionaries in institutions that were subordinate to the *Kreis* councils. The primary reasons many functionaries left were remuneration, unwillingness to sacrifice time to undergo qualifications, family issues and health reasons; this is also evident in *Einschätzung der Kadersituation des Rat des Bezirkes*, 15.3.77, p. 3; it is also discussed in BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 357, *Bericht vom III. Quartal*. The fact that this was a new attitude becomes evident when considering the perseverance, commitment and dedication of functionaries in the 1960s: for example, BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 2274, *Nationale Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück*, 12.6.61: here is a functionary who was in the process of working herself into the ground, trying to battle with bureaucracy and staff shortages and still trying to do a good job.

¹⁶ BLHA Rep. 502 Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg, Nr. 1784; Awards Nr. 13, Nr. 24, Nr. 26, Nr. 38, Nr. 35, Nr. 84, Nr. 104, Nr. 112, Nr., 135, Nr. 169, Nr. 173. The functionary who was awarded the medal 'Verdienstmedaille der DDR' was the *Gruppenleiter Kultur und Sportanlagen*.

¹⁷ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 23, *Über ein Gespräch in B., zur Klärung einer Eingabe und über die weitere Herausgabe des Handbuchs der Deutschen Luftpost*, 6.5.74.

While there are clear indications that personal motivations drove the executive functionaries, the analysis of the administrative functionaries is more difficult, as they tended to leave fewer clues about their taking up their positions. Once again, material that has been written since the *Wende* can give some hints about these former functionaries' attitudes to their work: in hindsight, they argue that there was a high level of identification with the tasks they were performing. For example, Christa Mosch accounts: 'Between 1980 and 1990, I worked as a leader of the sector in the division of literature, art and music of the Central Committee of the FDGB. The problem is that I am still very committed to that which I have spent a decade of my life on. I am not able to see it with as much of a distance as is probably expected of me.'¹⁸ This sentiment also becomes evident in the sources, but only among some functionaries. Broadly speaking, the administrative functionaries fell into two groups: there were those who sought a career in the administrative units of *Bezirk* Potsdam because they hoped that this would be a route to higher and more powerful positions. These individuals seem to have placed power-political aspirations over and above the dedication to cultural affairs. This was particularly the case with those individuals who held positions in the *Bezirk* leadership. In her study of *Bezirk* secretaries, Helga Welsh has shown that these individuals were loyal to the regime above all else, which was borne out in their biographies: in one way or another, these people owed their career advancement to the regime. They hoped to use their positions as a springboard to East Berlin to be close to the political decision-making process.¹⁹ This was not the case with all administrative cultural functionaries, however. In particular, those functionaries who worked in specialist commissions and in the more low-level part-time jobs of the *Bezirk* and *Kreis* administration showed few signs of desiring upward mobility. They remained committed to their particular field, filled their positions for a very long time, and expressed positive feelings about their roles and about the cultural field.²⁰ Their primary interest seems to have been carrying out their roles as unhindered and smoothly as possible.

¹⁸ Christa Mosch, 'Die Kunstpolitik des FDGB zwischen Kunstförderung und sozialer Verantwortung', in Monika Flacke (ed.), *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Staat: Die Kunst der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1994), p. 106

¹⁹ Helga A. Welsh, 'Kaderpolitik auf dem Prüfstand: Die Bezirke und ihre Sekretäre, 1952-1989', in Peter Hübner (ed.), *Eliten im Sozialismus: Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), pp.123-125.

²⁰ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 6402, *Eingabe vom Leiter der Bezirksagentur für Veranstaltungswesen Potsdam, 22.8.1974*: this functionary fears that, as a result of a merger of two institutions, his role will change. He states that he feels very fulfilled in his current role and wishes to remain there; see also BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 378, *handwritten letter by M.T., 27.12.79*: This functionary had been

Understaffed and Overworked

Having outlined the motivations of cultural functionaries, the analysis turns to exploring how functionaries perceived the work they were expected to do. Overall, most functionaries had a tendency to complain about the workload they were expected to fulfil. To a degree, their complaints were justified. Individuals who were ready to take on cultural functionary positions do not seem to have existed in abundance. Consequently, it was immensely difficult to fill functionary positions across the *Bezirk*, and there were constant staff shortages throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The *Bezirk*'s factory libraries, for example, were continuously understaffed: one, if not two or three positions were usually unfilled.²¹ Because of the staff shortages, many functionaries performed more than one role. They were very displeased about this state of affairs. The following example is a very common complaint from an administrative functionary working in the state *Kreis* leadership in Brandenburg:

In the meeting ... it was decided that friend B and I myself should put ourselves forward as candidates for the *Bezirk* Commission, after ... S. asked to be relieved of some of his workload. The only ones who ever do anything are always the same people, and they then get even more to do! I would have liked to get rid of all my work as well, and I would have probably had good reasons, but you know how it is, the last one gets bitten by the dogs – someone has to do it, after all.²²

This letter is a good illustration about the stress and frustration of some cultural functionaries, who felt they were unable to tackle the workload, and who resented other colleagues constantly giving them more to do. Problems such as those of this

employed in the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund*, and had left four years prior to the date of the letter. She was still in touch with the *Bezirk* leadership, and wrote them a nostalgic letter about her 16-year employment in the *Bezirk* leadership, about the enjoyment she got out of it and about her continuing fondness for her former colleagues. Some functionaries stayed in their positions for a very long time and became specialists in their fields, even though they were in administrative, not in executive roles: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, the correspondence here highlights that the two leading functionaries of the *Bezirk* leadership in the *Kulturbund*'s philatelist union held their positions for the most part of the 1960s and 1970s.

²¹ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1757, *Auswertung 1969*, see libraries in: *IWL Ludwigsfelde; Bibliothek des Bezirkskrankenhauses für Neurologie und Psychologie Görden Brandenburg; Stahl und Walzwerk Brandenburg*, p.1, p.4; LEW; CFWP, *Stahl und Walzwerk Henningsorf; GRW Teltow*.

²² BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 31, *Schreiben von der Kreiskommission Brandenburg an den Bezirksvorstand*, 25.9.66.

functionary were magnified when colleagues fell ill, took maternity leave or went on holiday.²³

At the same time as these staffing problems made their working life difficult, functionaries were struggling to fulfil a multitude of demands. Librarians, for example, were not only in charge of cataloguing, buying new books and administering the borrowing process. They were also responsible for raising the numbers of borrowers, for 'raising the quality of the books' that people borrowed, and on top of that they had to organise literary events, which ranged from reading groups to talks given by writers.²⁴ Other cultural functionaries faced similar high demands. The leaders of cultural houses in factories were not only responsible for the events that took place in their cultural house, but they also had to ensure that individual workers and brigades engaged in cultural activities after work. Furthermore, the functionaries had to organise the festivities on important state occasions, of which there were plenty. On top of this, they had to organise cultural activities in the surrounding living quarters of the workers.²⁵ Despite this demanding workload, they were poorly paid compared to functionaries in economic roles, which was particularly evident in the early 1960s.²⁶

The functionaries' frustrations about the heavy workload are probably not a surprising facet of their work. Complaints about understaffing and work burdens are common in most bureaucratic and cultural sectors in communist and western societies alike. Nevertheless, the functionaries' dissatisfaction with their heavy workload is an important aspect of functionary work. Work burdens, coupled with

²³ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 377/1, *Brief aus Birkenwerder 5.1.78*; *ibid. Postkarte vom 7.2.77*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 363/1, *Politischer Monatsbericht Juni 1974*.

²⁴ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1756, *Alle Arbeiter lesen, verfasst vom FDGB Bezirksvorstand Potsdam, 21.10.64* The criteria here listed for taking part in a competition for librarians include organising exhibitions, literary discussions, musical events and working with the community in order to gain more readers; BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1757, *Zum Leistungsvergleich, Bibliothek: Gewerkschaftsbibliothek des VEB Chemiefaserwerkes Friedrich Engels. 1.1.-31.12.68* Here the librarians claim to have organised 4 literary discussions, 30 book discussions, 7 exhibitions and 11 musical-literary evenings in one year in order to enter into the competition for factory libraries.

²⁵ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 2245, *Kulturhausleiter der Baurbeiter Rheinsberg an den Bezirksvorstand FDGB, 16.5.60*: 'Our cultural house has only got one functionary. It is not possible to attend to all villages of the MTS-area culturally. Our work has so far only been able to attend to those villages that the factories have 'adopted'. But those are only two!'; BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1702, *Perspektivplan für die Kulturarbeit im Klubhaus des VEB Atomkraftwerk Rheinsberg für 1964*; BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Bezirk Potsdam Nr. 1703, *Arbeitsprogramm der Klubleitung des CFWP für das 1. Halbjahr 1969*, pp.1-8.

²⁶ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 2245, *VEB Kunstseidenwerk Premnitz an den Bezirksvorstand des FDGB Januar 60*: here, the factory trade union tried to raise the income of the functionaries running the cultural club to a level which is appropriate for the role they fulfil. The FDGB leadership, however, rejects this plea; a similar example in *ibid. VEB Industriebau Brandenburg, Plangehalt des Klubleiters, 11.1.61*.

low pay, meant that cultural functionaries were quickly fed up with their roles which led them to give up their positions. As this happened quite frequently, turnover rates among cultural functionaries were quite high in *Bezirk* Potsdam. Alternatively, cultural functionaries stayed in their roles but chose to adapt the work to suit their expectations and capacities. Both of these aspects are crucial for the development of cultural life in the GDR because they severely limited the controllability of the cultural field, and instead induced a development that had a dynamic of its own. The aspect of high turnover will be dealt with in this section, whereas the second part of this chapter will deal with the ways in which functionaries adapted the situation to suit their needs.

High Turnover

High turnover of functionaries was very damaging for cultural life. A functionary's resignation necessitated the search for a replacement, during which time the activities either stood still, or the workload fell to remaining functionaries, who were unable to cope with it on top their own job.²⁷ Once a replacement had been found, he/she invariably took some time familiarising himself/herself with the demands of the new job, during which time the process could still not function effectively.²⁸ In order to reduce disruption to the organisation of the cultural process and to ensure the good implementation of cultural policy, functionary turnover thus had to be kept to a minimum. The majority of statistics indicate, though, that high turnover rates were at no point successfully combated.

There were certain functionary groups that constantly experienced difficulty with high turnover. This was the case with leaders of cultural houses, for example. A report of the *Bezirk* leadership, written in 1972, highlighted that 28 leaders of cultural houses in the *Bezirk* had resigned in five years – a high figure considering that only 26 of these positions existed in total. The report argues that lacking qualification made it difficult for people to handle the job, that the functionaries resented the low remuneration of these positions, and most importantly, the functionaries were attracted by other, better-paid work with a higher status in other parts of the cultural

²⁷ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1700, *VEB Atomkraftwerk I Kulturhaus, Tätigkeitsbericht über die Kulturarbeit im Kulturhaus*, 6.4.62; BLHA, Rep. 538 KB Nr. 517, *Angeforderte Kaderanalyse, Bezirksleitung Kulturbund*, 21.7.72.

²⁸ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 517, *Angeforderte Kaderanalyse, Bezirksleitung Kulturbund*, 21.7.72.

field.²⁹ Similar problems existed in other areas of the cultural field. For example, the functionaries who worked at the *Kreis* film schools tended to leave their positions within a short space of time, seeking more desirable opportunities in East Berlin.³⁰ There were even high turnover rates among functionaries in the local administrative leadership.³¹ In this field, the turnover rates were far worse than the sources suggest at a first glance, because the *Kreis* administrations had a tendency to hide vacancies in official reports to avoid being reproached for failing to fill vacancies. Certain posts, such as low-paid secretarial work, were often unfilled for a long time. In the official reports, they were simply scrapped from the list of available positions. When these cover-ups were noticed, they appalled the *Bezirk* leadership, who resented the *Kreis* leadership disguising ineptitude and poor plan fulfilment.³²

The central political organs and the leading administrative organs in the *Bezirk* Potsdam sought to limit the high turnover throughout the 1960s and 1970s to avoid the damaging effect of high turnover rates.³³ In the 1970s, the efforts to reduce functionary turnover were intensified in *Bezirk* Potsdam. There were attempts to increase the longevity of service among existing functionaries by improving their living and working conditions. The administrative *Bezirk* leadership tried to combat high turnover rates by promising to reward functionaries appropriately, by trying to give them better guidance and by dealing with circumstantial problems like housing issues.³⁴

The efforts to reduce turnover only had limited success, however. There are only a few cases where the efforts to reduce functionary turnover were successful.

²⁹ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22562, *Information über Kaderprobleme auf dem Gebiet der Kultur*, 13.11.72; Gisela Kyrieleis, 'Geschlossene Stadtkultur und Alltagskulturelle Nischen', in Wolfdietrich Kopelke (ed.), *Kultur und Kulturträger in der DDR* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), pp.91-92, p. 101.

³⁰ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 33652/4, *Konzeption zur Qualifizierung der haupt- und ehrenamtlichen Leitungskader auf dem Gebiet der Kultur und Volkskunst* 27.12.71, p. 12.

³¹ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22561, *Information über die Kadersituation in kulturellen Bereichen des Bezirkes* (undated, but probably written late 1971 or 1972).

³² BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22562, *Stellungnahme zur kreislichen Einstufung*, 23.4.74.

³³ This was an ongoing problem that was evident throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The *Bezirk* leadership of the SED addresses this issue: BLHA Rep. 530 *Bezirksleitung der SED Bezirk Potsdam*, Nr 3232, *Ergebnisse und Probleme in der Auswertung der 2.Bitterfelder Konferenz*, 12.8.64, p.4; The *Bezirk* Council is concerned about it: BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22561, *Information über die Kadersituation in kulturellen Bereichen des Bezirkes*, written around 1971/1972, p.4; The cultural department of the Central Committee was also concerned about it: SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A2/9.06/176, *Analyse über die Tätigkeit der Jugendklubbhäuser und Jugendklubs und Fragen ihrer perspektivischen Entwicklung*, 1968, p.6.

³⁴ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22562, BLHA, *Einschätzung der Arbeit zur weiteren Qualifizierung der Kaderentwicklung der Fachorgane der Kreise* 28.6.77, p.3; see also: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175: *Schreiben von A. aus der Redaktion R. Heimatkalender*, 6.2.70: this functionary threatened to resign from his post unless he was paid more. The *Bezirk* leadership increased his salary.

The administrative leadership in the *Bezirk* organisation (groups 1 a and b), were the only groups where high turnover was successfully combated. Figures from the *Bezirk* Cabinet for Cultural Affairs in the early 1970s, for example, show that only one functionary had been employed there for less than two years, while the other seven are described as 'long-serving' functionaries. There was, moreover, only one vacancy, for which a replacement was found very quickly.³⁵ Other examples taken from the highest administrative institutions reflect similar trends: the Department of Culture of the *Bezirk* Council could not only boast an absence of vacancies in the late 1970s but it also had many long-serving functionaries: in 1977, 20 per cent had been employed there over 15 years, 20 per cent over ten years, and a further 20 per cent over five years.³⁶ The comparatively low turnover rates among cultural functionaries in the higher administrative levels resulted from the intensified efforts to fill these positions, because of their strategic importance, and from the attractiveness of these jobs, which included higher pay, higher status and higher levels of responsibility. Furthermore, these were the highest possible positions in the *Bezirk*. Moving on from there to a more attractive post in East Berlin was a difficult task. Many functionaries found that their careers ended there.³⁷

Aside from the functionaries at *Bezirk* level, however, the high turnover of functionaries was never truly combated. There are only a few isolated cases where high turnover rates were significantly reduced.³⁸ But, as this subsection has shown, these cases are outnumbered by the instances of high turnover rates, in all spheres of cultural life.³⁹ The importance of this phenomenon should not be underestimated. The high turnover rates show a considerable amount of dissatisfaction among cultural functionaries, and the difficulty of filling important vacancies meant that working conditions became even more difficult for the remaining functionaries. The consequence of this was that, as the next section will show, the recruitment of

³⁵ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22561, *Information über die Kadersituation*.

³⁶ BLHA, Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22562, *Einschätzung der Kadersituation des Rates des Bezirkes und Schlussfolgerungen zur politischen Wirksamkeit der Mitarbeiter gegenüber den Räten der Kreise, der Betriebe und Einrichtungen*, 15.3.77.

³⁷ Welsh, 'Kaderpolitik auf dem Prüfstand', p. 125.

³⁸ BLHA Rep. 506 IFAL Nr. 2167, *Angaben der Gewerkschaftsbibliothek zur Betriebschronik, Ludwigsfelde*, 3.6.80. The factory 'Automobilwerke Ludwigsfelde', for example, employed 6 head librarians between 1955 and 1965, whereas between 1964 and 1980 this number sank to a mere three.

³⁹ The disruption was not necessarily only caused by many functionaries leaving, in some cases, if a few key people left, this could cause major upheaval: BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22561, *VE Lichtspielbetrieb Potsdam, Kaderanalyse der Belegschaft, insbesondere der kulturpolitischen Mitarbeiter und des technischen Personals*, 30.9.71. Out of 527, 11 had resigned between 1969 and 1971 – but these were key figures. Two years later, four positions had not been filled again, which affected the daily running quite badly.

functionaries could not be carried out according to stringent guidelines. It became more important to fill vacant positions than adhering to strict political-ideological guidelines.

Adequately Trained and Politically Reliable?

From Problem to Solution

Chapter 2 has shown that during the first decade of the GDR's existence, the police and the local state leadership monitored cultural groups and circles suspiciously because they feared that the members were still adhering to bourgeois and 'fascist' ideology. The functionaries who led these circles were, in part, the cause for such fears, because they frequently had been members of the former bourgeoisie, or of a 'fascist' organisation. Consequently, the party members attempted to change the leadership of cultural circles when it gave rise for concern. This method for controlling cultural development was a very intrusive one. Very gradually, the intrusive approach began to change, as it caused alienation and frustration at the grassroots. Increasingly, the executive functionaries were seen less as an aspect of the problem, and became more of a tool for developing the GDR's cultural life.⁴⁰ Of course, the People's Police did not cease to observe cultural groups in *Bezirk* Potsdam.⁴¹ The monitoring of cultural circles, however, ceased to entail a removal of cultural functionaries. From the 1960s onwards, there were only a few isolated cases where cultural functionaries were ousted from their positions. Moreover, the decisions to oust functionaries were now focused on questions of competence rather than on the background of a functionary.⁴² If the administrative organs kept tap on cultural functionaries, it was to ensure that they carried out their tasks correctly, rather than to catch them out in order to replace them.

There is a connection between this very gradual development and the political changes that were occurring in the early 1960s. After the introduction of the New Economic System, there were structural changes in the cultural field that increased the levels of responsibility and authority of the administrative functionaries at all

⁴⁰ StA Potsdam Nr. 2765, *Protokoll der Sitzung des Musikaktivs 18.5.62*, side 316.

⁴¹ See, for example, BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 310: In 1965, the police units carried out an analysis of several choirs.

⁴² BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 23, *Protokoll der Kreiskommissionssitzung, 3.11.67*.

levels. Simultaneously, the executive cultural functionaries, particularly the professional ones, witnessed a continuously expanding number of tasks for which they were responsible. Even though their levels of authority did not grow, the executive functionaries were nevertheless increasingly designed to represent the SED at the grassroots under the supervision of the newly strengthened administrative functionaries.⁴³ This process manifested itself in several ways. The honorary executive functionaries had to keep ever more detailed accounts of all of their members, which were then passed on to the administrative functionaries.⁴⁴ The professional functionaries had to write regular reports about the development of the cultural life in their area. The frequency with which they had to write these reports increased steadily throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁵ Finally, the executive cultural functionaries also sometimes had to intervene against participants if problems developed within their area of responsibility. One very illustrative example of this phenomenon occurred in a choir at the height of the Prague Spring in 1968:

Some members did not agree with the measures that were taken by the contractual partners of the Socialist countries with regard to occurrences in Czechoslovakia [the invasion of Prague and brutal crushing of the revolt]. This unclear question was dealt with by the choir leader in a factual way, so that ambiguities no longer exist.⁴⁶

If the ideological 'ambiguity' had arisen over a less acute matter, it might have been enough for the choir leader to simply conduct one general discussion to restore ideological clarity.⁴⁷ Because the invasion of Prague was such a sensitive matter, however, more action was necessary before the case could be closed. Thus, the report continues: 'The choir has separated itself from those members who behaved negatively'. In order to replace the members who had been ousted from the choir, new members were found and taken on board. They were all 'progressive citizens'.⁴⁸ This example is, of course, an exceptional case, because it occurred during a time of

⁴³ This development is discussed in more detail in chapter 7, pp. 186-188.

⁴⁴ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, *K. an S.B. in Wusterhausen/Dosse 13.12.65*: the *Bezirk* leadership instructed all functionaries to keep exact records about membership details, and all new members had to be noted down in card files.

⁴⁵ In the 1960s, the functionaries only wrote annual reports, whereas by the 1970s, this had increased to quarterly reports. Compare, for example, reports from *Kreis Pritzwalk* for the 1960s and 1970 in BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35 and BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 357.

⁴⁶ BLHA, Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940, *Einschätzung des Männerchors in B., registration number 215/08, 18.11.68*, p.2.

⁴⁷ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 306, *Berichterstattung, Bezirksleitung Potsdam, 20.3.65*: in a club meeting, an intellectual questions the need to forbid Wolf Biermann to perform in 1965. Though his statements were reported to the central organs in Berlin, the individual was not removed from the club.

⁴⁸ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940, *Einschätzung des Männerchors in B., 18.11.68*, p.3.

heightened conflict. It does illustrate, nonetheless, that cultural functionaries could be called to upon to take actions against unruly participants, and were, in these cases, forced to do the SED's bidding.

Over the course of the 1960s, executive functionaries were thus increasingly relied upon to secure the functioning of cultural life according to the SED's dictates at the grassroots. But giving the executive cultural functionaries more responsibility made it increasingly necessary for the central SED leadership to find ways of securing their loyalty and reliability. The following two subsections will now explore the different methods that were used to secure the trustworthiness of cultural functionaries. More importantly, though, each of these subsections will show that these methods were unsuccessful in what they were trying to achieve.

Qualification

An important mechanism for securing the reliability of cultural functionaries was to ensure that they were qualified to exercise their positions. The qualifications that cultural functionaries needed were threefold. Firstly, they had to be capable to put central policy into practice. They had to be familiar with the ideology that underpinned the SED's cultural model. On top of that, cultural functionaries had to be able to react to shifts in the political climate, knowing how to interpret changes in cultural policy and how to act upon them. Secondly, they needed to have particular cultural or artistic skills in order to fulfil their jobs. This was particularly in the case of executive cultural functionaries, who had to be able to lead choirs and painting circles, but cultural training was also a prerequisite for the administrative staff. Finally, cultural functionaries needed to have organisational skills. The executive functionaries had to write reports, collect membership fees and keep records of circle members, and the administrative functionaries had to ensure that executive functionaries carried out these tasks.⁴⁹ Any kind of qualification therefore had to entail political, administrative and organisational as well as cultural elements. Only by training functionaries in such a fully rounded manner could they be relied upon to do the SED's bidding.

⁴⁹ BLHA Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 243, *Laientheater – Mittelstufe* (no date, written after the second Bitterfeld conference in 1964, but before the seventh party day in 1967): this is a set of questions for an oral examination of students studying 'lay theatre'. The students are trained in all of the above areas. The main focus is on political-ideological content, but technical aspects like the fire regulations are also a part of the course.

The efforts to increase the levels of qualification of cultural functionaries grew continually from the mid-1950s onwards. In the late 1950s, the increasing focus on qualifications meant that cultural functionaries in *Bezirk* Potsdam were called upon to participate in the political and cultural courses offered by the state.⁵⁰ Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the calls for qualification intensified even further.⁵¹ Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the numbers of institutions that offered political and cultural education of functionaries grew steadily and offered more and more courses. For example, there was the central school for cultural functionaries in Meißen-Siebeneichen. In 1970, the *Bezirk* 'Academy for Cultural Work' was founded in Potsdam. There were also various colleges for specialised cultural pursuits that were founded throughout the 1960s and 1970s. These institutions provided courses for newcomers as well as refresher courses. People could study at the institution itself, but they could also study from home. The importance of political teaching on all of these courses was paramount. Even in the courses that focussed on cultural qualifications, the political analysis was the primary concern, and issues of the organisation of cultural life were secondary.⁵² As a result of the growing demand for higher levels of qualification, the numbers of participants at these courses increased throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁵³

The efforts to qualify functionaries were particularly geared at the administrative functionaries who worked in the *Bezirk* leadership (groups 1 a and b), because they played such a central role for administration and control of cultural

⁵⁰ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1075, *Industriegewerkschaft Metall Zentralvorstand 18.3.57*: in this case, the evasion of qualification was not tolerated. The document states: 'The next course for club leaders at the Central School of the Ministry of Culture in Meißen-Siebeneichen will take place between September 1957 and January 1958. The circle now has another possibility for delegating a club leader for qualification. ... It is necessary to think very carefully about the choice of which functionary to send on this course, and in particular, address the colleagues who, let's not beat about the bush, have so far managed to evade the schooling. Some of them need to be shown that their continued activity as club leader is in the long run impossible if the necessary qualification does not take place. For your *Bezirk* we recommend the following colleagues: (then the document singles out one individual functionary)'; BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1683, *Bezirksvorstand FDGB Abteilung Kultur, Einheitliches Studium für Kulturfunktionäre und Zirkelleiter der Volkskunstgruppen ab Februar 1963, 15.12.62*.

⁵¹ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB 1701 *Zur Perspektive der Kulturarbeit bis zum Jahre 1970 im VEB Chemiefaserwerk "Friedrich Engels" bis zum Jahre 1970*, p.4; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 329, *Gedanken zum Kaderprogramm der Bezirksleitung bis 1970*.

⁵² BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 23981, *Anhang 3 an das Programm für den 2. Wochenlehrgang für Führungskader 26.-30.10.70, Themenvorschläge für die weltanschauliche, kulturpolitische und ästhetische Qualifizierung von Leitungskadern*, Kyrieleis, 'Geschlossene Stadtkultur', p. 93.

⁵³ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22558, *Bezirkskulturakademie Potsdam an den Rat des Bezirks, 11.2.83*, a statistical analysis from the *Bezirk* Academy that shows the steady increase of participants at the annual courses: in 1972/73 there had been 99 participants whereas in 82/83 there were 237.

life.⁵⁴ But the attempts to qualify cultural functionaries were, in theory, aimed at all functionary positions. The state institutions provided even the least authoritative honorary functionaries, like *Kulturobmänner*, with courses and seminars from the early 1960s onwards, which were held at the cultural houses of the individual factories.⁵⁵ Such seminars were designed to teach these functionaries about strategies for capturing the workers' interest. This is described by one functionary in her report of a seminar she had attended: 'There were surprisingly many suggestions on how to guide the less interested or uninterested colleagues towards more sophisticated areas of culture, by taking a detour via their individual hobbies ... and by starting a conversation with them cunningly so that they remain unaware (of the actual intention)'.⁵⁶

Despite these increases in courses and seminars for the qualification of administrative and executive functionaries, however, there remained considerable gaps and shortcomings in qualifying these individuals. Many functionaries did not attend the requisite qualification courses, because of a lack of time and inclination, and because the functionaries in higher positions of authority were too over-stretched to lean on all functionaries to ensure that they attend qualification courses.⁵⁷ The high turnover rates among cultural functionaries, which have been outlined above, also affected the levels of qualification. Individuals who had received cultural qualifications did not necessarily remain in their positions for a long time. As there was a lack of personnel willing to fill the vacancies, unqualified persons were recruited to fill the empty positions: an unqualified person seemed to be preferable to a vacant position.⁵⁸ As a result, the figures show that the levels of qualification among cultural functionaries were remarkably low, except among administrative functionaries in the *Bezirk* leadership. Looking at a very detailed assessment of cultural functionaries in *Kreis* Königswusterhausen, which was compiled by the

⁵⁴ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 23981, *Anhang 3 an das Programm für den 2. Wochenlehrgang für Führungskader vom 26.-30.10.70*: The *Bezirk* Cultural Academy had special training courses just for functionaries in leading positions.

⁵⁵ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 2245, *Klubhaus Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg, Klubleitung an den Bezirksvorstand Potsdam, 17.2.60*: This extract aims to qualify *Kulturobmänner* and the cultural functionaries with the least responsibilities in the factories.

⁵⁶ BLHA, Rep. 514, VEB Landbauprojekt Potsdam, Nr. 129, *Kulturobmann kommt zu Wort nach Erfahrungsaustausch mit Kulturobleuten der IG Bau- Holz*.

⁵⁷ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 2245, *VEB Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau über die Zusammenkunft der Kulturfunktionäre am 2.12, 3.12.60*, p.2; *ibid.*, *Kulturhaus der Eisenbahner Neuseddin, 20.2.60*; BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 6449, *Rede (no title), Potsdam, 12.6.69*, p. 2; BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22562, *Information über Kaderprobleme auf dem Gebiet der Kultur, 13.11.73*, p. 2.

⁵⁸ BLHA Rep.547 FDGB Nr. 1758, *Vorlage des Sekretariats, Bericht über die Verwirklichung des Aufrufes zur Initiative der Bibliotheken der DDR aus Anlass des 100. Geburtstages Lenins, 5.5.1970*.

Bezirk leadership in 1971, the lack of political and cultural qualification becomes evident. The *Kreis* leadership employed only one functionary with a political as well as a cultural qualification. This functionary was the director of the *Kreis* Department of Culture. He was an SED member, had attended the *Bezirk* Party School for a quarter of a year, and was qualified as an 'officially recognised club leader'. Apart from this individual, the level of qualifications was lamentable. The deputy director had no political qualifications and embarked on her cultural studies in 1972 only because the *Bezirk* leadership had initiated an official investigation. The director of the *Kreis* Cabinet for Cultural Affairs' also had no political qualification, whereas the two remaining specialists for cultural administration had no cultural qualification. A similar picture emerges for this *Kreis* looking at the functionaries from the executive functionary group. None of its ten full time librarians had received any political training. This was also the case with the employees in the *Kreis* film department. The leaders of the various clubs were largely wholly unqualified, too: out of 28 village club leaders, only four had political qualifications, and none had a cultural one. Out of 19 leaders of cultural circles, seven had a cultural qualification and two had a political qualification.⁵⁹

The lack of qualifications was not the only problem. Even if a functionary was well qualified, there was no guarantee that he would be able to fulfil his role to the required standard. For example, a functionary who was hired as director of Sanssouci palace in the city of Potsdam in the 1960s had all the necessary qualifications, but he lacked the necessary people skills for his role. He was put in charge of organising and overseeing the repair works that were to be carried out on the palace. Because he was too occupied with this aspect of his work, he neglected other vital administrative tasks and managed to alienate his colleagues through his dictatorial style.⁶⁰

While the drive to qualify functionaries therefore gathered momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, the levels of functionary qualification in the cultural field did not improve dramatically. Apart from the administrative *Bezirk* leadership, cultural functionaries showed a surprising lack of political and cultural qualifications – in the worst cases, of both.

⁵⁹ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 33652/4, *Konzeption zur Qualifizierung der haupt- und ehrenamtlichen Leitungskader auf dem Gebiet der Kultur und Volkskunst 27.12.71 – Anlage II Analyse über die haupt- und ehrenamtlichen Kulturkader im Kreis Königswusterhausen.*

⁶⁰ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 3234, *Bericht 24.11.66.*

The Recruitment Process

Qualifying cultural functionaries was not the only way of ensuring their reliability. It was also possible to control and guide the recruitment process of functionaries, ensuring that only politically, ideologically and socially sound individuals were employed in functionary positions. Once again, however, it becomes evident that it was only among the administrative functionaries in the *Bezirk* leadership (group 1 a and b) that the recruitment process was conducted according to strict political guidelines. Among this group, the entry requirements were very strict. An *Eingabe*, written shortly after a failed application for the position of *Bezirk* Secretary of the *Kulturbund*, shows that there were particularly tough recruitment principles for these positions. The rejected candidate, who wrote the *Eingabe*, was not recruited for the position because he was not a party member.⁶¹ This applicant seems to have been particularly naïve to apply for the position in the first place. It does not seem like all applicants were as unaware of these strict political guidelines as this individual. As will be shown in the next example, there were persons who were well aware of the importance of having the correct political background, and who knew how to play the ‘ideology card’. The following text has been extracted from a curriculum vita, which was attached to an application for the post of ‘organisational secretary’ in the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund*. The application of this individual was successful.

While my father was only interested in my scholarly achievements, my mother tried to bring me into contact with progressive art from a young age, and she taught me to respect physical work. ... (When I was a student) my father wanted me to join a student’s union, but I preferred to spend the money on a second degree-course (in law) parallel to my other studies. ... During my holidays, I worked in the public transport sector and at the power station, as well as for Daimler Benz. Although I was not sympathetic to the Fascist regime, I did no more than helping two racially persecuted individuals with their emigration ... After the liberation of Berlin by the Red Army, I helped with the provision of foodstuffs... Shortly after that, in 1946, I joined the KPD ... As far as societal engagement is concerned, I worked for the Kulturbund even before its proper foundation. After 1952, I was secretary of the *Kreis* leadership in T and have been a member of the presidential council since 1954. In 1954 I helped with the establishment of the College for Film ... From 1954 to 1956 I was a member of the SED’s *Stadt* leadership in Potsdam.⁶²

⁶¹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe aus Kleinmachnow, an das Bezirkssekretariat des Kulturbundes der DDR, 17.8.78.*

⁶² BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 319, *Curriculum Vitae of A.W, 1968, pp.1-3.*

What makes this text so particularly interesting is as much what it doesn't as what it does say. Scholarly achievement does not count for much here, as can be determined from the critical remarks the individual makes about his father's obsession with it, as well as from the absence of grades or degree results at any point in the text. The important factor of this man's youth was instead his mother's fondness for 'progressive art' and her admiration for physical labour, which implies that he learned to respect the working classes. This focus is repeated in the man's account of his university experience: the fact that he studied for two degree courses at the same time is only of secondary importance. The primary achievement was that he financed these degree courses by not joining a student union, which was considered to be a decadent, bourgeois institution. The man carries on putting social development above scholarly skills: he recalls how he worked in factories and in city trams, thus showing that he identified with the working classes. This form of self-representation continues into his account of his life in the Third Reich. The only time he mentions this period is in the remark he makes about helping two people emigrate – he does not mention any professional experience (which he must have had, having begun university as early as 1929). Concrete achievements and activities only begin to emerge after the war, when he joined the KPD and supported the new social order. The individual who composed this CV therefore put a strong emphasis on showing his political and social trustworthiness.

There is some evidence to suggest that strict recruitment guidelines were also applied to functionaries in less authoritative positions. For example, an *Eingabe* written by an employee in the *Kreis* leadership of the *Kulturbund* lamented that strict recruitment principles were making it impossible to fill the vacant position of *Kreis* Secretary:

For two years the post has not been filled, and hardly anyone can be found who is interested, because this activity frequently takes up free weekends. ... We have made two recommendations. My colleague R. told me that both have been rejected. ... The activities of the *Kulturbund* in the *Kreis* have to stop unless we find a replacement. This seems impossible if candidate A is now also rejected. ... It would be a great mistake for the effort of building our state, if we reject every possible employee due to motives founded on principles, and then can't rectify the effects. If there is something you need, you have to be able to turn a blind eye.⁶³

⁶³ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr 363, *Letter from functionary O to Dr. M, 18.4.72*, pp.1-2.

This case can be regarded as a bit of a rarity. The stringent application of tough recruitment principles was usually abandoned very quickly when it was proving difficult to fill functionary positions in the cultural sphere. Usually, the criteria were relaxed considerably and people were taken on despite 'unsound' backgrounds. This is shown in the following text, which examines the functionaries working in the 16 Cabinets for Cultural Work:

The political and professional standard of qualification does not meet the requirements of this society's development. Frequently, functionaries with a specific related skill (musicians, dancers) were employed for the positions without meeting the political requirements. ... (Of the staff) 54 are in the SED, 11 in the other parties and 57 have no party membership. 13 were members of fascist organisations, of which 10 were in the Hitler Youth or Union of German Girls (these were the two Nazi youth organisations), 2 were in the NSDAP and 1 was in the SA. In 10 cases, immediate relatives moved to the Federal Republic of Germany illegally.⁶⁴

What is surprising about these statistics is that they concern cultural functionaries with an important position in the administrative sector. These functionaries made up a large percentage of the local administrative functionaries (group 1c). They had an immediate influence on the implementation of cultural policy because they were in close contact with the functionaries from the executive group. The fact that party membership was so low here, with fewer than half of all functionaries being in the SED, already challenges the assumption that the selection process of these functionaries was wholly dictated by political guidelines. Such an assumption is further undermined by the existence of members with a 'fascist' past, and by the presence of those with relatives in the West. Both factors would have classified individuals as 'unreliable' in the eyes of the SED and should have made their entry into such positions impossible.⁶⁵

The situation was hardly better among the executive functionaries. Looking once more at statistics of cultural functionaries in *Kreis* Königswusterhausen, which were been quoted above, a serious lack of SED membership among executive functionaries becomes evident. Among the ten full-time librarians in this *Kreis*, for example, only three were in the SED, and among the 55 part-time librarians, only

⁶⁴ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22561, *Information über die Kadersituation in kulturellen Bereichen des Bezirkes*, (no date but written either late 1971 or early 1972), p. 5; see also BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 329, *Mitarbeiter der Bezirksleitung Potsdam*. This statistic shows that among 20 employees of the *Kulturbund* of the *Bezirk* leadership, 11 had relatives in West Germany.

⁶⁵ The tendency to employ functionaries without the necessary political-technical qualification was heavily criticised by the *Bezirk* leadership: BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22562, *Information über Kaderprobleme auf dem Gebiet der Kultur*, 13.11.72, p. 2.

seven were party members. Looking at the leaders of youth clubs, it is astonishing to see that out of 18 there was only one SED member. Similarly, among choir leaders in this Kreis, only four out of 18 were in the SED and one was in the NDPD.⁶⁶ It was far too difficult to fill these functionary positions; practical matters had to over-rule ideological concerns. Cultural life needed librarians, club and circle leaders, even if these individuals turned out to be predominantly 'parteilos' (not a member of any party).

In short, it can be said that the methods which were to secure the reliability and loyalty of cultural functionaries were not enforced very well. Cultural functionaries outside the administrative leadership of the *Bezirk* frequently lacked the necessary qualifications, tended not to be members of a party and could have unsound backgrounds. Does this mean that the loyalty and dependability of functionaries were essentially questionable? On the one hand, cultural functionaries were unlikely to be in opposition to the regime. People who were in fundamental disagreement to the social order that existed in the GDR would not have been inclined to take up functionary positions within the system. From the available source material, no evidence has been found to suggest that there were functionaries who sought to challenge or undermine the supremacy of the SED. On the other hand, however, functionaries (aside from the administration of the *Bezirk*) also tended not to engage in open displays of loyalty. The rhetoric of the SED was used in official reports of course, but cultural functionaries did not necessarily show a great deal of support for the political dictates of the SED apart from that. There were even cases of functionaries who applied to leave the GDR in order to live in West Germany.⁶⁷ Rather than being fully loyal, obedient and dependable or alternatively wholly disloyal, in opposition and seeking to destabilise the GDR from within, functionaries, on the whole, can be described as being committed to the cultural element of the work they were doing, and were for the most part seeking to make ends meet. What does this mean for the cultural system? Cultural life in the GDR may not have been as well controlled as the regime leaders had intended it to be, but it was never as disruptive or problematic as they feared that it could be. This was because cultural functionaries engaged in a constant compromise: They did integrate into the cultural

⁶⁶ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 33652/4, *Konzeption zur Qualifizierung, Anhang II Kulturkader im Kreis Königswusterhausen*, pp.6-27.

⁶⁷ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, *Schreiben vom Leiter des Philatelistenzirkel Kyritz an die Kreisleitung des Kulturbundes, Abteilung Philatelie, 7.11.73*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, *Brief von W an K, 7.11.73*.

structures, but also managed to steer cultural life along certain paths. This compromise will be explored in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Cultural functionaries were a very diverse and multifaceted group. There are several commonalities between functionaries working at various levels of the cultural system, however. Firstly, the majority seem to have had a strong cultural interest that brought them to their positions. Secondly, outside the administrative *Bezirk* leadership, it was impossible to establish a reliable and well-qualified army of cultural organisers and administrators. The combination of personal cultural motivation, resentment about workload and the inability to secure functionaries' qualifications and political commitment, meant that cultural functionaries retained a certain independent spirit. The independent spirit, however, did not result in a clampdown on cultural functionaries. This was because, over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, functionaries were more willing to integrate and interact with each other in order to secure their spheres of independence, rather than trying to exercise their functions in isolated spaces. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Organising Culture: Compromise and Communication

This chapter analyses the two key aspects of functionary work in the cultural sphere. The first subsection of this chapter describes how the executive and local administrative functionaries created autonomous spaces within which they were able to organise cultural life so that it satisfied popular interest, even if that meant deviating from cultural policy. In a sense, these functionaries engaged in *Eigen-Sinn*: they created and protected autonomous spaces within which they were able to direct cultural life according to their beliefs and according to the wishes of the participants. The second subsection explores how the autonomy of cultural functionaries at the grassroots was restricted: there was a certain level of outside interference that could not be circumvented. All cultural functionaries had to fulfil certain administrative duties, which ensured that the executive functionaries were always in communication with higher levels of authority. The grass root cultural functionaries did not always resent the communication with the higher authoritative levels, however. In order to fulfil certain tasks, they increasingly sought the dialogue with the functionaries in higher positions. It can be said that cultural functionaries were not averse to outside interference, but that they sought to dictate its pace where they could. This is a very important aspect of functionary life. Cultural functionaries had a high degree of agency, and shaped the nature of cultural life either by securing limited forms of autonomy, or by communicating with other functionaries.

Spaces of Autonomy

Lack of Control and Perceptions of Expertise

The previous chapter has outlined the motivations of cultural functionaries and their deep-seated cultural inclinations. It has also shown that it was impossible for the SED leadership to enforce tight regulations regarding the qualification, reliability and loyalty of cultural functionaries. The combination of these two factors meant that cultural functionaries were not simply regime puppets. They were individuals with their own ideas about the organisation of cultural life.

In order to implement their own ideas, they secured limited autonomous spaces within which they could pursue their own goals and respond to popular interests. The functionaries were able to create these autonomous spaces because it was impossible for the administrative and police units to monitor the entirety of cultural life all the time. In the early 1960s, the administrative functionaries frequently lamented that the functionaries who organised cultural life operated 'in separation' from the administrative leadership.¹ During these years, the administrative and party organs conducted several investigations to assess the extent of this problem. For example, in 1962, the *Bezirk* leadership of the SED launched an analysis into the utilisation of funds in a few selected areas, and uncovered that some of the local cultural functionaries had seriously abused state funds. In Woltersdorf, functionaries handed in a finance plan for a village club to the *Kreis* Council, and the club received 1580 Marks. It transpired, however, that this club did not exist. The money was spent, among other things, on a record player for a dance group that turned out not to exist. Similarly, in Luckenwalde, funds that were allocated to the local cultural institution for the organisation of village festivals were spent on alcoholic drinks, food and cigarettes.² This gross misuse of funds, which only came to light in a random check by the party organisation, highlights that there were clear boundaries to the control that the administrative functionaries could exercise over the cultural field.

These kinds of misdemeanours had primarily been caused by very poor local administration. In the early 1960s, the local administrative functionaries were often criticised by the higher authorities for their failure to monitor the organisation of cultural life adequately and for not keeping a tap on grass root functionaries.³ Throughout the remainder of the 1960s and 1970s, the central party leadership attempted to rectify this problem by introducing more controlling bodies and by

¹ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Bezirksvorstand Potsdam (FDGB) Nr. 1701, *Bezirksvorstand, Kommission Kultur und Bildung, Einschätzung der Pläne der gewerkschaftlichen Klubhäuser des Bezirks Potsdam zur Direktive vom 14.3.62, 2.4.64*; BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1680, *Protokoll der Kulturkonferenz im Hause der DSF, 17.1.62*, p.2: at this conference, the participants are alerted to the case of a functionary, who is the only person in charge in cultural life in her factory and can neither develop the 'intellectual/spiritual and cultural life' in the brigades on her own nor look after the *Kulturobmänner* single-handed.

² BLHA Rep. 530 Bezirksleitung der SED (SED) Nr. 1843, *Bericht über einige Untersuchungen der Finanzierung neuer Formen der kulturellen Massenarbeit, 23.6.62*; for another example: Landkreis Oberhavel, Kreis- und Verwaltungsarchiv, Oranienburg (LkO) III 91 Gransee, *Bezirksinspektion Potsdam, Zusammengefasster Bericht über die wichtigsten Revisionsergebnisse auf dem Gebiet Kultur, 3.9.64*.

³ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 3232 *Einschätzung zum Fest der Lebensfreunde und der Volkskunst in Falkensee vom 29. August bis 6. September 1964*, p.5.

increasing the administrative tasks of functionaries working at all levels of the cultural system.⁴ These measures also had their limitations, however. While they produced more communication between functionaries, they never undermined the existence of autonomous spaces at the grassroots: the administrative functionaries simply did not have the staff or the means to control all aspects of cultural life at the grassroots.⁵

The shortcomings of the administration were exacerbated by another factor: the executive functionaries cultural often believed that they were experts in their fields. They were convinced that they knew far more about their cultural area than someone who was on the outside, no matter how 'politically-ideologically' qualified these outsiders were. These functionaries consequently had a strong desire to organise cultural life according to their own beliefs. Their ideas about how to organise cultural life could, however, be at odds with the intentions of the dictates from the centre. In the early 1960s, some executive and local administrative functionaries still articulated a feeling of superiority in a gentle but firm manner to the administrative functionaries in order to push through their views. This is evident in a letter written to the *Bezirk* leadership of the FDGB in 1965 from a functionary who led a club in Ludwigsfelde. The club's choir had been selected to sing at the *Bezirk* festival on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the FDGB. At the beginning of her letter to the *Bezirk* leadership, the functionary expresses her gratitude for this great honour, and outlines that the choir was looking forward to the event. There was, however, a problem with singing the cantata 'Arbeit, Arbeit Wundermacht', whose text had been written by Hans Marchwitza and whose music was composed by her colleague K. The functionary from the club in Ludwigsfelde insisted that she and the rest of the choir revered Hans Marchwitza and the composer of the cantata. Nevertheless, 'it is precisely because of these reasons, and because, at the end of the day, a *Bezirk* event has to have a high artistic level and a grand political message that we have decided to reject the cantata'. The reason for rejecting the cantata was entirely based on a musician's perspective: the functionary believed it was wrong in

⁴ See second half of this chapter, as well as Chapter 7, pp. 177-180, pp.186-188.

⁵ BLHA Rep. 538 Kulturbund der DDR, Bezirksvorstand Potsdam (KB) Nr. 32, *Bericht über die Kreisverbandskonferenz in Gransee, 19.09.70*: The administrative leadership of *Kreis* Gransee organised a conference, but hardly any circle leaders attended; the conference had to be cancelled; BLHA Rep. 503 Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz (CFWP) Nr. 4986, *Hinweise zur Aussprache der Betriebsdirektion mit Vertretern der Volkskunstgruppen, 28.9.72*, p.2: the factory does not have the staff to look after the cultural groups on a regular basis; see also BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 23, *Protokoll der Sitzung des Kreisvorstandes, 5.12.73*: at an organised seminar, none of the invited circle leaders turned up.

its 'compositional conception', as it lacked a climax and was too fast to sing well. She wrote that she was sure that the composer would defend his work against her opinion, 'but is it really such a disgrace to admit that one has written a bad cantata?'. At the same time, to avoid being reprimanded by the *Bezirk* leadership, the functionary expressed that she did not dislike singing modern socialist works. She suggested singing another cantata with a text from Hans Marchwitza or Johannes R. Becher.⁶

This functionary's desire to sing a cantata that was acceptable to her and the choir members overrode the urge not to contradict the FDGB *Bezirk* leadership's choice of performance material at a key political event. The functionary believed that her understanding of the musical field was greater than that of the *Bezirk* leadership, and that she could convince them with a rational argument. Whilst her letter was quite bold about her desires, she was also aware that her request was controversial, as she questioned the assessment of the functionaries in the FDGB *Bezirk* leadership. She tried to use several techniques to cushion the blow of her words, by underlining her dedication to the festival, to Hans Marchwitza and to the cantata's composer. Furthermore, at the end of her letter, she writes, apologetically, 'I ask you to pardon this ruthless openness, but it has to be done to further a good cause'.

This kind of 'ruthless openness' of cultural functionaries was only evident in the early 1960s. The administrative leadership was usually so preoccupied with 'political-ideological' concerns, and was convinced that their evaluation of a situation was correct, that rational argument from lower ranking functionaries did not usually have much effect.⁷ The executive functionaries' desire to steer the course of events in a particular direction according to their own judgement did not decline, however. When executive cultural functionaries implemented their own ideas, they

⁶ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1701, *Brief von H. N., Klub in Ludwigsfelde, 3.3.1965*; for a similar example, see BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1680, *Klubleitung Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau Wildau, über das Jahr 1961*: the leader of this club refused to bow to a directive from the *Kreis* leadership about the utilisation of the club house, and states that on weekends, she wishes there to be no 'endless conferences' in her club house to avoid alienating people. This stubborn attitude was even evident among functionaries in local administrative positions: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe, Kreissekretär S., Königswusterhausen, 2.6.66*: this functionary refuses to carry on exercising her roles unless the 'improper and uncalled for interference of the city administration ceases'.

⁷ Ina Merkel, ' "...in Hoyerswerda leben jedenfalls keine so kleinen viereckigen Menschen". Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR', in Alf Lütke, Peter Becker (eds.), *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster: Die DDR und ihre Texte. Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 285-286; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr 306, *Bezirksleitung der SED Potsdam an die 1. Sekretäre der Kreisleitungen der SED und Parteisekretär der Grundorganisationen, 25.5.66*, p.2; *ibid. SED Bezirksleitung Potsdam, Arbeitsgruppe Teltow, Arbeitsprogramm für die weitere Tätigkeit der AG im Raum Teltow - in Reaktion auf das 11 Plenum, 29.3.66*, p.10.

learned to do so more beneath the surface – or, in other words, within the available spaces of autonomy. The practice of steering cultural life according to their own judgment only became evident when the opinions of two functionaries clashed, and one of them turned to the higher administrative levels seeking support for his/her methods. In 1969, for example, a doctor tried to found a reading circle in his local intellectuals' club. In an *Eingabe* to the *Kulturbund*, he described how he had considered certain literary works to begin the first discussions in the reading circle. Among these were *Die Ermittlung* by Peter Weiss and *Menetekel* by Friedrich Wolf. He was unable to proceed with these ideas, however, because of the obstruction from the local librarian. This librarian, so the doctor lamented, had once tried to set up a literary circle, but had failed. She still seemed to consider herself the expert on this matter, nevertheless, and had quite strong beliefs about which kinds of books were suitable for such a circle. She refused to make *Die Ermittlung* available because the material would alienate the readership. Furthermore, she claimed that she could not hand over any books by Friedrich Wolf, because she believed his works had been singled out as undesirable by the censors (which wasn't the case, the doctor found out). Faced with these difficulties, the doctor laid down his post, and, due to the lack of a successor, the literary circle never became a reality. He turned to the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund*, nevertheless, to complain.⁸ In this example, the functionaries both exhibit a strong conviction of their own expertise. Both the doctor and the librarian had a certain idea of the texts they considered appropriate for the reading circle. The librarian was ready to ignore central censorship decisions in her selection of suitable material – she saw herself as a much better judge of what kind of literature was appropriate than the censors in East Berlin.

These examples show that executive cultural functionaries had their own agenda and were convinced about their own expertise. Coupled with frequently lacking checks on how cultural life was being organised, this meant that the organisation of cultural life was decidedly determined by the input of individual functionaries. But there was one factor that, in turn, determined the actions of the functionaries: they had to consider the interests and needs of their participants.

⁸ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe aus S von Dr. K., an den Präsident des Deutschen Kulturbundes*, (no date, but the reply letter was written in May 1969, hence the *Eingabe* was probably written in 1969). To view an example from the 1970s: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 363, *Informationsbericht November 1974*, p.2: Here, an administrative functionary takes matters into her own hands and chastises other functionaries without seeking consultation.

The People's Representatives

As a result of being motivated by a specific cultural interest, the executive cultural functionaries desired to see their field functioning well – otherwise their involvement became more of a burden than a factor of enjoyment. If, for example, a functionary took over the leadership of a particular circle, but had to deal with uncommitted members who never turned up to meetings, his/her enthusiasm for leading the circle could decline very quickly.⁹ The only way functionaries could guarantee the flourishing of cultural life, however, was to ensure that participants were animated and pleased about the state of their cultural activities. If decisions from higher levels of authority threatened to alienate participants, then the cultural functionaries modified these dictates to suit the situation at the grassroots. The executive functionaries' inclination to implement compromises was hugely beneficial for the stability and the functioning of cultural life in the GDR. Even though the functionaries' dedication to cultural life was not necessarily borne out of commitment to the SED, but out of personal motivations, their work did, in the long run, benefit the dictatorship far more than political loyalty could ever have done. They ensured that cultural life satisfied popular interests. This could keep discontent at bay and ensured that people remained involved in the organised cultural structures.

Some functionary compromises bent the rules more than others. In some cases, the compromises merely constituted a rescheduling of events to ensure that more people could attend. In Nauen, for example, the organisers of the local *Kulturbund* group concluded that their events were not attended enough. It would have been more in line with the *Kulturbund's* policies to have several events every month, and to try to increase the attendance levels at these different events. The leaders of the local *Kulturbund* groups, however, decided that they would limit themselves to one event a month, and shift the meeting day to a Sunday, to ensure

⁹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *AG Philatelie Nauen, Rechenschaftsbericht für das Jahr 1969*, 4.4.70, p.1-2; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Letter from P., Vorsitzender der AG Fürstenberg*, 14.7.62: the work in his circle is not functioning properly because the leading functionary cannot satisfy the members' demands for stamps. He tries to get help from the *Bezirk* leadership, but without much success. He considers dissolving the circle. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *An die Bezirkskommission Philatelie aus Nauen*, 14.11.66, p.2: this report outlines that, as a result of organisational problems, many people were losing the desire ('Lust') to take on functionary roles.

that people would attend them in greater numbers. Nothing else would be able to attract the crowds, they found.¹⁰

Not all compromises revolved around pure organisational matters, however. Many cultural functionaries modified the political dictates quite significantly in order to respond to the situation on the ground. In 1972, for example, the leader of a lay theatre circle was attacked for writing and performing pieces that lacked 'artistic quality', and were not suitable for supporting the cultural project of the SED. He defended his actions, however, by arguing: 'Even if the plays we put on lack in the artistic quality of their presentation, they are still effective through their folksy manner, and if we are able to draw people away from their television to attend a joint event and to satisfy them there, then this modest work also contains good quality. Whatever happens, I personally will continue to do my best to fight against arrogance and indifference in our cultural work'.¹¹ This functionary was trying his best to write plays that attracted as many people as possible. His desire to increase the attendance levels was in line with official policy. He found, however, that he could only fulfil this goal by putting on more 'lowbrow' performances, which was criticised. Despite being reproached for his work, however, he stuck firmly by his opinion that reaching out to people was preferable to fulfilling inflated demands for 'artistic' quality.

The circumvention of certain dictates can also clearly be seen in the examples of cultural life in the brigades in factories. From the early 1960s onwards, it was clear that the SED's ideal of bringing 'highbrow' culture to the working class was failing. The *Kulturobmänner* in the individual brigades were officially required to organise visits to the theatre, to a concert or to the museum. But these kinds of cultural endeavours did not, so the *Kulturobmänner* found, attract the interest of many workers. The majority of the workers preferred far more 'lowbrow' activities, like going on family outings or engaging in joint activities like playing card games. As these were the only kinds of activities that were frequented on a regular basis, these were the ones that the functionaries chose to organise.¹²

¹⁰ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Protokoll über die Mitgliederversammlung der Ortsgruppen Nauen des Kulturbundes der DDR*, 16.2.75, p. 2.

¹¹ BLHA Rep. 426 Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Potsdam (BfK) Nr. 249, *Letter from E.S. to R. in the Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Potsdam, from Kyritz*, 28.9.1972, p. 2.

¹² See Chapter 5, pp. 126-129 and Chapter 6, pp. 146-149.

While these compromises existed throughout the middle period¹³, they became more evident in the 1970s, when functionaries were not only more ready to bend the rules, but were also quite bold about it vis-à-vis higher authorities. This did not mean that they questioned the decisions of higher authorities – the previous section has shown that the assessment of the leading administrative functionaries on artistic matters was no longer challenged by executive functionaries from the mid-1960s onwards. Nevertheless, executive functionaries became more assertive about having to retreat before certain realities and insisted that they were forced to modify certain dictates in order to organise cultural life adequately. In particular, the executive functionaries had difficulties ensuring high attendance levels at events that were overtly political. Consequently, many functionaries tried to circumvent the ‘political-ideological’ content of the cultural activities they organised to avoid alienating people.¹⁴ This was not designed to question the cultural model of the party or to undermine the supremacy of the SED. It was just an attempt to make cultural life more appealing for the participants. In the 1970s, functionaries became more open about the need to adapt certain dictates. The aforementioned example about the functionary who wrote plays of a ‘lowbrow’ nature to attract more people has already highlighted this. The boldness of executive functionaries in the 1970s had resulted from gradual changes in cultural policy over the course of the 1960s, which insisted that organised cultural life had to focus on people’s interests more broadly.¹⁵

¹³ For an example from the 1960s, see: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 420, *Zuarbeit für den Plan über kulturelle Massenarbeit bei der Kreisleitung der SED für die wesentlichen Aufgaben des Deutschen Kulturbundes*, 28.10.66, p.4: the individual clubs sometimes ignored the directives of the Kulturbund when they organised their own events; BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB 1701, *Protokoll einer Klub Besprechung* 22.11.65, p.2.

¹⁴ StA Potsdam Nr. 5987, *Ergebnisse der Arbeit vom Januar-März 1974, Anlage 2, Analyse zur kulturpolitischen Arbeit, 1. Halbjahr 74*: the functionaries complain that they need to put in immense efforts to attract people to political-ideological events, but still do not manage to draw in many people. They prefer to focus on events where it is ‘relatively easy to awaken people’s interest’ in order to ‘secure the continuing existence of the club’, see also *Anlage 1* of this document: the events that attract people are playing Skat, staging cabarets and organising sociable events; in order to meet the political requirements, they plan a minimum of ‘political-ideological’ events: collecting funds for ‘solidarity’, helping the preparation of elections and supporting ‘Proletarian Internationalism’; see also Stadtarchiv Potsdam (StA Potsdam) Kulturbund Nr. 55, *Rechenschaftsbericht zur Mitgliederversammlung der Ortsgruppe Wilhelmshorst des Kulturbundes der DDR, 1.3.75*, p. 2, side 69: despite a lot of effort, only 11 people turned up to a political-ideological discussion; for an example from the late 1960s: StA Potsdam Nr. 3111/1, *Jahresanalyse Kreiskulturhaus Babelsberg 1968*, pp.4-5: these functionaries want to develop ‘appealing forms of sociability by developing proven forms [of cultural activity] in unison’: for example, they combined Jazz with Chanson, literature and film, or Beat with Soviet Poetry, which attracted new guests. Another way of attracting new people, they found, was to organise baking events for Christmas and discussions on how to look after pets.

¹⁵ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 357, *VEB Zahnradwerk Pritzwalk, Erfahrungsbericht, 17.11.78*, pp.4-5: the functionaries can be far more flexible, and more open about their compromises: in this factory

Chapters 7 and 8 describe how the SED party leaders increasingly acceded to people's lowbrow taste, and promised to satisfy popular interests even if they were 'lowbrow'. This policy change meant that functionaries felt encouraged to compromise, and that they could defend their compromises to higher authorities. In factories for example, executive functionaries could concentrate on organising family outings rather than 'highbrow' cultural events and call this 'cultural activity', without having to worry about circumventing official dictates.¹⁶ The potential for conflict and friction was thus vastly reduced. Cultural functionaries could increasingly respond to people's interests and minimise the risk of being reproached.

Over the course of the 1960s, even the local administrative functionaries could also increasingly and legitimately engage in compromises and respond to people's needs. The directives were still implemented as best as possible by the administrative functionaries, but now they were at liberty to relax them to suit particular circumstances. They, hence, engaged in compromises similarly to the executive functionaries. This can be seen from a record of a *Kreis* leadership plenary session of the Kulturbund in *Kreis* Nauen in November 1972:

The Chair: According to the plan, there has to be a monthly Wednesday talk, but that is not realisable. From experience, it can be said that Wednesday talks are not as well frequented as club evenings on weekends. The latest example of this was the last Wednesday paper given by Mrs I, which, despite the prominent speaker, was attended by about 25 guests. Financing the Wednesday evenings is far too costly considering the attendance levels.

Kulturbund delegate 1: The *Bezirk* conference was quite resolute about how important it is for the Kulturbund to stage these Wednesday talks.

Kulturbund delegate 2: We need to decide on the character of these Wednesday talks. Having a club evening with the brigades is out of the question. The majority of the workers have to get up at 5 am and go to bed at 10 pm in order to be ready for work in the factory. What would be best would be to have Wednesday talks with relatively few people and find experts from their own ranks. Club evenings with brigades have to take place on weekends.¹⁷

In a sense, the executive and local administrative functionaries were the people's representatives.¹⁸ They did not only adapt to the local situation, but they

they combine sociability and art, and even use alcohol consumption to tempt people to participate at cultural events.

¹⁶ BLHA Rep. 401 *Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes (RdB) Nr. 30778, Informationsbericht 3, Erfahrungen und Ergebnisse bei der Durchführung der Festlegungen der gemeinsamen Tagung des Präsidiums des Nationalrates der Nationale Front und des Ministeriums für Kultur, 28.9.70.*

¹⁷ BLHA, Rep 538 KB Nr. 363, *Protokoll in Falkensee; Kreisleitungssitzung, 15.11.1972, p. 1-2.* See also Chapter 7, pp. 185-186.

¹⁸ The low-level functionaries frequently identified with the participants to a high degree and they shared their views, which is evident from the fact that they tended to use only the first person plural when they wrote to higher authorities about grievances. See, for example, the above *Eingabe* of the

could also become people's mouthpieces. When a problem emerged, they spoke on behalf of themselves and their participants to the higher levels of authority to address any grievances.¹⁹ The following example illustrates that cultural functionaries were prepared to defend their participants' interests to a higher authority. In this example, a cultural functionary actually accuses the Kulturbund of showing a lack of solidarity with Vietnam, which was quite a strong indictment to make considering the ideological importance of the Vietnam War. This example is an extract from a letter by the *Kreis* Commission of the stamp collectors, addressed to the *Bezirk* leadership of the Kulturbund:

In mid-April we received a postage of 111 materials to be distributed among our members ... but as far as the Solidarity Stamps and the stamps for the double anniversary '30 years philatelists in the Kulturbund – 10 years Philatelists Union' are concerned, which our friends have been waiting for since the beginning of April, we unfortunately hear nothing from our *Bezirk* leadership ... our friends would like to criticise this, particularly regarding the fact that this represents an underestimation of the action of solidarity with Vietnam, which is not understandable.²⁰

The tone of the functionary in this letter suggests that she is not just carrying out a complaint formulated by the other participants, but actually shares the indignation of the participants. This is a very important realisation: the identification of functionaries with their participants could be quite high, which induced them on to pester higher-ranking administrative functionaries.²¹ Functionaries even showed a readiness to protect and shield their participants against outside interference. If it materialised that a member of a cultural group had got into trouble, cultural

choir leader who did not want to sing the cantata 'Arbeit, Arbeit, Wundermacht', who emphasised that she represented her group by saying, 'we have studied the cantata in depth ... we have spent a long time making sure that we have not made a mistake'. See also Anette Leo, 'Bilder mit und ohne Fragezeichen. Der FDGB, die Arbeiterklasse und die bildende Kunst', in Dokumentationszentrum Kunst der DDR (ed.), *Volkseigene Bilder, Kunstbesitz von Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR* (Berlin: Metropol, 1999), pp. 91-106: Leo argues that, 'when they [the functionaries] spoke of the working class, they were referring to themselves, and this gave them legitimisation for their actions'.

¹⁹ StA Potsdam Nr. 2773, *Eingabe über den Jugendklub, 12.11.63* and *Eingabenbehandlung der Eingabe Nr. 53 vom 12.11.63*: in this case, the leader of a youth club intervened on behalf of his members and secured the continuation of their club evenings.

²⁰ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, *Schreiben von dem Kreisvorstand des Philatelistenverbandes an den Bezirksvorstand des Philatelistenverbandes im Kulturbund, 6.05.79*.

²¹ *ibid.*, *Brief von W and Kü, 21.6.71*; For another example, see BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Schreiben von W. an den Deutschen Kulturbund, 8.11.63*: in this case, a functionary is so incensed about the poor treatment of his and his participants' work that he resigns from his post.

functionaries either tried to hush it up or intervened to ensure that no further action was taken against the individual.²²

Alongside the participants, the functionaries tried to fight for acceptable conditions in which they themselves and their participants could exercise their cultural inclinations.²³ In doing so, the executive functionaries became quite clever at exploiting certain situations. With the passing of time, they had learned how to phrase their demands in order to ensure that they were fulfilled. Functionaries understood how to exploit the weaknesses of the system in order to get what they and their participants wanted. For example, the executive functionaries knew that there were certain moments when the cultural structures were more exploitable. There was more money available for the organisation of public cultural events than there was for ordinary cultural activity. This meant cultural functionaries had to know how to 'time' their demands: if there was a shortage of materials in a particular cultural circle, functionaries waited until a workers' festival, a celebration day or a state visit before asking for the material, claiming that without it, the cultural group would not be able to perform at its highest standards, thus risking the positive image of the GDR. In these situations, functionaries could be sure to receive what they asked for.²⁴

The loyalty that executive functionaries exhibited towards their participants was reciprocated. The members of cultural clubs, circles and institutions could show signs of protectiveness towards functionaries. This is illustrated in the example of a leader of a club for intellectuals, who was ousted from her position by the *Bezirk* leadership. This cultural functionary complained about her treatment by the means of

²² StA Potsdam Nr. 3110, *Überprüfung der Wirksamkeit der Jugendklubhäuser der Jugendklubs*, 9.12.65, p.6: in this case, any disciplinary procedures were dealt with internally, and the administration or police were not involved; See also chapter 6, pp. 140-143.

²³ Complaints like the following were very common: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Schreiben betr. Bereitstellung eines Kulturraumes für die Zusammenkünfte der AG*, 14.6.66: this circle tried to secure a room for exercising their hobby regularly; for a similar example, see BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Bericht über die Kreisverbandskonferenz in Gransee*, 2.11.70.

²⁴ BLHA Rep. 502, Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg Nr. 2101, *Konzeption des Arbeitervarietes zur Vorbereitung von Programmbeiträgen zum 60. Jahrestag der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution und zu den 17. Arbeiterfestspielen 1978*, 8.2.77; after 11 pages that list the great plans that these functionaries had for the festivities around the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1917 and the preparation of the *Betriebsfestspiele* (factory celebration games), the document then includes a list of shortages that exist in the cultural sphere, which need to be addressed for these celebrations to go ahead; for an example from the 1960s: LkO III 89 Kreis Gransee, *Rat der Gemeinde Löwenberg an die Abteilung Kultur Gransee, betr. Zuschuss für kulturelle Zwecke*, 24.10.61: here, the functionaries ask for more funds in order to 'give Löwenberg the possibility for cultural enrichment'.

an *Eingabe*, and she even consulted a lawyer on this matter.²⁵ Nevertheless, she was neither restored to her former position, nor could she find out why she had been dismissed. Her case sparked off a very strong protest from one of the former members of her club. The protester wrote an *Eingabe* complaining bitterly about her treatment at the hands of the Kulturbund:

Perhaps this *Eingabe* will be brought into connection with the former leader of the club of the intelligentsia, whose position was terminated for reasons not known to me... A year ago, I terminated the direct debit with the building society of 3 marks per month to the Kulturbund and have since not taken up any further invitations by the new leadership.²⁶

The protester attached his *Eingabe* to a letter from the dismissed cultural functionary, in which she (the dismissed functionary) described his reasons for discontinuing his membership with the Kulturbund:

Herewith I confirm that a year ago you [the protestor] informed me that you had ended your membership, because you only took pleasure in club evenings in my [club] house, which had a high standard, where cultural activity went hand in hand with the best form of care.²⁷

Without the loyalty and the readiness to defend each other's interests, the smooth running of the cultural process would have been seriously hampered. Cultural functionaries relied on good communication with their members because it was their participation that ultimately made cultural life work. The participants felt that the cultural functionaries were as much their representatives as the SED's.

Interaction between Functionaries

The ability of the executive and local administrative functionaries to secure autonomous spaces and guide certain aspects of cultural life according to their own judgment was a prevalent aspect of cultural life – but it had its limitations. It was impossible to entirely evade the involvement of higher-ranking administrative functionaries in the organisation of cultural life. But how did grass root functionaries

²⁵ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175 *Eingabe von dem Rechtsanwalt G. R. Im Namen von Frau O, 1974.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid. Eingabe an die Bezirksleitung des Kulturbundes, 1975 and ibid. letter from Frau O, 1.9.75.* This kind of loyalty towards the functionaries existed throughout the history of the GDR: BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei Potsdam Nr. 309: *Abschlussbericht über den Vorgang Männchor in M (no date), side 2:* here, the leader of the choir fled to West Berlin. On the 25th anniversary of the choir, the members travelled to West Berlin and sang a song for him.

perceive the interaction with those in higher levels of authority? Did they always regard the interference from administrative functionaries as a hindrance or annoyance? This assumption seems plausible when considering that outside interference could bring with it unwanted interference and could entail irritating administrative burdens. Yet, the higher-ranking administrative functionaries were not only perceived as chastising figures of authority. They could also form part of the support network that grass root cultural functionaries relied on.

Increasing Administrative Burdens

All executive functionaries were expected to fulfil certain administrative and organisational tasks. They had to keep records of membership statistics, they had to write reports about the development of their area and they had to host a minimum number of 'political-ideological' events. Even honorary functionaries with very little authority and responsibility had to fulfil such administrative tasks.²⁸ The administrative functionaries were responsible for ensuring that the executive functionaries performed these duties adequately. Consequently, the two had to interact in one form or another. In order to highlight the interaction between administrative and executive functionaries, this subsection will focus in particular on the *Kulturbund*. The self-contained nature of this organisation makes it a very good example for highlighting the nature of administrative interference as well as changes that occurred over the 1960s and 1970s. During the discussion, other examples will be drawn on to give a fully rounded picture.

It was not easy for the administrative functionaries to ensure that subordinate executive and administrative functionaries fulfilled the administrative tasks. This was particularly evident in the 1960s. Partly, it was caused by the ineptitudes of the local administrative functionaries. The administrative *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund* struggled to ensure that the local administrative functionaries performed their tasks correctly in the 1960s. One particular example, taken from a *Kreis* at the edge of the *Bezirk*, highlights this problem. In this *Kreis*, functionary W. was responsible for the *Kulturbund's* Philatelist Union in his locality. But he was more of a stamp-collecting enthusiast than an administrator. This does not mean to say that he lacked dedication;

²⁸ StA Potsdam 2774, *Zur Berichterstattung über eingeleitete Massnahmen zum Ministerratsbeschluss vom 7.11.63, 14.12.63*; for a later example, see: BLHA Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 240, *Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit der DDR, Dezember 77, p.11.*

quite the contrary, he was in frequent communication with functionary K. in the *Bezirk Kulturbund* Philatelist Union. He was, however, utterly incapable of doing his job. The correspondence between the two functionaries shows that functionary W was an incredible burden to K. He turned to her with small problems and he constantly made mistakes when following standardised procedures. For K, this added to her already unmanageable workload, because she frequently needed to remind him about how to do his duties. At times, W drove K to despair, and on one occasion, she wrote him a letter saying: 'Please excuse my long silence, but if you knew what kind of things go on here sometimes! Many things come in, which are much more urgent'.²⁹ For the *Bezirk* administrative leadership, it was therefore quite a strenuous task to oversee the functionaries working at the *Kreis* level during the 1960s.

The situation began to improve with the 1970s, however. The administrative functionaries in the *Bezirk* became more forceful in ensuring that the local functionaries performed their duties. They began to punish executive functionaries who neglected their administrative tasks. For example, if leaders of cultural circles did not hand in their reports on time in the 1970s, the funds of the circle they led could be frozen, and restrictions were imposed on the circle members. In stamp collecting circles, the stamps that were distributed through the *Kulturbund* could be withheld and the means for exchanging stamps with collectors in other countries could be restricted.³⁰ These methods proved to be quite effective. When the circle leaders saw that their hobbies were in danger, they responded immediately. This was the case, for example, with a small stamp collectors' circle in Neuruppin. In 1972, this circle was reprimanded by functionary K from the *Bezirk* leadership: 'Unfortunately, until today, we have not received any [reports] from you. Therefore, we are forced to freeze the 'supplementary material' for all members. At the same time, we are forced to cancel the 'new material' for members E, A and G'. It was difficult enough for stamp collectors to get hold of stamps even through the *Kulturbund*³¹, but having the regular stamp deliveries cancelled was devastating for

²⁹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, see correspondence between W., Kü. and Kr. For other examples, see: BLHA Rep. 538 Nr. 34 *Brief an BAG Königs-Wusterhausen, 10.12.63*; LkO III 90, Kreis Gransee, *Rat der Gemeinde an den Rat des Kreises Gransee, betr. Finanzierung Dorfklub II Halbjahr 1962 und für das Jahr 1963*: in this case, a village club used up its annual finances in the first half of the year; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Letter from S. 11.9.68*.

³⁰ Rep. 538 KB der DDR Nr. 24, *Postkarte von W. an Kü, 5.8.72*.

³¹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, *Letter to K. in the Bezirk leadership of the Philatelist Union, 24.11.62*: In this letter, an individual complained about problems receiving stamps. He addressed the *Bezirk* secretary of the philatelist union with the familiar 'Du' and asks him: 'Imagine I were to subscribe to a newspaper, which I received on a daily basis, and when important materials are published, they [the

dedicated collectors. Thus, on the same day as receiving the letter, the functionary leading the circle wrote back an embittered letter, explaining that he had been ill. He added 'as far as I am aware, these kinds of methods are not usual in our state, when instead you should enlighten and help'. He does, nevertheless, include some details about the active members of the circle and about his attempts to keep the work going in order to reverse the decision of the *Bezirk* leadership to freeze the circle's stamp deliveries. His letter was not the only one that was written, moreover. The threat of withholding stamp deliveries also spurred someone else into action, namely member G (whose 'new material' was due to be cancelled). He had once led the circle and had given up the leadership a year earlier. He hastily informed the *Bezirk* leadership about membership details of the circle, describing the nature of their recent meetings and complaining about the current functionary leading the circle. In order to smoothen ruffled feathers even further, he added that he was prepared to take over the leadership of the circle once more and recruit some new members.³²

This example highlights how cultural functionaries had to get used to growing levels of outside involvement in cultural life. In the 1970s, they could not get away with ignoring outside interference either if they wanted their activities to run smoothly.³³ The *Kulturbund* was not the only organisation where this development was evident. The demand for functionaries to write regular reports and keep detailed membership statistics grew consistently throughout the 1960s in all areas of the cultural sphere. By the early 1970s, the executive and local administrative functionaries were now expected to write quarterly reports - a few years earlier, an annual update would have sufficed.³⁴ While the functionaries had to get used to the increasing report writing, they found their own ways of dealing with it. Their readiness to report problematic issues declined. In the earlier years, they were still very keen to describe numerous problems they were having in organising cultural life. Over the course of the late 1960s and 1970s, this changed. Furthermore, the more reports functionaries had to write in the 1970s, the more similar these

papers] are not delivered, but sold at a higher price at the newspaper stand. What would you say to that?'

³² BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 25, *Schreiben Kü an W.* 14.2.72; *ibid. Antwort von W.* 15.2.72; *ibid. Antwort von G.*, 16.2.72.

³³ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 163, *Zentrale AG Terrarienkunde und Feldherpetologie Kurzinformation 3-4/1976*, 'Es sieht schlimmer aus als es ist', pp.2-4.

³⁴ In the 1970s, the administrative leadership seemed to regard writing more and more reports and planning cultural life in advance as the solution to all problems: BLHA, Rep. 401 *Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam (RdB) Nr. 6468, Ständige Kommission geistig-kulturelles Leben und Freizeitgestaltung des Bezirkstages über den Einsatz in der Kooperation Gerdshagen am 21.6.72.*

reports became. Functionaries now used common phraseology and repetitive structures when writing reports. Problems were either reported in a vague and generalising tone, so that the blame could not be attributed to the functionary or the problem discussions took place in a rehearsed manner.³⁵

Executive functionaries were therefore beginning to get used to a growing unavoidable level of outside interference with the growing administrative demands. This did not mean that they fulfilled all their administrative duties without fail in the 1970s. There were still problems with ineffective and negligent functionaries.³⁶ Nevertheless, the executive functionaries were more acutely aware of the administrative duties that they had to perform. If a report was not sent in on time or a task remained unfilled, this no longer fell by the wayside, but was noticed by the local administrative functionaries. It was then followed up by lengthy excuses from the executive functionaries, explaining that they were suffering from an illness or were overworked, and did not have a lack of will.³⁷

'I can't endure this pressure much longer': Asking for help

The growing outside interference and administrative duties were a restriction of the autonomous development of cultural life in itself – but curiously they also produced a further willingness of executive cultural functionaries to surrender their independent spaces. As ever growing demands were being levied on cultural functionaries by higher levels of authority, the local and grass root cultural functionaries began to expect something in return for meeting these demands: namely to receive the aid and support that was needed to fulfil these demands. The high levels of outside interference and pressures did, therefore, not cause greater

³⁵ Taking as an example the collected reports from the 1970s of the Kulturbund in Pritzwalk in BLHA Rep. 538 Kulturbund Bezirk Potsdam Nr. 357 shows a stark increase in reports that are written compared to the 1960s. See *Quartalsbericht I. Quartal 1974*, *Quartalsbericht I Quartal 1975*, and *Quartalsbericht III Quartal 1976*. These three reports include no more than these vague hints at problems. As the frequency of the reports increase, the willingness to discuss problems declines: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr 357, *Quartalsberichte 1972-1976*.

³⁶ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *letter from K. to S., 16.8.72*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Vorsitzender der BAG im VEB Schiffselektronik, in einem Brief an Philatelistenverband im Bezirksvorstand, 12.3.79*: In this case, the leader of a circle threw a lot of material from the previous year away, so when asked for a receipt, he is unable to find it for quite some time; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 26, *Brief vom Bezirkskreissekretär an den Philatelistenverband der DDR, 19.09.1980*.

³⁷ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Kreisvorstand der Philatelisten an den Bundesvorstand der Philatelisten - Mitgliederstatistiken der Kreisverbandes Gransee, 23.2.79*; the analysis below will show that another way of dealing with the attribution of blame was to blame all problems on a higher ranking functionary.

withdrawal into autonomous spaces. Instead, they fostered a greater willingness to interact with cultural functionaries in higher positions of authority in order to secure their support, which became particularly evident in the late 1960s and 1970s.

This state of affairs will, first of all, be illustrated by drawing on two examples from *Kreis* Pritzwalk in the 1960s and 1970s. The first example is highly illustrative of the interaction between local and *Bezirk* administrative functionaries. In the early 1960s, the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund* began to make increasing demands on the local administrations. For example, the *Bezirk* Philatelist Union now annually called on the leaders of all *Kreis* Philatelist Commission to meet in Potsdam on a Sunday for a conference. This arrangement did not suit the delegation from *Kreis* Pritzwalk, however, because the *Kreis* was far away from Potsdam. The responsible functionary, who will here be called functionary A, was very unhappy about this state of affairs:

Probably, no one from our *Kreis* will be present at the meeting of the 21.1, because we would have to take the train at 4:49 and would only return at 22:12. Why should we be forced to pay the cost for this trip, when we are already being punished by such a difficult journey?³⁸

The answer from the *Bezirk* was not very sympathetic. The *Bezirk* leadership requested the attendance of at least one member of the *Kreis* Commission, promising only to consider the question of reimbursement once the delegate had arrived in Potsdam.³⁹ The rather stropy functionary in Pritzwalk, however, remained unimpressed by the reply from Potsdam, and sent no one to attend the meeting. As later correspondence revealed, he had been deeply vexed that the *Bezirk* leadership refused to consider the special situation of Pritzwalk, and would not shift the meeting to a more convenient date for the Pritzwalk delegation. Functionary A did not send any delegate to the Potsdam meeting in the subsequent years, as a form of protest. Until 1965, he did send reminders about his reasons for his non-attendance, but in that year, he decided that he had had enough:

Even though I have written several times that on Sundays there is only an impossible connection to Potsdam [nothing has changed]. I will never again send an apology for non-attendance at a meeting in Potsdam on a Sunday.⁴⁰

³⁸ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35, *letter from Pritzwalk to the Bezirk leadership in Potsdam, 10.1.62*

³⁹ *ibid.*, *Reply on the 16.1.62.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, *A letter 'Betr. Tagung in Potsdam', 17.3.65.*

Despite these tensions, the functionary was keen to fulfil his administrative tasks. He was, however, having problems ensuring that the organisation of stamp collecting functioned as it was meant to, and desperately communicated his difficulties to the *Bezirk* leadership in the hope for some sort of aid, guidance, or understanding. For example, the *Kreis* Commission was supposed to see to it that the stamp collectors' circles met on a frequent basis in order to avoid their members collecting without the guidance and supervision of the group. This proved a difficult endeavour in the rural *Kreis* Pritzwalk, however. As functionary A. pointed out:

Our groups are very small groups and are very difficult to reach ... the members are not available during the day because they work. The only times that would be appropriate would be the evenings, but there, travelling there and back is even more difficult to do.⁴¹

These concerns, however, did not provoke much of a response. This prompted functionary A to write an embittered letter of resignation in 1968, in which he attributed his resignation to his age and his wife's disability, which was making the continuation of his role impossible. He did not refrain from making some cutting remarks about the refusal of the *Bezirk* leadership to take his concerns seriously and about the lamentable state of stamp collecting in Pritzwalk.⁴² This functionary's experiences were very frustrating. It was not so much the increasing demand that was placed on him which caused this frustration. Rather, he believed that he had done his best in submitting to the demands from the *Bezirk* leadership, but felt that he had not been met half way. He was bitterly disappointed that his concerns were not taken seriously and that he was not given a helping hand. This is quite a good example for the nature of functionary work in the 1960s. As the responsibility, duties and pressures on local functionaries increased, they communicated with functionaries in higher positions of authority. They had particular grievances and applied to the authoritative functionaries for compromises and guidance. If this help did not materialise, as was the case in this example, the functionaries felt disillusioned and

⁴¹ *ibid.*, *Arbeit der Kreiskommission*, 30.1.64.

⁴² *ibid.*, *Letter on the 18.8.68*.

dejected. If however, the higher levels of authority responded to the functionaries' grievances, then they could make a positive difference, as the next example will show.

The next example also comes from *Kreis* Pritzwalk, and also concerns stamp collecting. It focuses on an honorary executive functionary, who led the main philatelist group in Pritzwalk. This functionary, who will be called functionary B, only joined the *Kulturbund* in 1968.⁴³ In 1969, he already took over the leadership of the Pritzwalk group. Therefore, he did not have a lot of experience or knowledge of the *Kulturbund*, which made his early years as leader of the group difficult. The group's annual report for the year 1969 shows that functionary B was facing some tough challenges:

The leadership of the group in Pritzwalk believes that a repetition of an annual meeting [of stamp collectors] cannot achieve any better results. These meetings are attended, on average, by 13 collectors, most of whom are retired. These collectors are not interested in a thematic collection or in producing items for exhibition. ... There is also not much use in the leader and perhaps three or four other members drawing up a yearly plan, which will only exist on paper. The work of our group has already been criticised by the leader, but there were no changes or suggestions. The work with the young people hardly exists at all – while there are suggestions for the erection of circles, they fail when it comes to who will lead these groups. There is no one to lead them.⁴⁴

In light of these difficulties, the leader of the circle turned to the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund* for help. He wrote the following angry and pleading letter in 1970: 'Years ago, we were promised help from the *Bezirk*. Not just once, but several times. Nothing happened. Our members regard that as a failure to appreciate our circle and its work. Our disappointment still lasts today. We are of the opinion that we can't talk about our problems in Potsdam, but only in Pritzwalk'. Functionary B then launched into an explanation of the difficult situation of the cultural groups, mentioning the high average age on the one hand and people's lack of time on the other. Then he added, 'Had I known then what kind of work I was taking on, I would certainly not have done it. What is missing is not good will, but the right people, who

⁴³ *ibid.*, *Letter to Bezirk leadership in Potsdam*, 18.4.70.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, *Jahreshauptversammlung 1969*, 6.3.70.

would then also take on a youth group. I myself don't know what to do anymore in order to activate the work in Pritzwalk. We would really appreciate some help'.⁴⁵ Functionary B's statements were quite bold. He was unable to fulfil the requirements that were levied on him: he could neither attract young people nor increase the commitment of the older members of the circle. His letter had an effect on the administration of *Bezirk* Potsdam. The *Bezirk* leadership was spurred into action and sent a delegation to Pritzwalk.⁴⁶ Functionary B's next annual report showed gratitude about the *Bezirk*'s willingness to help:

In June, we had an important conference in our cultural house, where we welcomed as our guests Herr K, the *Bezirk*'s chair of the philatelist union and Frau U, *Bezirk* Secretary. This conference was designed to ameliorate the work of the Pritzwalk group. In response to the inspiration that Herr K gave us, we decided to go more public with stamp collecting and become more active. This resulted in a little publicity show we hosted in December 1970 in the *Kreis* cultural house, where it was possible to exchange stamps. The public was informed by articles in the press, advertisement signs and personal invitations. ... Most of our active members made themselves available [to help out] in a selfless manner for carrying out this event ... The population took part quite numerously. Careful estimates name 250-300 people.⁴⁷

The involvement of the *Bezirk* functionaries therefore had a positive effect and spurred the work of the circle on. There was, however, also a bitter pill for the philatelist group to swallow. Despite all their efforts, not a single delegate from the *Kreis* Council, or the City Council attended the event, which was perceived very negatively.⁴⁸ Moreover, whilst the help from the *Bezirk* leadership had resulted in a short-term boost for the circle, this was not backed up by long-term plans. In the long run, this very brief infusion of support could not work miracles for the circle. By 1978, all the old problems had returned to haunt the circle's leader. Nevertheless, by that time, the December event had become a tradition for the circle, and enjoyed high visitor numbers, and the circle had managed to establish much better lines of communication with some administrative functionaries in the *Kreis*.⁴⁹ The calls for help in 1970 had therefore helped the circle along a little.

Going into these two examples in such detail was necessary to show that, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, cultural functionaries, both in local administrative jobs and in executive positions actively sought outside involvement and demanded

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, *Letter to the Bezirk leadership in Potsdam*, 18.4.70.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, *Reply on the 2.5.70*.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, *Jahresbericht 1970*.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, *Einschätzung über den Stand des Wettbewerbs des Kreisverbandes Philatelie Pritzwalk*, 1978.

to be heard by the higher levels of the administration. Of course, so far, these examples have been limited to the *Kulturbund*. Very similar situations existed across the board. In factories, for example, executive cultural functionaries had strong grievances about neglect from administrative functionaries in higher positions of authority. The executive functionaries demanded the help from supporting institutions or organisations, in particular from the trade union leadership (BGL). The BGL was often criticised by executive cultural functionaries because it was primarily concerned with issues other than culture.⁵⁰ In the following extract from a FDGB meeting in 1964, almost every functionary had a complaint to make about the BGL in his factory:

Colleague H, Club Rheinsberg: The BGL in our factory largely only concerns itself with supply issues, and with issues about how to fulfil the plan. The factory doesn't concern itself with our problems at all. The cultural work has to be done by the Club single-handedly.

Colleague M, HO-Kreisbetrieb Neuruppin: we have one full-time BGL leader for a workforce of 600 colleagues, distributed all over the Kreis. But it is hard work here. Ever since 1960, I have been asking the BGL to introduce me to individual *Kulturobmänner*. ... But we are receiving no help from the BGL. At the beginning of the election period, they always make a nice plan, which contains everything, but nothing is ever done. The BGL members are not interested in it [culture]; they are only concerned with the economics. If culture happens to be on the agenda one day, the BGL members just won't turn up to the meeting.⁵¹

These functionaries expressed clear resentment about being left to their own devices by the BGL and never receiving any support. They were angry about having to do a lot of hard work without being given a helping hand. These complaints were taken very seriously by the higher-ranking administrative leadership. The FDGB continually reminded the BGL in all factories not to underestimate their duties of looking after cultural life.⁵² The bitter complaints of these executive cultural

⁵⁰ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1682, *Protokoll der Beratung mit den Sekretären für Kultur bzw. Stellvertretenden Vorsitzenden der Kreisvorstände FDGB*, 2.7.63, p.2: here, a BGL functionary is criticised for not sending anyone from the trade union leadership in his factory to a cultural seminar. The functionaries replied: 'If I had no other concerns than that [culture], I could sleep peacefully every night'.

⁵¹ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1685, *IV Protokoll der Beratung mit Kulturfunktionären aus den Kreisvorständen FDGB, Klubbäusern und Kommissionen Kultur und Bildung der BGL der Betriebe, in Potsdam 30.9.64 and Neuruppin 28.9.64*. Other examples that mention problems of working with the BGL: *ibid.*, *III Protokoll der Beratung mit den Sekretären für Bildung und Kultur der Kreisvorstände des FDGB*, 8.12.64; *ibid.*, *Bezirksvorstand, Abteilung Kultur, Einschätzung der Beratung mit hauptamtlichen Gewerkschaftsbibliotheken*, 21.10.64.

⁵² StA Potsdam Nr. 3109/1, *Hans Otto Theater Potsdam Jahresanalyse 1968*, 19.1.68, p. 10-11: This analysis laments that the trade unions and factory leadership do not concern themselves enough with the cultural life of the brigades, as a result, too few workers attend theatrical performances. BLHA

functionaries therefore had a noticeable effect, and spurred the administrative leadership into action. Admittedly, the success was limited. In the 1970s, executive functionaries who worked in factories were still only getting limited attention from the BGL.⁵³ Nonetheless, the *Bezirk* leadership took their concerns very seriously and was at least trying to rectify the situation.

What is interesting about these three examples is that they concern cultural functionaries with low rank, authority and responsibility, who had few personal connections to the administrative functionaries in higher positions of authority – and yet, they directly addressed high-ranking administrative functionaries in the *Bezirk*. Silvia Klötzer, whose study on cabaret in Potsdam was discussed in the introduction to Part Two, argues that personal contacts between functionaries were the key for successful communication.⁵⁴ In the above examples, it does not seem, however, as though personal contacts were necessary for dialogue between functionaries. There were only very few functionaries who had strong personal contacts with the administrative leadership at *Bezirk* level. They usually held key positions in the administrative leadership of the larger *Kreise*. To give an example, a leading administrative functionary of *Kreis* Nauen wrote the following letter to the *Bezirk* leadership, complaining about being overworked and asking for help:

I have already gone half mad with worry about what will be. I realised now that I cannot count on my colleague R. She won't be back before June 5th!! 36 days holiday! On the 18th June I have a large event of the Deutsche Staatsoper. She isn't concerned with that at all. I can do it all by myself. The event is part of the factory festivals. [This is] Important for us. Please speak to M on my behalf. I hope I will still be able to get in touch with A. Why do you always have to draw everything out so long? I don't understand that. Is what is happening here so totally irrelevant for you? ... With you, not even an SOS seems to register!⁵⁵

This functionary is clearly trying to exploit all her contacts in the *Kulturbund*'s *Bezirk* leadership in order to be heard. Not only does she seem to know the person she is writing to very well, but she is also asking him to contact two other

Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1693, *Konzeption für die Durchführung der Betriebsfestspiele 1971 des VEB Wohnungsbaukombinates Potsdam*.

⁵³ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1694, *Kreisvorstand Königswusterhausen, Einschätzung der durchgeführten Betriebsfestspiele 1972*, 28.8.72, p.2; see also BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1697, *Einschätzung der Betriebsfestspiele 1975 in Nauen*, 1.7.75.

⁵⁴ Sylvia Klötzer, "„Volldampf Voraus?": Satire in der DDR. „Eulenspiegel“ und „Kabarett am Obelisk“ in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren", in Thomas Lindenberger (ed.), *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur, Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 274-291.

⁵⁵ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 363, *Brief von der Kreisleitung Nauen an die Bezirksleitung des Kulturbundes*, 18.4.72.

influential members at the *Bezirk* level from whom she hopes to receive some support. But not many functionaries had a personal network at their disposal through which they ask certain individuals to talk to others on their behalf. The functionaries at the lower levels would hardly have known those in the *Bezirk* leadership well enough. Being unfamiliar with higher-ranking functionaries was not, however, a problem for the executive functionaries. It was not necessary to know administrative functionaries on a personal level in order to communicate with them. The grass root functionaries had another kind of bargaining tool: they knew that their work was an important device in securing the functioning of cultural life.⁵⁶ Consequently, they developed a particular way of communicating with higher authorities. As a result of their growing levels of responsibility, cultural functionaries were held increasingly accountable if cultural life was not functioning properly. But they did not take the blame quietly. In cases where the organisation of cultural life was experiencing difficulties, and the grass root functionaries were reprimanded for certain difficulties, they responded by attributing the blame right back at the higher levels of the administration. They usually highlighted the lack of guidance and support from the administrative functionaries. In the same process, they asked those in the positions of power for help and support to sort out the difficulties they were experiencing. For example, the leader of a cultural house in N. took the opportunity of an FDGB ‘workshop for exchanging experiences’ to vent his feelings:

The cultural house does not have much staff. For example, our librarian takes care of all technical and financial duties, so that she can't even begin to think about working with literature properly ... Our room is in a catastrophic state. People use it for gymnastics and do all sorts of things. But we do not receive means for any kinds of repairs. Our factory does not look after the club house at all. In any case, things are looking very bad. There are always some functionaries from the leadership who appear and criticise, but no one helps.⁵⁷

This functionary is complaining about the responsible administrative functionaries in the factory, and about the FDGB's leadership. He did not need a personalised network for expressing his opinions – it was enough for him to have a sense of what was owed to him in order to demand a helping hand instead of

⁵⁶ For example: StA Potsdam Nr. 2773, *Jugendklub Camilo Cienfuegos*, 14.7.63: this club needs a new room, but is not given one. ‘We would like to add that we are trying to reach in particular the youths from the *Grenzgebiete* and so far, 40 boys and girls visit us’. Then the letter details what kinds of work they do with the youth and conclude ‘We have written all this down to show that we are trying to establish an eventful work with the youths’.

⁵⁷ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1682, *Protokoll über den Erfahrungsaustausch mit Klubhausleitern und Sekretären für Kultur der Kreisvorstände der FDGB*, 21.5.63, p. 7: *Kulturhaus Neuseddin*.

criticism. He could attribute the organisational shortcomings to lack of finance and guidance, and absolve himself of responsibility. Cultural functionaries did, therefore, not only integrate and interact with those administrative functionaries whom they knew personally. They were prepared to carry their grievances to an anonymous or authoritative source, as long as they knew that this source could, in some way, be held responsible and spurred into action. This is where the ‘centre’ versus ‘periphery’ argument breaks down. Most of the above examples have shown that cultural functionaries, no matter how far down the chain they operated, were more than happy to make demands – even low-ranking honorary functionaries felt that they were able to reproach the *Bezirk* leadership. The *Bezirk* leadership was called upon so often that its functionaries found it difficult to deal with so many demands at the same time.⁵⁸

It may seem surprising, perhaps, that the cultural functionaries were not more in awe of those functionaries who were in more authoritative positions than they were. It shows that cultural functionaries had learned in which situations they could reprimand figures of authority. They were also acutely aware of their own importance in running cultural life and establishing socialism. As a result of these considerations, grass root functionaries were willing – even insistent – on communicating with the administrative functionaries. It is noticeable how their communications increase over the course of the 1960s: the more the functionaries had to do, the more they aimed to involve the state organs.⁵⁹ They were not constantly trying to withdraw into autonomous spaces together with the participants. When it came to ironing out shortcomings or attributing blame to others to avoid being reprimanded, functionaries readily made use of channels of communication. Their actions were guided by their interest in seeing cultural life function effectively,

⁵⁸ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *K. an AG Philatelie Nauen 12.2.69*: here, the leader of the *Bezirk* philatelist union replies to the complaint from a functionary and says that he is very sorry about the problems that the AG Nauen was experiencing, but that it was impossible for him and his staff to be in constant contact with all circles.

⁵⁹ There were numerous complaints from functionaries like the ones above, which complain about lacking support from state organs. See: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *letter from S. 11.9.68*: after the leading functionary is criticised for not performing his duties properly, he attacks the AG Friesack and the *Kreis* leadership for not supporting him enough, even though he was ill; StA Potsdam Nr. 5987, *Kulturhaus Hans Marchwitza, Bericht über die Kunstauktion, 16.10.69*: functionaries of the cultural house complain about lacking support from the *Kulturbund* in organising an event; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *AG Philatelie Nauen, Rechenschaftsbericht für das Jahr 1969, 4.4.70*; BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 7490, *Zur kulturellen Betreuung der Bauarbeiter des Stadtzentrums* (no date, written between 1970 and 1974), pp.2-3: this document outlines that, as a result of neglect from the state administration, the leading functionary had to tackle too many tasks, which meant that cultural life was suffering.

because it made their own life easier and avoided them being punished for negligence. If turning to the administrative functionaries was a way for addressing certain problems, then that was the strategy they chose. In their communication with the administrative functionaries, they did their best to outline the pressure they were under in order to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the higher authorities. Thus, one *Kulturbund* functionary in Rathenow, who was sending a report that had been hastily cobbled together to the *Bezirk* leadership, wrote: 'I can't endure this pressure much longer ... I have also contracted gastric influenza that has not yet been clearly identified. But that's just an aside'.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Over the course of the 1960s, the executive cultural functionaries learned that it was advisable to adhere to certain dictates in order to avoid negative consequences. At the same time, they desired to direct cultural life according to their own ideas. As a result, they engaged in compromises: they adapted the policies of the SED to make sure that cultural life suited the situation at the grassroots, and within these spaces of autonomy, they implemented some of their own ideas. But as their administrative tasks grew continually over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the executive cultural functionaries also increasingly felt the need to communicate with the administrative functionaries. This communication was not purely enforced on the executive functionaries. They frequently turned to different levels of the administration seeking help and advice. Cultural life did not, therefore, exist in localised, isolated spheres. Communication between functionaries was a fundamental aspect that characterised the development of cultural activities.

This development, however, bore the seeds for problems and tensions. When the executive cultural functionaries turned to the administrative leadership, asking for help and guidance, they could be frustrated. The administrative functionaries did not always respond to the pleas of the executive functionaries kindly, arguing that cultural functionaries should not 'wail and complain' but sort their problems as it was expected of them.⁶¹ Furthermore, the administrative bodies did not have the means to respond to every functionary's request. Many calls for help were therefore

⁶⁰ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 444, *Kreisleitung Rathenow an die Bezirksleitung*, 15.5.76.

⁶¹ BLHA Rep. 543 FDJ Bezirksvorstand Potsdam Nr. 203, *Referat auf der Bezirksdelegiertenkonferenz 1965*, p. 39.

not answered adequately. By the later 1970s, more and more executive functionaries were becoming disillusioned about the inability of the administrative functionaries to respond to their pleas for help. This caused the willingness to communicate with higher-ranking functionaries to decline. Chapter 9 highlights how the executive cultural functionaries gradually ceased to interact with administrative functionaries, because they no longer saw the benefits of this communication.

PART II

Attempted Self-Determination - Pursuing an Interest:

The Participants

Wie bei der Arbeit, so auch bei der Fete
alles kommt ein wenig späte
Das soll uns jedoch wenig drücken
ich denk das Fest wird schon noch glücken
Mein kleines Lied soll nicht verklingen
ohne noch ein Lob zu singen
Ein Lob auf die Geselligkeit
die wir oft schon zu mancher Zeit
gepflegt und bewiesen an vielen Orten¹

This is a lovely little ode to sociability, composed by a worker in the factory *Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau* in Wildau. Its celebration of brigade festivities illustrates what the next two chapters discuss in detail: people who participated in cultural activity usually had deeply personal motivations for doing so. They sought pleasurable, cosy get-togethers, or the opportunity and facilities to exercise their cultural inclinations and hobbies. In many respects, the cultural structures that the state provided were seen as a means to satisfy these personal cultural inclinations, whether people attended festive events with a high degree of conviviality, or lived out a personal hobby among like-minded people. The experiences and attitudes of the participants are, in this light, similar to the motivations and patterns of behaviour of cultural functionaries, in particular of functionaries in the ‘executive’ group. Not only were both groups driven by a personal interest, they were also both willing to integrate into the organised structures to fulfil their interests there.

In GDR historiography, the participants in cultural life have received slightly more attention than cultural functionaries. Some historians argue that in the organised cultural sphere, people had little room for self-expression. For example, Rüdiger Henkel, who has studied parties and mass organisations in the GDR, argues that the *Kulturbund* was primarily a tool for control, which may appear to have

¹ Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) Rep. 505 Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau Wildau Nr. 2032, *Brigadebuch, Fasching 1978*. Translation: ‘As with work so with festivities, everything is a little late, but that should not depress us, I am sure the celebration will yet succeed. My little song shall not end, without proclaiming a tribute, a tribute to sociability, which we have frequently at various hours, practised and proven in many locations’.

satisfied lots of interests, but ultimately did little more than manipulate people's cultural practices according to the SED's ideology. Henkel argues that, compared with West Germany, where these activities were organised privately, this was not a valid form of interest-representation. The only way to escape the SED's attempts at social standardisation, Henkel suggests, was to exercise cultural activity in one's own home or with friends. According to Henkel, the *Kulturbund* therefore advanced the withdrawal of 'many intellectually lively people' into private spheres.² In contrast to Henkel's views, historians like Sandrine Kott, Helmut Meier and Simone Hain have shown that such a one-sided focus on coercion is not sufficient for explaining cultural life in the GDR. They argue that people could, and did, live out their interests and hobbies according to their personal inclinations in the GDR's organisations and institutions. Hain suggests that this explains the many memories of happiness and fulfilment that East Germans today associate with the GDR's cultural structures.³ The next two chapters of this thesis support these theories that organised cultural activities in the GDR satisfied people's personal interest. There were, of course, more restrictions on the nature of cultural activity in the East than in the West, but that is not to be equated with a total inability for living out individuality and personal desires in the organised cultural structures.

Even in the eminent work of these social historians, however, some aspects of cultural life have been better explored than others. People's inclination to withdraw into autonomous spaces within the organised structures has received the greatest attention.⁴ These theories are connected to particular developments in GDR historiography. In the 1990s, Günter Gaus' characterisation of the GDR as a 'niche society' was embraced and adapted by many social historians. The conceptualisation of the GDR as a 'niche' society argued that in everyday life in East Germany, people withdrew into 'niches', which were free from the political constraints of public life. In these niches, people exercised their personal inclinations in spite of the SED's

² Rüdiger Henkel, *Im Dienste der Staatspartei: über Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1994), pp. 236-237; see also Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (ed.), *Freizeit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1981), p. 43.

³ Helmut Meier: 'Der Kulturbund der DDR in den 70er Jahren. Bestandteil des politischen Systems und Ort kultureller Selbstbetätigung', in Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders, Leben in der DDR* (Karl Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 2000), pp. 616-618; Simone Hain 'Ausgraben und Erinnern', in Simone Hain, Michael Schroedter, Stephan Stroux, *Die Salons der Sozialisten: Kulturhäuser in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996), p.53; Sandrine Kott, 'Zur Geschichte des kulturellen Lebens in DDR-Betrieben, Konzepte und Praxis der betrieblichen Kulturarbeit', in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), p. 192.

⁴ Hain, 'Ausgraben und Erinnern', p. 53; Kott, 'kulturelles Leben in DDR-Betrieben', p. 192; Maier, 'Der Kulturbund', p. 618.

attempts at social standardisation.⁵ This argument was also evident in the model of the 'durchherrschte Gesellschaft', as it proposed that there were boundaries that made it possible to evade total party control.⁶ The existence of autonomous spaces should not be entirely discarded as an idea, because they were a prevalent aspect of cultural life in the GDR. Chapters 2 and 3 have shown that grass root cultural functionaries were instrumental in creating and upholding these autonomous spaces. They adapted or circumvented SED dictates and responded to people's cultural inclinations. Consequently, the existence and importance of the local independent spheres is discussed in detail in chapter 6. Nevertheless, the sole focus on autonomous spheres is problematic. Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted that autonomous spaces were not the only element that characterised functionary work. There was also a great deal of interaction and integration between various levels of functionaries. Was the situation really that different for participants? Were they unable to fulfil their personal inclinations through participation and interaction? Could they only live out their interests in limited spaces of autonomy?

The following analysis demonstrates that people did not either bow their heads obediently to the party dictatorship or withdraw into niches. The key aspect that dominates the discussion is the participants' desire to fulfil their personal cultural interests. In order to be able to realise their personal desires, the participants were prepared to integrate into the structures of the regime, and, most importantly, they interacted with functionaries at the grassroots and at intermediate levels of authority. The participants hence actively utilised a variety of strategies to steer the course of events their way. Essentially, people regained a limited sense of self-determination over their own lives. Moreover, as they manipulated the structures according to their wishes, the participants enter the discussion as a group of agents, not as a terminally passive, powerless collection of individuals.

A great deal of these two chapters relies on the analysis of *Eingaben*. Of course, *Eingaben* have to be used with care. Felix Mühlberg and Ina Merkel, have

⁵ The concept of the 'niche society' has been criticised, for example by Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London, New York: Arnold, 2002), p.50 and Ralph Jessen, who argued that the narrow focus on niches, which are 'outside the reach for political construction and control, or were only marginally influenced by it', hinders the understanding of social action, experiences and mentalities: Ralph Jessen, 'Die Gesellschaft im Staatssozialismus: Probleme einer Sozialgeschichte der DDR', in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21 (1995), p. 103-104.

⁶ Richard Bessel, Ralph Jessen 'Einleitung: Die Grenzen der Diktatur', in Richard Bessel, Ralph Jessen (ed.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), pp. 7-16.

explored the problems of using them as a primary source. *Eingaben* are first and foremost letters of complaint. They do not reflect every-day routine, but concentrate only on disruption of every-day life.⁷ Consequently, they are a distortion of real life, as they focus the historian's mind only on conflict and conflict solution, not on other practices of every-day life. Furthermore, *Eingaben* are always written for a specific purpose. Their author always wanted to get a particular grievance fulfilled. In order to realize that aim, the writers of *Eingaben* employed a particular kind of rhetoric. They always made sure to portray themselves in a positive light and stressed their self-sacrificing contribution to society.⁸ This kind of positive self-representation was then followed by a targeted utilization of the party's rhetoric. Ralph Jessen argues that the specific utilisation of SED terminology in *Eingaben* does not reflect how people expressed themselves in everyday-life. Their language in *Eingaben* signalled the willingness to adapt and submit to SED supremacy, Jessen concludes.⁹

Under these circumstances, do historians advocate using *Eingaben*? Certainly, Merkel, Mühlberg and other historians, such as Beatrix Bouvier, are keen to utilize them as a source. Aside from all their problems, they do contain useful information. Firstly, Mühlberg has pointed out that *Eingaben* are valuable for illustrating people's conceptions of 'normality'.¹⁰ In most *Eingaben*, people voiced what, in their eyes, they could reasonably expect from the socialist state under 'normal' circumstances. The conceptions of what constituted these 'normal' circumstances changed over time. Thus, it was 'normal' in the 1970s to expect a provision of basic foodstuffs, whereas during the shortages of the late 1940s, 'normality' would have been characterised by the absence of these items. Secondly, *Eingaben* are useful because they are a form of discourse with the state.¹¹ They reflect how people communicated with various administrative and controlling units, and how this communication became ritualised over time.¹² They are therefore an

⁷ Ina Merkel, Felix Mühlberg, 'Eingaben und Öffentlichkeit', in Ina Merkel (ed.), *Wir sind doch nicht die Meckerecke der Nation! Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR* (Berlin, Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, erweiterte Neuauflage, 2000), p. 15.

⁸ Ina Merkel, ' "...in Hoyerswerda leben jedenfalls keine so kleinen viereckigen Menschen". Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR', in Alf Lütke, Peter Becker (eds.), *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster: Die DDR und ihre Texte. Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), p.289.

⁹ Ralph Jessen, 'Diktatorische Herrschaft als kommunale Praxis: Überlegungen zum Zusammenhang von „Bürokratie“ und Sprachnormierung in der DDR-Geschichte' in Lütke, Becker, *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster*, p.59, p. 67.

¹⁰ Felix Mühlberg, 'Konformismus oder Eigensinn? Eingaben als Quelle zur Forschung der Alltagsgeschichte der DDR', *Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung*, Kulturinitiative '89 e.V. und Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Berlin, (Februar 1996), pp. 332-333.

¹¹ Merkel, 'Briefe an das Fernsehen', p.298.

¹² Jessen, 'Diktatorische Herrschaft', p.67, p. 75.

illustration of how people interacted with the structures of the regime in order to address shortcomings and grievances. People 'learned' the best forms of communication. They studied party policy carefully and they were able to articulate their interests using the SED's own rhetoric and promises.¹³ Thirdly, *Eingaben* are also useful because they highlight people's capacity for pushing through their own private interests.¹⁴

¹³ Beatrix Bouvier, *Die DDR - ein Sozialstaat? Sozialpolitik in der Ära Honecker* (Bonn: Dietz 2002), p. 317.

¹⁴ Bouvier, *Die DDR - ein Sozialstaat?*, p. 316.

Chapter 5

Patterns of Participation

At almost each stage of his/her life, the average East German citizen was likely to be a member of one or several mass organisations, whether as a child or adolescent, as part of the working population or as a result of activities pursued in his/her free time. Whilst appreciating the strong presence of state institutions or mass organisations in people's lives, however, the citizens of the GDR should not be regarded purely as passive subjects 'being organised' by the SED. People were able to give their lives a personal direction and meaning. This becomes particularly evident in people's fashioning of their free time, as the following two chapters show.

Leisure in the GDR: Socio-Economic Changes

In order to analyse cultural life in the GDR, it is necessary, first of all, to understand the patterns of people's leisure time in the dictatorship, and how these patterns changed over time. There have been several studies that looked at the way people spent their free time in the GDR. Dietrich Mühlberg, for example, has analysed socio-economic changes that determined leisure time in GDR. He argued that trends of leisure time in East Germany were similar to those in West Germany, though in the East they occurred with a slight time delay.¹ Whereas West Germany's economic miracle took place in the 1950s, the GDR experienced a smaller, yet distinct, economic upturn in the 1960s. In the 1950s, life in East Germany was therefore still governed by rationing and low consumerism. In the 1960s, in contrast, East Germany became more of a consumer society. Items for the household, such as fridges and vacuum cleaners were more and more widely owned. Goods that were important for the development of leisure time activities, such as televisions and cars, were also becoming increasingly widespread. In her analysis of changing patterns of consumption, Ina Merkel has shown the increase in car ownership, for example. In 1958, 1.6 per cent of people owned a car. By 1966, this had increased to 9.4 per cent,

¹ Dietrich Mühlberg, 'Überlegungen zu einer Kulturgeschichte der DDR', Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, Hartmut Zwahr (eds.), *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994), pp. 72-73.

and by 1971, 17 per cent of households had a car. Similarly, by the 1970s, most households had a television.²

Another important change that affected the development of people's leisure time was the continuous increase in people's disposable free time. In the 1950s, the working week was legally fixed at 48 hours, distributed over six days, with twelve days of holiday and thirteen state holidays. By 1967, the working week had been reduced to 43 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours, distributed over five days, with fifteen days of holiday and nine state holidays (the religious holidays had been dropped). In the 1970s, the working hours were further reduced for workers who performed manual labour, and mothers with three or more children were given increasingly more free time.³ Even though the GDR continually lagged behind West Germany and other Socialist countries in terms of the available free time, these developments nonetheless meant that the GDR could develop into a 'leisure time society'.⁴ Not all of this extra free time could, however, be used for the pursuit of leisure time activities, because it was also taken up by housework (cleaning, preparing meals, going food shopping). The division of labour of the household was still very traditional. Household chores mostly fell to women, so they had considerably less free time than men. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, men became more willing to help in the household, but women still carried the primary burden.⁵

Despite the limitations, these socio-economic changes had a marked impact on leisure time activities. In the 1950s, the patterns of free time still moved within traditional, pre-War structures. The evenings did not provide enough time for any extended leisure time activities, aside from sporadic engagement in associational life. Sundays were dominated, particularly in the countryside, by church events, dances and sociable occasions.⁶ The growing consumption of goods for leisure activities (like televisions) and the greater availability of free time began to uproot these traditional structures. There were also other developments that changed people's leisure time patterns. In the 1950s, the SED pursued a hard-line policy that was

² Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis. Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), pp. 310-321.

³ Gerhard Lippold, 'Arbeitszeit, Freizeit und Erholung', in Günter Manz, Ekkehard Sachse, Gunnar Winkler (eds.), *Sozialpolitik in der DDR, Ziele und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin: Trafo Verlag, 2001), pp. 139-151; Gerlinde Irmscher, 'Freizeitleben: Muße, Feierabend, Freizeit', in Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders, Leben in der DDR* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2000), pp. 350-373.

⁴ Irmscher, 'Freizeitleben', p. 353.

⁵ Lippold, 'Arbeitszeit, Freizeit und Erholung', p. 149; Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (ed.), *Freizeit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Bonn: Neue Gesellschaft, 1981), p. 35.

⁶ Irmscher, 'Freizeitleben', p. 357.

directed against the church and sought to curtail church events with all possible means. This caused an immense drop in members of the church, and in attendance at church events.⁷ Another important development that undermined traditional leisure time patterns was the change in social structures that resulted from growing industrialisation, urbanisation and increasing female employment. The final factor that precipitated a change in leisure time was the development of a youth culture. In the 1960s, young people became more of a leisure group within their own right. They had a lot of disposable time and money, and desired popular music and entertainment.⁸ Through all of these factors, new leisure patterns emerged. Members of the working population favoured relaxation, enjoyment and sociability. In the evenings of workdays, people enjoyed listening to music, reading or watching television in their homes, and on the weekends, people made use of their growing mobility (through the high car ownership) to go on trips. An important element of people's free time was also being with family and friends.

This newly prevalent 'leisure time culture' did not correspond to the SED's ideas, however. The SED had hoped that people would spend their increased free time in state institutions and organisations, in order to educate and better themselves. Instead, people's free time activities developed similarly to Western patterns; and this was not restricted to young people.⁹ In some respects, the SED's attitude towards the problem of privately exercised cultural activities altered in the 1960s and 1970s. There were many cultural activities that could not be performed outside the home, such as reading or watching TV and being with friends and family. Trying to undermine these activities meant fighting a losing battle. Consequently, the party leadership increasingly tolerated people's cultural engagement in the home and with family or friends. Moreover, the desire for lowbrow entertainment and enjoyment culture also proved impossible to counter. As of the late 1960s, cultural policy recognised these trends and no longer denigrated them. Instead, these trends were

⁷ For figures of falling church membership: Christoph Kleßmann, *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation. Deutsche Geschichte 1955-1970* (Bonn, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997), pp.395-8: the numbers of evangelical Christians fell from 80.5% in 1950 to 59.4% in 1964; the numbers of Catholics from 11% to 8%; Mark Allinson, *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany, 1945-68* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 109; Antonia Maria Humm, *Auf dem Weg zum sozialistischen Dorf? Zum Wandel der dörflichen Lebenswelt in der DDR von 1952-1969 mit vergleichenden Aspekten zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), pp.292-302. The analysis will return to the role of churches in the cultural field later on in this chapter.

⁸ Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, pp.348-349; see also Chapter 6, pp. 160-161.

⁹ Lippold, 'Arbeitszeit, Freizeit und Erholung', pp. 149-152, Ute Mohrmann, 'Lust auf Feste: zur Festkultur in der DDR', in Badstübner, *Befremdlich Anders*, p. 423; Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, p. 323. See also Chapter 8, pp. 198-201 for the effects of the introduction of the 5-day week.

incorporated into the ideological framework that underpinned the SED's cultural model, as chapter 8 will show.¹⁰ Helmut Hanke, one of the SED's leading cultural theoreticians, argued in 1970 that performing cultural activities within the home, with families and friends, was not only acceptable, but a 'main factor of continuous durable cultural needs', as long as it did not challenge the SED's supremacy.¹¹ Over the course of the 1970s, the desire for sociability, entertainment and individual interest-fulfilment increased, at the expense of highbrow activities and associational life. By the 1980s, as Chapter 9 shows, this had culminated in a process of 'individualisation'.

One aspect of people's leisure pursuits that the SED could not accept, however, was people's continued engagement with Western media. In the 1950s, the radio was the dominant medium for listening to Western popular music and news. Radio stations like RIAS, based in West Berlin, and Radio Luxembourg were widely listened to by East Germans. This remained a prominent feature of life for the remainder of the GDR. In particular, East German youths satisfied their desires for popular music by listening to West German radio and recording popular songs onto tapes. With the growth of television ownership in the 1960s, most East Germans could also access West German television channels, unless they lived in the so-called 'valley of the oblivious', where West German television could not be received. The SED was concerned about the level of 'enemy propaganda', which could infiltrate East Germany through the Western media. In the early 1960s, the FDJ initiated an 'action against the NATO transmitter', where 25 000 young people symbolically pointed their TV aerials to the East. But such actions could not stop the majority of the population tuning into Western media. Moreover, people became increasingly open about their readiness to listen to West German radio and to watch West German television. The SED eventually tried to win people away from the Western media by creating East German emulations of Western music and entertainment. But even this action was ineffective and did not undermine the presence of Western media in people's lives.¹²

¹⁰ Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen, Bundesarchiv (SAPMO BArch) DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/36, *Entwicklungsprobleme des sozialistischen Kulturlebens in den siebziger Jahren, November 1970*, pp. 27-43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.41-42.

¹² Dorothee Wierling, 'Die Jugend als innerer Feind. Konflikte in der Erziehungsdiktatur der sechziger Jahre', in Kaelble, Kocka, Zwahr, *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, pp. 406-411; Axel Schmidt, 'Zwei Staaten, eine Hörfunk- und Fernsehgeneration. Überlegungen zur Bedeutung der elektronischen Massenmedien in der Geschichte der Kommunikation zwischen Bundesrepublik und DDR', in Arnd

In the leisure patterns of the population, it is obvious that the GDR was not a homogenised society whose free time was characterised by SED's stringent imposition of a new social model. Mühlberg argued that the changes in the socio-economic patterns of leisure time, which meant that people's free time activities resembled Western trends, support the theory of 'modernisation'. According to the modernisation theory, the GDR was not a totalitarian state controlled and shaped solely by the SED, but was deeply affected by general modernisation trends that were also evident in Western societies. The main problem with this theory is that it takes the Western model (usually it uses the example of West Germany) as the non-plus-ultra, to which the GDR is then compared. The developments in the GDR are therefore not analysed in their own right, but only in light of how they correspond to Western trends, in order to determine which developments were signs of a 'modern' society. Consequently, Ina Merkel has criticised Mühlberg's support of the modernisation theory. Merkel concludes that in people's leisure time structures, there was a process of 'de-differentiation', which was followed by 're-differentiation'. She argued that in the GDR, there was no differentiation according to material wealth or ownership of certain products. Moreover, people of different classes lived in the same environment, as intellectuals and workers usually inhabited the same units of accommodation. Despite these homogenising aspects, however, Merkel argues that there was still a process of re-differentiation, because age, gender, living area and education influenced the people's lives. Young people spent their leisure time very differently to members of the working population. The level of education also played a prominent role. Intellectuals went to the theatre more frequently than workers, she argues.¹³

Merkel's argument is a very convincing reflection of cultural life in the GDR. As will be shown throughout this chapter and the next, people's cultural activities took very different forms according to their social situation and according to their background.¹⁴ Of course, the determining factor of people's leisure time patterns was not necessarily age, gender or education *per se*. What often underpinned the differences behind the leisure time patterns of various social groups was the influence of particular social environments that individuals moved within. Within

Bauernkämpfer, Martin Sabrow, Bernd Stöver (eds.), *Doppelte Zeitgeschichte: Deutsch-deutsche Beziehungen 1945-1990* (Bonn: Verlag J.H.W. Dietz, 1998), pp. 61-68.

¹³ Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, pp. 348-355.

¹⁴ See Chapter 1, pp. 17-20 for statistics of the difference in cultural engagement of different social groups, as well as Chapter 6.

these environments, there existed certain social pressures that individuals were subjected to, and hence, these environments had harmonising effects on people's leisure time, which people either had to accept or withdraw from. These environments could be either friendship circles or families, or even small socialising units like cultural circles. Another important environment was the workplace. The SED placed great emphasis on cultural life being organised within the workplace. In particular in the factories, the brigade was not only an aspect of the working life. Friendships among colleagues and joint social occasions meant that contact with people from the workplace could extend deep into people's lives.¹⁵ This process had been intended by SED policy. Brigades were designed to organise joint cultural activities for all their members outside working hours. In these jointly organised activities, however, the individual brigade member had to bow to the desires of the majority, unless he/she was willing to disassociate himself/herself from the group in order to fulfil an individual interest.¹⁶ The influence of the workplace was not only evident in factory brigades, moreover. For example, in a hospital in *Bezirk* Potsdam, a young doctor tried to start a reading circle, but his endeavours had little chance for success. Most of his colleagues had a musical and not a literary interest, which he had to concede to.¹⁷

There were, hence, many forms of outside influences that people were subject to in their free time. The influence of such environments could restrict individuals in the expression of their cultural inclinations, but it could also stimulate them to explore different areas. Individuals at the workplace could encourage each other to take up particular cultural activities. If, for example, one or two members of a brigade pursued a certain activity, they could induce other people around them to take up this hobby. Similarly, members of cultural circles could inspire each other to pursue their interests more vigorously. In some circles, the members could form close friendships.¹⁸ To conclude, people did not just experience pressures from party

¹⁵ Irmischer, 'Freizeitleben', p. 355-356.

¹⁶ Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) Rep. 514 VEB Landbauprojekt Potsdam Nr 129: *Brigadebuch 1969*: here is an example of a young woman who withdraws from collective cultural activity.

¹⁷ BLHA Rep. 538 Kulturbund Bezirksvorstand Potsdam (KB) Nr. 306, *Politische Berichterstattung, Bezirk Potsdam, 19.12.65*, p.3.

¹⁸ BLHA Rep. 503 Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz (CFWP) Nr. 6388, *Auswertung der Brigadearbeit der Brigade "N. I." im III Quartal 71*: in this brigade, several individuals pursue the same activity by forming small groups. There is a particularly high number of chess players who interact with each other; BLHA Rep. 505 Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau Wildau Nr. 2031, *Brigadebuch, 1972, Ich sammle auch Briefmarken*: in this brigade diary, an individual wrote about stamp collecting and mentions the inspiration he received from other stamp collectors in his circle; BLHA Rep. 471/15.1

and state organs in their free time, but also adjusted their cultural inclinations to social environments. Even though the presence of outside influences is a prevalent aspect that shaped people's engagement with cultural life, one factor that should not be underestimated is the personal dimension. When people engaged with cultural activity, they sought to fulfil personal interests – they did not only respond to pressures from the outside. This had a major impact on people's fashioning of free time, as the next subsection will show: participation in cultural life was not merely a result of coercion.

Living out Personal Interests

Organised cultural life in East Germany was always subject to a certain level of outside interference, police observation and repertoire restrictions, as the final section of this chapter will show. Under these circumstances, why did people get involved in organised culture in the first place? Did they participate in the regime's cultural structures because the higher-ranking administrative and executive functionaries forced them to? This seems highly unlikely. Forcing people to become culturally active did not work; people could be compelled to attend single cultural events or festivals, but no form of coercion could sustain a long-term engagement with a single cultural activity. Perhaps it could be argued that people got involved in cultural activity to secure a personal advantage. In the GDR, showing 'social engagement' could be useful for advancing one's bargaining power with the regime. Using one's free time for helping the aged or cleaning up the streets could come in handy when writing *Eingaben*, for example, because it was perceived to increase one's chances of having one's grievances addressed.¹⁹ But it is unlikely that people's involvement in the cultural sphere was purely the result of the desire for increased bargaining power. Cultural engagement did not rank highly on the SED's scale of what was 'socially productive': if people were solely engaged with cultural affairs in their free time, and did no other form of 'social work', they could still be regarded

Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei Potsdam (DVP) Nr. 310, *Abschließender Bericht über die Ermittlungen zur Überprüfung der AG Philatelie des Kulturbundes Pritzwalk*, 26.6.64: here, the circle members organise joint family outings.

¹⁹ For a discussion of *Eingaben* and the techniques people used to achieve their goals, see the theoretical introduction to Part Two.

with suspicion by the police units or administrative functionaries.²⁰ The participants themselves were aware of this, and did complain that their ‘cultural-political’ activity was not regarded as ‘societal work’.²¹ If the only driving force behind a culturally active life had been furthering one’s image as a good citizen, then many people would have been more likely to choose different ways of engaging socially.

This section argues that the main determinant behind people’s involvement in state organised cultural activity was a personal cultural inclination, coupled with a readiness to exercise this within the organised cultural structures. Pressure from party or state organs could, at most, broaden existing interest, by providing cultural facilities and by encouraging people to engage with them, but it could not create or enforce such a personal interest or inclination from scratch. This was an aspect that remained unchanged throughout the history of the GDR.

Joining a Cultural Circle

The clearest manifestation of personal interest as a driving force behind people’s engagement in cultural activity can be found in the analysis of cultural groups and circles.²² Usually, people who joined a cultural circle had engaged with its particular cultural direction beforehand, and, once they had been members of the circle for a while, had the tendency to stay in it for a period of time.²³ Pursuing a cultural endeavour was therefore for many a long-term commitment. The steadfastness of the participants could only have had its origin in deep-seated personal interest. The participants had to make considerable sacrifices in their free time to keep their

²⁰ If people were only culturally active, and performed no other form of social activity, they could attract negative attention from the police units: BLHA, Rep. 471/15.2 Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei Potsdam (DVP) Nr. 940: *Männerchor B., Registration number 215/10* and *ibid. Männerchor R., registration number 215/13, Einschätzung, 5.11.69*: in both choirs, some of the members exercised no other social activity, which is recorded critically.

²¹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. *Politischer Monatsbericht, von R. an P., 14.2.75*, p. 2.

²² BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 309, *Königswusterhausen Analyse über die Tätigkeit der Arbeitskreise Philatelie, 17.6.64*, side 91: here, a report outlines, ‘The majority of the members regard collecting as a personal hobby. It is impossible to speak of an economic incentive of these philatelists’; BLHA Rep. 530 Bezirksleitung SED Bezirk Potsdam (SED) Nr. 4249, *Programm für die perspektivische Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit im Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz, 18.4.68*, p. 8, side 00027: This report states that people perceived being culturally active as a private affair and as a personal hobby.

²³ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 29, *Mitgliederliste der AG Philatelie B., 30.6.72*. 26: in this circle, the average membership is 10 years; BLHA, Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24: *AG Nauen (No date, but written either 1974 or 1975)*: seven members of the philatelist circle in Nauen are to receive a medal for their 20-year membership; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 19, *Eingabe von Bundesfreund N, an die Zollverwaltung Bad Schandau, 17.7.80*: the person who wrote this *Eingabe* has been collecting for 25 years.

cultural activity going.²⁴ For members of choirs, for example, it was important to attend rehearsals and performances. A serious stamp collector had to occupy himself with collecting, sorting and attending events for trading with other collectors. Those who were members of a 'circle for writing workers' did not just have to attend the meetings of the circles; they also had to write in evenings after work and on weekends.²⁵

Because of the commitments involved with pursuing cultural activity, it could be difficult to form a new cultural circle. When a new circle emerged, people often showed initial enthusiasm,²⁶ resulting from a preliminary desire to try something new, but that could quickly wane, meaning that people left the circles after a short period of membership. This can, for example, be seen in a 'circle for writing workers' in Wittstock. This circle was started in 1970s and initially had quite a few members. Looking at the annual reports, however, shows that after the first two years there remained only two members who regularly contributed to the circle's output – and these two were the circle's founder and his son. In the end, the interest among the other participants had disappeared so much that the circle's founder decided to create another circle elsewhere. Throughout the entire period, nevertheless, the circle's founder and his son were undeterred by the lack of initiative from the other members, and won various prizes for their literary production.²⁷ This is quite a typical example: following the *Bitterfeld Way* in the early 1960s, there were increased efforts at establishing new cultural circles, in particular 'circles for writing workers'. A lot of these circles were, however, short-lived because people did not have the sustained interest to be members for very long.²⁸ The administrative units made sporadic efforts to keep cultural activity going and increase the membership of

²⁴ The extent of the personal involvement and sacrifices is evident in the following document: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 234, *letter from Sch. to J. on 10.6.80*: 'We were informed by telephone that you asked us to see to it that your responsible factory will give you time off for [attending] the photography event in Zechlin. Unfortunately, we are unable to follow your request, because all participants are using a part of their holiday to attend'.

²⁵ BLHA Rep. 426 Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Potsdam (BfK) Nr. 260, see the poem *Lyrischer Entstehungsprozess*; Rep. 538 KB Nr. 444, *Einschätzung der Kulturpolitischen Tätigkeit der Kreisorganisation Rathenow für das Jahr 1971, Kreisleitung 10.1.72*: this report outlined that groups for music are more successful than literary groups, as people don't have to study any material prior to the meeting.

²⁶ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 22, *An den Deutschen Kulturbund Bezirksleitung Potsdam, aus der Ortsgruppe Luckenwalde 19.8.62*.

²⁷ BLHA Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 249, *Protokoll eines Zirkels*, pp. 23-24.

²⁸ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr 3232, *Ergebnisse und Probleme in Auswertung der 2. Bitterfelder Konferenz 12.8.64*, p. 2; BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 3239, *Kulturkonferenz der BAGL und des VEB GRW Teltow am 21. 8.65, Mal- und Zeichenzirkel*.

cultural circles throughout the 1960s and 1970s. It was impossible, however, to turn engagement with cultural circles into a mass movement.²⁹

When people participated in cultural activity in a serious manner over an extended period of time, they often became semi-professionals, particularly where tasks such as creative writing or collecting were concerned. The professionalism of these amateurs can be highlighted in the case of a lay theatre director in Potsdam, who produced a *Schattenspiel* (a play performed by using shadows) of one of Andersen's tales. His show was so successful that it ran for a few years.³⁰ The professionalism of the lay artists and of those who pursued a particular hobby was a factor in most long-standing cultural circles with a relatively stable membership. The members of these circles could be so knowledgeable about their hobby that they intimidated potential newcomers who had far less expertise.³¹ Over the course of the 1970s, this professionalism became a growing feature of cultural life in circles, and the members of the groups welcomed outsiders less and less.³² This caused cultural circles to become more and more introspective, which is discussed in Chapter 9. It was becoming increasingly difficult for outsiders and newcomers to engage with these circles.

Along with having a personal interest in a particular field, and becoming quite knowledgeable about a particular activity, the participants expressed a sense of pride in the cultural pastime they pursued. This becomes evident in a brigade diary from the factory *Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau* in *Wildau*. In this diary, several people who collected different things wrote about their hobby. Each of them described his/her hobby with loving vocabulary, providing samples from their collection as well as illustrations. One of them, for example, occupied himself 'with the collection of the outer beautification of the packaging around differently sized containers for igniting material' (alternatively known as the collection of match

²⁹ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 3239, *Probleme zur Entwicklung der kulturellen Massenarbeit in den Wohngebieten am Beispiel Henningsdorf*, 7.2.64, pp.1-4: this report describes an attempt by the state *Bezirk* leadership to organise events that would get people interested in cultural activity, but it failed.

³⁰ Stadtarchiv Potsdam (StA Potsdam) Nr. 3391, *Betr. Antrag auf Genehmigung zur Errichtung eines Schatten und Puppentheaters für die Stadt und das Land Potsdam*, 29.3.77; *ibid.*, "Andersen im *Schattenspiel*"; *ibid.*, *Abschrift an den Rat des Bezirkes Abteilung Kultur*, 16.6.79.

³¹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Protokoll über die Sitzung der leitenden Kader der AG Philatelie des Kreises Nauen*, 6.6.70: in this circle they attracted more young people when they organised separate meetings for young people and adults; Helmut Meier: 'Der Kulturbund der DDR in den 70er Jahren. Bestandteil des politischen Systems und Ort kultureller Selbstbetätigung', in Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders, Leben in der DDR* (Karl Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 2000), p. 616.

³² BLHA Rep. 401 *Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam (RdB) Nr 23984/2, Rat des Kreises Potsdam Abteilung Finanzen and Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam, Preisbestätigungen bei Veranstaltungen des "J.C.-Club"*, 21.2.74.

boxes). This collector, in his own words, ‘pursued – despite the rather modest interest of the Kulturbund in this field, despite lacking partners to trade with, despite poor offers of samples in specialist shops and despite the lack of attention in the ‘Collector’s Express’ – unwaveringly the diverse and educational series of the examples from many countries on this earth ... with pure passion and true interest’.³³ This description and the careful attention to the representation of a few examples from his collection indicate a certain pride in this individual about his hobby. This individual was unable to comprehend how his fascination with this hobby was not shared by the *Kulturbund* and other people.

The importance of personal interest as a primary driving force behind pursuing a cultural activity is not truly surprising. It is a main motivator for people’s cultural engagement in all societies. In the case of the GDR, it is important to note that this personal interest was just as much of a motivating factor as it is in other societies, and that coercion did not determine people’s cultural engagement. One issue still remains unclear, however: why did people choose to exercise their cultural interest in the regime’s structures, when these structures imposed ‘political-ideological’ restrictions on them? The answer to this is simple: people joined a cultural circle because their hobby could be lived out most effectively there. Being a member of a cultural circle secured the best possible access to the requisite materials, equipment, organisation and the chance to meet other like-minded people with whom to discuss one’s interest.³⁴ As opposed to the early 1950s, where cultural groups tried to resist incorporation into the state’s cultural structures, they had learned to exploit these structures for their support in the 1960s and 1970s. People no longer resented institutions like the *Kulturbund* for the organisation they provided. Of course, some of the restrictions that these institutions imposed on cultural activity could be resented, but many participants no longer resented the provision of the organisation and equipment as such. In the 1950s, cultural circles had been incorporated into the

³³ BLHA Rep. 505 Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau Wildau (SMBHR) Nr. 2031, *Sammeln aus Spaß an der Freude*, pp.1-2; see also BLHA Rep. KB Nr. 24, *Protokoll der Jahreshauptversammlung der AG Nauen am 13.2.66*: several philatelists sent their work to an exhibition, but their collections were not graded as highly as they thought they ought to have been - they contemplated not sending their work to these exhibitions again; a similar complaint can be found in BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Schreiben von W. an den Deutschen Kulturbund*, 8.11.63; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe aus Königswusterhausen*, 14.10.1965: here, a Carnival club whose members complain about lacking attention from the *Kulturbund*, even though they regard themselves as a ‘very active and publicly effective’ group.

³⁴ Peter Fischer, ‘Philatelie im Kulturbund. Zwischen Indoktrination und Freizeitnische’, in *Heterogenität und Konsistenz. Zur Herausbildung und Entwicklung des Kulturbundes in der DDR Pankower Vorträge*, Heft 30 (Berlin 2001), p. 65.

cultural structures. Gradually, the participants learned that these organised structures offered certain advantages that could be exploited. In the early 1960s, the members of cultural circles and organisations began to remind the state institutions and organisations to look after the provision of cultural life adequately.³⁵ In order to secure the best possible support for their circles, the participants were willing to engage in 'institution-hopping'. They were ready to jump from one institution to another searching for the right kind of support. For example, the members of a rural *Kulturbund* group felt so neglected, that all 33 of them left the *Kulturbund* and joined the village club instead, hoping for better support of their interests there.³⁶ As a result of their personal interests, people therefore became quite adept at securing the best possible environment within the structures of the regime to exercise their hobby.

The combination of personal interest, willingness to make sacrifices and socio-economic changes explains the membership patterns of cultural circles in the GDR. Members of the intelligentsia were more inclined towards these circles than workers. This can only be explained from the upbringing and socialisation habits of members in these two social groups, which would have shaped their interests and readiness to engage with cultural activities in circles. Furthermore, as the 1960s and 1970s progressed, the cultural circles attracted fewer and fewer young people. In the 1950s, young people were still willing to engage with associational life, but by the middle period of the GDR, the interest declined.³⁷ As a result of the emerging youth culture in the 1960s, the administrative and executive functionaries found it very hard to attract interested young people to cultural circles.³⁸ An additional problem that exacerbated this phenomenon was the growing professionalism of the cultural circles, which made it hard for newcomers to integrate. This caused a declining and

³⁵ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 306, *Erster Zwischenbericht über die durchgeführten Jahreshauptversammlungen*, 6.5.64, p.2; see also BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 29, *An den Deutschen Kulturbund Kommission Philatelie, R.J.* (no date, but written around 1967).

³⁶ BLHA, Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 196, *Zirkel Schreibender Arbeiter, VEB EPW Neuruppin, Kündigung der Trägerschaft über unsere Zirkel*, 20.11.78; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe aus Potsdam, den 25.5.66* and *Eingabe am 14.7.1966*: here is a group of individuals who are interested in coin collecting, and who want to be taken on by the *Kulturbund* to be able to exercise their hobby; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Philatelisten Kulturbund Nauen, AG Philatelie Nauen, Rechenschaftsbericht für das Jahr 1969*, 4.4.70, p. 2: this is a complaint from a philatelist circle, who say that are being neglected by the *Kulturbund*.

³⁷ Humm, *Auf dem Weg zum sozialistischen Dorf*, pp. 265-267.

³⁸ This was already evident in the early 1960s: Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr 310, *Abschließender Bericht über die Ermittlungen zur Überprüfung der AG Philatelie des Kulturbundes Pritzwalk*, 26.6.64: there are only 2 pupils who are members; out of 48 members, 27 are over 40; BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940, *Männerchor R. Kreis Zossen, Registration number 215/13*: this choir has no members under 20; In some cases, the problem lay with the FDJ, which did not try to help to recruit younger members into cultural circles: BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 3239, *Kulturkonferenz der BAGL und des VEB GRW Teltow am 21. 8.65*, p.2; see also BLHA Rep 538 KB Nr. 35, *Jahreshauptversammlung 1969*, 6.3.70.

increasingly ageing membership of cultural circles. Retired people had always been more attracted to cultural circles than working people, because they had more free time and were looking for ways to occupy themselves. With the declining interest of young people, the 'over-ageing' of cultural circles became more and more of a problem for the administrative leadership in *Bezirk* Potsdam in the 1970s.³⁹

Perceptions of Organised Culture in Factories

There were two sides to cultural life in factories. Firstly, there were cultural events that were organised in individual brigades. In the 1960s, the SED embarked on a new policy whereby individual brigades had to engage in cultural activities that would embrace all members. Every 'brigade contract' had to include a plan that specified how many cultural activities would be carried out in each year. These activities were particularly meant to revolve around 'highbrow' cultural pursuits. The title of the brigade and remuneration depended on the fulfilment of the 'brigade contract'.⁴⁰ In the 1970s, the brigade contracts were further extended with regard to the obligation to participate in cultural activity. They now had to include a 'culture and education plan'. This was a separate contract and a pledge for fulfilment of a minimum of cultural activity.⁴¹

In the 1960s, it became evident that the workers tended to ignore the demands for engaging in 'highbrow' cultural activities and occupied themselves with 'lowbrow' entertainment instead. The workers were primarily concerned with fulfilling their own interest at brigade events, and their interests usually centred on sociable, entertaining events, such as boat trips, dances or card games. This will be analysed in greater detail in Chapter 6. In the late 1960s, the SED began to accept that the brigades organised their cultural activities according to more 'lowbrow' interests. Chapter 7 shows that the SED party leaders became increasingly resigned to this state of affairs and adapted the cultural model accordingly.

³⁹ BLHA Rep 538 KB Nr. 35. *Schreiben Pritzwalk an Potsdam am 18.4.79*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 357, *Quartalsbericht I/76*; For the growing difficulties of attracting young people in the 1970s, see Chapter 9, pp. 216-217, p. 221.

⁴⁰ Thomas Ruben, Bernd Wagner (ed.) *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg: Eine Bestandaufnahme* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin Brandenburg, 1994), 'Ein Betriebskulturhaus, zb Küstrin-Kietz. Interview mit Frank Kuchnia, dem ehemaligen Leiter', p.188.

⁴¹ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 20289/1, *Zuarbeit für die Erarbeitung einer Bewußtseinsanalyse, 28.10.78*, p.2: 80% of brigades have a 'culture and education plan'.

While workers were, therefore, able to realise their desire for sociable endeavours when it came to fulfilling their brigade contract, things looked slightly different when it came to festivals organised in the factory. This is second aspect of organised cultural life in the factories. Theoretically, the workers had no way of determining the course of events at these festivals, nor could they choose not to participate – on major state occasions, like the May 1st celebration or the anniversary of the Republic, the brigades were expected to participate. But is it justifiable to attribute the attendance of these festivals to pure instances of coercion and force? Did people not satisfy any personal cultural interests when they participated at these events? These festivals constituted a day off work that was spent in a celebratory, relaxed and joyful manner. It is highly unlikely that the workers got no enjoyment out of them at all.

It is hard to find reliable evidence of how the workers perceived organised festivals in factories, because it is difficult to determine whether opinions of these events that were expressed in brigade diaries were genuine. For example, the brigade diaries usually contained highly positive descriptions of the May 1st celebrations, but these descriptions were usually very short, which indicates that the workers wrote down what they felt the leading functionaries wanted to hear, rather than heartfelt sentiments.⁴² Nevertheless, there are some elements of the brigade diaries that give more of an insight into workers' perceptions of factory festivals: when the workers described the International Women's Day on March 8th, 1971, which was a less important, but nonetheless celebrated event, their descriptions were slightly more open. For example, a brigade diary of the factory *Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau Wildau* describes the International Women's Day in 1971 and they voiced negative sentiments about how this day had been celebrated in their factory. They did not criticise the event itself, or the motives behind it, but were critical of certain organisational aspects:

[After the main speech], there followed a festive concert – well, at least it called itself that ... It could have become a 'festive' concert, if the person announcing the music had not taken out all that was festive with his loaded jokes and inappropriate statements. After the Mozart tunes, he ... compared our cultural house to a cow's shed and proceeded from there to philosophise. All of this

⁴² The brigade diaries of the *Stahl und Walzwerk Henningsdorf* illustrate the brigades' participation at the Workers' Day very well: the diary writers ensure that there is a token photograph and a positive note accompanying the description of this day – but the texts are very short compared to events that meet the interest of the members of the brigade more broadly: BLHA Rep. 502 Stahl und Walzwerk Henningsdorf (SWWH) Nr. 471 and Nr. 472.

took 90 minutes. By now it was 16:30 and everyone was hungry. A few women had to rush home, because they had to care for children and family. But the organisers had not considered this at all.⁴³

This bad experience did not remain a one-off. In the following year, the women of the same brigade again complained about the International Women's Day. The account of the speech and festivities in this year goes as follows:

We tried to understand what was said [in the festival speech], but with the loudspeakers being switched off it was pretty pointless. So we began to entertain ourselves in our own way. But we hadn't quite given up yet. When ... the group from the music school appeared on stage, we stood at the bars (to see over the balcony). Doing so, we noticed that there were some empty seats in the room (below, nearer the stage) – even a completely empty table. This caused a rather bad mood, and being tired from standing, we sat down again. (Once the loudspeakers were switched on) we were more and more disappointed. Of the songs, about 70% were Italian, Russian, English and French. The poems that were read out talked about goats and someone called Franz Helmut – that was all we understood.⁴⁴

These statements could be interpreted as showing resentment about having to attend such festivals, and as an indicator that enjoyment levels were low. However, reading these extracts with a little more care, they actually show the opposite: what these women are complaining about is that they did *not* get any enjoyment out of them, when they felt that they should have done. Celebrating the Women's Day, and being given time off to do so should have been done in a 'festive' manner, but that did not happen. It was this aspect, which gave cause to the complaint. The women wanted to be entertained properly. What would that have entailed? In the accounts of the Women's Day in 1971 there are some clues that help to answer this question:

The other guests finally arrived at 18:30, to soothe their empty stomachs. Then, through dancing and alcoholic drinks, the good mood soon arrived. All in all, it did become a nice and cheerful evening.⁴⁵

Another popular way of celebrating the International Women's Day was spending it in more intimate circles. In some brigades, the male members spoiled

⁴³ BLHA Rep. 505 SMBHR Nr. 2031, *Brigadebuch 1971*, '8. März'.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, *Brigadebuch 1972*, '8. März'.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 1971, 8. März'. The Women's Day was not the only occasion where this became evident: BLHA Rep. 505 VEB SMBHR Nr. 2029, *Brigadebuch 2 (1969)*, *Der Titelkampf und das Ergebnis*: in this year, the brigade was awarded the title 'Kollektiv der Sozialistischen Arbeit'. They wanted to celebrate this award, but the organisers let them down, "so that the whole collective spent the evening with music and dance, chewing on three half-dry bread rolls, and it was difficult to find some cool moisture for the throat [a drink]. To overlook this bad gastronomic occurrence would be an error, because we believe that these conditions should no longer exist in the 20th year of our Republic and that we cannot tolerate them."

their female colleagues and surprised them with a few niceties. In the brigade diaries, the women recorded these occasions with a notion of great satisfaction and enjoyment, like the women of a brigade in the *Landbauprojekt Potsdam*:

Our male colleagues surprised us with a very nicely set table. Even though the flower situation was difficult, a few vases were filled with snowdrops. Our colleagues put great care into making the coffee ... After the coffee, the leader of our division brought us a small present from the factory with good wishes ... For all this effort and attention we women want to thank our colleagues very much ... This day ended in a good mood.⁴⁶

At the International Women's Day, the women liked attention from the male members of the brigade, or good music that was followed by polite and well-mannered commentary, and the provision of good food, good music and the opportunity to dance. The women, however, felt more than justified to complain if the day, on which they were meant to be celebrated, was ruined by poor organisation. This is quite a good illustration of how the obligatory attendance of certain events in the factories could fulfil a personal interest: if the workers were being made to attend these events, then, in some cases at least, they anticipated being entertained properly.

Choosing Not to Engage in Organised Cultural Life

Much to the distress of the state leadership of *Bezirk* Potsdam, people still performed cultural activity 'on their own', meaning that they exercised their hobbies without seeking membership in the requisite cultural circle or group. It is impossible to determine how many people exercised a particular cultural activity privately. The administrative functionaries were unsure about the extent of this phenomenon, but could not deny that it existed.⁴⁷ Moreover, the policy of getting workers to attend certain forms of organised cultural events in factories on a regular basis was also only successful to a limited degree. Certain key events, like the May 1st celebrations had to be attended, of course, but there were other non-obligatory events where

⁴⁶ BLHA Rep. 514 VEB Landbauprojekt Potsdam Nr. 133, *Internationaler Frauentag*. See also: Rep. 502 SWWH Nr. 471, *Internationaler Frauentag*: this diary shows very similar sentiments: the Women's Day is enjoyed when the women are pampered and the brigade can engage in sociable activity; See also: BLHA Rep. 502 SWWH Nr. 472, *Gewerkschaftsgruppenversammlung am 6.5.77*; *ibid. Internationaler Frauentag, 8.3.77*; *ibid. Internationaler Frauentag 1974*; *ibid. 8 Mai - Tag der Befreiung, 1976*: this event, though being a more 'political' affair, includes entertainment and dancing, which is seen as the 'high point' of the celebration.

⁴⁷ BLHA Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 249, *Letter E.S., Kyritz 28.9.72*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Protokoll, Kreisverbandskonferenz des Philatelistenverbandes in Falkensee, 10.10.70*. This problem increased over the course of the 1970s – see Chapter 9, pp. 216-219.

attendance levels often left a lot to be desired. Usually, ‘highbrow’ cultural events were less successful at drawing in the crowds.⁴⁸ Why did people choose to withdraw from the organised cultural activities? In some cases, people may have been disinclined to become active in organised cultural life because of the high levels of state interference. Chapter 4 outlined that cultural functionaries had difficulty enthusing people about cultural events that had too overtly ‘political-ideological’ overtones. While this was undoubtedly an aspect that drove people’s withdrawal, people also had personal, rather than political, reasons for disengaging from organised cultural life. These personal reasons are the focus of this section.

For many people, a sheer lack of time, energy and resources could be the main reason for not joining, or for leaving a cultural circle. This applied particularly to the cultural circles in the countryside, where long distances, and difficulty coordinating events prohibited people attending.⁴⁹ In some cases, people showed regret about being unable to deepen their involvement in these circles, and expressed annoyance that their environment was limiting them in their ability to exercise their hobbies.⁵⁰ Lack of time or energy was not the only reason why people chose to withdraw from cultural circles, though. People also withdrew from organised circles, or chose to play a limited role within them, because they wanted to distance themselves from others. This is where ‘horizontal’ expressions of *Eigen-Sinn* become evident: some people chose not to engage with organised cultural life, because they wanted to distance themselves from others in their immediate surroundings.⁵¹ In some cases, the professional standard of the long-standing members of cultural circles could intimidate people. Newcomers often could not keep up with the artistic

⁴⁸ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 3232, *Notiz über den Besuch des Kulturhauses Ludwigsfelde am 19.9.67*, p.2; BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 4986, *Stand und Durchsetzung der Aufgaben zur staatlichen Kulturpolitik einschließlich Auswertung der 3. Betriebsfestspiele, 10.7.72*, p.3: at the factory festivals, the event ‘Summer day at the lake’ attracted 900 visitors, and the garden festival attracted 1000, whereas the meeting with writers only attracted 300.

⁴⁹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 351 *Maßnahmeplan für die Ortsgruppe R., 4.2.1974*: this document shows the difficulties of reaching people in rural areas; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 25 *Schreiben von G. an Kreis am 16.2.72*: this former functionary highlights that many people seem to be interested in attending events, but simply cannot find the time; BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 4189, *Der Bericht zur Durchsetzung der Kulturpolitik von 12.10.73*, p. 3: ‘In many discussions, [we encountered] the frequently recurring argument: ‘We want to sing [in the choir] when it appeals to us and when we have time for it ... not during the entire year’.

⁵⁰ BLHA Rep 538 KB Nr. 35, *Eingabe, 20.11.66* .

⁵¹ For a discussion in ‘Eigen-Sinn’ and differences between ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ expressions of *Eigen-Sinn*, See Chapter 1, pp. 22-25.

ability or the knowledge of others, and chose to withdraw from these specialists.⁵² Alternatively, people found the situation in their local cultural circle unappealing, because they either disliked some of the members of the groups, or because they were outraged about poor organisation. Such individuals preferred to stay out of these circles, and exercised their cultural interests in their own personal spaces instead.⁵³ In some cases, people did join cultural circles to benefit from certain advantages (for example, stamp collectors who were members of a circle received material from the post), but chose not to integrate into the group and did not attend group meetings. They were called 'inactive' members. Some people were 'inactive' because the cultural group disappointed their expectations.⁵⁴ In other cases, people were 'inactive' because they did not feel inclined to engage with other people in the group.⁵⁵ In the aforementioned 'circle for writing workers' in Wittstock, for example, one of the members was an enthusiastic lay writer, but he did not wish to have his texts read and assessed by the rest of the group. He wanted to write for his own purposes, probably because he did not want to subject his works to the criticisms of others.⁵⁶ Towards the end of the 1970s, people became increasingly unwilling to join circles that did not appeal to them and became more protective about their free time. This development is explored further in Chapter 9.

Similarly to cultural circles, low attendance at cultural events in factories was also connected to personal reasons. Lack of time, energy and interest were the key factors that prevented workers attending cultural events.⁵⁷ Alternatively, personal tensions between individuals could also be the root cause of non-attendance. In some brigades, the individual members did not get on with each other. In these cases, it

⁵² See above; BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 4249, *Programm für die perspektivistische Entwicklung der Kulturarbeit im CFWP*, 18.4.68, p.11, side 0028: the demands that are placed on this musical group are too great for individual members.

⁵³ Archiv Landkreis Oberhavel, Kreis- und Verwaltungsarchiv, Oranienburg III 92 Gransee, *Protokoll der Kulturgruppen Vollversammlung am 13.4.62*: there are immense personal tensions within this dancing group, which causes fluctuation in the membership and arguments between participants and functionaries; See also Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940, *Einschätzung des Gesangvereins in B.*, 9.4.62: here, there are tensions between SED members and others.

⁵⁴ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Protokoll über die Jahreshauptversammlung der AG Nauen 18.1.65*: on the 'exchange days', most members can't find the stamps they're interested in and hence stay away.

⁵⁵ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Protokoll der Jahreshauptversammlung der AG Nauen am 13.2.66*: here, many of the members only joined the *Kulturbund* to receive stamps, but they do not want to engage with other collectors in meetings; the same is evident in this circle: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Protokoll über die Jahreshauptversammlung der AG Nauen, 18.1.65*, p.1.

⁵⁶ BLHA Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 249, *Protokoll eines Zirkels*, p.5.

⁵⁷ Women had less free time to pursue cultural activity than men, because they needed to look after the home and the families: BLHA Rep. 506 VEB IFA Automobil Werke Ludwigsfelde Nr. 407, *Maßnahmen zur weiteren Verbesserung der Arbeit mit den Frauen im Betrieb*, 18.7.72; But time restrictions were also evident more generally: BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP, Nr. 4189, *Vorlage für die Betriebsparteiabteilung am 25.11.74 - Einschätzung über kulturelle Fragen, 18.11.74*, pp. 3-4.

could be difficult to organise joint events: the internal tensions were evident during all collective experiences, and the brigades consequently tried to organise joint events as infrequently as possible.⁵⁸

Why is it so important to stress that people often withdrew from organised cultural activity for personal reasons, and to stress that evasion of political-ideological influence was not the only factor behind people's disengagement? It is a vital aspect because this highlights that people's attitude towards state organised cultural activity was not black or white: people did not either embrace it or reject it. When the official cultural structures and events met people's interests, then they were attended, but if they did not, for whatever reason, then people withdrew and sought to satisfy their interest elsewhere. Cultural life in the GDR was, therefore, not dominated either by withdrawal into niches or by a complicit participation in the dictatorship. People moved within and outside the structures in an effort to maximise their personal gain. When they withdrew from the organised structures, they did so because of personal constraints (lack of time or mobility), because they wanted to avoid others, because the cultural circles did not satisfy their interests or because they disliked the overt interference from state organs.

A very good illustration of people's willingness to 'pick and choose' was the development of attendance levels at activities that were organised by the Protestant church (*Bezirk* Potsdam was predominantly Protestant). In the 1950s, the SED adopted a repressive stance towards the church, and the church responded with defiance. By the end of the decade, however, the Protestant church and SED began seeking a *modus vivendi*. In 1958, the SED guaranteed freedom of religious belief and worship, and ceased to undermine the church as obviously as it had done in the early 1950s. Over the course of the 1960s, however, there were still tensions between the state and the Protestant church. This manifested itself in cultural life. A cause for conflict was the failure of many pastors to seek permission for cultural events they

⁵⁸ BLHA Rep. 505 SMBHR Nr. 2029, *Brigadebuch 2*: in this brigade, the individual members did not get along with each other, and this had a marked effect on cultural life: the 'culture and education plans' were not fulfilled and each brigade event was carried out in a subdued atmosphere. See for example *1969 eine Feier zur Adventszeit, Protokoll der Kontrolle der Brigadeverpflichtungen zu Ehren des 100. Geburtstages Lenin 17.4.70; Protokoll über das Arbeitsessen am 28.5.70, Thema Auffrischung des Brigadelebens, 19.6.70, Protokoll über die am 9.6.70 durchgeführte Brigadeveranstaltung; Aus dem Brigadeleben, 18.6.70*; BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 1843, *Informationsbericht Nr.9, Bericht über eine Becher-Veranstaltung des DFD in Ludwigsfelde, 18.4.62*: after a structural reorganisation of a division in a factory, the morale of the workers had suffered and with it, the willingness to engage in joint cultural activity had subsided.

organised from the police.⁵⁹ Furthermore, at some church organised cultural events, the participants engaged with Western culture or were introduced to Western organisations.⁶⁰ Young people, who were disaffected by the SED's restrictive policy on popular music, were attracted by the more open atmosphere in their local pastor's house, where they could play 'Beat music'.⁶¹ Consequently, the police units sought to undermine cultural events in the church where they could. The situation between state and church remained tense until 1969, when the church officially severed its ties to the West. From then on, the relations between the church and state began to relax considerably. This culminated in the 1978 'church-state' agreement.

Throughout the 1960s, there were certain cultural groups, like choirs in rural areas that remained tied to the church.⁶² Priests also tried their best to draw young people into the church by organising attractive and entertaining events.⁶³ During the 1970s, when the activities organised by the church were less of a bone of contention, people began to attend church organised cultural events in higher numbers more generally.⁶⁴ Many pastors offered desirable pastime activities. These included events for youths and for adults. The events were focussed on excursions, games of table tennis, book readings and religious music.⁶⁵ In some ways, people were drawn to the church in the 1970s because it provided a platform for engaging with some more controversial events and conducted more open discussions, which the state did not

⁵⁹ BLHA, Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 124, *Booklet II, betr. Kirchliche Veranstaltungen in Pritzerbe, Heft für Pfarrer B.*, 3.8.67, see *Protokoll 17.3.53* and *Betr. Filmveranstaltung in der Kirche P*, 7.8.67: between 1953 and 1967, a priest repeatedly fails to register the events he is organising; *ibid.* *An das Volkspolizeikreisamt vom Transportpolizei-Amt*, 16.4.69; BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 306, *Tätigkeit der Jungen Gemeinde, Kreis Neuruppin*, 13.2.67; Ellen Ueberschär, 'Der lange Atem der kirchlichen Jugendarbeit – Repression von Freizeiten und Rüstzeiten', in Horst Dähn, Helga Gotschlich (ed.), *„Und Führe uns nicht in Versuchung...“*, *Jugend im Spannungsfeld von Staat und Kirche in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1989* (Metropol Verlag Berlin 1998), p. 181.

⁶⁰ BLHA, Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 306, *Bericht 16.1.67*, pp. 1-2, side 62-63 and *Tätigkeit der Gemeinde 19.5.62*, p. 2, side 139: church based cultural circles and activities had contact to West German organisations, engaged with Western culture (i.e. book readings that discussed West German novels).

⁶¹ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Kreisbehörde Brandenburg Nr. 124, *Einschätzung der Kirchenarbeit im Monat Februar in P.*, 27.2.68.

⁶² BLHA Rep. 471/15/1 DVP Nr. 305, *Analyse der Tätigkeit der evangelischen Kirche auf dem Lande, Juli 65*, Blatt 27-28; *ibid.*, *Tätigkeit der evangelischen Kirche auf dem Lande*, 30.3.63, p. 2, side 26.

⁶³ BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 306, *Tätigkeit der Jungen Gemeinde im Kreis Belzig*, 71-76, 30.6.66; Allinson, *Popular Opinion*, p. 110.

⁶⁴ Detlef Pollack, *Kirche in der Organisationsgesellschaft. Zum Wandel der gesellschaftlichen Lage der evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR* (Stattgart Berlin Köln: Kohlhammer GmbH, 1994), p. 427, p. 429 and p. 439.

⁶⁵ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 6450, *Rat des Kreises Potsdam an Rat des Bezirkes, Kurzinformation - Aktivitäten der Kirche im kulturellen Bereich*, 18.20.71; BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 28381 *Bericht aus Zossen 15.11.73*.

offer.⁶⁶ But it was not only that which attracted people back to church events. Some people were also drawn towards church events because of the attractive offers that existed there. They did not necessarily attend church events because they resented state organised culture *per se*, but because the church offered them something more attractive. There are indications that cultural activity in the churches soared in the 1970s when local state organisation proved to be disappointing.⁶⁷ These individuals were ready to switch back to the regime's institutions if these focussed on their interests again.

There was thus a readiness to make use of state organised activities, 'private' entertainment and church events intermittently. People's interaction with organised cultural life in the GDR was therefore highly complex, and had many shades of grey, but it centred on one common element: the satisfaction of personal interest. As the next chapter will show, the dominance of people's interest meant that when they participated in organised activities, people devised several strategies to ensure that things went their way. Before embarking on this analysis, however, it is necessary to explore one more aspect. When people chose to engage with organised cultural activity, they had to accept certain limitations. If people wanted their activity to progress without conflict, they had to address a certain minimum of political requirements.

Meeting Ideological and Administrative Requirements

The SED expected GDR citizens – in particular the workers – to attend large events and cultural performances in order to maintain the 'progressive' image of the GDR, where culture was not a privilege of the few, but was an enterprise enjoyed by the masses. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, people had to attend festivals and national events such as the Worker's Day, the anniversary of the GDR, the anniversary of the Liberation of Germany by the Soviets and the International Womens' Day. On May 1st, for example, factories celebrated the Workers' Day by having various brigades marching through the streets of the towns, which were lined with people who

⁶⁶ Pollack, *Kirche in der Organisationsgesellschaft*, pp. 428-429, pp. 438-439.

⁶⁷ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Kreisbehörde Brandenburg Nr. 124, *Volkspolizeikreisamt Greifswald*, 24.1.72; When the functionaries in state institutions saw the church events become more popular and were drawing people away, they tried to draw people back into state organisations: BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 28381 *Rat der Stadt Brandenburg, kirchliche Aktivitäten*, 30.11.73; Pollack, *Kirche in der Organisationsgesellschaft*, p. 432.

cheered the 'working class heroes' on.⁶⁸ A high turnout at these occasions was vital. These events did not just celebrate Communism and the GDR, but, in the eyes of the SED party leaders, they showed that the GDR was a state legitimised by the happy condition of its population, which was not suffering from Capitalist exploitation. Apart from these key events, there were also occasionally other important cultural performances that were held in factories or cultural houses and relied on high public attendance. On these occasions, the trade unions were told to sell a certain amount of tickets to ensure attendance, particularly among the workers.⁶⁹

Just like workers in factories had to attend certain organised events, those people who lived out their hobbies within the confines of the official cultural structures had to accept a degree of outside interference. Bureaucratic measures were imposed on the cultural groups and circles in order to assess the membership of these groups, and to ensure that the cultural activity moved in specified boundaries. This will briefly be illustrated on the examples of the registration of choirs and of the administration of stamp collectors.

As Chapter 2 has shown, it became a requirement for all cultural circles to be registered and authorised in 1949, and functionaries had to provide the administrative units with full details of the members of individual cultural groups. In the endeavour to record details about the members of all circles, the police had a whole division called *Erlaubniswesen* (section for granting permission) that observed and monitored cultural circles closely. Throughout the 1960s, this police division observed the cultural groups and assessed the details of the membership and the nature of the groups' cultural engagement.⁷⁰ Choirs, for example, were closely monitored because it was feared that they were still steeped in pre-GDR, bourgeois and religious tradition. Hence, the division *Erlaubniswesen* recorded the backgrounds of the choir leaders and the choir members, listing whether they had been members of Nazi organisations, whether they had relatives who lived in the West, and even whether they were morally upright citizens.⁷¹ In order to avoid attracting suspicion or negative attention from the police or the state's administrative units, the choirs had to comply with a certain amount of outside regulation of their repertoire. Towards the

⁶⁸ see footnote 42.

⁶⁹ BLHA Rep. 504 Geräte und Reglerwerke Teltow Nr. 428, *FDGB Kreisvorstand and BGL GRW Teltow*, 29.10.69.

⁷⁰ See files BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 308, Nr. 309 and Nr. 310; BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940.

⁷¹ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940, for example *Volkspolizeikreisamt Pritzwalk, Protokoll über die Überprüfung der Tätigkeit des Männerchors M.*, 14.5.65, pp.1-3, side 81-83.

mid-1960s, they had become much more outwardly conformist.⁷² Unlike the 1950s, the repertoire of choirs was now far more in line with official dictates: when cultural groups performed or exhibited their work publicly, they included a requisite amount of Socialist material. This meant, for example, that choirs occupied themselves with a certain degree of ‘progressive’ workers’ songs.⁷³ Similarly, orchestras had to rehearse marching music, so that they could be used at official celebration days.⁷⁴

The bureaucratic measures for monitoring and guiding cultural groups increased more and more between the 1960s and 1970s. Just as the executive cultural functionaries were increasingly punished for not fulfilling their administrative duties from the early 1970s onwards,⁷⁵ the participants were prohibited from exercising their activity in organised cultural structures in specific circumstances. This can be observed by turning to the example of stamp collectors’ circles in *Bezirk* Potsdam. The administrative units feared that there were interested stamp collectors who were collecting outside a state-controlled cultural circle.⁷⁶ Consequently, access to stamps from the post was restricted to those collectors who were members of cultural circles. While this encouraged interested stamp collectors to join a state-organised philatelist circle, it soon emerged that there were many people who were only members of stamp collectors’ groups ‘on paper’, but never attended meetings. These members received stamps from the *Kulturbund*, but still effectively collected on their own, in other words, they were ‘inactive’. The ‘inactive’ members were therefore not reached by the political work of the circle, which concerned the *Bezirk’s Kulturbund* leadership. Over the course of the 1960s, functionaries running the stamp collectors’ circles were not only required to provide lists of names and backgrounds of the members of their circles, but they were also requested to give an indication of active and inactive members within their groups.⁷⁷ In the early 1970s, this information was then used to force inactive members to become active: the local state administrations demanded that all inactive members were to be excluded from the cultural circles, unless they attended the circle’s meetings a certain number of times.⁷⁸

⁷² See Chapter 6, pp. 140-143.

⁷³ For example: BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr 309, *Tätigkeit des Deutschen Sängerbundes auf dem Gebiet der DDR*, 24.6.65, pp.2-3, side 182-183.

⁷⁴ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 3236, *Akten-Vermerk, Kampfgruppen-Orchester N., August 1964*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ See Chapter 4, pp. 96-98.

⁷⁶ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Protokoll, Kreisverbandskonferenz des Philatelistenverb in Falkensee*, 10.10.70, p. 2.

⁷⁷ See Chapter 4, p. 95.

⁷⁸ This occurred throughout the 1970s, and had some problematic effects on the membership statistics: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Philatelistenverband St., an den Philatelistenverband im*

It is difficult to determine people's attitude to the presence of outside involvement in their affairs. In the sources of the period, there are no instances of people complaining about this phenomenon directly. Such an act would have been tantamount to challenging the supremacy of the SED. There are, nevertheless, some indications that the participants in cultural life resented the levels of state and party involvement and the restrictions that this imposed on the way they exercised their hobbies. Looking at the sources after November 1989 shows that, as soon as they could, people complained bitterly about certain aspects of the organisation of cultural life in the GDR. Circles of philatelists, for example, vented their feelings about the tight regulations that had been imposed on exchanging stamps with foreigners:

These bureaucratic irritations no longer correspond to modern times ... The current form does not allow the attachment of a personal messages to sent items, which should really be possible amongst people under normal circumstances. The current form is degraded to a pure sending of goods, which does not serve the understanding of collectors amongst themselves.⁷⁹

The net effect of the continued expression of these grievances was that in 1990, the Philatelists' Union made itself independent from the *Kulturbund*, preferring to carry on with its own affairs and putting an end to outside interference.⁸⁰

Conclusion

It has been shown that people's engagement with organised cultural activity was primarily determined by their personal cultural interests. In some cases, people felt that they could fulfil their interests best by withdrawing and exercising cultural activities 'privately'. If, however, it served the satisfaction of their interest, people were willing to engage with the cultural structures in the state institutions and mass organisations. Once they had joined these institutions, they wanted their interest to be fulfilled. Therefore, they began to employ a variety of strategies, which ensured that the structures of the regime satisfied their inclinations and desires. To a degree, they had to tolerate a degree of outside inference and conform to the SED's cultural

Bezirksvorstand, 12.2.73: after culling their inactive members, this circle had only nine remaining members; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 29, *Letter H.M to K, Henningsdorf*, 10.5.77; the inactive members were not always ousted: sometimes, the material that they received was restricted: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Bezirk Potsdam Nr. 23, *Bericht der AG R.*, 15.2.79.

⁷⁹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 21, *Schaffung von Bedingungen für einen neuen Austauschverkehr für Philatelisten*, 25.11.89.

⁸⁰ Peter Fischer, 'Philatelie im Kulturbund', p.66.

norms. But in spite of that, people made sure that cultural life in the organised structures satisfied their interests. This is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Communication with Cultural Functionaries

The previous chapter argued that when people pursued cultural activities within the organised cultural structures, they wanted to satisfy a particular personal inclination. Upon meeting a minimum of the political requirements (for example by singing 'progressive' workers' songs at public performances), the participants looked after the fulfilment of their interests.¹ Cultural life in the GDR was not, therefore, standardised and 'de-differentiated' as a result of state coercion and party control. In pursuit of their interests, the participants shaped and determined the nature of cultural activities, which undermined the SED's imposition of a particular cultural model. There were two mechanisms through which the participants could realise their interests: they expressed *Eigen-Sinn* to secure autonomous spaces in which they pursued what they were interested in, but they also communicated with cultural functionaries. The communication with cultural functionaries was not restricted to dialogue between participants and executive functionaries. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the participants increasingly sought to communicate with functionaries at the local administrative and intermediate levels of authority.

The mixture of *Eigen-Sinn* and interaction with functionaries was very complex. It took a while for people to learn how to manipulate cultural life by integrating into the organised structures and communicating with cultural functionaries at various levels of authority. In the early 1950s, the participants and honorary executive functionaries still tried to resist being integrated into the organised cultural structures and did not conform to the SED's cultural principles. Gradually, this began to change, and by the late 1950s, people interacted with the organised structures more readily.² The process of integrating into the organised structures was then affected further by the erection of the Berlin Wall. The construction of the Wall on 13th August 1961 had a deep impact on the cultural practices in the areas of *Bezirk* Potsdam that surrounded West Berlin. Many people who lived these areas, in particular young people, had utilised the cultural facilities in

¹ Antonia Maria Humm, *Auf dem Weg zum sozialistischen Dorf? Zum Wandel der dörflichen Lebenswelt in der DDR von 1952-1969 mit vergleichenden Aspekten zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), pp. 260-261.

² This is explored in Chapter 2, pp. 48-49.

West Berlin.³ Furthermore, contacts had developed between cultural circles in these areas and in West Berlin. Some people had also been members of cultural circles in West Berlin.⁴ Initially, the building of the Berlin Wall caused resentment, confusion and disruptive behaviour, particularly among the young people within these border regions.⁵ Similarly, some cultural groups with cross-border contacts tried to uphold their contacts with West German cultural groups regardless of the closed border.⁶ Nevertheless, after the construction Wall, there was no longer an alternative to fulfilling personal interest inside the GDR. From now on, culturally active people in *Bezirk* Potsdam had to make the most of the cultural structures that existed in the East. Gradually, open expressions of resentment subsided, and integration into the structures gained the upper hand.

Using autonomous spaces

Declining Nonconformity

Throughout the 40-year history of the GDR, the participants in cultural life engaged in *Eigen-Sinn* in pursuit of their cultural interests. The manifestations of *Eigen-Sinn* changed over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. In the early 1960s, there were still

³ See Chapter 2, pp. 44-45. There were some citizens of *Bezirk* Potsdam who lived in the GDR but worked in West Berlin (where they were paid more): these individuals were called *Grenzgänger*. The SED resented people commuting to West Berlin on a daily basis. Shortly before the Berlin Wall was erected, there were demands from the state institutions for the *Grenzgänger* to give up their jobs and register for work in the GDR: Stadtarchiv Potsdam, (StA Potsdam) *Film Nr. 159 Beschluss des Rates der Stadt Potsdam über Grenzgängerwesen, 8.8.61*; after the Berlin Wall was built, the *Grenzgänger* were among the ones who showed most resentment about the erection of the Wall (ibid., *Beschluss Nr. 143/-/61*: this police report describes a woman who refuses to work in the GDR; ibid. *Beschluss Nr. 142/-/61*: this described an individual who complained about the Berlin Wall. His neighbours reported him to the police and he was 'removed'). Some *Grenzgänger*, who had not registered for work in the GDR faced imprisonment: Hendrik Röder, 'Die Knarre haben wir! Ein Schauprozess gegen die Evangelische Studentengemeinde', in Sigrid Grabner, Hendrick Röder, Thomas Wernicke, *Widerstand in Potsdam, 1945-1989* (Berlin-Brandenburg: Be.bra Verlag GmbH, 1999), pp. 51-58; Erhart Hohenstein, 'Mein Gott, was haben die mit euch vor! Zehn Monate im Leben des Volker Schobeß', in Grabner, Röder, Wernicke, *Widerstand in Potsdam*, pp.59-67.

⁴ See chapter 2, p. 44-45.

⁵ Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) Rep. 401 Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam (RdB) Nr. 2274, *Kontrolle im Auftrage der Agit-Kommission der Bezirksleitung, 19.8.61*, side 207-209; BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei (DVP) Kreisbehörde Königswusterhausen Nr. 462, *Bericht zur Entwicklung der Klassenkampfsituation und des Einsatzes der bewaffneten Kräfte des Kreises in der Zeit vom 13.8 bis 31.8, 20.9.61*, pp. 1-8; ibid. *Einschätzung der Klassenkampfsituation im Kreis Königswusterhausen nach dem 13.8.61*, side 14; ibid. *Einschätzung der Lage im Kreisgebiet*, 22.8.61, side 190.

⁶ BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 309, *Abschlussbericht über den Vorgang Männerchor in M.*, side 2; ibid., *Verdacht der Einflussnahme des Deutschen Sängerbundes auf Männerchöre im Bezirk Potsdam*, 25.6.65; ibid. *Analyse über die Tätigkeit des Verbandes der Kleingärtner, 9.12.63*, side 253.

some culturally active people in *Bezirk* Potsdam who over-estimated the extent of their autonomous spaces, and who persistently engaged in nonconformist behaviour. In most cases, these individuals only expressed defiance of the new cultural order when they believed that they were not being observed. For example, on one evening in 1961 (shortly after the building of the Berlin Wall), the members of a choir met in a gastro-pub after a rehearsal. Towards the end of the evening, many of the choir's SED members had left, and, according to a police report, the following incident unfolded:

We [the police] were told [by a member of the choir] that ... when he went to the toilet in the gastro-pub, he heard that songs such as 'Mein Schlesierland, mein Heimatland' [My Silesia country, my home country] were being sung in the bar ... He could not determine who had sung this song in particular. The choir has some members, who formerly came from Silesia, and it is possible that they were the ones who sang this song.⁷

Other reports about this night account that the choir members also sung the West German hit 'Schwarz-braun ist die Haselnuss, schwarz-braun bin auch ich', which the authorities perceived as a 'fascist' song. The text celebrated the colours black and brown, which the SED interpreted as clear indications of West German 'fascist-Imperialist' tendencies, because black was the colour of the West German Conservative Party, and brown was formerly the colour of the Nazis. In order to prevent the police from taking any further action after this incident, the choir's leading functionary had to issue a warning to the choir members, asking them not to allow such incidents to occur in the future.⁸

Not all acts of nonconformity took place in such a seemingly secluded environment, moreover. Some incidents in the 1960s showed more open defiance. In 1965, a *Sängertreff* (meeting of singers) was organised in Pritzwalk, where the participating regional choirs had to form a parade and carry the flags of the GDR and of the Worker's Movement, in order to show their allegiance to the new state and their support for the Socialist social order. On this occasion, the following incident occurred:

⁷ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei Potsdam (DVP) Nr. 940, *Unterredung mit S. (Chormitglied)*, Berlin 22.9.61.

⁸ *ibid*, *Abschrift, Singen von Liedern mit faschistischem Inhalt durch Mitglieder des Männerchors im Lokal L*, 20.9.61; for other incidents where nonconformity became evident underneath the surface: BLHA Rep. 530 Bezirksleitung SED Potsdam (SED) Nr. 3232, *Abteilung Org/Kader, Abteilung Ideologische Kommission an das ZK der SED*, 24.6.63, p. 14: in some cultural groups, people stated that they considered the 'Anti-Fascist Protective Wall' (the Berlin Wall) as 'immoral'.

The male choir B ... only carried the green flag of the cultural group ... those flag carriers who were meant to carry the red flag [the flag of the Workers' Movement] and the flag of the GDR merely left the distributed flags leaning against the wall of the gastro-pub and went along to accompany the group's flag. The following choirs consequently also did not feel obliged to carry the red flag of the working class and the flag of the GDR along with the group's flag.⁹

This incident was a serious issue. The members of these choirs were willing to celebrate their local group by carrying its flag. They seemed to have had little inclination for showing their support of the GDR and for Socialism, however, as they left the two flags that symbolised these elements behind.

The participants in cultural life slowly learned that these acts of nonconformity did little to benefit them. If an individual was noted as someone who did not embrace Socialism, this could entail serious negative consequences. Career options became closed off or attractive holiday resorts were not made available for these persons. It did not, moreover, take very much to be regarded as a 'negative' citizen. In the early 1960s, the police division *Erlaubniswesen* expressed concerns about the meagre 'political-ideological' content of various cultural groups.¹⁰ These fears sparked off a wave of investigation to assess the 'political-ideological' commitment of the members. One choir in Kreis Pritzwalk, for example, was investigated in 1965. It had come to the police's attention that this choir frequently sang at church events, and when doing so, seemed to know the required songs very well. When singing the *Sozialistenmarsch* and the *Gefangenenchor* from the opera *Aida*, a 'progressive' song, however, the members sang it 'not with rejection, but showing as little enthusiasm while singing it as they do when singing other songs ... the main focus is the melody ... the text does not attract much interest'.¹¹ It is hardly necessary to point out that coming under investigation for not singing a song with enough conviction shows how careful cultural groups had to be when they were giving public performances in order to be regarded as 'progressive' associations.

⁹ BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 310, *Betreff Sängertreffen in der Gemeinde B.*, 5.7.65, p. 2, side 92.

¹⁰ BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940 *Männerchor S.*, *Protokoll EA 2/61*, 12.7.61; BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 310, *Ausstellung der Arbeitsgemeinschaften Philatelie Potsdam Stadt und Land*, 5.8.64, side 43; BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 309, *Analyse über die Tätigkeit des Verbandes der Kleingärtner und Kleintierzüchter*, 9.12.63, side 253-254.

¹¹ BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 310 *Protokoll über die Ermittlungen zur Überprüfung der Tätigkeit des Männerchors L. in B.*, pp. 1-2, side 73-74; see also all reports in BLHA, Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940, they all contain an analysis of the amount of 'progressive' material in their repertoire; see also: BLHA Rep. 538 Kulturbund der DDR, Bezirksvorstand Potsdam (KB) Nr.29, *Protokoll der Kreisdelegiertenkonferenz des Kreisverbandes des Philatelistenverbandes der DDR im Deutschen Kulturbund Oranienburg in Glienicke*, 5.9.70, p.2.

In contrast to the early-to-mid 1960s, in the later 1960s and 1970s, the participants in cultural life became more outwardly conformist.¹² The number and the seriousness of the disturbances dropped in the 1970s; the discussion of such incidents is almost absent in the police files and in the reports of administrative functionaries.¹³ Furthermore, cultural groups that had once engaged in acts of defiance began to conform by performing or exhibiting ‘progressive’ works at public events.¹⁴ The growing levels of outward conformity do not indicate, however, that the participants identified more strongly with the SED’s cultural model: there were still subtle forms of ridiculing the cultural project of the SED. Evidence of this can be found in the brigade diaries. In the 1970s, these diaries often included pictures, jokes and poems, which demonstrated a ‘tongue-in-cheek’ attitude towards socialist norms. For example, the following extract from a poem describes an excursion of a brigade in the factory *Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau*, in Wildau:

Having arrived, opinions are united
Which is rare, but I believe that
We had found the real team interests
As we were about to eat!
Excursions, guided tours
Everyone knows that so well.
Seeing, listening, behaving well.
Bruno was still standing when asleep he fell¹⁵

The extract ridicules the brigade members, whose main interest at the excursion was the food, but it also makes fun of the SED’s demand for ‘cultured’ and ‘educational’ contents of the outing, which bored the brigade members. The poem shows no real objection to the educational content of the brigade outing, but it does

¹² The development of growing ‘outward’ conformity in the 1960s was also noticeable generally: see Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 138-142; Mark Allinson, *Politics and Popular Opinion in East Germany, 1945-68* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 125.

¹³ There was one exception: there were growing levels of disturbances from young people at public events: there were growing incidents of young people tearing down flags or defacing official buildings with Nazi symbols. BLHA Rep. 471/51.1 DVP Nr. 53, *Hinweise 19.4.66*, side 147; BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 231, *Auskunftsbericht, Einschätzung der polizeilichen Lage, Einige Vorkommnisse zum 20. Jahrestag und 1. Mai in Kreisen Potsdam und Oranienburg, 15.6.66* side 25 and *Lagefilm zum Einsatz Arbeiterfestspiele, 19.6.66*, side 67; BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 643, *Abschlussbericht zum Ordnungseinsatz aus Anlass des 100. Baumblütenfestes in Werder/Havel vom 26. bis 30.4.79*.

¹⁴ BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 309, *Tätigkeit des Deutschen Sängerbundes auf dem Gebiet der DDR, 24.6.65*, side 182-183: *Chor in N/D*; *ibid. Einschätzung der Tätigkeit der Gesangsvereinigung im Kreis Neurppin*, p.3, side 333: by the mid-1960s, these choirs, which had engaged in nonconformist activity, began to include more ‘progressive’ songs in their repertoire.

¹⁵ BLHA Rep. 505 VEB Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau Wildau (SMBHR) Nr. 2029, *Exkursionsballade*.

emphasise distance to political commitments, which are not shared, but endured.¹⁶ If these forms of gentle ridicule still existed, then it is quite likely that culturally active people did not identify with all of the SED's cultural goals, but that they had learned not to voice their disagreement.

Eigen-Sinn Evident in Cultural Activity in Circles

Even if the instances of nonconformist behaviour in cultural circles had declined quite considerably by the late 1960s, 'vertical' expressions of *Eigen-Sinn* were, nonetheless, still very prevalent, but in subtler forms. In the day-to-day proceedings of the cultural circles, people's interests determined the repertoire and development of the cultural activity. This can be grasped by looking at stamp collectors' circles. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the members of these circles collected largely only the kind of stamps they were interested in. Many of the members specialised in collecting stamps in certain areas (aviation, for instance) and showed little interest in any other material.¹⁷ These people's collections were rarely occupied with pursuing Socialist themes, despite efforts from the administrative functionaries to raise people's interest in these areas.¹⁸ It was only at public events that the participants and executive functionaries aimed at a greater 'political-ideological' content, and showed commitment to the socialist cultural model, so it was difficult for the administrative functionaries to reprimand these circles.¹⁹ Cultural life in the circles was, therefore, not exclusively determined by SED policy – the participants' interests shaped the nature and development of cultural life to no small degree.

In order to explore this phenomenon further, a lot of insight can be gained by looking at 'circles of writing workers'. In the early 1960s, the SED initiated these

¹⁶ The occurrences of jokes and gentle ridicule are evident in brigade diaries throughout the 1970s: BLHA, Rep. 502 Stahl und Walzwerk Henningsdorf (SWWH) Nr. 471, *Brigadebuch 1979*, p. 1 features a collage of jokes, some of them related to the cultural field. See also footnote 13: the disturbances at public events, such as torn down state flags, were also an indication of this.

¹⁷ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Protokoll über die Jahreshauptversammlung der AG Nauen 18.1.65*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 615, *Bericht über eine Beratung bei der Bundesleitung des Deutschen Kulturbundes, Zur Auswertung der IV. Deutschen Fotoschau, 30.6.61*, p.1.

¹⁸ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 29, *Protokoll der Kreisdelegiertenkonferenz des Kreisverbandes des Philatelistenverbandes der DDR Oranienburg, 5.9.70*, p. 2; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 23, *Arbeitsplan 1973/74 - 24.7.73*.

¹⁹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 31, *Protokoll über die Kreiskonferenz, 23.5.70*, pp.1-2; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 615, *Bezirkskommission Foto, zwei Jahre nach der letzten Bezirkskonferenz, vier Monate nach der Bezirksfotoschau, 39.3.68*, pp.1-2; Thomas Ruben, Bernd Wagner (ed.) *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg, Eine Bestandaufnahme* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin Brandenburg, 1994), 'Interview mit Frank Kuchina, dem ehemaligen Leiter des Kulturhauses Küstrin-Kietz', p. 186: 'If the reports were done correctly, you had a lot of space for manoeuvre (Freiraum)'.

circles in the hope that the GDR's workers would create their own working class literature that would stand out as a marvel among socialist literature. Yet, despite the immense efforts to establish these circles throughout the GDR, they were neither very numerous nor did they have a lot working class members.²⁰ Essentially, and unsurprisingly, these circles only attracted the few people who had a personal interest in writing, and these individuals rarely came from the working classes. The people who were interested in creative writing, though, had their own ideas of what they wanted to write about. Of course, they could not pursue their own ideas at all times. When they wanted to publish their work, their texts had to correspond to the ideas of Socialist Realism and at least uphold the image of meeting the official requirements. Nevertheless, looking at the texts in detail shows that the socialist ideal was really only adhered to on the surface. Underneath, these amateur writers largely wrote about what they were interested in. In 1978, there was a Competition for Writing Workers in *Bezirk* Potsdam for which several amateur writers sent in their texts. On the one hand, these texts show that, by this time, people had learned the rules of the game – they knew that their texts had to include references to working class issues (such as life in the factories), to the Soviet-German friendship, or a rejection of 'Fascist-Imperialism'. Still, however, all of these texts are essentially particular stories that are just padded out with these references.

One of the texts describes a journey to the writer's childhood town in Poland, from where his family had been expelled after the War. The childhood days are written about with great longing – clearly, the main desire here is to recapture the spirit of the writer's childhood. To meet the ideological requirements at the same time, however, the writer also includes passages about the Nazis and shows that they ruined this idyll. In another story, a different writer described the workers of a factory on their early morning walk to work. This text thus met the SED's desire for the 'writing workers' to portray the working class, but it left out any kind of political or ideological moralisation. It is a simple and very uneventful story. A third story focuses on a woman who is in labour in a house that is snowed in so that she cannot be brought into a hospital. Her neighbour searches for someone in the snow who is able to deliver her baby. He finally finds a Russian officer, who happens to know

²⁰ See Chapter 1, p. 17-20; Simone Barck, "Ankunft im Real-Sozialismus" Anno 1970. Anmerkungen zu sozialen Irritationen und kulturellen Diffusionen am Beispiel der Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter', in *Potsdamer Bulletin*, Nr. 28/29 (Januar 2003), p.66-68: workers' numbers fell from 50% to 10%.

about delivering babies, and who is such a kind man that his name is given to the newborn baby boy.²¹

All of these texts are constructed to include a certain adherence to 'political-ideological' requirements. On the whole, however, they fulfilled the writers' great desire to write particular stories. The tales are about a lost childhood, about getting up in the morning and about an exciting, near fatal labour experience. None of these stories truly vindicate the socialist model. This trend was noticed and heavily criticised by the administrative functionaries throughout the 1960s and 1970s. They lamented that the 'writing workers' believed that they were fulfilling all ideological requirements by including a few 'correct' references, but had not quite understood what was truly expected of them.²² Yet, the functionaries who led these circles and the local administrative functionaries simply did not have the means to change the situation. They had enough trouble keeping the 'circles of writing workers' going. The demands for fulfilling the ideology simply fell by the wayside under these pressures.²³

The process of pursuing a personal interest and evading political pressures is a clear indication of vertical *Eigen-Sinn*. Yet, these expressions of *Eigen-Sinn* were no longer as defiant as they had been in the 1950s and early 1960s. In order to secure the continuation of their hobby, people adhered to certain dictates. These dictates were only fulfilled to a minimum, however. The participants did as little as they could get away with. Certain aspects were almost completely ignored. The leading administrative functionaries noticed, for example, that culturally active people almost entirely neglected to deal with the 'West German Imperialist threat'.²⁴

Eigen-Sinn Evident in Cultural Activity in Brigades

Following growing central demands over the course of the 1960s and 1970s there were increasing pressures on brigades to organise collective leisure activities for their members. These activities were not only designed to unite the brigade members, but

²¹ BLHA Rep. 426 Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit (BFK) Nr. 260, *Die Drehtür; Schichtwechsel; Eine Wintergeschichte*.

²² StA Potsdam Nr. 5389, *Einschätzung beim Leistungsvergleich der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kabarett Potsdam 27.2.66*, side 32; this was still a concern in the 1970s: Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 240, *Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit der DDR, Dezember 1977*, p.6.

²³ BLHA Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 249, *letter by E.S., Kyritz, 28.9.72*.

²⁴ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 20289, *Entwicklung der sozialistischen Volkskunstbewegung im Bezirk Potsdam und die Aufgaben bis zum 20 Jahrestag der DDR, 1967*, pp.4-5.

they were also meant to educate and stimulate the workers.²⁵ Over the course of the 1960s, however, it emerged that the cultural activities in brigades did not correspond to the SED's ideas of 'highbrow' and educational cultural endeavours. Only a few brigades boasted a high degree of highbrow cultural activity (such as a combination of going to theatre, attending concerts, visiting exhibitions and organising book readings). These brigades were so unusually culturally active out of their own choice because they either pursued the highest state title and had to perform exceptionally across the board to get it, or because the majority of the brigade's members were particularly culturally active in their free time.²⁶ Many brigades did not, however, commit to participating in many 'highbrow' cultural activities.²⁷ This did not change when, in the 1970s, brigades increasingly had to commit to organising activities in 'culture and education plans'. In these plans, the workers defined 'cultural activity' quite liberally. The events that they planned centred on sociable occasions of a 'lowbrow' nature, which corresponded to the worker's interests and desires. In the 'culture and education plan' the workers usually planned only one visit to the theatre, or to an exhibition, in order to include some kind of highbrow activity. The other activities focussed on evenings of card games, joint nature outings, usually with families, sporting weekends and festive events with music, dance and alcohol consumption. Over the course of the 1970s, brigade members became bolder in the pursuit of 'lowbrow' cultural activities. They were far more inclined to voice their disinclination towards 'highbrow' cultural activity and increasingly asserted their desires for sociable experiences.²⁸ Furthermore, the few 'highbrow' cultural activities that were planned in the 'culture and education plan' were often not carried out.²⁹

²⁵ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Bezirksvorstand Potsdam (FDGB) Nr. 1680, *Plan der Kulturarbeit für die Gewerkschaften im Stadtkreis Brandenburg 10.1.62*; BLHA Rep. 503 Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz (CFWP) Nr. 3268, *Perspektivplan der kulturellen Arbeit des VEB Chemiefaserwerkes "Friedrich Engels" Premnitz/Kreis Rathenow, 11.3.65*, p.6.

²⁶ BLHA Rep. 502 Stahl und Walzwerk Brandenburg (SWWB) Nr.2072, *Wettbewerbsbeitrag der Brigade „J.G.“*. In 1965, this brigade had 16 members, who had 20 theatre subscriptions. By April 1965, they had already hosted two political festive events and one festive occasion that was accompanied by a cultural programme; BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 4189, *Vorlage für die Betriebsparteiabteilung am 25.11.74 - Einschätzung über kulturelle Fragen, 18.11.74*, p.3: this report outlines that these brigades were only so unusually culturally active because they were pursuing a particular title.

²⁷ BLHA Rep. 502 SWWB Nr.2072, *Brigade H.M, 4.10.65; Brigade K; Brigade J.G. Brandenburg, 4.10.65*.

²⁸ *ibid.*, *Wettbewerbsbeiträge der Brigaden TK1, Betriebskontrolle Meisterbereich 2/Schicht III, Wettbewerbsverpflichtung 1970*, p.2: for the entire year, they plan one presentation, one evening playing Skat, one visit to the theatre, two days where the brigade went on a walking outing, an evening of bowling, an excursion on a boat and a brigade evening with family members; BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 4207, *Brigade A., Antrag auf Brigade der sozialistischen Arbeit, 7.7.72*: in the annual plan, they organise three evenings playing card games, a two-day excursion, one brigade evening and

These practices manifested themselves so clearly in the 1970s because the SED now officially sanctioned 'lowbrow', sociable and enjoyable endeavours in cultural policy, which meant that the workers could pursue their interests more openly. Looking at entries in brigade diaries in the late 1960s and 1970s that describe collective cultural experiences shows how openly the workers now focussed on the sociable content of cultural activity and how much the educational aspect of cultural activities was disregarded. Officially, when making an entry in a brigade diary, workers were meant to write about how cultural activities had edified them.³⁰ Quite the opposite was the case, however. When writing about cultural events in the late 1960s and 1970s, the workers tended not to focus on what they had learned – this was only mentioned in half a sentence somewhere in the description of the individual outings. The descriptions of the events usually focussed on experiences of togetherness, cosiness, fun, relaxation and enjoyment. The descriptions of highbrow cultural activity were usually very short when compared to more sociable events. In a brigade of the *Landbauprojekt* Potsdam, for example, the description of an outing to the musical 'My Fair Lady' was limited to a few very short lines:

With a lot of difficulty and only through perseverance, we finally achieved that the whole brigade went to see a theatrical performance on 20.4.69. The discussion on the following day showed a good opinion about the performance. In future, we want to do our cultural work in the brigade in the same spirited manner in which the musical was performed.³¹

In the case of more lowbrow, relaxing and sociable outings, however, a very different picture emerges. In the description of an outing to Neuruppin by a brigade

two angling events; *ibid.* *Brigade D.J., Antrag für Kollektiv der sozialistischen Arbeit*: they organised one games evening, one evening bowling, one angling event, a bus trip to Berlin, an evening eating wild boar and a shooting event; this was criticised in reports of the BGL: BLHA Rep. 506 VEB IFA Ludwigsfelde (IFAL) Nr. 2226, *Referat von Kollege P.*, 23.1.74, p.4; See also BLHA Rep. 511 VE Autobahnkombinat Potsdam, Nr. 601, *Rechenschaftsbericht zu den Gewerkschaftswahlen für den Zeitraum 1966/67, 3.10.1967*, pp.4-5: the trade union tried to organise a factory festival, but people showed little interest in participating. The factory leadership then decided to host a Carnival, which attracted far more interest and turned out to be a very successful event.

²⁹ BLHA Rep. 506 IFAL Nr. 1758, *Wettbewerb der Brigade W.S., Kultur und Bildungsplan 1976 Unter der Losung "Sozialistisch arbeiten, leben und lernen"*; BLHA Rep. 506 IFAL Nr. 2226, *Kulturobleuteversammlung, Referat von P.*, 23.1.74, p. 8: in order to compete in the competitions, the brigades select one person who can sing, for example, to represent the brigade culturally.

³⁰ Jörg Roesler, 'Das Brigadebuch: betriebliches Rapportbuch, Chronik des Brigadelebens oder Erziehungsfibel?', in Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders: Leben in der DDR* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2000), p. 154: the brigade diaries were designed as educational devices (Erziehungsfibel).

³¹ BLHA Rep. 514 VEB Landbauprojekt Potsdam (Landbau) Nr. 135, *My Fair Lady*; this is also evident in other brigade diaries: BLHA Rep. 514 Landbau Nr. 133, Brigade diary 1975: *Protokoll über die Erfüllung der Verpflichtungen zum Vertrag "Kollektiv der soz. Arbeit" III Quartal 1975*, p. 3 and *Die Kunst dem Volke - wir gehen ins Theater*: the descriptions of the theatrical performances are very short.

from the *Stahl- und Walzwerk Henningsdorf*, for example, everything is worth a mention: the train on which the journey began, the weather, all activities including luncheons, boat trips, coffee breaks and walks. In the evening, the account continues, 'we drove home with the factory bus. We were singing, not from the alcohol, but from the pleasure of relaxation and joy in life'.³² In collective activities of the brigades, the workers therefore sought fulfilment of their interests. They wanted relaxing, fun and sociable occasions. If expectations of good mood, cosiness and happiness were not met, then this could spread resentment and lead to negative commentary in the brigade diaries.³³ Just as activity in cultural circles, brigade events were strongly characterised by people's *Eigen-Sinn*: the workers asserted their own personal interests within their own spaces.

The Importance of Support from Functionaries

When participants in cultural life expressed 'vertical' *Eigen-Sinn* in pursuing their interests, this could sometimes lead to conflict between them and local administrative functionaries. For example, in a small town in *Kreis* Brandenburg in 1975, a pensioner decided to look after the upkeep of an historic tower in his locality. He collected some money from his community and got hold of the tower's keys to conduct guided tours. Soon, however, he got into trouble with the local *Kulturbund* leadership because he refused to involve them in this process. Upon being criticised by the local *Kulturbund* leadership, he described his actions in an *Eingabe* to the *Bezirk* leadership as follows:

On 18th August, I was asked to hand the money over to the Kulturbund..., for purposes, which were not reconcilable with those of the original intention of the collection ... In the last meeting (of the local *Kulturbund* group) there was a regular uproar, because I refused to give my signature to this endeavour. The

³² BLHA Rep. 502 SWWH Nr. 472, *Ausflug des Kollektivs nach Boltenmühle*, pp. 1-2; This is also evident in other brigade diaries throughout the late 1960s and 1970s - the sociable lowbrow events are the ones that are described in most detail, and record the most positive sentiments: Rep. 514 Landbau Nr. 131, *Brigadebuch 1968* p.19; BLHA Rep. 514 Landbau Nr. 132, *Brigadebuch 1969, Fasching*; BLHA Rep. 514 Landbau Nr. 133, *Brigadebuch 1975 Unsere Brigade nach Nassau/Erzgebirge and Gartenfest 1975*; BLHA Rep. 502 SWWH Nr. 471, *Brigadebuch 1978, "Ein gemeinsames Erlebnis"*; BLHA Rep. 502 SWWH Nr 470, *Brigadebuch 1978, Brigadefahrt: Eine Dampferfahrt*.

³³ BLHA Rep. 505 SMBHR Nr. 2029, *Der Titelnkampf und das Ergebnis*; see also Annegret Schüle, 'Von der Verpflichtung zum Vergnügen: Brigadeleben im VEB Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren', in Reante Hürtgen, Thomas Reichel (eds.) *Der Schein der Stabilität: DDR Betriebsalltag in der Ära Honecker* (Berlin: Metropol, 2001), p. 131.

chairman shouted at me as if I was a young boy, but then, that is what he tends to do. Politeness and good behaviour are rare here.³⁴

The local administrative functionaries in the *Kulturbund* argued that the pensioner should not have collected money on his own accord, that he should not have offered trips and talks when he was not instructed to do so and that he should have shown more cooperation with the local *Kulturbund* leadership. The leading local representative of the *Kulturbund* described the author of the *Eingaben* as ‘a very stubborn character and has overstepped a few boundaries with his formulations’.³⁵ The individual was ultimately forced to hand over the money and keys, and was no longer allowed to organise unauthorised guided tours. He had underestimated the importance of communication with the local administrative cultural functionaries. If he had been more cooperative, he might have remained involved in the upkeep of the tower, but as it was, the matter was completely passed into the hands of the *Kulturbund*.

This example shows briefly how important well-functioning dialogue with functionaries could be for the participants. If participants were too forthright with their expressions of *Eigen-Sinn*, they did could be at odds with higher-ranking functionaries, which could undermine the fulfilment of their interests.³⁶ If, however, the participants were on good terms with executive and local administrative functionaries, then these functionaries were frequently willing to defend their interests. Chapter 4 has explored how executive functionaries secured and upheld the autonomous spaces for the participants in cultural life. As a result, people did not just practise *Eigen-Sinn* against cultural functionaries, but also relied heavily on communication with and support from grass root functionaries; in other words, the utilisation of autonomous spaces could be a collective experience, in which executive and local administrative functionaries and participants acted as allies and tried to fulfil common goals.³⁷ Moreover, the participants also sought support from higher-ranking administrative functionaries in order to secure their interests. The interaction between participants and functionaries was, therefore, very complex, which is

³⁴ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe am 20.8.75 Herr S. aus Z. an die Bezirksleitung*.

³⁵ *ibid. Kreisleitung Brandenburg betr. die Eingabe von Herrn S, 28.8.75.*

³⁶ To view another example of tensions between individuals and administrative functionaries: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 23, *Aktennotiz 13.5.74.*

³⁷ See Chapter 4, pp. 88-94: there could be quite close connections between functionaries and participants.

explored in the rest of this chapter. The extent to which *Eigen-Sinn* dominated cultural life was limited.

Expectation

In cultural life, there was one aspect of the SED's political rhetoric that culturally active people had come to internalise: the party leaders continually insisted that the state, under the leadership of the party, was responsible for organising all aspects of cultural life within the specified structures. If the state took on board all responsibility for the organisation of cultural life, and allowed no room for other forms of organisation, then it also had the duty to ensure that the cultural facilities were able to meet people's cultural interests, as long as these interests did not challenge the supremacy of the SED.³⁸ If, therefore, the organised structures did not fulfil people's interests, then the participants blamed the executive and administrative functionaries, and made it clear that they expected to see any shortcomings rectified.³⁹

A term that is commonly brought into connection with the GDR is that of the 'social contract' between 'regime' and 'people', where the state promised to provide for people, and in return, the population accepted SED rule. Honecker's 'Unity of Social and Economic Policy', which was introduced in 1971, is often regarded as the clearest example of an agreement of this sort between 'party' and 'people', when the policy primarily promised to satisfy people's material, social and cultural needs.⁴⁰ To give a prominent example of the 'social contract' theory in current historiography, Peter Hübner has argued that in the early 1970s, there was a period of 'Normalisation', because the countries of the Soviet bloc were all trying to achieve greater stability by promising to provide for people. Hübner's utilisation of the term 'Normalisation' is an application of the idea of a social contract to this particular period in GDR history.⁴¹ Other historians have also firmly embedded the idea of a

³⁸ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr, *Eingabe*, 12.8.75; *ibid.*, *Eingabe* 28.1.75: in both of these *Eingaben*, people expressed that their membership in the *Kulturbund* entitled them to certain things.

³⁹ Ina Merkel, Felix Mühlberg, 'Eingaben und Öffentlichkeit', in Ina Merkel (ed.), *Wir sind doch nicht die Meckerecke der Nation! Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR* (Berlin, Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, erweiterte Neuausgabe, 2000), p.18.

⁴⁰ For more detail on Honecker's *Einheit von Wirtschafts und Sozialpolitik* and the ways it affected the cultural sphere, see Chapter 8, pp.202-205.

⁴¹ Peter Hübner, 'Norm, Normalität, Normalisierung: Quellen und Ziele eines gesellschaftspolitischen Paradigmenwechsels im sowjetischen Block um 1970', in *Potsdamer Bulletin*, Nr. 28/29 (Januar 2003), pp.24-28.

social contract into their arguments. The concept ‘paternalistic dictatorship’, introduced by Konrad Jarausch, also contains it, because it points to the SED’s promise to care and provide for the population in a paternalistic fashion.⁴²

The idea of the social contract is also an aspect of this section about ‘expectation’. The SED’s promise to provide for the population will be seen as a starting point. Yet, this will be applied differently to Hübner’s and Jarausch’s interpretation. The argument does not focus on the benevolent provision of goods and services that kept people content and calm. Instead, it is regarded as a factor that enabled the participants in cultural life to articulate their expectations to a responsible authority, with a good chance of having their expectations fulfilled. In other words, it gave people more bargaining power to realise their own interests. People internalised the SED’s rhetoric to a degree to be able to wield it to their advantage. Any formulation of their expectations was usually interwoven with a reference to what kind of cultural life was to be expected in a socialist country, and rounded off with a bitter remark about the state’s failure to fulfil these promises.⁴³ Often, these kinds of remarks were a reflection of what people had extrapolated from various elements of cultural policy, and patched together into a picture that reflected their own idea of ‘how things should be’.

Playing on SED Promises to Make Demands

Cultural activity never led to anywhere near as many *Eingaben* and complaints issues such as housing problems.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it affected an area of life that could be quite dear to certain people. When the participants in cultural life wrote to the *Kulturbund* or to the *Bezirk* Council to complain about shortcomings in cultural life, they expressed feelings of anger and resentment about the non-fulfilment of the

⁴² Konrad Jarausch, ‘Care and Coercion: the GDR as Welfare Dictatorship’, in Konrad Jarausch (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 47-69.

⁴³ For example, BLHA Rep. 505 SMBHR Nr. 2029, *Brigadebuch 2* (1969), *Der Titelkampf und das Ergebnis*, which is quoted in footnote 33.

⁴⁴ BLHA Rep. 542 Nationale Front der DDR Bezirk Potsdam Nr. 1106: for example, *Beschluss "Die Arbeit mit den Eingaben der Bürger im Jahre 1975"*, *Anlage 1 Übersicht über die zahlenmäßige Entwicklung der Eingaben und zum Stand ihrer Bearbeitung*, 16.6.76: in 1974, 48 371 *Eingaben* were written overall, but only 813 related to cultural activities; BLHA Rep. 502 SWWB Nr. 2108, *Eingabenanalyse 1972-73*: in 1972, out of 294 *Eingaben*, only 2 related to the cultural field; BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 4943, *Information über den Stand der Eingabearbeit im Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz*, 12.8.71: in the second half of 1970, 223 *Eingaben* were written in this factory and none related to the cultural field.

SED's promises. Most elements of the communication process were already evident in the early 1960s.⁴⁵ The participants in cultural life were acutely aware of their bargaining power very early on, and they were ready to use it. Frequently, they composed their complaints as a collective group, in order to give their argument more weight, as will become evident in most of the examples below. An *Eingabe* written by a factory brigade highlights that there was a strong understanding among these workers in the early 1960s that they could demand certain things from the administrative units. The brigade was trying to organise a visit to Potsdam, and had written to the City Council in Potsdam to receive information about accommodation. When the council's functionaries did not reply, they were sent the following boisterous letter:

We allow ourselves to ask you what right the employees of your administration have to ignore the decision of the *Staatsrat* (to respond to *Eingaben* within 14 days). We demand an explanation from the guilty employee who performed so badly, and information about how our *Eingabe* will be treated, so that we can still undertake our visit to the city Potsdam at the said date. We can assure you that the brigade of the train station Frankfurt/Oder, who year on year, in icy frost and burning heat do the toughest work for the benefit of the GDR, regard it as self-evident that their selfless application receives a small note of recognition. This recognition was meant to be the trip to Potsdam. We are of the opinion that we don't need to state the importance of our working people and expect that you will now take the right decisions.⁴⁶

The workers who formulated this *Eingabe* reiterated several aspects of SED policy: they refer to the decision of the *Staatsrat*, which dictated that *Eingaben* had to be dealt with in a specified period of time. They also asserted that as workers, they had an elevated status in the GDR and their needs had to be attended to.⁴⁷ Finally, they hint at the cultural programme of the SED, which dictated that cultural activity had to be available to workers to allow them to recover from their hard working days. The city administration, in these workers' minds, had failed to fulfil SED policy, and had not given the workers something that was owed them. They could therefore justly be reprimanded, so the *Eingabe* insinuates. Rhetorically, the workers use the language of the SED, but they also inserted passages reflecting their own perceptions of their self-worth: they describe their work as being 'tough', they are

⁴⁵ Jochen Stadt, *Eingaben: Die institutionalisierte Meckerkultur in der DDR: Goldbrokat, Kaffee-Mix, Büttreden, Ausreiseanträge und andere Schwierigkeiten mit den Untertanen* (Berlin: Forschungsverbund SED-Staat, Nr. 24/1996), pp.4-5.

⁴⁶ StA Potsdam Nr. 2773, *Eingabe der Eisenbahner des Grenzbahnhofs Frankfurt/Oder*, 14.8.63.

⁴⁷ Alexander von Plato, 'Arbeiter Selbstbilder in der DDR', in Peter Hübner, Klaus Tenfelde (eds.), *Arbeiter in der SBZ-DDR* (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 1999), pp. 873-874.

‘selfless’ and just want a ‘small’ note of recognition. The workers are relying on this particular kind of self-representation and on reference to regime policy to ensure that their demands were fulfilled.

Being a member of the working class could, of course, be an advantage in making demands on the regime. It was also possible for members of other population groups to communicate expectation to the state, as long as they were able to portray their grievance as a reflection of SED cultural policy. In 1963, for example, the members of a club for intellectuals decided that the decoration of the city of Potsdam did not appeal to their aesthetic ideals. After a discussion among the 65 members of the club, they wrote an *Eingabe* explaining:

Particularly where the renovation of gastro-pubs is concerned, we have to observe that in our city the artistic decoration is in the hands of amateurs. The best example is the ‘Gambrius Cellar’ ... Even though the Specialist School for Applied Art offered to draw up a plan for this gastro-pub without charge, the division for trade [Handelsorganisation, HO] did not consult a specialist cadre. ... Instead of using initiative, money is being spent on people who cannot do anything. ... Also, for years, the visual advertisement at main political and festive occasions has not corresponded to the modern artistic point of view. Posters are still put up with awful depictions of workers, which cannot possibly reach out to people’s hearts and minds. ... Essentially, it is a wrong representation of the picture of mankind, which goes directly against our Humanist ideals. And this at a time when we have a very good lay circle in the RAW [a local factory], which works on a high level and could advise ... The worst amateur creation was shown at the Park Festival, which is meant to attract foreign visitors. All that, and the way the 1st May was celebrated, has nothing to do with Socialist Art.⁴⁸

Similarly to the workers who wanted to visit Potsdam, the members of the club of intellectuals also used certain elements of SED cultural policy to their advantage. By accusing the city administration of misrepresenting the Humanist image of mankind, and giving a poor illustration of Socialist Art, the members of the club had a good leg to stand on for demanding the improvement of the town centre. Both of these examples show that by the early 1960s, the participants had already internalised the cultural rhetoric of the SED, had modified it to suit their purposes and used it to make particular demands. This was an important strategy for fulfilling personal interests. Participants in cultural life demanded to be looked after

⁴⁸ StA Potsdam Nr. 2773, *H.-Klub Potsdam, an die ständige Kommission für kulturelle Massenarbeit beim Rat der Stadt 4.10.63*, pp. 1-2.

adequately within the organised cultural structures and spurred functionaries into action.⁴⁹

Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, this strategy also began to change. This had a lot to do with developments in cultural policy and with the SED's increasing broadening of the cultural model, which will be described in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8. The scope for articulating demands had become greater; there were more diverse and 'lowbrow' interests whose fulfilment could now be demanded. This did not fail to inflate people's perceptions of what they could expect from the cultural structures. An example of this can be found in the factory *Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz* in 1974. The factory director had ordered the trade union leadership to report on the developments of cultural activities among workers. The trade union leadership reported rather favourably on the development of theatre visits among the workforce, in order to show that it had fulfilled the cultural and political goals set out in the plans of action at the beginning of the year.⁵⁰ The factory leadership, however, was not fooled by this report, and remarked: 'The explanations about the achievements in the area of theatre are dominated by the statement that real progress occurred. In our view, this is in contradiction to a letter from the *Kreis* council, which states that in the factory, the advertisement has achieved no effect as far as theatre visits are concerned'.⁵¹ In a follow-up document, the trade union leadership was thus forced to admit that the working class could not be enthused about going to the theatre. Some of the workers were quite bold about their lack of interest:

The programme of events at the Brandenburg Theatre does not appeal to us. We really could rather drive elsewhere occasionally, and find something that does appeal to us.⁵²

This was quite a frank articulation of lack of interest and would have been unusual in the early-to-mid 1960s. In this incident in the 1970s, the workers expected

⁴⁹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 23, *Schreiben vom 2.1.64*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe aus Königswusterhausen, 14.10.1965*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 29, *Von R.J. an den Deutschen Kulturbund, Kommission Philatelie, (no date)*.

⁵⁰ BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 4189, *Erfüllung der kulturpolitischen Aufgaben unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Durchsetzung der sozialpolitische Arbeitskultur, 30.10.74*.

⁵¹ *ibid.* *Kultureinschätzung zur Vorlage - Erfüllung der kulturpolitischen Aufgaben, 15.11.74*.

⁵² *ibid.* *Vorlage für die Betriebsparteiabteilung, Einschätzung über kulturelle Fragen, 18.11.74*; for a similar example, see BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 7490 *Bericht aus Nauen, 16.9.69*, p.2: here, construction workers are to be drawn into organised cultural activities, but it is impossible to attract their interest, despite the best efforts of the leader of the *Kreis* cultural house. They attended weekly film screenings, but did not frequent the library and refused to attend other sorts of highbrow events.

the trade union leadership to accept that they had no interest in going to the theatre, and also believed that other events would be organised instead, which would correspond more to their interests. The trade union functionaries were powerless in the face of these statements. The workers' demands tied in to recent developments in cultural policy, which outlined that cultural life in factories had to correspond more to workers' interests rather than 'highbrow' activities. This example shows how changes in cultural policy benefited the broader articulation of people's interests.⁵³ It also highlights that the workers had become more protective about their desires. If they were not interested in theatrical performances, there was little the trade union leadership could do to force them to go. Consequently, the trade union functionaries tried to conceal the workers' disinclination to go to the theatre from the factory leadership.

Pitting Functionaries Against Each Other

In the process of communicating their expectations to functionaries in higher positions of authority, an added complexity was the role of cultural functionaries. The participants usually blamed the administrative functionaries, particularly the ones operating at the local level, if anything went wrong in cultural life. The executive functionaries were often regarded more favourably and were seen as allies whose work was being hampered by ineffective administrative functionaries. People often relied on the executive functionaries for support against the administrative functionaries.⁵⁴ Chapter 4 has explored the readiness of executive functionaries to defend their participants' interests. To give another example of the importance of executive functionaries criticising the administrative units on behalf of their participants, in 1963 the *Konzert- und Gastspiieldirektion* (KGD) had asked a choir in

⁵³ This was noticeable at the level of the factory as well as within the brigades: BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 30778, *Informationsbericht 3, Erfahrungen und Ergebnisse bei der Durchführung der Festlegungen der gemeinsamen Tagung des Präsidiums des Nationalrates der Nationalen Front und des Ministerium für Kultur, 28.9.70*, pp.1-3: This conference concludes that there is a need to establish a greater focus on people's interests in cultural events in factories, including events for families and celebrating traditional festivals; see also *ibid. Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam an den Vorsitzenden des Rates des Kreises, 25.11.71*, pp.1-2: these local administrative functionaries take advantage of the eighth party congress and want to provide more gastro-pubs in cultural houses.

⁵⁴ Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Bereitstellung eines Kulturraumes für die Zusammenkünfte der AG, 14.6.66*: the individuals of this circle collectively complain about the leader of the cultural house and the local administration for not providing them with rooms in which to meet – when they used the cultural house, they were locked in and had to climb out of a window; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 23, *Bericht aus Rangsdorf 2.4.62*: this is a complaint from an executive functionary about a local administrative functionary.

Potsdam to perform a particular piece at a public event, but due to an illness of the choir leader, the original date could not be met. The choir hoped for the performance to be rescheduled, but after a while it seemed as though the KGD would not organise the performance at all. The members of the choir, had, however, quite looked forward to the possibility of giving a public performance. From the late 1950s onwards, the participants in cultural life had developed a taste for prestigious public performances.⁵⁵ A cancellation would have been a disappointment. As a result, the choir leader wrote an *Eingabe* to the City Council in Potsdam, stating:

I am not exaggerating when I say that this would be the end of the city's choir! ... I know its mentality very well: if the work, which we have rehearsed for months, were now suddenly be taken off the plan ... then further members would lose their interest and leave. But that has to be avoided at all costs! We want to celebrate our 150th anniversary next year!⁵⁶

This example highlights two things: firstly, it shows that participants were no longer opposed to being involved in the organised cultural structures up to a certain point. They had become quite fond of some aspects of state organisation, like public performances. Secondly, it shows that executive cultural functionaries formulated complaints on behalf of the participants, in order to give their complaints more weight. The executive functionaries knew how to phrase their complaints, moreover: this functionary insinuated that the future of the choir was at stake if the cancellation of the concert was not reversed, which was probably a tactic for spurring the administrative functionaries into action.

The executive functionaries were not the only ones whose support counted. The participants and the executive functionaries also had to work out whom to address their *Eingaben* to in order to achieve a result. Frequently, they wrote *Eingaben* to a level of authority that stood above the functionary whom they complained about. This authoritative instance was usually the *Bezirk* Council, or the *Bezirk* leadership of a mass organisation like the *Kulturbund* or the FDGB. The participants and executive functionaries clearly hoped that the more powerful functionaries would use their influence to ensure that the grievances were sorted out. As a report from the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund* expressed in 1964: 'It is often the case that a group has a much closer relationship to the *Bezirk* than to the

⁵⁵ Humm, *Auf dem Weg zum sozialistischen Dorf?* pp. 262.

⁵⁶ StA Potsdam, Nr. 2773 E. T. an Rat der Stadt, August 1963; For a similar example, see StA Potsdam Nr 2773, *Potsdam Bornstedt, Anforderung von Kinderzeichnungen 1962*, 22.3.63.

local or to the *Kreis* organisation.’⁵⁷ The communication between participants and functionaries was, therefore, not a localised affair. People wrote to the *Bezirk* leadership to sort out local problems. One *Eingabe*, for example, addressed to the *Kulturbund* leadership, rounded off a complaint with the words: ‘I want you to know what methods are commonly being applied here. Maybe then your positive reports will become a little more critical’.⁵⁸ In some cases, the *Bezirk* leadership responded to these complaints by chastising the local administrative functionaries, and reminding them about their duties vis-à-vis the participants and executive functionaries.⁵⁹

The *Bezirk* leadership could, therefore, be used as an ally against ineffective local functionaries. But what did people do when the problem lay with the *Bezirk* leadership itself? Even in these cases, the participants and executive functionaries did not cower before the higher authority, but they were quite ready to challenge even the functionaries in these positions of leadership. Again, the participants tried to consider whose support it was best to secure in order to resolve their grievances: they addressed the central institutions in Berlin, like the Ministry of Culture. In 1973, for example, a male choir was passed over for an award that it had hoped to receive. The members were outraged not to receive the award and promptly wrote an *Eingabe* to the Ministry of Culture, hoping that this would reverse the decision of the *Bezirk* leadership:

We expect our artistic and social achievements to be acknowledged, and we will simply not be satisfied with being under-valued by not being given the award ... we do not only expect an apology, but a noticeable improvement in the assistance that is given, particularly to those groups that have for years, despite great difficulty, been active in the area of culture.⁶⁰

These examples show that the participants in the cultural field tried as hard as they could to fulfil their interests by communicating their expectations to various cultural functionaries. While they were not guaranteed to be successful, in many of the above cases, the participants did achieve either a direct fulfilment of their requests, or they at least saw to it that the administrative functionaries considered

⁵⁷ BLHA 538 KB Rep. 306 *Erster Zwischenbericht über die durchgeführten Jahreshauptversammlungen, Bezirksleitung Potsdam, 6.5.64, p.2.*

⁵⁸ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe 25.10.75*, *ibid.*, *Eingabe, 28.1.75*, p.3: the purpose of this complaint was to ‘really kick up a fuss that would be heard at the top’.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, *Eingabe 18.3.1980; Antwort am 6.5.80.*

⁶⁰ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 20294, *Eingabe des Männerchors der E.B.K. an das MfK über die Handhabung des Auszeichnungswesens, 8.11.73.*

their grievances and met them half way. To conclude, the participants in cultural life did not simply withdraw into the autonomous spaces to ensure that their interests were being met. There were several aspects of cultural life that could only be resolved by interacting with different kinds of executive and administrative functionaries.

Exploitation

Communicating expectations to functionaries in higher positions of authority was one form of interacting with the organised structures for fulfilling personal interests. The effects of this strategy could not secure the realisation of all aims, however. Consequently, there was also another mechanism through which people actively engaged with the cultural structures: they also relied on a strategy of exploiting organised cultural life. By carefully considering how the cultural structures functioned, the participants were able to ensure that they could be used for their own purposes. This strategy added a further complexity into the relationship between participants and cultural functionaries. The participants engaged in a strategic dialogue with cultural functionaries, playing on their responsibilities and utilising them for realising a particular goal. This process was not restricted to communication with functionaries at the grassroots. People exploited cultural functionaries in the highest positions of authority in the *Bezirk*. The participants were not, therefore, purely at the whim of cultural functionaries. They made the functionaries work *for* them.

The strategy of exploitation existed throughout the 1960s and 1970s – there were no noticeable trends or changes over time. By the late 1950s, the culturally active population had been incorporated into the structures of the regime, and they had begun to grasp how these structures could be exploited. From then on, they made extensive use of the strategy of exploitation in very different ways. It had not taken them very long to learn the ‘rules of the game’.

Social Differentiation in Cultural Life

The participants in cultural life immensely benefited from the fact that the SED was keen to incorporate as many people into its structures as possible by catering for a

wide variety of interests and needs – it meant that there were varying institutions and mass organisations that offered very different forms of cultural activity to different social groups. Cultural life in the GDR therefore had various forms of interest representation. Within the given framework, the participants were able to pick and choose between the different mass organisations and institutions according to which kind of activity they were interested in.

Each mass organisation and factory in *Bezirk* Potsdam offered a very different kind of cultural diversion for different social groups. There were, for example, cultural activities specifically for women. The mass organisation which was in charge of women, and was also responsible for their cultural development, was the DFD. From the limited material that survives about the DFD's cultural activities in *Bezirk* Potsdam, it can be seen that they sought to organise events that were geared at specifically 'female' issues, like beauty treatment or managing a household. One document, which describes the outcome of a competition between mass organisations about the fulfilment of their cultural plans, for example, highlights this process:

The DFD has been the only mass organisation to successfully complete all requirements of the competition, such as the organisation of meetings for women, creating gymnastic groups, implementing housewives' brigades ... In the month of July alone, we had nine meetings of women with over 500 participants. Group 21 ... organised cosmetic evenings, thus achieving a good turnout at all events. We now also want to finance building a child-care centre in Bornstedt.⁶¹

The concentration on gymnastic circles, general meetings, cosmetic evenings, aspects of childcare and events for housewives was designed to attract as many women as possible.⁶² Elements of high culture seem to have played a small role here. This focus on specific group interests was not entirely planned. Often, the organisers of the cultural facilities found that they had little choice but to respond to the expectations that people had when they joined these organisations. In other words, people went to certain mass organisation because they expected to be provided with certain cultural events there. If the organisations offered something other than what people expected, then attendance levels dropped. The youth organisation, the FDJ, is one of the most telling examples of this. The young people

⁶¹ BLHA Rep. 543 FDJ Bezirksleitung Potsdam Nr.1034, *Kurzer Exkurs zum DFD*, (no date).

⁶² The desire to cater specifically for women was not only evident in the DFD, but also in factories: BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1680, *Plan der Kulturarbeit für die Gewerkschaften im Stadtkreis Brandenburg 10.1.62*: in order to attract more women, the FDGB leadership advocates organising events and starting groups that would appeal to women, such as ballet groups, groups for making clothes and singing groups.

who attended its events were primarily interested in youth entertainment, and showed very little desire for ‘political-ideological’ events, or for ‘highbrow’ culture.⁶³ Upon visiting a clubhouse in Ludwigsfelde, for example, the SED *Bezirk* leadership noted that, “when we work together with the FDJ, then it becomes clear that they are only concerned with the organisation of dancing events. With regard to this, there are those in the FDJ, who, in order to appeal to the youths, even promote the use of *Beat* bands”.⁶⁴ This situation had emerged because in *Bezirk* Potsdam, the young people tended to attend FDJ events or youth clubs in search of discos, musical evenings, gaming equipment and the possibility to have a chat with friends. Rather than spending a lot of time and energy on other events, that attracted little interest from the youths, the FDJ functionaries therefore organised cultural events that appealed to young people’s interests.⁶⁵

The situation that existed in the FDJ and DFD is evident in all mass organisations and institutions: people went to these cultural facilities to take advantage of certain aspects that they offered. They exploited the organised cultural structures for their benefit. They took what they desired but tried to leave what they did not care for. The organisers were therefore more or less forced to cater for specific interests. As a result, cultural life within the organised structures was differentiated to a degree and represented the interests of different social groups.

Targeting Functionaries to Fulfil Personal Needs

In some cases of exploitation, people resorted to a direct targeting of the SED’s weak points in order to fulfil a particular goal. This kind of exploitation required an understanding of how the structures could be manipulated in one’s favour. It was a strategy that already manifested itself in the late 1950s, and it remained a facet of cultural life throughout the 1960s and 1970s. A good illustration of people’s early, targeted exploitation of weaknesses emerges in the analysis of cultural life in the border regions in the late 1950s. The SED had an interesting approach to these areas

⁶³ StA Potsdam Nr. 2774, *Analyse über die Lage unter der Jugend und die Wirksamkeit der staatlichen Jugendpolitik*, p.8: this report expresses concerns that too many people regard free time as a private affair and do not spend it in state organisation enough. The report concludes: the young people have their own interests and are only drawn to the state organisations when these address their desires.

⁶⁴ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 3232, *Notiz über den Besuch des Kulturhauses Ludwigsfelde 19.9.67*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ BLHA, Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 21553, *Aus dem Bericht über die Entwicklung der territorialen und betrieblichen Möglichkeiten zur Gestaltung der Freizeit der Jugend im Bezirk Potsdam 15.12.77*.

in the years before the construction of the Wall: 'All villages and towns [close to the border] have to become a colourful pearl necklace around West Berlin. With this, we want to turn *Bezirk* Potsdam into an example of the construction of socialism. In all areas of life, we want to radiate to West Berlin and show that peace, happiness and prosperity exist where the workers and peasants rule.'⁶⁶ This was also designed to prevent the inhabitants of these regions being attracted by the cultural activities in the West and fleeing the Republic. Hence, the administrative functionaries of *Bezirk* Potsdam had to ensure that the border regions were provided with the richest and most fulfilled forms of cultural life possible. The *Bezirk* leadership consequently set aside special funds to provide for the cultural institutions there if they were found to be wanting.⁶⁷

The inhabitants of the *Grenzgebiete* seemed to know quite well that the regime's leadership had a special urge to attend to their cultural needs. Hence, they were quite forthcoming with making demands about the improvement of the local cultural facilities and adequate provision of entertainment.⁶⁸ They seemed to know that the responsible authorities would try their best to fulfil their demands. In 1959, for example, a major cultural event took place in West Berlin. In order to avoid GDR citizens attending it, lots of cultural events were organised in the border regions. In the aftermath of this, the young people of the border regions in *Kreis* Oranienburg pointedly remarked that it took an event to take place in West Berlin for anything to be organised in their area. Their opinions were reported to the functionaries in the Cultural Department of the Central Committee, who promptly demanded that the administrative functionaries worked a lot harder on improving the cultural work in the border regions around Berlin.⁶⁹

Another population group that, like the inhabitants of the *Grenzgebiete*, was acutely aware of their status and bargaining power were the workers in the factories. The workers knew that, according to the official political stance, it was the duty of the factory leadership to ensure that they were provided with a diverse cultural life.

⁶⁶ BLHA Rep. 543 FDJ Nr. 618, *Ansprache auf der Bezirksdelegiertenkonferenz vom 23-24.4.1959*, p.78; see also BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 1802, *Information über die Beratung im Politbüro am 7.7.59*, 8.7.59.

⁶⁷ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 6450, *Rat des Kreises Potsdam an den Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam*, 5.9.73: in this document, the *Kreis* leadership in Potsdam pledges to provide funds specially for the club house in Teltow.

⁶⁸ StA Potsdam Nr. 2766, *Maßnahmen zur Entwicklung des geistig-kulturellen Lebens in den Grenzgebieten* (no date).

⁶⁹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/9.06/15, *Tätigkeitsbericht für die Zeit vom 1.-30. September 1960 - zum Beschluss des Sekretariates vom 1.12.59 über allseitige Verbesserung der Arbeit in den Randorten von Berlin*, pp.1-3.

Thus, whenever the members of individual brigades desired an evening of 'cultural' entertainment, the brigades did not organise these events themselves. Instead, a report about cultural activity in the *Chemiefaserwerk* Premnitz outlined, they simply approached the club leadership, which was responsible for the smooth running of cultural affairs in the factory, and 'ordered' a fully organised cultural programme from them.⁷⁰

Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the workers became bolder and bolder about 'ordering' cultural programmes. As cultural policy broadened and aimed to provide workers with an increasing satisfaction of their interests, even if these were 'lowbrow' interests, the members of the brigades increasingly asked the responsible functionaries to organise events for them. In 1972, for example, the male members of a brigade in the factory *Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau* in Wildau describe how they used the opportunity of the annual factory festival to request the organisation of an evening of playing the card game Skat:

Attentively, we had studied the programme of our second factory festival. We saw that there were events for children, young people, women, even joint events, but no event for men! Obviously, it hurts us, if as men we are always put to the rear. So we told our *Kulturobleute* ... to organise something for the men of the brigade ... So while our women yesterday marched into the cultural house, to be enlightened about the difficult fashion problems of this season, we went to the 'Sportlerheim' of the Otto Franke Stadium to have our Skat tournament.⁷¹

These men felt justified to use the factory's cultural functionaries, and a factory institution, in order to achieve what they wanted: the organisation of a social evening occupied with a cherished pastime. People did not just wait passively for the state to provide them with cultural diversions. They knew that they were entitled to a rich cultural life, and that they just had to wait for the right moment on which to make their demands in order to see their desires fulfilled.

Using the Kulturbund Against Another Party

Aside from initiating the organisation of certain events by playing on the weak points of the SED and on responsibilities of cultural functionaries, there was also another

⁷⁰ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1702, *Auszug aus: Zur Perspektive der Kulturarbeit bis zum Jahre 1970 im VEB Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz Juli 63*, p.2; this was also evident in the *Kulturbund*: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Schreiben von H. aus F. An die Bezirksleitung Philatelie 10.5.65*.

⁷¹ BLHA Rep. 505 SMBHR Nr. 2031, *Unser 1. Skatturnier der Brigade 4.5.72*.

aspect of the strategy of exploitation, which involved an even more calculated communication with functionaries. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, there were some participants who sought to exploit the authority of cultural functionaries in order to sort out personal problems.⁷² These individuals involved higher-ranking administrative functionaries in settling their personal disputes. In these cases, the complaints were not composed on behalf of a group, but were written by single people – this was not a collective endeavour. Admittedly, these cases were isolated ones, but they show, nevertheless, that there were certain individuals who utilised the organised structures as a mechanism through which to achieve personal gains. These incidents can be seen most clearly in the analysis of stamp collectors in the *Kulturbund*. Among this group, there were some participants who believed that membership with the *Kulturbund* entitled them to special, institutional protection against an offending party. In most cases, they addressed the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund* in order to sort out their personal problems.

In the most harmless cases, these individuals involved the *Kulturbund's* organs in order to settle a problem they were experiencing with another state institution. The individuals invariably felt that they were unable to take action against this institution on their own, and expected that their membership of the *Kulturbund* would mean that the *Bezirk* functionaries would sort the problem out instead. For example, a stamp collector had travelled to Hungary, and taking the encyclopaedia 'Altdeutschland unter der Lupe' with him, which was confiscated by customs officers. He wrote to the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund* claiming to have been unaware that this book was a forbidden text, and stating that he desperately needed it for his collecting activity. He directly addressed the President of the *Kulturbund* Philatelist Union in Potsdam, reminding him that 'you should be informed about my activity in the philatelists circle in N., which for 25 years has concentrated specially

⁷² At this point, it might be interesting to reflect on the arguments presented in Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): pp. 129-158. Gellately analysed the practice of denouncing people to the Gestapo and found that in many cases of denunciation, 'citizens seized on the situation in specific circumstances and for specific purposes related to their private lives' (p. 147): they informed on neighbours or spouses after a fight or disagreement, for example, for revenge or personal benefit. This thesis neither wishes to equate the *Kulturbund* with the Gestapo, nor to insinuate that turning to higher-ranking functionaries in the *Kulturbund* was identical to denunciation in the Third Reich. The interesting parallel that is instead highlighted here is the willingness to turn to a state institution for personal gain, not out of 'system loyalty'. Gellately argues that turning to the Gestapo was, 'usually determined by private interests and employed for instrumental reasons never intended by the regime' (p. 147) – the same can be said for turning to the *Kulturbund*. In this sense, the *Kulturbund* was not just an instrument for controlling the population in their free time, but was also a mechanism for realising personal goals.

on one area. Therefore I ask you to use your influence for me, so that I can get the book back from the customs' office'.⁷³ The *Kulturbund* was, in this case, seen as a source through which to over-ride another GDR institution, against which a single individual was powerless.⁷⁴

There are other cases, which show a less harmless attempted utilisation of the *Kulturbund's* functionaries in the *Bezirk* leadership. These were incidents when members of cultural circles involved the organisation to settle a personal dispute with other participants. The following appeal from a stamp collector to the *Kulturbund*, for example, would fall into this category:

I do have one request: Is there a philatelists group in the town Hohen-Neuendorf? One of the collectors there has cheated me in a foul way, and I would finally like to sort it out.⁷⁵

Even though this complainant does not ask the *Kulturbund's* functionaries to take direct action against the individual in Hohen-Neuendorf, he does not hesitate to use the organisation to settle a personal matter with another collector. The author of this *Eingabe* is clearly not concerned about giving another collector a bad reputation in the *Kulturbund* – if he had been concerned about it, he would not have written that someone betrayed him, but it would have sufficed to ask whether or not a circle existed in Hohen-Neuendorf. Of course, in this case, the complainant did not actually state the full name of the person who offended him. But there were cases, when someone's name was included in the communications. For example, a collector from Karl-Marx-Stadt wrote to the leadership of the Philatelist Union in Potsdam in 1981 complaining that a certain collector in Bezirk Potsdam owed him money. He asked the help of the *Kulturbund* to get it back.⁷⁶ In another example, a local functionary wrote the following to the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund* in 1964 on behalf of a collector: 'Herr S. established connections with a member of the group in P. [name and address of the other person is included] at the last exhibition, where the latter received stamps worth 120 Marks. In a letter, he [the collector in P.] promised to settle the balance, but he has not kept this promise. A reminder that was sent by Herr

⁷³ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 19, *Brief von Bundesfreund N., am 17.7.80.*

⁷⁴ This was not an isolated event – requesting administrative functionaries to help with foreign exchanges or to over-ride customs officers were not unusual among dedicated stamp collectors: BLHA KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe Frau G, 11.5.69*, BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Eingabe 14.8.70*; BLHA Rep 538 KB Nr. 30, *Brief an den Deutschen Kulturbund Potsdam am 16.10.68.*

⁷⁵ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35, *Brief vom 20.11.66.*

⁷⁶ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 19, *Eingabe P.W., Karl Marx Stadt, 31.8.81.*

S. was not collected from the post. I would like to ask you to instruct [the collector in P.] to fulfil his obligations, and to do so promptly'.⁷⁷

What is interesting about all these cases is that the responses from the *Kulturbund* were neither positive nor helpful. In the first case, the *Kulturbund* replied to the owner of the encyclopaedia saying that it could only make an official objection to the customs officers if the journey to Hungary had been an official trip, which this one had not been, so the conclusion was that nothing could be done, except that the person should inform himself better next time. In the second case, the request about information regarding a cultural circle in another town was simply ignored in the reply letter. In the third case of the outstanding payment, the *Kulturbund's* reply letter stated that no one by that name was in the organisation, and refused to take the matter any further.⁷⁸

It does not seem, therefore, that the administrative functionaries in the *Kulturbund* were particularly keen to be utilised in these ways. There are, furthermore, no indications that they encouraged people's habit of turning to the *Kulturbund* to sort out personal problems and disputes. The initiative to involve the *Kulturbund* in a personal matter came from the participants – it was not encouraged by the *Kulturbund* functionaries. If the *Kulturbund* did get involved in personal disputes between members, the processes could be drawn out in a lengthy and messy way. It was often impossible to determine which side was in the wrong, and whom to support, especially since both parties could resort to all kinds of measures of getting the *Kulturbund* on their side. In one case where the *Kulturbund* got involved in a personal dispute, one party threatened to undermine the re-election of the President of the Philatelist Union of the *Bezirk* leadership in Potsdam, because he had supported the other side.⁷⁹ As a result of these difficulties when becoming involved in such disputes, the *Kulturbund's* central leadership warned its functionaries not to get involved in such disputes.⁸⁰

To conclude this section, there were different ways in which people tried to exploit the state organs such as the *Kulturbund* for their own purposes. People had

⁷⁷ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Aus der AG F. an die Bezirksleitung Potsdam, 25.9.64.*

⁷⁸ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35, *Antwortschreiben am 15.12.66*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr 19, *Antwortschreiben am 29.7.80*; *ibid. Antwortschreiben am 30.9.81.* The reply letter for the fourth case (the letter written on behalf of Herr S.) could not be located.

⁷⁹ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 19, *exchange of letters between collectors W. and collector K.*; *ibid. Gutachten von dem Speziasten K., 3.3.70*; *ibid. Brief von S, 12.06.1970*; *ibid. Protokoll einer Sitzung 19.01.72*; the above mentioned threat was made in *Brief vom W. an K., 20.1.73*, p.1.

⁸⁰ *ibid., Schreiben aus dem Philatelistenverband der DDR im Deutschen Kulturbund an den Bezirksverband 12.11.71.*

adapted to the fact that the cultural institutions and organisations were a dominant feature of cultural life, realised that they could be useful for realising their needs. It is often said that in the GDR, where material shortages were a constant factor of life, *Vitamin B* (B stands for *Beziehungen*, or connections) was vital for getting along. Knowing whom to approach in which situation was vital. The state institutions, as can be seen here, fitted into this pattern in which know-how and exploitation of all different resources was common practice. People saw these institutions and organisations as a way to get things done, even when they received no encouragement.

Conclusion

Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, people became more and more successful at securing their personal interests within the structures of the regime, because they had learned how to play the rules of the game. When they withdrew into autonomous spaces, they gradually ceased to engage in openly nonconformist behaviour. Instead, they fulfilled the political dictates where it was necessary, before proceeding to satisfy their own cultural inclinations as much as possible through *Eigen-Sinn*. Withdrawal was not the only aspect of cultural life, however. The participants also actively sought to address their interests and sort out their problems by engaging in dialogue with cultural functionaries at various levels of authority. The patterns of integration are apparent very early on – the strategies of communicating expectations and exploiting the organised structures are already evident in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They developed into a prominent factor of cultural life in the middle period of the GDR. In communicating with cultural functionaries, the participants were most inclined towards interacting with the executive functionaries who operated directly at the grassroots. They were also ready, however, to communicate with functionaries in high positions of authority. Their strategies for interest fulfilment were, therefore, not a localised affair. Of course, it was not always possible for the participants to realise their interests, even through these different strategies. The administrative functionaries still had the potential to undercut the participants and refuse to come to their aid. In the 1960s and 1970s, the participants seem to have been undeterred in their pursuit of communication with cultural functionaries, despite the possibility of being refused. By the late 1970s, however, they became increasingly aware that the

communication with cultural functionaries did not seem to achieve the desired results. Chapter 9 shows that the participants and executive functionaries gradually ceased to interact with the administrative functionaries as a result.

Part III:

From Utopianism to Pragmatism:

Cultural Policy

The previous four chapters have highlighted that cultural life in *Bezirk* Potsdam was shaped by individual motivations, by the willingness of functionaries to compromise and by the participants' strategies for interest fulfilment. The following two chapters analyse how this situation increasingly induced political leaders to take a broader approach towards *cultural mass work*. The SED's cultural model had been founded on an inherent contradiction. The state only provided restricted forms of cultural activity within the cultural institutions. At the same time, however, it envisaged that no form of cultural activity would exist outside these institutions. This process was intended to work by re-educating people and redesigning their interests within the cultural institutions. The outcome has been evident in the previous chapters: the attempted re-education did not have much effect and cultural life remained subject to the participants' personal interests and desires. The party leadership was increasingly forced to react to this situation, and to consider broadening the cultural model to address a greater variety of cultural interests. It was, therefore, people's obstinate pursuit of their interests that gradually led to a cultural model which sanctioned the pursuit of lowbrow, entertaining and 'hobby' activities.

There are narratives of GDR history where, as a result of the underlying division of the East German dictatorship into 'state' and 'society', central policies and social developments at the grass roots are written about almost entirely separately. Some analyses describe major political shifts without including the perspective of how this may have been influenced by what happened at the grassroots.¹ Similarly, some social studies portray the developments at the grassroots as being restricted to the local area and having no impact above this level.² There were, of course, some policies that could not be influenced by public opinion. Mark

¹ See for example in Peter Grieder, 'The leadership of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany under Ulbricht' in Patrick Major, Jonathan Osmond (eds.), *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht, 1945-71* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 22-40; in particular defenders of the totalitarian theory argue power only emanates from the central party bodies in Berlin. The influence of social developments on central decisions is, consequently, often left out of the analysis.

² 'Die Grenzen der Diktatur. Zur Einleitung', in Lindenberger (ed.), *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), p. 32.

Allinson has highlighted that no form of public discontent could prevent the introduction of conscription, for example.³ Other aspects of SED rule that were non-negotiable were the leading role of the Party, the construction of socialism and the closed border with West Germany. There were, however, some areas of social and cultural policy where degrees of latitude existed. In the 1960s, the SED was beginning to contemplate policy adjustments in certain areas to respond to the social situation. Under the Honecker administration of the 1970s, the social reforms became even bolder, took concrete shape and were cemented into the official political line. Recently, some historians have begun to emphasise the impact of these social developments on policy decision-making. Historians like Monika Kaiser, Jeannette Madarasz and Donna Harsch have traced the SED leaders' increasing concern with social developments.⁴ Madarasz has highlighted the complex processes of communication between workers, intermediate functionaries and the central level in the mid-to-late 1960s, which led to a central policy that aimed to improve the living and working conditions of workers.⁵ Similarly, Donna Harsch has shown how the SED was forced to reconsider its stance on abortion and contraception from the mid-1960s onwards. In the face of cramped living conditions and women's career developments, the SED leadership was beginning to contemplate giving women more access to the contraceptive pill and allowing abortions, even at the risk of a declining birth rate.⁶ Political developments were therefore not just decided at the top and enforced (or failed to be enforced) at the bottom. Policy changes were influenced by considerations of the situation at the grassroots.

These arguments still need to become more prevalent in GDR historiography. The gradually increasing consideration of the situation at the grassroots and the ensuing adaptation of policies are often not given enough weight. Moreover, when the party's growing consideration of people's needs has been analysed in GDR historiography, then these narratives tend to be restricted to the Honecker era. Peter

³ Mark Allinson, 'Popular Opinion', in Patrick Major, Jonathan Osmond (ed.), *The Workers' and Peasants' State*, p. 98.

⁴ Monika Kaiser's argument will be considered in more detail in Chapter 7, p. 183 and pp. 190-191.

⁵ Jeannette Madarász, *Working in East Germany. Normality in a socialist dictatorship, 1961 to 1979* (publication pending, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): Madarász's chapters on the factories TRO, BGW, EVW, HFO and CFO show that some factory leaderships had better central policy organs than others. For the clearest indication of change initiated in the factories and taken on board at the central level, see chapter on the BGW, subsection 'The importance of connections'.

⁶ Donna Harsch, 'Squaring the circle: the dilemmas and evolution of women's policy', in Patrick Major, Jonathan Osmond (eds.), *The Workers' and Peasants' State*, pp.160-162: Harsch argues that changes of the abortion laws were already becoming evident in the 1960s, though the problem was addressed more decisively in the 1970s.

Hübner and Jürgen Danyel, for example, argue that there was a faction within the SED, among them Erich Honecker, who disagreed with Ulbricht's reforms in the 1960s. They saw an opportunity to sideline Ulbricht in 1970, when it became clear that Ulbricht's economic policies were not working. After the regime change in 1971, Hübner and Danyel argue, Honecker embarked on a new course, which was announced at the eighth party congress. This new course primarily aimed to satisfy social needs, in particular those needs of the working classes. It was, according to Hübner and Danyel, a break with Ulbricht's policies, and formed a more traditional, conservative course that focussed on democratic centralism and shied away from daring reforms.⁷

As far as the political development of *cultural mass work* is concerned, this narrative needs to be modified.⁸ Chapters 7 and 8 highlight that changes in the cultural model began in the late 1950s. Over the course of the 1960s, the party leaders increasingly began to reflect on the development of cultural life. As a result of these considerations, the policy of *cultural mass work* was modified and increasingly broadened in order to include more 'lowbrow' activities, so that it was more in tune with people's desires. This eventually culminated in the reforms of the 1970s. By 1971, most of the concessions that Honecker made to the cultural sphere were already evident in cultural policy. It can therefore be said that in the area of *cultural mass work*, Honecker did not so much introduce an entirely new course, but affirmed and solidified the development of the 1960s. Even though this cultural model was better suited to fulfilling people's cultural interests, it had unforeseen effects, however: the promises of fulfilling people's interests within the state institutions had raised the expectations among the culturally active population too much. Because many of these expectations were not fulfilled, frustration and

⁷ Peter Hübner, Jürgen Danyel, 'Soziale Argumente im Politischen Machtkampf: Prag, Warschau, Berlin, 1968-1971', in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, vol. 11 (2002), p.809 and 825-831. Klaus Schroeder modified his theories on totalitarianism in order to incorporate these policy changes into his arguments: Schroeder, 'Vorbemerkung', in Hannelore Offner, Klaus Schroeder (eds.), *Eingegrenzt, Ausgegrenzt. Bildende Kunst und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR, 1961-89* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), p.9: he argues that in the 1970s, the SED's totalitarian aspirations had to 'retreat before societal realities', which entailed a 'softening of the totalitarian system', leading to a 'late-totalitarian state organisation of supply and surveillance' – a development that can be regarded as a 'gradual ideological erosion'.

⁸ Annette Schuhmann and Horst Groschopp have come to similar conclusions in their analyses of policy changes over the course of the 1960s: Annette Schuhmann, 'Veredelung der Produzenten oder Freizeitpolitik? Betriebliche Kulturarbeit vor 1970', in *Potsdamer Bulletin*, Nr. 28/29 (Januar 2003), pp. 73-78; Horst Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR: Vorläufer, Konzepte, Gebrauch. Versuch einer historischen Rekonstruktion', Thomas Ruben, Bernd Wagner (ed.), *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg, Eine Bestandaufnahme*, (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin Brandenburg, 1994), pp. 165-169.

resentment grew at the grassroots, and led to a process of individualisation and growing introspection. This will be discussed further in Chapter 9.

Chapter 7

Responding to Developments at the Grassroots

This chapter analyses changes in cultural policy from the late 1950s until 1965. During these years, the broadening of the SED's cultural model was in its early phases, but it was nonetheless becoming increasingly evident. The main aim of the analysis is to emphasize that the alterations of SED cultural policy were reactions to the situation at the grassroots. In order to highlight this, the analysis concentrates on the close correlation between difficulties that were experienced by the administration in *Bezirk* Potsdam and the issues that were addressed by central cultural policy in Berlin. Looking at developments from this angle shows that cultural policy did not follow a well-directed and clearly structured course. During the late 1950s, the imposition of the cultural structures was proving to be a difficult process. The SED party leaders sought to address this problem by applying hard-line measures. In the early 1960s, however, it became evident in the localities that this approach was not working. Following the building of the Berlin Wall, the SED leaders embarked on a new course, and Walter Ulbricht, First Secretary of the SED, initiated a policy of liberalisation. Cultural policy was, therefore, subject to changes as a result of unforeseen developments at the grassroots. At each step of the way, key events and the atmosphere of the time also influenced the decisions that were taken centrally. Thus, events like the Hungarian Revolt in 1956, the introduction of the youth communiqué in 1963, the New Economic System between 1963 and 1965 and the eleventh plenum in 1965 played a major role.

Education over Economics: 1956 – 1961

The Socialist Cultural Revolution

Chapter 2 highlighted the difficulties of developing cultural life according to socialist ideals in *Bezirk* Potsdam during the 1950s. The imposition of the new cultural model was obstructed by time-honoured cultural circles, which stubbornly pursued old traditions and were reluctant to surrender their independence. At the same time, it was difficult to initiate cultural life in the factories as a counter-balance to the

established cultural traditions of the 'bourgeoisie'. Throughout the 1950s, the administrative leadership of *Bezirk* Potsdam was concerned about both of these issues. In reports, which were passed to the central bodies of the SED, the functionaries discussed their concerns. For example, the leadership of the state administration in *Bezirk* Potsdam frequently highlighted isolationist tendencies of cultural circles, which included unwillingness to engage with the 'political and economic conditions' of the new Republic and a preference for a more traditional, 'bourgeois' repertoire.¹ Similarly, the *Bezirk* leadership of the SED expressed concerns about the difficulties of reaching the working class with organised cultural activities.²

In the late 1950s, the SED embarked on a hard-line, educationalist course that sought to bring these aspects under control. In particular, the party leadership began to concentrate more efforts on developing cultural activities among the working class, which was considered to be a solution to countering the influences from the former 'bourgeoisie'. Another event that impacted the development of cultural policy in these years was the Hungarian Revolt of 1956. After the Revolt, the Soviet Union initiated a political shift throughout the Eastern bloc, which aimed to establish greater control over popular developments to stem any further opposition. Through the combination of these influences, the cultural model of the SED underwent a significant change. A broader spectrum of people's pastime activities became incorporated into *cultural mass work*, in order to address more aspects of people's private lives.³ At the cultural conference in 1957 and at the fifth party congress in 1958, the SED party leaders introduced the idea of a 'Socialist Cultural Revolution'. From now on, there were few aspects of daily life and patterns of behaviour that were not in some way related to ethical questions around the 'socialist personality'.⁴

¹ The state administration and the FDGB leadership expressed such concerns: Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) Rep. 401 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam (RdB) Nr. 2756, *Gransee, Analyse Volkswirtschaftsplan, 9.1.58*, p. 3, side 84; BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Bezirksvorstand Potsdam Nr. 1679, *Nur die Kultur ist gut, die der Produktion dient*, 11.12.54.

² BLHA Rep. 530 SED Bezirksleitung Nr. 1802, *Günter Witt über Bemerkungen zu den Problemen der Kultur auf dem fünften Parteitag*, 23.5.58, p. 2.

³ Isolde Dietrich, 'Abschied von der Laubenkolonie?' in Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung, Februar 1996, (Kulturinitiative '89 e.V. und Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Berlin), p. 534: Dietrich argues that Ulbricht wanted to reach people in all the spaces where they spent their free time - in 1958, he wanted cultural activities to be organised in aggregations of allotments.

⁴ Rüdiger Thomas, 'Zum Projekt einer Kulturgeschichte der DDR', in Heiner Timmermann (ed.), *Diktaturen in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert - Der Fall DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot GmbH, 1996), p. 493; Horst Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR: Vorläufer, Konzepte, Gebrauch. Versuch

For cultural life, this had massive ramifications. At the cultural conference in 1957, Alexander Abusch⁵ outlined that the Socialist Cultural Revolution envisaged greater levels of public education through culture. Entertainment and relaxation were now supported by the SED for the first time, provided that they existed to further Socialist goals.⁶ Abusch outlined:

In all the artistic activity, there must not be a division between the cultural-educational and the entertaining priority of art. This means: it is a fundamental question of the Socialist Cultural Revolution that the whole area of entertainment and enjoyment, which very naturally assumes a large part in the life of our working people, is, in the required manner, drenched by the socialist spirit. ... In all of this, it is wrong to assume, Comrades, that the activities of enjoyment have to concede to the bad taste of the public. Unfortunately, the opposite is the case, that with such statements, years have been spent organising people's taste in precisely this direction ... the fight for economic profitability also always has to align itself with the main focus, which is the profitability in people's minds, meaning that the Socialist Cultural Revolution is advanced a little with every one of our cultural achievements.⁷

In this extract, Abusch acknowledges that there was a desire for diverse and entertaining forms in cultural life that needed to be addressed by the SED's cultural model. This shows that the SED leadership was trying to address the problem that people still satisfied certain interests outside the organised cultural structures. The Abusch speech also shows, though, that the Socialist Cultural Revolution did not sanction the satisfaction of people's 'lowbrow' interests and needs, unless this was coupled with an exposure to socialist principles. In valuing the 'profitability of the mind' more than economic profitability, Abusch clearly outlined that the SED did not wish to tailor cultural events to popular demands for 'light' entertainment, no matter how many people they would draw in. The broadening of the cultural model still had severe limitations.

The Socialist Cultural Revolution revitalised old ideas from communist cultural theory of the Weimar period, namely furthering working class culture and working class lay artistic creation.⁸ The growing focus on the importance of workers' artistic

einer historischen Rekonstruktion', Thomas Ruben, Bernd Wagner (ed.) *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg: Eine Bestandaufnahme*, (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin Brandenburg, 1994), p. 146.

⁵ At this point, Abusch was the deputy of the Minister for Culture. He was Minister for Culture between 1958 and 1961. Abusch was also a member of the Central Committee.

⁶ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1/180, *Beschluss der 32. Tagung des ZK der SED, 9.7.57*, p.8.

⁷ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1.01/407, *Kulturkonferenz 23. und 24. Oktober 1957, Referat von Alexander Abusch*, pp. 69-75, p. 133.

⁸ Simone Barck, "Ankunft im Real-Sozialismus" Anno 1970. Anmerkungen zu sozialen Irritationen und kulturellen Diffusionen am Beispiel der Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter', in *Potsdamer Bulletin*, Nr. 28/29 (Januar 2003), p. 64: Barck names Willi Bredel, Hans Marchwitza, Otto Gotsche and Karl Grünberg as prominent representatives of this movement.

creation is a familiar phenomenon of these years, because it was this idea that precipitated the famous *Bitterfeld Way*. In 1959, a cultural conference took place in the industrial city of Bitterfeld, which introduced a new method for engaging the working classes with art and culture. The subject of the conference centred on highbrow cultural activity and on making this more accessible to the population. It called on artists to go into the factories and produce culture *with* the worker and *for* the worker, so that their artefacts portrayed the realities of every-day life in factories. The conference did not stop at the work of artists. It declared that one of the SED's primary goals was advancing cultural artefacts produced *by* the worker, which was very new. Artists and writers were told to support the working class in producing their own artefacts. The creation of artistic works was no longer to be solely an endeavour of professionals – now art was meant to be created at the source, namely by the working class in the factories.⁹

These policies can be regarded as a reaction to complaints about the inaccessibility of the working classes, which were coming from the localities. Now, cultural policy focussed more strongly on cultural circles in factories. The SED leadership called for the creation of working class literary circles where professional writers could assist the workers in creating their own proletarian literature. In order to support this development, the central organs initiated literary prizes that were solely awarded to lay writers in writers' circles.¹⁰ This was meant to counter the developments of cultural life during the 1950s that had run counter to the socialist cultural model of the SED. In *Bezirk* Potsdam, the increasing focus on factories had an immediate effect. By 1962 there were 23 'circles of writing workers' in the *Bezirk*.¹¹ A few circles received support from prominent artists. In the factory *Geräte und Reglerwerke Wilhelm Pieck* in Teltow, a circle for writing workers was established in March 1960 with six members. For a brief period in 1966, the circle

⁹ Walter Ulbricht, 'Schlusswort: Fragen der Entwicklung der sozialistischen Literatur und Kultur', in *Greif zur Feder Kumpel: Protokoll der Autorenkonferenz des mitteldeutschen Verlag Halle (Saale) am 24. April 1959 in Bitterfeld* (Halle an der Saale, 1959), pp. 94-116; Barck, 'Ankunft im Real-Sozialismus', p. 64.

¹⁰ Sandrine Kott, 'Zur Geschichte des kulturellen Lebens in DDR-Betrieben, Konzepte und Praxis der betrieblichen Kulturarbeit', in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), pp. 178-181. The members of the literary circles became quite fond of these awards and enjoyed the possibility of publishing their works. Chapter 9, p. 223-224, pp. 227-228 highlights how disappointed the lay writers were when the possibilities for publication declined.

¹¹ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1753, *FDGB Bezirksvorstand Abteilung Kultur: Der gegenwärtige Stand der Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter im Bezirk Potsdam, sowie die Zusammenarbeit mit sozialistischen Brigaden und Tagebuchschriftstellern*, 31.10.62.

was supported by the notable writers Christa Wolf and Gerhard Wolf.¹² As a result of the shift in focus of cultural policy, it became practice to include cultural and artistic circles at major public events in *Bezirk* Potsdam, rather than professional artists. This was a way of simultaneously furthering lay artistic activity and saving money.¹³

Strengthening the Role of the Administrative Apparatus

In order to establish greater control over more areas of life of the East German population, the SED party leaders also found it necessary to address the distribution of responsibility in the local cultural institutions. Again, this development can be seen as a reaction to the situation in the localities. In the later 1950s, administrative and executive functionaries working in the various institutions of *Bezirk* Potsdam were experiencing difficulties pushing through the new, hard-line course of the Socialist Cultural Revolution. For example, they found it hard to initiate cultural activities that lasted longer than a few weeks.¹⁴ Similarly, in the local state administrations of *Bezirk* Potsdam, there were mounting complaints that it was difficult to administer and coordinate cultural life, as the established institutional mechanisms for administering and controlling the cultural sphere were failing.¹⁵ Cultural life in *Bezirk* Potsdam did not function as the SED had envisaged it.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the central SED leadership sought to tackle such organisational problems by increasing the power and control of the local and intermediate state leadership.¹⁶ The responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, of the *Bezirk* and *Kreis* administrations and of the *Kulturbund* ballooned, and they became increasingly responsible for organising, guiding and streamlining cultural life. At the cultural conference in 1960, Alfred Kurella¹⁷ outlined: ‘At the 1957 cultural conference, the goal was for the party cadres to report on cultural affairs – thus it was

¹² BLHA Rep. 426 Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit, Bezirk Potsdam (BfKA) Nr. 249, *Information zum Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des VEB GRW Teltow, written in 1984.*

¹³ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 1843, *Bericht über die Kontrollen beim Rat der Stadt Potsdam hinsichtlich der Vorbereitung der Veranstaltungen "Sommer im Sanssouci", 9.6.62, p.2.*

¹⁴ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1706, *Protokoll über die Beratung mit den Zirkel- und Gruppenleitern im VEB Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau Wildau, Fotozirkel, 19.8.58.*

¹⁵ BLHA Rep. 547 FGB Nr. 1688, *Kreis Wittstock/Dosse, Bericht, 8.3.58:* in this report, it becomes evident that the *Kulturaktive* are not functioning.

¹⁶ This was already indicated in Ulbricht’s speech at the Bitterfeld conference: he suggested that the Ministry of Culture had to play a more instrumental part in the organisation of cultural life. Ulbricht, ‘Schlusswort’, pp.113-114.

¹⁷ At this point, Kurella was the director of the ‘Commission for Cultural Questions’ at the Politbüro of the Central Committee (he stayed in this position until 1963). From 1965 to 1975, he was Vice President of the Akademie der Künste. He was also a member of the Central Committee.

a party congress. This time, it is designed to be a new culture conference, carried by three institutions: the Central Committee, the Ministry for Culture and the *Kulturbund*. It will only be these three, because they are specifically responsible for culture, and have no other commitments on the side.’¹⁸ What is noticeable in this extract is that Kurella did not mention organisations like trade unions and cultural houses. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the central bodies restricted the authority of these institutions in cultural life.¹⁹ High-ranking party leaders, like Kurella, feared that if institutions like cultural houses were not placed under the firm guidance of the party and state, they would exist too independently. Kurella was more in favour of a system of more centrally coordinated cultural development.²⁰

In response to theories like Kurella’s, the organs of the state administration were given more responsibility. They received greater authority to administer the fulfilment of the SED’s cultural policy, and they were responsible for synchronising cultural development in factories, cultural institutions, mass organisations and living areas simultaneously, to ensure that one common cultural development emerged that was centrally guided. This system was meant to undermine any independent tendencies that were not sanctioned by the SED.²¹ In order to tackle these responsibilities, the administrative units were required to erect various structures for coordinating cultural life. Firstly, the *Bezirk* Councils had to establish ‘Centres for Culture’ that would be able to oversee the cultural development in the *Kreis*.²² Secondly, the *Kreis*, city and community administrations had to erect ‘Cultural Action Groups’, in which representatives of all cultural institutions and mass organisations came together to discuss the development of cultural life and received coordination from the state administration.²³ Finally, the state administration had to find new ways of reaching people. In July 1960, for example, Alexander Abusch drew up a plan entitled ‘Re-shaping the ‘People’s Art Cabinets’ in the *Kreise*’, which

¹⁸ SAPMO BArch, DY 39/IV 2/1.01/415, *Beratung zur Kulturkonferenz 25. Januar 1960, Kurella*, pp. 2-5.

¹⁹ Groschopp, ‘Kulturhäuser in der DDR’, p.154: Groschopp outlines that responsibilities were taken away from the cultural houses and given to state institutions; Kott, ‘kulturelles Leben in Betrieben’, pp.178-184: Kott highlights how in the early 1960s, the influence of the FDGB over cultural life was reduced as the Ministry of Culture gained in importance as a controlling instance.

²⁰ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1/262, 14. *Tagung des ZK, November 61, Kurella*, p.25.

²¹ SAPMO BArch DR 1 7906, *Abteilung örtliche Organe. Inspektion und Grundsatzfragen der kulturellen Massearbeit, Entwurf Richtlinie zur Bildung von Kreiskulturzentren bei den Räten der Kreise, regarding the ‘Das Gesetz zur Vervollkommnung und Vereinfachung der Arbeit des Staatsapparates’ am 11.2.58, 23.9.58.*

²² *ibid*, p. 2.

²³ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV 2/9.06/92, *Maßnahmeplan zur Durchführung des 8. Plenums des ZK der SED, 22.4.1960*, p. 15.

were designed to achieve greater participation of the population in cultural life. These Cabinets were meant to be local centres where efforts for encouraging cultural activity in cities, factories, villages, families could be concentrated and coordinated – albeit under the strict understanding that these centres would follow the cultural direction of the Ministry of Culture.²⁴

The need for the state organs to coordinate cultural life became ever more important because the SED wanted the cultural institutions of the GDR to provide more and more activities to reach a broader range of people.²⁵ Among the party leadership, there were constant concerns that the population's cultural activity was still exercised too independently.²⁶ In order to rectify this, the SED made it increasingly difficult for people to exercise a cultural activity outside a state institution.²⁷ In order to facilitate the incorporation of larger sections of the population into the regime's cultural network, the cultural structures were expanded throughout the early 1960s and more money was provided for local cultural life. For example, early in 1961, it was decided to expand the *Bezirk* funds of the *Kulturfonds*. This was done to ensure that the local state administrations could branch out into new areas of cultural activity and fortify unstable cultural institutions, like the village clubs.²⁸

In order to ensure that the structures, in particular the state administration, could handle the greater responsibility without endangering the ideological education of the working class, the SED began to concentrate on qualifying and training cultural functionaries, both in ideological and cultural terms. In *Bezirk* Potsdam, the leading administrators were doing all they could to address issues of functionary

²⁴ *ibid.* Alexander Abusch an Wagner, *Anordnung über die Umbildung der Kreisvolkskunstkabinette in Kreiskabinette für Kulturarbeit: Vereinbarung mit dem Nationalrat der Nationalen Front des demokratischen Deutschlands über Kreiskulturzentren*, 28.7.60, *Anhang: Umbildung der Kreisvolkskunstkabinette*.

²⁵ Kott, 'kulturelles Leben in Betrieben', p. 182.

²⁶ See, for example: SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/51, *Ministerium für Kultur, Auswertung des sechsten Parteitages der SED und der Konferenz des Politbüros und des Präsidiums des Ministerrates mit Schriftstellern und Künstlern*, 2.8.1963, p. 3: this report articulates fears that the cultural groups exist too independently from the state organs, and that there was not yet a clear system of leadership to rectify this. For another example: SAPMO BArch, *DY 30/IV 2/1/244, 10. Tagung des ZK*, 15.-17.12.1960, p. 13.

²⁷ SAPMO BArch, *DY 30/vorl. SED 7868, Verordnung über Veranstaltungen*, side 393: in order for an event not to have to be registered, it had to take place in the private realm, with only family members attending and with a personal subject matter. In any other case, it was an event, for which permission had to be sought, and it could be withheld unless certain requirements were fulfilled (if dancing was involved, the event needed to be registered with the police at least five days before it took place).

²⁸ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/9.06/114, *Haushaltsplan des Kulturfonds der DDR 1961*, 18.7.60.

qualification. In 1959, Günter Witt²⁹ wrote a letter to Kurella in reaction to the SED resolution entitled 'Higher levels in cadre work and party education', where he stated that the qualification of the SED cadres had been neglected in previous years, but that now, a 2-month long qualification had been instigated for cadres in the cultural field.³⁰ The increasing desire to qualify cultural functionaries also became more intense across the whole of the cultural field, not just among party cadres. In 1958, the FDGB *Bezirk* leadership, for example, wrote an ominous letter to the leader of a small-scale club, who had not turned up to a course, in which they stated: 'We cannot agree with your behaviour ... and we expect you to give us a written statement explaining why you did not turn up to this conference'.³¹ Even at the lowest administrative levels, the state was trying to enforce greater levels of qualification for the most infrequently exercised functionary positions.³²

Despite the changes to the SED's cultural model and cultural structures, however, cultural life remained in a state of disarray. Attempts to increase control, to improve coordination between cultural bodies and to increase the responsibility of the administration only highlighted these problems further, rather than rectifying them. It was impossible to control cultural life: it soon emerged that cultural activities had a dynamic of their own. People did not let themselves be incorporated that easily.

Broadening the Cultural Model in the Early 1960s

Difficulties Implementing Narrow Educationalist Ideals

Despite best efforts, the structural changes of the late 1950s were not having the desired effects, which became evident in *Bezirk* Potsdam during the early 1960s. The demands that were placed on the *Kreis* administrative units to coordinate, control and oversee cultural life could not be met. Whilst the administrative functionaries did their best to set up the various 'Cultural Action Groups' and encouraged cultural delegates from the main mass organisations to come together to plan cultural life,

²⁹ Witt was a member of the SED *Bezirk* leadership in Potsdam as well as a member of the Central Committee. In 1960, he became deputy Minister for Culture, a position he held until 1965, when he was ousted from the Central Committee after the 11th plenary session.

³⁰ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 1802, *Brief von Witt an Kurella* 11.8.59.

³¹ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1706, *FDGB Bezirksvorstand* 14.5.58.

³² Stadtarchiv Potsdam (StA Potsdam) Nr. 2765, *Protokoll der Sitzungen des Musikaktivs* 18.5.62, side 316.

these groups usually did not function adequately. Once they had been established, they only existed 'on paper', meaning that the delegates never, or only very sporadically, came together to meet each other. The mass organisations and cultural institutions worked largely independently from each other, with some, such as the FDJ, proving to be pretty ineffective in organising cultural activities.³³ The SED *Bezirk* leadership expressed concerns that in the cultural field, the party, state and mass organisations worked side by side, rather than with each other.³⁴ Similarly, the state leadership of the *Bezirk* had noticed that the individual cultural functionaries at the grassroots worked 'in isolation' and were not adequately supervised by the party leadership and the state organs.³⁵ Chapters 3 and 4 already highlighted the embedded problem of insufficient contact between administrative and executive functionaries, which meant that the executive cultural functionaries constantly demanded more help and guidance from the administrative functionaries. These difficulties had a marked effect on cultural life in the *Bezirk*. Chapters 5 and 6 have shown that the participants in cultural life continued to exercise their cultural interests even if these ran counter to the policies of the SED. In the early 1960s, moreover, it was becoming clear to the various state and party organs of the *Bezirk* leadership that any successes in furthering working class culture were short-lived. In October 1962, the FDGB *Bezirk* leadership expressed concern that the 'movement of writing workers' was experiencing a downward trend. For example, a circle in Rathenow that originally had 32 members only had 8 left over after just 3 years. A major problem, the FDGB report suggested, was that the demands that were being levied on artistically creative workers were too high.³⁶ Concerns about elevated central expectations, which endangered the implementation of the *Bitterfeld Conference*, were also expressed in a report from the *Bezirk* leadership of the FDGB in 1961, which warned that workers who engaged with lay theatrical productions resented the expectations that their productions had to be as good as those in professional theatres.³⁷

³³ For example, BLHA Rep. 538 Kulturbund der DDR Bezirk Potsdam Nr. 30, *Brief von W. an K.*, 15.12.63; StA Potsdam Nr. 2774, *Informationsbericht 18.10.63, Abteilung Kultur, Informationsbüro.*

³⁴ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1700, *Direktive zur Verbesserung der kulturellen Massenarbeit der Klubs und Kulturhäuser, Beschluss vom 14.3.62, 29.3.62.*

³⁵ BLHA Rep. 410 RdB Nr. 702, *Einschätzung der Verwirklichung der Direktive des ZK vom 14.3.62 zur Verbesserung der kulturellen Massenarbeit der Klubs und Kulturhäuser und des Beschlusses des Sekretariats der Bezirksleitung, 3.5.62, side 56.*

³⁶ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1753, *FDGB Bezirksvorstand Abteilung Kultur, Der gegenwärtige Stand der Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter im Bezirk Potsdam sowie die Zusammenarbeit mit sozialistischen Brigaden und Tagebuchschreibern, 31.10.62.*

³⁷ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1700, *Das Arbeitertheater, Bezirksvorstand des FDGB an alle Kulturhäuser und Klubhäuser, 17.5.61, p.3.*

The SED leadership in Berlin was not oblivious to these difficulties. The party's organs expressed concerns that the administrative units in the *Kreise* were not paying enough attention to cultural life, or that they dealt too intensely with single issues rather than addressing wider concerns of creating a uniform cultural system.³⁸ It was also becoming obvious that SED cultural policy was not implemented correctly as a result of the organisational shortcomings: firstly, people still exercised their cultural interests outside cultural circles,³⁹ and secondly, even within cultural circles, the implementation of cultural policy was difficult. Functionaries in the central SED party apparatus noticed with alarm that even the most prized cultural development of the early 1960s, the *Bitterfelder Weg*, was not producing the expected results. They outlined that the 'writing workers' did not engage with pressing political or ideological questions of the day, and that artists were not involved in furthering the 'movement of writing workers' satisfactorily.⁴⁰ Similarly, the party functionaries argued that people interpreted the party's broader approach to cultural activity wrongly: they engaged in 'petit-bourgeois' cultural activities and indulged in cultural material from the 19th century that was 'sentimental' and 'kitschy'.⁴¹ Functionaries in the central party organs in Berlin were therefore perturbed that it was still impossible to establish control over people's cultural endeavours. A report from the FDGB leadership in Berlin, for example, expressed concern about the unsatisfactory degree of activities of 'high culture' in people's leisure time activities:

The regular visit to the theatre of our working people is not yet a part of the organisation of their free time. The working people use the most impossible excuses for closing themselves to it, but also many functionaries of our class do pursue the course of developing their partially deformed and also underdeveloped and even wholly undeveloped artistic taste where dramatisation, opera, ballet and concert are concerned.⁴²

³⁸ SAPMO BArch DY 30/vorl. SED 7868, *Material zum Teil kulturelle Massenarbeit des Referates des Genossen Grünberg*, (no date, but most likely from 1959), p. 4, side 87, p. 9, side 92, and *ibid.* *Hausmittelung Abteilung örtliche Organe*, 11.7.59.

³⁹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/9.06/15, *Günter Fischer, Bericht über die wichtigsten Probleme in der zweiten Juli Hälfte 1960*, pp.1-2.

⁴⁰ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/9.06/15, *Tätigkeitsbericht für den Monat Juni, Genosse P. C.* (no date, but probably written in 1959 or 1960); *ibid.* *Arbeitsbericht 1-5. Juli 1960*.

⁴¹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/9.06/15, *Tätigkeitsbericht für Januar 1961, H.K.*, 4.2.61, p. 2.

⁴² BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr 1680, *Plan der Kulturarbeit für die Gewerkschaften im Stadtkreis Brandenburg 10.1.62*, p. 5. See also: BLHA Rep.547 FDGB Nr. 1758 *Einschätzung des Leistungsvergleichs der hauptberuflich geleiteten Gewerkschaftsbibliotheken des Bezirks Potsdam* (no date, but must have been written in the mid-1960s judging by the date of other documents in this file): Only 28% of the readers in trade union libraries are factory workers.

These were the problems that the SED leadership had to deal with. How the SED chose to address these problems will be highlighted in the following section.

Embarking on a Reform Course

In the early 1960s, new ideas emerged about handling cultural life in the GDR. These ideas aimed at broadening the cultural model of the SED further, in order to incorporate an even broader spectrum of people's free time into the regime's cultural structures. Ulbricht and alongside him Hans Bentzien (the Minister for Culture) and Kurt Turba advocated recognising and responding to people's 'real' interests and needs.⁴³ The important event that had enabled these ideas to be considered by Ulbricht was the building of the Berlin Wall on 13th August 1961. This event fortified the GDR, it put an end to the endless stream of people fleeing the Republic, it cut people off from the cultural and entertainment facilities in West Berlin and it instigated within Ulbricht a feeling that he could now safely continue with the project of building the GDR.⁴⁴ Ulbricht's reforms of the early 1960s were designed to appeal to people and to avoid repelling them from the state institutions.⁴⁵ The highly restrictive cultural model of the 1950s, which could not incorporate the population into the regime's cultural structures, was undergoing a decisive transformation as a result. The problem was that these ideas were not met with approval from party's hard-liners, like Erich Honecker⁴⁶ and Alfred Kurella, who tried to re-establish their authority in the SED's cultural course over the mid-1960s, as will be shown shortly.⁴⁷

Ulbricht signalled the new reform course when he, along with Kurt Turba began working on a youth communiqué in 1962, which was announced in 1963. It

⁴³ Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR', p.159-162.

⁴⁴ The numbers of those who left the GDR via West Berlin were very high: Dietrich Staritz, *Geschichte der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, erweiterte Neuauflage, 1996), p. 194: in 1960, 200 000 people left the GDR according to official calculations; SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV 2/9.06/15, *Tätigkeitsbericht für die Zeit vom 1.-30. September 1960 - zum Beschluss des Sekretariates über allseitige Verbesserung der Arbeit in den Randorten von Berlin 1.12.59*, p.2: this report shows that there were concerns about people accessing cultural facilities in West Berlin. Some historians have highlighted that the building of the Wall had a major impact on Ulbricht's willingness to reform: Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 44-48; Monika Kaiser, *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker: Funktionsmechanismen der SED-Diktatur in Konfliktsituationen 1962-1972* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 57-60.

⁴⁵ Kaiser, *Machtwechsel*, p 134, p. 136.

⁴⁶ Honecker was a Secretary of the Central Committee at this point, in 1971 he took over from Ulbricht as First Secretary.

⁴⁷ Kaiser, *Machtwechsel*, p. 137, p. 147, pp. 167-168.

pledged to pay far greater attention to young people's thoughts and wishes than ever before. It denounced previous attitudes of a 'lack of understanding', and pledged that all functionaries had to listen earnestly to young people's views to avoid their alienation.⁴⁸ With regard to cultural life for young people, this meant:

As the Youth Communiqué states, the trust in young people is constantly increasing. The relationship with the young people and the whole of our work with the youth has to be improved. ... Many young people are already engaged culturally and organised in lay artistic circles. Until now, the work with the youth has not received enough attention ... Youth centres are not yet a general focus of cultural life ... The youth has a right to sociable get-togethers, to have music, film, dance, theatre sport. Therefore, the attitude of many [functionaries] has to be corrected that young people who carry portable stereos, who dress conspicuously and who stand on street corners lower the appearance of a cultural institutions. This relatively small part also needs to be included in cultural life. In this way, bad attitudes of young people towards society will be eliminated.⁴⁹

These new ideas were making radical concessions to the way young people spent their free time. Young people who did not respond to the SED's image of the polite and well-groomed person were no longer immediately regarded as outlaws. A great deal of freedom was thus infused into young people's cultural lives. It is quite clear, at the same time, that this initiative was geared at 'mopping up' youths, who had previously been regarded as outsiders, into the regime's cultural structures, which meant that the party leaders were still trying to increase control, albeit with new methods.

This new attitude did not only entail concessions to young people's interests. They induced a more relaxed attitude to cultural development across the board. The cultural institutions were encouraged to offer activities that were in line with popular interests and would attract more people generally.⁵⁰ For example, an analysis from the Department of Culture in the Central Committee stated, very much in line with the youth communiqué: 'These days it is not enough to know the opinions and fears of three or four citizens, and establish a programme of intellectual-cultural life in the factory, village ... based on that'. The report thus outlined that it was important to build cultural life around the interests of a wide range of people. A further

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.61, pp. 133-159 ; Mark Fenemore, 'The Limits of Repression and Reform: Youth Policy in the Early 1960s', in Major, Osmond, *The Workers' and Peasants' State*, pp. 177-181: Fenemore argues that even though there are limitations of the reforms of the youth communiqué (for example, its paternalistic style), Ulbricht realised that bold reforms were necessary to overcome certain problems.

⁴⁹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/9.06/92 *Für ein kulturvolles Leben der jungen Generation (No date, but the youth communiqué is mentioned, hence it has to be have been written later).*

⁵⁰ Sandrine Kott, *Le Communisme Au Quotidien, Les entreprises d'Etat Dans la Société Est-Allemande* (Paris: Belin, 2001), pp.116-7; Barck, 'Ankunft im Real-Sozialismus', pp. 60-61.

concession the report made was that 'the clubs, circles ... are to be kept open for all interested people, even if they are not members'.⁵¹ Rather than trying to impose an educational and constrained cultural model on an unwilling populace, Ulbricht was now beginning to address people's 'real' interests and needs in order to ensure that the official cultural structures were made use of more broadly.

The liberalisation course also entailed a strong focus on the cultural circles. In line with the *Bitterfeld Way*, Ulbricht and his reformers hoped to further *künstlerische Selbstbetätigung*,⁵² because that entailed a focus on people's interests while at the same time offering potential for stimulating artistic activity in the population. Thus, the SED hosted a number of conferences and discussions around the issue of furthering *künstlerische Selbstbetätigung*. There was the 'people's art conference' in 1963, which insisted that anyone engaging in *künstlerische Selbstbetätigung* was making a vital contribution to the establishment of Socialism.⁵³ Other conferences, furthermore, also discussed the importance of 'people's art', and the vital contributions that people's artistic creation was making to the 'socialist cultural development'.⁵⁴ There was also a growing focus on the importance of the *Kulturbund* as the umbrella organisation for the GDR's various cultural circles.⁵⁵ And finally there was the second Bitterfeld conference in 1964, which once more emphasised the SED's main goal of involving the working class in artistic creation. Whilst the liberalisation course introduced important changes into the cultural sphere, it had its limitations, however. Not all interests were tolerated and addressed. The SED was still insistent that certain kinds of leisure time activities were undesirable. For example, Bentzien expressed concern about people's growing tendency to watch television, because he argued that it resulted in a fall in visits to cultural institutions like theatres.⁵⁶ Yet, the change of atmosphere and the

⁵¹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/36, *Information über einige neue Probleme im künstlerischen Schaffen der DDR*, 21.10.65, pp.12-14.

⁵² This term is difficult to translate. Literally, the translation could be 'artistic self-employment' or 'artistic self-engagement'. It means 'being artistically active'.

⁵³ Ministerium für Kultur (ed.), *Volkskunstschaffende schmückt die Republik, Referat, Diskussion, Schlusswort und Entschließung der Volkskunstkonferenz in Leipzig am 4. und 5. Juli 1963*, Schriftenreihe des Ministeriums für Kultur (Berlin, 1963).

⁵⁴ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/J IV 2/2/919, *Anlage Nr. 5, Zum Protokoll der 4. Konferenz anlässlich des 5. Jahrestages der Bitterfelder Konferenz mit Künstlern und Kulturschaffenden am 28.1.64, 1.2.64*, p.5.

⁵⁵ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A2/9.06/52, *Vorlage an das Politbüro des ZK der SED, Maßnahmen zur weiteren Verbesserung der staatlichen Leitungstätigkeit auf kulturellem Gebiet und Anwendung wesentlicher Grundsätze des NöS bei der Planung und Leitung im Bereich Kultur*, 15.6.65, *Genosse Bentzien*, p.3.

⁵⁶ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/2.024/19, *Vorlage, Ideologische Kommission beim Politbüro des ZK der SED, Betreff Änderung der Arbeitsweise des Ministerium für Kultur*, Bentzien, 9.12.63, p.6.

liberalisation was evident. In *Bezirk* Potsdam, the focus on people's 'real' interests fell on very fertile ground. Increasingly, the local administrative functionaries showed a more understanding approach towards cultural life. At a meeting between the ideological commissions of the *Kreis* leadership of the FDGB and cultural functionaries from the trade unions in 1964, the sinking numbers of theatre visits were discussed. The *Kreis* leadership from Neuruppin suggested: 'In our *Kreis*, we have also noticed a downward trend. Yet, when plays attract general interest, the house is full. Perhaps we should start by staging plays that are in accordance with current taste and only advance to the modern plays step by step'.⁵⁷ The functionary's ability to make such a suggestion shows the different atmosphere – it was no longer necessary to adhere to Abusch's 'profitability of the mind'. People's taste could now be considered. Similarly, at a different FDGB meeting with 'painting workers' circles', an administrative functionary suggested: 'We should not ignore the real joy in artistic creation. That is something we should not forget, despite all focus on themes. We should not gloss over the interests of the circle members.'⁵⁸ It seems that the new atmosphere that had been initiated by Ulbricht was being taken seriously as a tool for involving more people in cultural life in *Bezirk* Potsdam.

Increasing the Responsibilities of Local Functionaries

The policy changes that were occurring since 1963 also entailed another reform of the organisational structures of cultural life. As has been pointed out above, the structures that had been put in place in the late 1950s were not functioning as it had been intended. In 1962, the SED *Bezirk* leadership in Potsdam still lamented the impossibility of getting all the Cultural Action Groups to function, for example.⁵⁹ In Berlin, different solutions were put forward to address these issues. Hans Bentzien believed that the reason for the malfunctioning lay with the *Bezirk* and *Kreis* Councils, whose increased responsibilities decreased the possibilities for central

⁵⁷ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1682, *Protokoll der Beratung mit allen Ideologischen Kommissionen der Kreisvorstände des FDGB und den Verantwortlichen für Kultur aus der Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung einiger Großbetriebe am 15.2.64, 17.2.64.*

⁵⁸ BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1682, *Beratung mit malenden Arbeitern und ihren künstlerischen Leitern im FDGB Haus Potsdam, 23.7.63, p.2.*

⁵⁹ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 1843, *Sekretariatsvorlage, Einschätzung der Verwirklichung der Direktive des ZK vom 14.3.62 zur Verbesserung der kulturellen Massenarbeit der Klubs und Kulturhäuser und des Beschlusses des Sekretariats der Bezirksleitung, 3.5.62, p.12.*

control, rather than increasing them. In December 1963, he wrote to the Ideological Commission of the SED, complaining:

The new decrees that have existed since 1961 about the rights and duties of the local organs have made the possibility of central influence on the cultural area even more difficult than in the area of economics. Ever since they have come into being, each Community Council and *Bezirk* Council is leading the cultural development according to general central decisions autonomously. This means that there is a danger that the process of cultural development of certain *Kreise* and *Bezirke* depends on the level of education and on the degree of understanding of the responsible functionaries. Those who have a lot of understanding for questions relating to culture usually manage to create the necessary material and personnel requirements. In those areas where that is not the case, cultural life is developing more slowly.⁶⁰

The concerns of Hans Bentzien about the need for greater centralisation were brushed aside, however.⁶¹ Instead, the cultural sphere was re-organised according to the principles of the New Economic System (NES). Ulbricht introduced the NES in 1963 in the hope of creating East Germany's own 'economic miracle' that would match the West German one and ultimately stop the East German population yearning for the capitalist West. The idea behind the NES was to adopt a more flexible approach to the GDR's development by allowing a more competitive economic environment. The principal idea was to delegate more responsibility to the localities and to individuals, while rewarding individual hard work and high productivity. The economic system was hence decentralised and personal initiative was rewarded.⁶²

In the cultural field, the new economic model also led to some restructuring. The key idea that was associated with the administration of the cultural field from 1963 onwards was the 'principle of production' and the 'new and exact decision over the tasks and areas of responsibility for the developments of cultural life'.⁶³ The cultural sphere was meant to function better, and become more economically viable, by delegating more responsibility to well-trained cultural functionaries in the localities. Therefore, it was decided that there was an increasing need for *Fachleute* (people with specific training) to become involved in the organisation and leadership

⁶⁰ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/2.024/19, *Vorlage für die Ideologische Kommission beim Politbüro des ZK der SED, Betr. Änderung der Arbeitsweise des Ministeriums für Kultur, Hans Bentzien, 9.12.63*, p. 7.

⁶¹ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/2.024/19, *Bemerkungen zur Vorlage über die Änderungen der Arbeitsweise des Ministeriums für Kultur, 7.4.64, S. an Hager*, p.3: this analysis concludes in response to Bentzien's argument that increased centralisation is not the answer. Instead, the Ministry of Culture is told to increase its efforts instead.

⁶² Kopstein, *Politics of Economic Decline*, p. 48-57.

⁶³ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/32, *Vorschläge für die Koordinierung der Arbeit, 7.9.64*.

of cultural life in the GDR. These *Fachleute* were to be tied into a well-developed system of central political instruction positions in order to ensure their reliability. They were also designed to work at the grass roots to assess the 'real' interests and needs of the population.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the *Bezirk* administrations were to receive better guidance from the central organs like the Ministry for Culture and the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee. They were meant to build new institutions, like 'Permanent Commissions for Culture', which were to work more effectively at coordinating cultural life than had hitherto been the case.⁶⁵ Thus, cultural life was to function according to much clearer conceptions, planning and insight.⁶⁶ Finally, the SED continued to place a great deal of emphasis on improving the 'quality of leadership activity' among functionaries. The Central Committee devised an even more unified system of qualification for cultural functionaries, involving preparation for the organisation of cultural life, as well as in-depth political and ideological training.⁶⁷

Even though the attempts to increase the levels of qualification among cultural functionaries had limited success, as Chapter 3 has shown, this development was nonetheless very important for the development of cultural life in the localities. Firstly, the growing responsibility of local cultural functionaries, who were, moreover, instructed to assess and respond to people's interests, encouraged more dialogue between local functionaries and participants, as well as between local functionaries. Secondly, the greater focus on people's interests precipitated a process whereby the SED promised to consider and fulfil the cultural needs of the population, rather than focussing on educational goals. This meant that the participants in state-organised cultural life increasingly regarded the organised cultural structures as locations where they could articulate and fulfil their interests

⁶⁴ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/51 *Ministerium für Kultur, Auswertung des sechsten Parteitages der SED und der Konferenz des Politbüros und des Präsidiums des Ministerrates mit Schriftstellern und Künstlern*, 2.8.63, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁵ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A2/9.06/52, *Vorlage an das Politbüro des ZK der SED, Maßnahmen zur weiteren Verbesserung der staatlichen Leitungstätigkeit auf kulturellem Gebiet und Anwendung wesentlicher Grundsätze des NöS der Planung und Leitung im Bereich Kultur, Bentzien*, 15.6.65, pp. 10-12.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* p. 9.

⁶⁷ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/51, *Auswertung des sechsten Parteitages der SED und der Konferenz des Politbüros und des Präsidiums des Ministerrates mit Schriftstellern und Künstlern*, 2.8.1963, pp. 3-5; SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A2/9.06/52, *Maßnahmen zur weiteren Verbesserung der staatlichen Leitungstätigkeit auf kulturellem Gebiet und Anwendung wesentlicher Grundsätze des NöS der Planung und Leitung im Bereich Kultur*, 15.6.65, p. 7.

and needs. The problem that remained, however, was the hard-line stance of those people in the highest echelons of the SED who were opposed to these reforms.

The Eleventh Plenum

Not all SED party leaders shared Ulbricht's vision about the necessity of the reforms in the early 1960s. The most important opponents were Erich Honecker, Kurt Hager⁶⁸ and Alfred Kurella. They preferred the educationalist outlook, which they felt had been abandoned in favour of responding to popular interests. The disagreements between these leading SED party members culminated at the eleventh plenum in November 1965. The eleventh plenum occurred at a time when the party's liberalisation course seemed to be making good progress, and as a result, it took everyone by surprise. At the plenum, the reform course in the cultural sphere was retracted and the SED party leaders announced a new hard-line stance. Because of its ferocious language, this plenum in November 1965 came to be known as the *Kahlschlagplenum* ('demolition-plenum'). The plenum has also been likened to the 'formalism plenum' in 1951, when the political direction of cultural policy was heavily dominated by Stalinist principles.⁶⁹

At the eleventh plenum, the counter-reformers attacked the cultural field on two fronts. Firstly, the speakers lashed out against prominent cultural figures and institutions, accusing them of taking too many liberties, thus endangering the cultural and intellectual development of the population. Kurt Hager, for example, lamented that the process of de-Stalinization has been mistaken as a free licence to criticise every aspect of Socialist rule in the GDR – something that could not be tolerated.⁷⁰ The battle was secondly being fought over the field of *cultural mass work*. Honecker, Hager and Albert Norden⁷¹ painted a bleak picture about the state of cultural life. Honecker insisted that the principal goal was the provision of sensible and stimulating free time, particularly for young people. He argued that this goal had been undermined by television series that were full of moral decay and sexual

⁶⁸ Hager was a secretary of the Central Committee. In the 1970s, he headed the Department of Culture in the Central Committee.

⁶⁹ Günter Agde, 'Vorwort', in Güther Agde (ed.), *Kahlschlag: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965: Studien und Dokumente* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, erweiterte Auflage, 2000), p. 12.

⁷⁰ SAPMO BArch DY/30/2/1/338, *Protokoll der 11. ZK Tagung vom 15. bis 18. Dezember 1965, Referat Kurt Hager*, p. 62.

⁷¹ Norden was a member and secretary of the Central Committee, a member of the Politbüro, a representative of the Volkskammer and a member of the presidency of the Nationale Front.

practices.⁷² Norden described how he had undertaken the painstaking task of listening to the radio to count the acceptable, progressive and positive songs. He was 'shocked' to find that these had been in the minority. Rather than celebrating new songs, *folk* songs and artistic songs, the radio stations were hankering after Western commercialism, he claimed.⁷³ These hard-liners had made an impression on Walter Ulbricht. At the eleventh plenum, he conceded to their views. He no longer spoke of the need to listen to young people and incorporate their wishes. Now, he proclaimed that in modern music 'the constant monotony of the 'yeah, yeah, yeah' kills the intellect and is ludicrous'.⁷⁴ At the plenum, listening to people's concerns was taken off the agenda: Norden pointed out that only the 'petit bourgeois person' sways and questions. With this, Norden implied that good socialist citizens did not need to be listened to because they would not ask uncomfortable questions in the first place.⁷⁵ In short, it seemed as though most of the reforms of the earlier 1960s were being reversed by an irate few.⁷⁶

As opposed to the policy changes that have been outlined in this chapter, the eleventh plenum was not a reaction to events at the grassroots. Even though the opponents of the reforms insisted that they were concerned about developments in the media, in the arts and in the localities, they seem to have used these issues as a pretext. They wanted to realize their anti-reformist stance and weaken Ulbricht's position. Hence, they overplayed the 'problematic' developments at the grassroots, when, in reality, there were no truly perturbing recent developments that could have prompted such a ferocious reversal of the liberalisation course.⁷⁷ Historians have concluded, therefore, that the eleventh plenum took place because of a power struggle at the top of the SED leadership.⁷⁸ Honecker, in these years a hard-liner,

⁷² SAPMO BArch DY 30/VI 2/1/336, *Protokoll der 11. ZK Tagung vom 15. bis 18. Dezember 1965, Bericht des Politbüros, gehalten von Erich Honecker*, pp. 66-71.

⁷³ *ibid.*, *Protokoll der 11. ZK Tagung vom 15 bis 18 Dezember 1965, Referat Albert Norden*, p. 193.

⁷⁴ SAPMO BArch DY/30/2/1/338, *Protokoll der 11. Tagung des ZK vom 15. bis 18. Dezember 1965, Referat Walter Ulbricht*, p.54.

⁷⁵ SAPMO BArch DY 30/VI 2/1/336, *Albert Norden*, p. 187.

⁷⁶ Most of the blame for the problematic situation that had arisen was attributed to Hans Bentzien, who was consequently relieved of his duties a few months after the plenum: SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A2/9.06/10, *Information über eine gemeinsame Beratung des Ministers für Kultur, Genosse Hans Bentzien, und der zentralen Parteileitung des Ministeriums für Kultur*, 7.1.66; *ibid.* *Entwurf, Einschätzung der Arbeit des Ministers für Kultur, Genossen Hans Bentzien*, 8.1.66.

⁷⁷ Kaiser, *Machtwechsel*, p. 167-173.

⁷⁸ Recent studies have outlined that the 11th plenum developed as a result of internal tensions, and did not occur on Soviet instructions; see for example, Elke Scherstjanoi, 'Von der Sowjetunion lernen ...', in Güther Agde (ed.), *Kahlschlag: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED, 1965. Studien und Dokumente* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, erweiterte Auflage, 2000), pp. 37-64. Many historians now argue that the plenum took place as a result of a power struggle within the SED, where a faction

secured the backing of several prominent members of the central committee to counter both Ulbricht's liberalisation course in the cultural field, as well as Ulbricht's economic reforms under the NES. Many historians regard the eleventh plenum as a first stepping-stone in the process that led to leadership change in 1971.

The plenum instigated a difficult period for professional artists and writers. In the immediate aftermath, they moved between feelings of uncertainty and anger. Even cultural functionaries were quite confused about the party's line.⁷⁹ Professional artists and writers realised that the eleventh plenum spelled the end of the liberalisation process. Their work was now treated even more suspiciously than before – a development that was reinforced by the Prague Spring in 1968.⁸⁰ For young people, the plenum was also detrimental. The SED moved once more towards repressing their interests rather than showing understanding.⁸¹ In the field of *cultural mass work*, however, the newly imposed restrictions did not last very long. The hard-line approach, so it emerged soon, could not work in binding large parts of the population into the cultural structures of the regime. If the SED party leaders wanted to have greater control over the cultural field, then they were going to have to consider people's interests, and not ignore them. This development will be explored in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the problems that were experienced in *Bezirk* Potsdam were taken into consideration by the SED leadership. The structural problems and the difficulties of reaching people in the regime's cultural structures could not be brushed aside with words or ideology, but forced the SED leadership to adopt a different approach. The policy changes of these years were, of course, not only subject to aspects of cultural life at the grassroots. The political climate, key events

gathered around Honecker and challenged Ulbricht's recent reforms: Kaiser, *Machtwechsel*, chapter 3, pp. 133-231; Kopstein, *Politics of Economic Decline*, pp.57-60; Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR', pp. 153-166; Kott, 'kulturelles Leben in Betrieben', p. 184; Leonore Krenzlin, 'Vom Jugendkommuniqué zur Dichterschelte' in Agde (ed.), *Kahlschlag*, pp.160-163.

⁷⁹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/4, *Information: Neue politisch-ideologische Momente in der Diskussion um die Problematik des 11. Plenums*, 25.3.66, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Wolfgang Engler, 'Strafgericht über die Moderne – das 11. Plenum im historischen Rückblick', Güther Agde (ed.), *Kahlschlag: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED, 1965. Studien und Dokumente* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, erweiterte Auflage, 2000), pp.28-33.

⁸¹ Olaf Schäfer, *Pädagogische Untersuchungen zur Musikkultur der FDJ: Ein Erziehungswissenschaftlicher Beitrag zur Totalitarismusforschung* (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, Berlin 1998), pp.108-111.

and tensions within the SED leadership played a major role in determining the course of cultural policy. Still, the impact of the situation in the localities on the cultural model of the SED cannot be ignored. Over the course of the late 1950s and early-to-mid 1960s, cultural policy embarked on a gradually broadening approach, moving away from the strict educational goals of the party and more towards addressing a wider variety of people's interests within the structures of the regime. Even the eleventh plenum was only a short-lived interruption of this process. The policy of *cultural mass work* cannot be analysed separately from events at the grassroots. It was deeply affected by considerations of popular developments.

Chapter 8:

From Art to Culture

When Erich Honecker came to power in 1971, he was adamant that he had made a complete break with the Ulbricht era. He portrayed the changes he introduced as grand innovations of social, economic and cultural policy. The developments of the Ulbricht years were almost entirely dropped from the official rhetoric. In the cultural sphere, for example, the *Bitterfeld Way* was hardly ever mentioned again.¹ The impression that Honecker was trying to convey, however, did not correspond to reality. His policies relating to cultural life, which were announced at the eighth party congress in 1971, and which were discussed in more detail at the sixth plenum in 1972, tied in to developments in cultural policy in the late 1960s. In these years, the SED's cultural model underwent its greatest broadening yet. It soon became evident that people's interests and needs could not be disregarded if the SED wanted to have any insight into their lives outside work. Honecker and the other counter-reformers of the eleventh plenum could not uphold the educationalist, restrictive cultural vision of the plenum in this situation. Consequently, the reforms of the early 1960s were not only brought back, but also taken a step further. This chapter highlights the impact of grass root developments on cultural policy once again, as they were particularly evident in this period.

How The Hard-Liners Failed

Reconsidering the Situation After the Eleventh Plenum

The eleventh plenum left a difficult legacy in the cultural field. The central director of the *Kulturbund*, Karl-Heinz Schulmeister, informed the Central Committee that there had been initial appreciation of the necessity of the plenum in the population, but that this quickly turned into fears that the party would now pursue an exaggeratedly hard-line course. Members of the intelligentsia, Schulmeister warned,

¹ Archiv Stiftung Parteien und Massenorganisationen, Bundesarchiv (SAPMO BArch) DY 30/IV A 2/2.024/7, *Disposition für das Referat zur Beratung der Präsidenten der Künstlerverbände, 13.9.71*: This document states that all aims of the Bitterfeld conference had been fulfilled. Now 'the main principles of our culture are no longer specifically *Bitterfeld* ones, but are main tendencies in the development of our National-Socialist culture, which were determined at our party congresses'.

were particularly prone to believing rumours that spread such fears.² Schulmeister's statements about people's initial agreement with the plenum need a leap of faith to be believed, but his account of fears and confusion, particularly among the intelligentsia, seem very plausible. They show that the eleventh plenum was causing problems for the SED because it risked alienating the culturally active population. Over the next few months, the SED began walking a tightrope. To a degree, the messages of the eleventh plenum were reiterated and adopted in the official discourse. Some changes were made to the administrative and organisational structures in order to re-centralise cultural life. For example, in a report looking at cultural institutions, the apparatchiks of the Central Committee came to the conclusion that the work of the party had not penetrated cultural life deeply enough. These shortcomings were blamed on the lack of coordination between different departments, organisations and institutions, and on the failure to set up the advisory councils correctly. The report also lamented that the *Bezirk* and *Kreis* administrations had tolerated too many instances of negligence. Because of these problems and instances of carelessness, the ideological and political content of cultural activities was suffering, the analysts concluded.³ This called for a more uniform, centralised leadership, more adequate control mechanisms and clearer political-ideological formulation. The process whereby individual functionaries could shape aspects of cultural life, and implement policies according to their own understanding, was halted.⁴ While the eleventh plenum sparked off moves to instigate greater control, however, the party leaders also did not want to alienate culturally active people even further. It was necessary to stop the effects of the eleventh plenum going too far. The cultural functionaries had to be prevented from over-shooting in the wrong direction. There were, for example, concerns about the 'movement of writing workers', whose members believed that their texts now had to include certain types of political statements in order for them to be acceptable. In an evaluation of the effects of the eleventh plenum by the Department of Culture in the Central Committee, it was

² SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/4, *Schulmeister an H., aus dem Deutschen Kulturbund an die Kulturabteilung im ZK, 12.2.66.*

³ *ibid.*, *Information über die politisch-ideologischen Probleme, die in der Parteigruppe Klubs und Kulturhäuser des Ministeriums für Kultur und Auswertung des 11. Plenum zur Diskussion und Klärung gestellt wurden*, pp.1-2.

⁴ *ibid.*, *Gedanken zur Auswertung des Systems Förderung kultureller Prozesse in Auswertung des 11. Plenums, 14.1.66.*

decreed that, 'we have to ensure that the eleventh plenum is not evaluated too formally'.⁵

In this atmosphere, executive cultural functionaries in *Bezirk* Potsdam were unsure about what to do and which course to pursue. Many tried to ignore the messages of the plenum and carried on with their work as they had done before. For example, the factory newspaper of the *Stahl- und Walzwerk Henningsdorf* conducted an interview with the leader of its cultural house, asking for his thoughts on the eleventh plenum. The functionary only stated his agreement with the necessity for cultural activity to support the economic endeavour of the GDR. He did not touch on any other discussion points of the plenum, but instead launched into an analysis of cultural life in his factory.⁶ Cultural functionaries were not the only ones who were trying to ignore the newly introduced hard-line course. Over the course of 1966 and 1967, it was becoming clear that culturally active people were not changing their cultural habits. The SED party leadership of *Bezirk* Potsdam, for example, was expressing concerns that in many villages 'the opinion still dominates that the village festivals are primarily there for entertainment and colourful events and that the political work should not be moved into the foreground'.⁷ The central SED leadership was increasingly worried about these local tendencies, particularly in light of the introduction of a new policy, which introduced a free Saturday every fourteen days for workers in 1966 (in 1967, this was extended; all weeks were now 5-day weeks). The introduction of the 'five-day week every two weeks' is a highly illustrative case, which shows that the party leadership recognized that people's cultural inclinations ran counter to their expectations.

The decision to give workers more free time by granting them a free Saturday every two weeks was a major ideological boost for the party. It played on the communist ideology of liberating the working class from the constraints of their work, and could serve as a tool for legitimising the SED dictatorship, because it highlighted the advantages of the socialist system vis-à-vis the West. It also contained connotations of social control. By giving workers more free time and by

⁵ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/4, *Information über die Perspektivplanung "Volkskunst" zur Auswertung des 11. Plenums*, 23.2.66.

⁶ Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) Rep. 502 VEB Stahl- und Walzwerk Henningsdorf (SWWH) Nr. 1011, *Henningsdorfer Stahl, Zu Gast in der Redaktion Kulturhausleiter*, 20.1.66, p.2; see also Stadtarchiv Potsdam Nr. 169, *Sitzung des Rates der Stadt 12.1.66*: at this meeting of the City Council, the content of the 11th plenum is hardly touched on.

⁷ BLHA Rep. 530 SED Bezirksleitung Potsdam (SED) Nr. 1843, *Information über die Vorbereitung der Dorffestspiele 27.2.67*, see attached handwritten sheets.

providing the 'right' facilities in which to spend this time, the workers would be able to turn themselves into fully rounded Socialist personalities.⁸ It was also hoped that the workers would then return to their factories more relaxed and would work more efficiently.⁹ At the same time as recognising the advantages of introducing the free Saturday every fourteen days, however, the SED leadership also realised that it entailed one very serious problem. It gave people a full day, which was purely there for the pursuit of leisure activities. In a six-day week, people had one free day on which to do their chores and on which to rest. Now, workers were given a full day for engaging with cultural activities. In order to ensure that people spent their free time in the 'correct' way, the cultural organisations and institutions had to ensure that the workers participated only in state-organised leisure activities. The SED's aim at the initial introduction of the five-day week was therefore to increase strict and uniform administration of the cultural system.¹⁰ This seems to suggest that the ideas of the eleventh plenum were gaining the upper hand, and the cultural sphere was becoming even more uncompromising and centrally controlled. But it turned out quite differently.

As soon as the 'five-day week every two weeks' was introduced throughout the GDR, it became clear that nothing would go according to plan. The Agitation and Propaganda department in the Central Committee division drafted a report after the first free weekends. This report concluded people's participation in state organised cultural activity had been quite low. Despite a lot of effort to incorporate people into the organised cultural network, there was hardly any increase in visits to theatres, museums or libraries. Instead, spending time with the family dominated people's free weekends. Excursions to the countryside, going for walks, or visiting *folk* festivals were particularly popular. People also frequented gastronomic establishments in

⁸ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/83, *Document without a title*: In the introductory paragraph, it states that it is a summary of the '*Sitzung des Präsidiums am 21.2.66*' which discussed 'how the *Kulturbund* can contribute to furthering purposeful fashioning of the free time of working people in the Republic', pp.1-2: the pending introduction of the 5-day week is outlined as a 'political, social and cultural achievement of the workers' movement'.

⁹ *Ibid.*; As has been outlined in the Chapter 1, p.15, the SED leadership always considered relaxation a vital factor that contributed to the 'reproduction of the capacity to work', as it was believed that workers were more productive if they had been able to relax; but while the SED leaders had other reasons for furthering cultural life in the GDR, the functionaries in the leadership and trade unions of the factories considered relaxation and the reproduction element of 'cultural work' the main goal to strive for in cultural life: BLHA, Rep. 503 VEB Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz Nr. 3268 *Perspektivplan der kulturellen Arbeit des VEB Chemiefaserwerkes "Friedrich Engels" Premnitz/Kreis Rathenow*, 11.3.65, p. 34.

¹⁰ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/4, *Aufgaben und Probleme der sozialistischen Brigaden und betrieblichen Kultureinrichtungen zum 11. Plenum unserer Partei*, 12.1.66, p.2.

huge numbers. The Department for Trade and Supply could hardly cope with the increased demand. The workers desired sociable, entertaining and relaxing activities. There was only one exception: people did increasingly join cultural circles, particularly when these circles did not only focus on cultural activity, but also incorporated some form of sociable get-together. Circles with more intimate, cosy and familiar atmospheres were clearly being preferred.¹¹ In concluding their report, the Agitation and Propaganda department advised that the leadership had been too forceful with regard to the regulation of the cultural field and that there had been too much obsession with organisation and uniform planning, whereas not enough attention had been paid to people's 'real' interests.¹² It was, therefore, becoming increasingly apparent to the party apparatchiks in Berlin that the workers pursued lowbrow activities that corresponded to their own interests.

The inability to channel and control people's cultural habits at the grassroots was also becoming evident in other areas. The *Bitterfeld Way* was not working out as had been expected. The SED had hoped that the *Bitterfeld Way* would become a mass movement, where people could create progressive socialist and uplifting new working class artefacts that could rival the output of professional artists.¹³ In the late 1960s, however, it was clear that these hopes were not going to be fulfilled. Becoming involved in cultural activities in lay circles and groups remained a minority activity. Moreover, even among those people who did get involved in cultural circles, there were few with truly working class roots. Finally, the SED leaders had to accept the fact that the literary and artistic output of lay people was hardly astounding, and could not rival professional art and literature.¹⁴ As a consequence of this realisation, the *Bitterfeld Way* was, from the late 1960s onwards,

¹¹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/90, *Bericht der Abteilung Agitation über die Erfahrungen der massenpolitischen Arbeit unter Berücksichtigung der Einführung der 5-Tage Woche in den Industriegebieten..*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹³ See Chapter 7, p. 176.

¹⁴ In Bezirk Potsdam, the difficulties of implementing the *Bitterfelder Weg* were a concern for the SED leadership in the mid-1960s: BLHA Rep. 530 SED Nr. 3232, *Ergebnisse und Probleme in Auswertung der Zweiten Bitterfelder Konferenz, 12.8.64*, pp.2-3; *ibid.* *Einschätzung zum Fest der Lebensfreunde und der Volkskunst in Falkensee vom 29. August bis 6. September 64*, p.5. Simone Barck explored the development of the *Bitterfelder Weg* and its failings in the GDR: Barck, "Ankunft im Real-Sozialismus" Anno 1970. Anmerkungen zu sozialen Irritationen und kulturellen Diffusionen am Beispiel der Bewegung Schreibender Arbeiter', in *Potsdamer Bulletin*, Nr. 28/29 (Januar 2003), pp. 66-68; see also Annette Schuhmann, 'Veredelung der Produzenten oder Freizeitpolitik? Betriebliche Kulturarbeit vor 1970', *Potsdamer Bulletin*, Nr. 28/29 (Januar 2003), p. 74.

no longer pursued with any seriousness.¹⁵ In the late 1960s, the party still paid lip service to it, but in the 1970s, even that was no longer the case. The ideals of bringing 'high' culture to the people thus suffered a further, significant blow. Chapter 9 highlights that this was a huge disappointment for the lay artistic circles of *Bezirk* Potsdam, who felt that their efforts were now no longer appreciated by the functionaries in the state administration.

Continuing the Process of Broadening the Cultural Model

The inability to change people's cultural habits induced a change in cultural policy only a couple of years after the eleventh plenum. One very telling document, entitled 'Short portrayal of new problems in *cultural mass work* highlights this change in particular. Unfortunately, it is unclear which department in the Central Committee this document came from. For the moment, this document is interesting because it outlines the new approach to cultural life very comprehensively. This document advocated returning to a policy of understanding and inclusiveness in the cultural field. It recognised that the interests of the population were incredibly diverse, and that people's increased leisure time could not be managed by focussing on only some aspects of these interests, but not others. The report advocated that people should not be forced to participate in cultural activities that did not appeal to them, and that the members of a brigade should not be forced to go to the theatre or to read the same book, as this was a sign of 'misguided collective spirit'. The document promoted a very new approach to cultural life in factories instead. Rather than forcing the brigades of each factors to undertake collective 'highbrow' cultural experiences, the document suggested that the brigades should be allowed to arrange the cultural activities according to the interests of the various members.¹⁶

The suggestions that were outlined in this report were adopted in SED party rhetoric in the late 1960s. After the thirteenth plenum in July 1966, for example, the Cultural Department of the Central Committee concluded that the introduction of the 'five-day week every two weeks' did not have to produce *more* cultural activities,

¹⁵ Barck, 'Ankunft im Real-Sozialismus', pp. 68-71; Sandrine Kott, 'Zur Geschichte des kulturellen Lebens in DDR-Betrieben, Konzepte und Praxis der betrieblichen Kulturarbeit', in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), p.184. See Chapter 9, p. 222-231 for the effects this had on morale of the circles, who felt that their efforts were no longer taken seriously by the party leadership.

¹⁶ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/90, *Kurze Darstellung neuer Probleme in der kulturellen Massenarbeit* (no date, but the introduction of the 5-day week is mentioned, so it must have been written in 1966 or after).

but rather create a diverse, varied and high quality cultural life. The report welcomed the various nature activities that people had been engaging with on their free weekends. It insisted that all cultural institutions had to welcome such activities, and that those institutions, which still worked in the 'old style' (and abhorred lowbrow activities connected to nature) had to change.¹⁷ Similarly, analytical material that was prepared for the seventh party congress of the SED insisted that clear political-ideological leadership did not mean, 'that the cultural development process has to be restricted to the ideological superstructure. Within the production method, in the working, living and relaxation environment and in behaviour patterns there also exist cultural processes, which have to be recognised and guided with Socialist determination, if the cultural activity is to be productive ... Television has to develop into a main factor of a cultured form of entertainment'.¹⁸ Both of these quotations show that cultural policy was once more pursuing Walter Ulbricht's reformist line of the early 1960s, and had gone even one step further towards recognising and supporting people's 'lowbrow' interests.¹⁹ The growing focus on people's interests in the late 1960s was never officially emphasised as clearly as it had been in the youth communiqué. Yet, there were very subtle but noticeable developments in this direction. By remaining fairly low-key, they survived the turbulences of this period.²⁰

The hard-liners from the eleventh plenum, such as Alfred Kurella, had to concede to this development. Initially, they tried to counter it, but without much success. At the fourteenth plenum in December 1966, for example, Alfred Kurella acknowledged the importance of establishing institutions that were designed to cater for people's recreational needs, signalling a partial acceptance of the new approach. He also, however, attempted to criticise the recent reforms. He reminded Ulbricht about his commitments to the educationalist model at the eleventh plenum, and

¹⁷ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/5, *Material der Kulturabteilung des ZK für den Bericht des Politbüros an die 13. Tagung des ZK, 25.7.66*, pp.14-16.

¹⁸ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/1, *Hausarbeit: theoretisches Grundsatzmaterial zum siebten Parteitag*, 12.1.67, pp. 8-10. To give another example: SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1/370, *vierte ZK Tagung vom 29/30.1.1968, Diskussionsbeitrag des Genossen Rodenberg*, p. 89-19: 'With the introduction of the five-day week, the specific importance of the family increases more and more... The territories where the working people live are gaining in significance. It is important to establish new connections between the factory and the living area ... This concerns cultural work from light entertainment to dealing with the problems of individual factories ... There are many ways of providing a truly interesting intellectual/spiritual-cultural life in the living area'.

¹⁹ Annette Schuhmann has also explored this development and argues that in the second half of the 1960s, the 'educational aspect' of 'cultural mass work' retreated before economic and social imperatives: Schuhmann, 'Veredelung der Produzenten oder Freizeitpolitik?', pp. 73-78.

²⁰ Horst Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR: Vorläufer, Konzepte, Gebrauch. Versuch einer historischen Rekonstruktion', Thomas Ruben, Bernd Wagner (ed.), *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg, Eine Bestandaufnahme*, (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin Brandenburg, 1994), p. 168.

criticised the cultural section of the 'Plan for the development of the economy until 1970' because it did not incorporate the educationalist elements.²¹ Kurella pointed out that the plan had been phrased in such a general tone that it could have appeared in a cultural document of any period (and thus, so he implied, it did not include the direction that the party had outlined at the eleventh plenum). He argued that the plan did not deal with the fundamental notion of culture functioning as a means for 'socialist self-education' of the people. In his closing statement at the plenum, Ulbricht gave Kurella a conciliatory reply, promising to formulate the issues relating to culture more precisely, but he refrained from making any concessions about reiterating the messages of the eleventh plenum.²² He was in the process of reinstating his reforms from the early 1960s.

The new approach of including 'lowbrow' cultural activities in the SED's cultural model can be seen quite evidently in many areas of the GDR's cultural life. The document from the division 'Agitation and Propaganda', which was quoted above in reference to the 'five-day week every two weeks', had pointed out that people primarily sought sociable get-togethers in their free time. In the late 1960s, this was no longer undermined, but instead, the party pledged to provide people with enjoyable, sociable occasions. For example, Dieter Heinze and Gert Rossow, two theoreticians on cultural affairs, summarised the 'cultural-political' tasks following the seventh party congress thus: 'The clubs and cultural houses do not just have to address educational principles. In a much stronger fashion than has been the case until now, it is necessary to turn them into places of qualitative sociability and Socialist entertainment'.²³ The changed approach also became evident in the party approach towards cultural circles. Despite the disappointment of the *Bitterfeld Way*, the cultural circles were still an important focus of *cultural mass work*. After all, the introduction of the five-day week had shown that people were willing to engage with lay artistic activity, provided that it was sociable and fun.²⁴ When promoting these kinds of organised cultural activities, the cultural theoreticians tried not to portray the 'movement of people's art' as inaccessible, intimidating or dull by insisting on

²¹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1/353, *Protokoll der 14. ZK Tagung vom 15. bis 17. Dezember 1966, Referat Kurella*, p. 71. The 'Gesetz über den Perspektivplan zur Entwicklung der Volkswirtschaft der DDR bis 1970' can be found in: SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV 2/1/350: culture is discussed on p. 22.

²² SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1/353, *Protokoll der 14. ZK Tagung vom 15. Bis 17. Dezember 1966, Schlusswort Ulbricht*, p. 73.

²³ Dieter Heinze, Gerd Rossow, *Der Parteiarbeiter, kulturpolitische Aufgaben nach dem VII. Parteitag* (Ost Berlin, 1968), p.33.

²⁴ This had been outlined in the report of the 'Abteilung Agitation und Propaganda', which was mentioned above, in the subsection 'Reconsidering the situation at the grassroots'.

educational and highbrow contents. While underlining the importance of participation in cultural circles for the edification of the socialist personality, it was pointed out that cultural circles were also about relaxation, sociability and fun. Artistic engagement was now meant to include people with all kinds of needs, emotions and concentration spans.²⁵ Even in the factories, the SED began to adopt a much broader cultural model to ensure that it would be easier for people to identify with it. Cultural policy began to focus on something called 'production culture'. The workers in factories were encouraged to introduce a 'cultural' atmosphere into their workplace by keeping their surroundings clean and aesthetic. This endeavour was meant to lift workers' spirits while they were at work, because the environment had become more pleasant, it was to increase their aesthetic understanding and it was to make the production process easier.²⁶

At the same time as appreciating the SED's more inclusive approach towards people's engagement with leisure activities in the late 1960s, it has been said that Ulbricht at no point sanctioned cultural activity performed outside the realm of state organisation. Far from it: the new inclusiveness of the late 1960s and the focus on people's interest were designed to incorporate larger sections of the population into organised cultural life. When it became clear that people pursued cultural activities according to their own choosing, rather than adhering to SED demands, the Party leaders realised that they needed to adapt. If people favoured nature activities, then the regime would acknowledge this, and be sure to establish state-organised nature clubs and societies to tie people into the cultural structures of the regime.²⁷

²⁵ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/176, *Prognose über die Entwicklung des künstlerischen Volksschaffens der DDR, Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit 1968*, p. 7-8; see also SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/49, *Stenografische Niederschrift der 5. Sitzung des Staatsrates der DDR, 30.11.67*, pp.28-29.

²⁶ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/4, *Aufgaben und Probleme der sozialistischen Brigaden und betrieblichen Kultureinrichtungen zum 11. Plenum unserer Partei 12.1.66*.

²⁷ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/90, *Information über eine Beratung des Ministeriums für Kultur mit den Abteilungsleitern der Räte der Bezirke und der Räte der Kreise, 29.9.66*, pp. 1-2: in this report, the recent developments are characterised as a 'clear programme for the entire development of the population', wherein all areas of politics, economics, culture and the military had to conform to the basic principles of Socialism and serve as a guide for working people.

Honecker, Hager and Cultural Theory

Regime Change and Continuity

When Honecker came to power in May 1971, he announced a specific agenda for reform at the eighth party congress, which was called 'Unity of Social and Economic Policy'. Honecker pledged that the party would do its utmost to work for people's immediate benefit and that economic progress would be used to raise people's standard of living. This policy also affected the cultural sphere. Honecker insisted that raising the quality of people's cultural life was an integral part of raising the standards of living.²⁸ Whilst Honecker presented these policies as a new entity, however, they were strongly rooted in developments of the 1960s, and merely cemented the political direction of the previous years.²⁹ This may seem surprising, because Honecker is always credited with embarking on a liberalisation course in the cultural field in the early 1970s. This view only applies to the field of professional art and culture, however, where Honecker officially put an end to the clampdown that had been initiated at the eleventh plenum.³⁰ In terms of 'cultural mass work', there was a great deal of continuity between the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the sixth plenum in 1972, these continuities became particularly evident.

The sixth plenum can be regarded as the antithesis of the eleventh plenum. Like the eleventh plenum, it also dealt with culture, but it officially sanctioned a broadening of the SED's cultural model and promised to satisfy people's various cultural interests. Kurt Hager gave the main speech at this plenum, because he had taken over the Cultural Department of the Central Committee. In his speech, Hager signalled a very wide-ranging interpretation of what cultural life encompassed. He specifically pointed out that the party was keen to respond to the diverse forms of cultural life that existed at the grassroots: 'We are assuming that the needs, particularly in the cultural field, are incredibly differentiated and varied. Goethe

²⁸ SAPMO BArch DR 1/8841, *Dienstanweisung Nr. 3/71, Festlegung zur Ausarbeitung der Entwürfe zum Fünfjahrplan 1971-75 im kulturellen Bereich*, 7.9.71.

²⁹ These continuities are also highlighted in Jeannette Madarász, *Working in East Germany. Normality in a socialist dictatorship, 1961 to 1979* (publication pending, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), see Chapter 2 ('Arguments'), subsection 'Central Policies'.

³⁰ This clampdown had been in effect since the eleventh plenum, as has been shown in Chapter 7, p. 189-191. At the eighth party congress, Honecker said he wanted greater 'variety and breadth' in art, that he welcomed the 'many handwritings' of artists and writers and that he wanted to embark on an era of 'no taboos'. This is often seen as a liberalisation, see for example Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1981), pp.182-186, Günther Rüter, *Kulturbetrieb und Literatur in der DDR* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1988), p. 74.

already knew that 'one thing does not appeal to all'. The needs are dependent on the material and cultural situation, on the level of education and cultural habits'.³¹ With such statements, Hager indicated that the SED leadership would fulfil many cultural interests, including 'lowbrow' activities.³² In particular, Hager stated that the party was committed to satisfying people's desires for 'sociability'.³³ Hager also reaffirmed that the party was intended to establishing greater breadth in lay artistic activity in cultural circles. He insisted that people should be able to engage in these circles 'according to their inclinations and interests'. This was because, Hager outlined, people's lay artistic activity had become 'increasingly varied and more intense'. Hence, 'the [eighth] party congress has made it its task to increase the influence of people's art in every day life even further and fulfil the growing desires for cultural and artistic activity more effectively'.³⁴ Hager was, therefore, also promising that the party would pay more attention to people's artistic inclinations and that the cultural institutions were going to reflect the variety of lay cultural activity. All in all, Hager was keen to show that the party was primarily concerned with satisfying a wide range of interests and that it was ready to respond to cultural interests expressed at the grassroots.

In light of the developments described in the previous section of this chapter, the continuities between the 1960s and 1970s are obvious. The Ulbricht administration had already promised to satisfy popular desire for lowbrow activities and sociable get-togethers within the organised cultural structures in the late 1960s. Moreover, it had pledged that activities in cultural circles would be designed so that they suited people's interests. In the early 1970s, the ideas from the previous years about responding to people's interests were taken on board; they were not newly introduced. Many of Hager's statements were very close to the rhetoric used in the final years of the Ulbricht era. For example, Hager insisted that the collective cultural experience of the working class was not to be limited to visits to the theatre, museums and concerts, but that the brigades had to engage in activities that 'interest

³¹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1/458, *Protokoll der 6. Tagung des ZK, 'Zu Fragen der Kulturpolitik der SED', Berichterstatter Genosse Kurt Hager, 7.7.72, p. 9.*

³² SAPMO BArch, DR 1/8935 *Der Staatssekretär, Vorlage für die Dienstbesprechung des Ministers am 14.9: Ergebnisse, Erfahrungen, Probleme auf den Einsätzen von Arbeitsgruppen der Kulturabteilung ZK der SED und des Ministeriums für Kultur, 2.9.71, p. 18.* In this document, leisure time activities are even called 'hobbies' (this term was not used in the 1950s and early 1960s).

³³ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1/458, *Protokoll der 6. Tagung des ZK, Zu Fragen der Kulturpolitik der SED, Berichterstatter Genosse Kurt Hager, 7.7.72, p. 45.*

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 16.

all, that benefit all and that mean that all can have fun'.³⁵ These kinds of statements had already been made shortly after the introduction of the 'five-day week every two weeks'.

There were other continuities between the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, at the sixth plenum, Hager introduced the term 'working culture' as a firm aspect of *cultural mass work*. In order for the workplace to be a cultured environment, there had to be 'order and cleanliness at the workplace, on the factory grounds, at the construction site ... where they are not being strived for, there can be no mention of socialist culture. It is a question of a worker's honour to produce at a tidy workplace with high quality and punctually'.³⁶ It was hoped that a clean and orderly working environment would put the workers into a cultured, orderly and sanguine frame of mind. But this idea was not new. Introducing the concept of a clean and ordered workplace into the realm of cultural life rephrased the idea of 'production culture', which had emerged in the late 1960s, as has been described above.

The continuity was also evident in Honecker's attempts to establish greater centralised control over people's free time. At the sixth plenum, for example, Hager included the 'culture of interpersonal relations' in 'cultural mass work'. He stated that, 'we know that particularly the area of inter-personal relations does not have the kind of cultural manifestation that meets our Socialist and ethical value assumptions. There are still many cases of indifference, impolite behaviour towards fellow citizens. The socialist community has no place for these cases of disrespect of man, for careless, egotistical behaviour towards the individual and towards society'.³⁷ 'Cultural mass work' was thus obliging people to be clean and tidy, polite, kind and generally well behaved. Hager also discussed the importance of the home as a cultural centre, where people pursued individual activities, sought relaxation and watched television. On average, Hager stated, people watched as much as 15 hours of television a week. As a result, Hager outlined that it was necessary for the SED to devote greater attention to the medium of television, in order to encourage it to 'use its facilities better, to prompt people to participate in cultural life and creative cultural activity'.³⁸ These references show that the Honecker administration was trying to gain greater influence over people's free time. It introduced the

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 12, p. 15.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 15.

politicisation and social standardisation into more and more areas of life. An individual's level of tidiness, politeness and orderliness now became a public affair. 'Cultural mass work' was carrying the party's narrow view of how individuals should behave further and further into people's lives.

The SED's increasing desire for control also became evident in centralising structural changes Honecker introduced in the cultural system. The Ministry of Culture was redesigned as a central focal point for administration and organisation of cultural life. It was instructed to collect more information from the localities, processing this information and using it to monitor and guide cultural developments at the grassroots. It was given more power to address problems that were arising with the implementation of the SED's cultural policy.³⁹ This development imposed intensified bureaucratic demands on local cultural institutions and organisations. The various local and regional cultural organs had to ensure that cultural activities developed according to the ideological demands of the eighth party congress in a well-controlled manner.⁴⁰ They were required to work according to 'exact' and 'long-term' plans that reflected central policy.⁴¹ In order to ensure that the plans were regularly drawn up and fulfilled, the local institutions were told to compose quarterly reports on cultural development that would constantly keep the central units updated.⁴² If the functionaries failed to write their reports, they were reprimanded by a higher authoritative level, as was shown in Chapter 4.

The attempt to increase control was not wholly beneficial for the administration and organisation of cultural life, however. The central institutions were inundated with reports from the localities. These reports were, to make matters worse, not incredibly insightful either. As Chapter 4 has shown, the over-worked local functionaries churned out longer and longer reports to fulfil central requirements, but in order to save themselves time and hassle, they stuck to very formalised methods of report-writing, which did not truly focus on accurate reflections of the cultural situation. Ultimately, as the next chapter will show, the

³⁹ SAPMO BArch, DR1/8789, *Staatssekretär an die Abteilungsleiter, 8.12.71*: in this document, concerns are expressed that the channels of information in the Ministry of Culture are not functioning properly; SAPMO BArch, DR 1/8843 *Dienstanweisungen 1971-73, Entsprechend dem Beschluss der Dienstbesprechung am 16 Mai 1972 - Maßnahmen zur Erhöhung der Effektivität der Informationsarbeit, 23.5.72*, pp.1-16: this document announces the introduction of strict guidelines to ensure that the flow of information can function smoothly in the Ministry.

⁴⁰ SAPMO BArch DY 30/J IV 2/3A/2110, *Direktive zur Durchführung der Mitgliederhauptversammlungen der Kreis- und Bezirksdelegiertenkonferenz des Deutschen Kulturbundes im ersten Halbjahr 1972*, p.1.

⁴¹ SAPMO BArch DR 1/8935, *Der Staatssekretär, 2.9.71*, p.6, p.9.

⁴² See chapter 4, pp. 96-98.

communication between different levels of functionaries ultimately began to break down.

To summarise this section, Honecker had abandoned the educationalist outlook on cultural life that he had, among others, put forward at the eleventh plenum. Instead, he imposed a centralised cultural system that promised to satisfy a variety of popular interests. Importantly, this development is another manifestation of the SED's growing realisation that it had to react to developments at the grass roots, as will become evident in the next subsection.

Considering Popular Interests: Cultural Theory

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the concentration on people's cultural interests and needs had become the focal point of cultural theory in the GDR.⁴³ Hans Koch, for example, one of the leading cultural theoreticians, wrote two major works, *Unsere Literaturgesellschaft* in 1965 (before the eleventh plenum) and *Kulturpolitik der DDR* in 1976. The difference between the two could not be more obvious, and the impact of the rhetoric of the eighth party congress and the sixth plenum is also clear. In *Unsere Literaturgesellschaft*, Koch lamented that cultural development still lagged behind the economic and political development and that a separation between 'art' and 'life' had ensued. He proceeded to praise the fifth party congress and the *Bitterfeld Way*, as they had attempted to combat the discrepancy between economics, politics, culture and art. At the same time, however, he warned that this was not evident in all areas of cultural life. A weakness that remained was entertainment culture and lowbrow culture. Here, 'petit-bourgeois' behaviour still existed, he wrote. The texts of hit songs, the crime films on television, musicals and imported films gave cause for concern, he argued.⁴⁴ In 1965, Koch advocated countering the population's inclinations towards lowbrow activities, and furthering artistic, educational endeavours instead.

Eleven years later, Koch's views on culture had altered considerably. In *Kulturpolitik der DDR*, Koch's list of important 'cultural' activities seemed endless and included references to lowbrow as well as to entertainment culture: 'The 'art' of cultural political leadership consists of uniting and harmonising the diverse elements

⁴³ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV B 2/9.06/4, *An die Abteilung Agitation, Information über aktuelle Fragen der Verwirklichung der Kulturpolitik*, 2.11.72, pp. 1-4.

⁴⁴ Hans Koch, *Unsere Literaturgesellschaft: Kritik und Polemik* (East Berlin, 1965), pp.185-188.

and areas of socialist culture [here follows a long list, which includes ‘the effort to have entertainment and sociable activities at a high standard] It encompasses the whole knowledge of a person, his abilities, talents, behaviour, beliefs, his social habits and pleasure’.⁴⁵ Koch’s text reiterated various new elements of cultural life that Hager had introduced into cultural policy, such as the culture of human relations, and ‘working culture’. Importantly, his text also portrayed the positive attributes of entertainment and sociable activities – the elements he had abhorred in 1965. Looking at Koch’s analysis shows how much the focus on artistic endeavour had shifted in favour of diverse cultural activities that were determined by personal inclination.

The change in cultural theory that is evident from Koch’s writings had not purely come about in reaction to alterations in cultural policy of the Honecker era. Prominent cultural theoreticians had been influenced by the reforms of the 1960s. They realised that people’s cultural inclinations at the grassroots deserved a lot of attention. Consequently, leading theoreticians, in particular Helmut Hanke, were fervent defenders of the need to respond to popular interests and providing cultural activities accordingly in the early 1970s.⁴⁶ The previous section has highlighted that in the late 1960s, the cultural theoreticians Rossow and Heinze advocated abandoning the educationalist principles of cultural policy and focusing on fulfilling people’s interests instead. In the early 1970s, the cultural theoreticians reiterated this advice to the party leadership. In 1971, Hanke edited a volume, in which he, Manfred Weißfinger and Christa Ziermann pointed out that the people’s patterns of behaviour in their free time was incredibly varied. They argued that different cultural interests were shaped by differences between individuals. These differences arose from their different occupations, their level of education and their personal ‘feeling of social responsibility’, and because of personal issues such as gender, age, or background. From this, the theoreticians concluded that the cultural programme had to encompass ‘all sides of our societal life’ rather than ignoring the variety of interests.⁴⁷ Hanke insisted that this would not hinder, but further the socialist project. In the previous year, he had written an essay on culture (which was sent to Hager), in which he stated that developing ‘a varied, intellectually stimulating, interesting cultural life,

⁴⁵ Hans Koch, *Kulturpolitik in der DDR* (East Berlin, 1976), p. 8.

⁴⁶ Groschopp, ‘Kulturhäuser in der DDR’, pp. 169-170.

⁴⁷ Helmut Hanke and Manfred Weißfinger, Christa Ziermann, *Kultur und Freizeit. Zu Tendenzen und Erfordernissen eines kulturvollen Freizeitverhaltens* (Ost Berlin, 1971), p. 11.

which advances the edification of new forms of social interaction, is a main factor in the cultural fashioning of free time and actively contributes to strengthening of the socialist consciousness'. He did not believe, moreover, that cultural life should be restricted to the artistic sphere. He advocated that 'people's artistic creation' should become 'people's *cultural* creation, which plays a key role in the development of people's creative ability, the aesthetic formation of life's milieu and *cultural* forms of free time activity ... Our cultural life has to develop in a much happier and more joyful way'.⁴⁸ By replacing the adjective 'artistic' with the adjective 'cultural', Hanke advocated a much broader conception of what pastime activity entailed.

These theoreticians' advocacy of providing people with a variety of pastime activities was adopted by the official discourse. It fitted well into Honecker's 'Unity of Social and Economic Policy', which pledged to provide people with a satisfaction of their interests. Moreover, it had the potential to reach large sections of the population in their free time. Consequently, Hager adopted a lot of Hanke's ideas at the sixth plenum, as has been shown above. The rhetoric of the cultural theoreticians was also evident in the plenum's aftermath. In a speech held after the plenum, Hager insisted, 'We do not regard culture just as literature or art'.⁴⁹ 'Culture' was broadly defined as 'the expression of the wholeness of the basic needs, interests and habits'.⁵⁰ Even Albert Norden, who had spoken against Ulbricht's reforms of the early 1960s at the eleventh plenum, agreed that, 'culture and the cultural task should not be understood as a narrowly defined area'.⁵¹ The cultural theoreticians had therefore succeeded in upholding the broad conception of 'culture' that had been introduced in the late 1960s and had focussed Honecker's policy on responding to people's interests.

Before closing this section, it has to be said that the cultural theoreticians also perceived the need for certain limitations to remain on cultural life. For example, they insisted that people still had to adhere to forms of socialist standardisation in their cultural activities. In *Kultur und Freizeit*, the authors stated, 'In this way, the

⁴⁸ SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/2.024/7, *H. an Hager, 13.10.70*: H. attached two theoretical essays about the tendencies in recent cultural development. The second essay is: *Helmut Hanke, Die sozialistische Kultur in den siebziger Jahren*, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV B 2/9.06/4, *Speech by Kurt Hager (undated, but it cannot have been given not long after the 6th plenum as Hager refers to the 'recent' 6th plenum)*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV B 2/9.06/4, *Auswertung der 6. ZK Tagung der SED, Maßnahmeplan zur Auswertung des 6. Plenums des ZK der SED im Bereich der marxistisch-leninistischen Kultur und Kunstwissenschaft, 12.10.72*, p. 3.

⁵¹ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV B 2/9.06/48, *Abteilung Kultur, Zuarbeit zum Referat für die erweiterte Nationalratstagung der Nationalen Front - gehalten von Albert Norden, 2.10.72*, pp. 2-3.

citizen's right to free time and relaxation, which has been proclaimed in our socialist constitution, is simultaneously to be understood as a duty to use free time purposefully, for the well-being of the whole of society and to one's personal advantage. Everyone should consider the basic principle: "Lost time is wasted life".⁵² Leisure pursuits therefore had to correspond to the SED's ideas and norms about societal usefulness and purpose. Moreover, the theoreticians never advocated cultural activities becoming a 'private' or independent affair.⁵³

The 1970s

Addressing People's Interests and Needs

The increasing broadening of the cultural model over the course of the 1960s and 1970s was having a marked effect on cultural life in *Bezirk* Potsdam. The desire to satisfy people's interests meant that the cultural organs, the state administration and the factories focussed on providing more and more cultural activities in very new ways. To begin with, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the SED leadership increasingly wanted to involve the working classes in cultural life and encouraged cultural activities becoming a regular aspect of life in factories.⁵⁴ In order to further this goal, the SED initiated factory festivals across the GDR in 1970. The factory festivals are not to be confused with so-called workers' festivals, which had already existed in the 1960s. The workers' festivals took place annually in a different *Bezirk* of the GDR. At these workers' festivals, selected lay artistic talents came together and presented themselves to the nation, in order to demonstrate the superiority of socialism to the world. In the 1970s, the workers' festivals were continued, but the SED wanted to create festivals that reached out to all artistically talented and culturally interested people on a more local scale, rather than concentrating on the nation's top lay artistic talents. Hence, the factory festivals were introduced. At these

⁵² Helmut Hanke, *Kultur und Freizeit*, p. 44.

⁵³ Groschopp, 'Kulturhäuser in der DDR', p.170.

⁵⁴ The desire to bring culture to the working classes in the factories was an important factor of SED policy before the 1970s: in the late 1950s, it culminated in the introduction of the *Bitterfelder Weg*, which was described in Chapter 7, p. 176, it was also an element of the brigade movement wherein workers were to engage in collective cultural activity within their brigades (see Chapter 5, pp.126-120 and Chapter 6, pp.146-149), and the efforts to establish clubs, cultural houses and libraries in factories also aimed to bring culture to the worker. Honecker once more focussed the party's efforts on the needs of the working class, but with a slightly different outlook: cultural activities now became more of a commodity – quantity and enjoyment became more important than quality and education.

annual festivals, each factory drew together all culturally and artistically active people from a factory and from the surrounding areas to perform their arts and show their crafts. The rest of the community was invited to attend these occasions. These festivals took off very quickly due to the enormous central efforts. Whereas in 1971, there had been 1017 Factory Festivals in the GDR, there were already 2111 in 1973, and these numbers continued to rise.⁵⁵

While the focus on factories was a central aspect, the SED also aimed to promote cultural endeavours of the working class in their living area.⁵⁶ Hence, bringing cultural activity to housing developments was made a key priority. Here, the mass organisation *Nationale Front* became particularly important for the SED as the best mechanism for organising cultural activity there.⁵⁷ It also became increasingly important to support and improve the main cultural institutions in the GDR: thus, the functions of cultural houses were extended. They ceased to be purely educational establishments, but instead provided a broad range of cultural activity. In the 1970s, they could even provide gastronomic facilities – something that had been vehemently rejected in the early 1960s.⁵⁸

Aside from focussing on the working classes, the leading administrative units of *Bezirk* Potsdam were also keen to provide different population groups with cultural activities that were specifically tailored to their needs. In 1976, for example, the administrative leadership of *Bezirk* Potsdam decreed that it was important to provide activities and events that ‘meet the needs for entertainment and sociability within the realm of the family’.⁵⁹ This entailed several areas of focus: establishing broader cultural networks for families, making these networks financially accessible, and, above all, ensuring that cultural activity responded to the interests of children of

⁵⁵ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV B2/9.06 47, *Einige inhaltliche Entwicklungsprobleme von Kultur und Kunst, wie sie in unserer Republik nach dem VIII. Parteitag gestellt und auch schon beantwortet wurden* (undated, but must have been written after 1974, as it mentions the ‘third people’s art conference’), p. 47.

⁵⁶ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/1, *Hausarbeit: theoretisches Grundsatzmaterial zum siebten Parteitag, 12.1.67*, pp. 8-10.

⁵⁷ SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV B 2/9.06/48, *Zuarbeit zum Referat für die erweiterte Nationalratstagung der Nationalen Front, Norden, 2.10.72*, p. 6, pp.12-21.

⁵⁸ Groschopp, ‘Kulturhäuser in der DDR’, pp. 165-172; BLHA Rep. 538 Kulturbund der DDR, Bezirksleitung Potsdam (KB) Nr. 65, *Konsumgenossenschaft Stadt und Landkreis Brandenburg VEB Gaststätten, Dokumentation über die Zusammenarbeit des VEB mit der Kreisleitung Brandenburg des Kulturbundes der DDR*; *ibid.* *Konsumgenossenschaft Stadt- und Landkreis Brandenburg, Vereinbarung zwischen der Konsumgenossenschaft Stadt und Landkreis Brandenburg und der Kreisleitung Brandenburg des Kulturbundes der DDR*, 5.5.75.

⁵⁹ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 23992/2, *Vorschläge zum Maßnahmenplan zur Betreuung kinderreicher Familien, 10.6.76*.

different ages, as well as to their parents.⁶⁰ Similarly, the *Bezirk* was trying to provide more facilities for retired people. The old people's association *People's Solidarity* organised performances by local choirs and music groups, special afternoon performances at theatres for retired people and efforts of the KDG focussed on old people's needs.⁶¹ In the localities, the *Kreis* leaderships were also keen to provide cultural events for the elderly.⁶²

Another very important development was the much broader provision of activities in cultural circles. Several hobby activities, which had previously not received much support in the organised structures benefited from this. These were largely those activities that did not pursue an 'artistic' endeavour like writing or painting, but concerned themselves with diversions of a more 'lowbrow' kind. As the SED now accepted that people's pastimes spanned a wide-range of *cultural* activities (not just artistic ones), such as photography, handicraft, research and collecting, these circles were increasingly supported.⁶³ Moreover, cultural activities that had hitherto been regarded as 'bourgeois' and suspicious, and had been forbidden, were now allowed. Carnival clubs are a good example. In the 1950s, celebrating Carnival was still regarded as a dangerous remnant of Germany's bourgeois past, and staging the Carnival was by no means to be left in the hands of the population. The formation of Carnival clubs was, hence, not supported.⁶⁴ In the 1970s, however, this image had changed. Celebrating and organising Carnival was popular, and the pursuit of this activity in Carnival clubs was now perceived to be beneficial. It attracted people to join a circle that was supervised by the state organisation, and at the same time, it alleviated the state of organisational tasks, because dedicated lay people now organised the Carnival. Hence, in 1980, the 'Central House for Cultural Work' instructed the *Bezirk* administration that 'Carnival has its legitimate place in the various ways of satisfying the cultural needs of our citizens for sociability, entertainment, enjoyment and happiness.' It was important to guide the Carnival

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, *Die Betreuung kinderreicher Familien unter kulturellem Aspekt*, 14.11.75.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, *Vereinbarung zur Verbesserung der medizinischen, sozialen und kulturellen Betreuung der Bürger im höheren Lebensalter sowie Förderung ihrer stärkeren Teilnahme am gesellschaftlichen Leben für das Jahr 1981*.

⁶² *ibid.*, *Abteilung Kultur, Rat des Kreises Neuruppin*, 26.11.76.

⁶³ DR 1/8935, *Kulturelles Leben der Arbeiterklasse, der Staatssekretär*, 2.9.71, p.18, Isolde Dietrich, 'Abschied von der Laubenkolonie?' *Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung*, Februar 1996, (Kulturinitiative '89 e.V. und Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Berlin), p.355.

⁶⁴ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Potsdam Nr. 1995, *Karnevalsgesellschaften, Ministerium für Kultur an alle Räte der Kreise*, 28.11.55.

clubs to ensure that they operated in accordance with the party's cultural model and brought the 'socialist ideal' to fruition.⁶⁵

These developments meant that there were now more ways in which culturally active people could identify with the SED's cultural project. They could make increasing demands from the organised cultural structures and request the provision of cultural activities that satisfied their interests. This furthered popular integration and participation in organised culture. The only problem that emerged over the course of the 1970s was that the SED had abandoned the high hopes it had once had for the cultural output of the more artistic circles. Increasingly, the artistic circles, which had been praised so much in the 1960s, were beginning to feel neglected. The cultural policy had shifted towards satisfying people's interests, but was losing out on making the culturally active population feel valued. In the 1980s, this increasingly became a bone of contention, which will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

The Biermann Affair

There remained one group of culturally active citizens in *Bezirk* Potsdam, however, for whom the 1970s did not only entail greater broadening and understanding, but also increasing suspicion. After the 'Biermann affair', intellectuals had to endure growing mistrust of the leadership in *Bezirk* Potsdam. Wolf Biermann was a singer and political songwriter whose critical lyrics had for a long time been a thorn in the flesh for the SED. As a consequence of the hardening of SED policy in 1965, he had been forbidden to perform publicly, but with help from West Germany, he was able to record his songs in the West and make copies which were then smuggled them back into East Germany. Consequently, he remained a prominent figure in the East. In November 1976, the SED decided to rid itself of this troublemaker. They allowed him to give a concert in West Germany. Once he had left the East, the SED stripped him of his citizenship and refused him re-entry into the GDR. This caused a great storm among writers and artists in the GDR, who wrote a letter of protest to the SED, which was published in the French newspaper *Agence France*. The SED reacted very negatively to this letter, and described it as an act of disloyalty. Consequently, a rift ensued between the SED and many prominent artists and writers. A lot of these

⁶⁵ BLHA Rep. 426 Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Nr 339, *Information über die Tätigkeit von Karnevalsclubs oder -gesellschaften in der DDR, Zentralhaus für Kulturarbeit, 7.4.80.*

figures left the GDR between 1976 and 1980, among them the writer Jurek Becker and the composer Tilo Medek. The reaction of artists and writers caused deep misgivings among the SED leadership. The party leadership demanded that artists and writers reiterated their commitment to the GDR and condemned Biermann and his 'supporters'.

In *Bezirk* Potsdam the Biermann expulsion and its aftermath caused suspicious monitoring of clubs for intellectuals. The members of these clubs had to phrase their thoughts and feelings very carefully to avoid attracting even further suspicion. In the following report on the 'club for the intelligentsia', the members were very unsure about how to handle the situation:

In the club, various friends had the point of view that Biermann should not be unnecessarily inflated, and that we should not be diverted from our obligations ... Several members of the intelligentsia do not have a firm opinion. They are uncertain and are observing how the situation will develop. One friend was of the opinion that the decision 'for' or 'against' Biermann would make him [Biermann] popular in an unjustified manner. That would lead to a situation, where the events could not be left to die down. Other artists were of the opinion that those who behave like Biermann cannot be surprised if the state can't remain silent.⁶⁶

The Biermann affair showed that the broadening of the cultural structures had not brought with it unending levels of tolerance. The desire for increasing the control over the cultural sphere and for monitoring people's cultural development remained a prominent aspect despite the SED's more open and inclusive attitude.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the hard-line course of the eleventh plenum did not have a hold over the field of *cultural mass work* for long. From 1966 onwards, it became obvious that a cultural model, which did not respond to the existing patterns of people's leisure time, was not going to suffice for incorporating people into the regime's cultural structures. Events like the introduction of the five-day week, as well the realisation about the failure of the *Bitterfeld Way* were instrumental in showing the regime leadership that popular interests had to be incorporated into the SED's cultural model. Consequently, the late 1960s were characterised by an

⁶⁶ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 306, *SED Bezirksleitung, Potsdam, Betr. Information über Sitzungen, Meinungen, Fragen usw. im Zusammenhang mit der Aufhebung der DDR Staatsbürgerschaft von Biermann, 22.11.76.*

immense broadening of the concept of *kulturelle Massenarbeit* in order to address as many aspects of people's free time as possible. Even though Honecker portrayed this development as a new policy formulated in 1971, there were strong continuities between the late 1960s and 1970s. In particular, the cultural theorists advised the regime leadership not to restrict people exercising their interests and inclinations. The Honecker administration consequently adopted the inclusive cultural model and pledged to satisfy people's interests and needs more broadly. The party's demand from the earlier period, which insisted that cultural activities had to be educationalist and of a high quality had been abandoned, and now, the SED promoted entertainment and quantity. For cultural life at the grass roots, this meant that people were now able to articulate their leisure time interests within a state organisation without being rebuffed for not pursuing enough 'highbrow culture'. For the purposes of integration, participation and communication, the continuity between the 1960s and 1970s was a vital factor.

Chapter 9

Breakdown of communication: the late 1970s and 1980s

The 1980s can be described as a decade where interaction, integration and communication in cultural life declined. The dialogue between functionaries and participants began to break down, and withdrawal into independent spheres became more common at the grassroots. This chapter is entitled ‘individualisation and introspection’, because these two terms highlight the changing nature of people’s behaviour patterns in cultural life. The term ‘individualisation’ expresses how in the late 1970s and 1980s, people began to withdraw from collective cultural experiences in order to satisfy individual desires and needs. The term ‘introspection’ explores how the cultural circles became more and more introverted and cut off from the outside. Their members preferred each other’s company and ceased to believe in the benefits of interacting with the administrative functionaries.

Individualisation is not a new concept for describing people’s changing behaviour patterns in the 1980s. Albrecht Göschel argued that during the final decade of the GDR, people became more focussed on their individual needs and on personal self-fulfilment. This was coupled with a growing frustration with the SED.¹ In these years, the SED refused to embrace change: while Gorbachev announced his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the SED leaders proclaimed that they saw no need to ‘change the wallpaper’ in the GDR; in other words, they refused to embark on similar liberalising reforms as the Soviet Union. At the same time, the economy was taking a downward trend. The GDR increasingly relied on West German monetary infusion to prop up the failing economy. Nevertheless, Erich Honecker refused to abandon his policy of subsidisation. This policy served little purpose, however. It pumped funds into many areas unnecessarily (there was, for example, no real need to subsidise foodstuffs), and yet it did not reduce popular discontent, because the SED was unable to meet people’s growing demands for raised living standards. Honecker felt, nonetheless, that he could not abandon his pledge to provide for people in their daily lives, and obstinately continued to sacrifice economic stability for his policy of

¹ Albrecht Göschel, *Kontrast und Parallele: kulturelle und politische Identitätsbildung ostdeutscher Generationen* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln: Verlag W. Kohlhammer/Deutscher Gemeindeverlag, 1999), pp. 225-235. Göschel also draws parallels to similar processes and patterns of behaviour in West Germany – this does not seem to have been purely a trend in the GDR.

subsidisation.² The combination of these factors did not fail to have an impact on the population. People increasingly resented the lack of freedom in the GDR, the growing economic problems and the leadership that seemed to be more and more divorced from reality.³ The younger generations in particular began to turn their backs on the only state they had ever known. This state of affairs eventually culminated in the GDR-wide demonstrations of 1989 that led to the Peaceful Revolution on November 9th.

Manifestations of ‘Individualisation’ and ‘Introspection’

Over the course of the late 1970s and 1980s, the dynamics of cultural life in *Bezirk* Potsdam began to change as a result of the process of individualisation. Participation in cultural circles shrank continually, which was a sign that people began to abandon collective cultural experiences. More and more people focussed on the fulfilment of individual needs. They preferred privately organised activities, and many were increasingly drawn towards ‘entertainment culture’.⁴ The growing abandonment of collective experiences was not only evident in cultural life. Jeannette Madarasz, who analysed workers in East German factories, describes the individualisation process of the late 1970s and 1980s as a development from the ‘we’ to the ‘I’, meaning that officially promoted collective events were increasingly forsaken by the workers. Madarasz argues that this was a sign of the workers rebelling against the enforced standardisation of life in the factories.⁵

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the membership in cultural circles declined quite significantly. The following graph illustrates the falling numbers of philatelists in the

² André Steiner, ‘Zwischen Konsumverhalten und Innovationszwang: Zum wirtschaftlichen Niedergang der DDR’, in Konrad H Jarausch, Martin Sabrow (eds.), *Weg in den Untergang: der innere Zerfall der DDR*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1999), pp. 163-168; Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 80-105.

³ Martin Sabrow, ‘Der Konkurs der Konsensdiktatur. Überlegungen zum inneren Zerfall der DDR aus kulturgeschichtlicher Perspektive’, in Jarausch, Sabrow (eds.), *Weg in den Untergang*, pp. 103-104.

⁴ Stiftung Parteien und Massenorganisationen, Bundearchiv (SAPMO BArch) DY 30/vorl. SED 30338, *Genosse Hager an Erich Honecker*, 9.11.82: Hager outlines in this document that entertainment culture had become so popular that it was the only aspect of cultural life that made financial gains, which were used to subsidise other forms of cultural life.

⁵ Jeannette Madarász, *Working in East Germany. Normality in a Socialist Dictatorship, 1961 to 1979* (publication pending, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): Chapter 1 (Introduction), subsections ‘‘We’’ and ‘‘I’’ as reflections of socio-political change’ and ‘Individualisation’; See also Renate Hürtgen, ‘Entwicklung in der Stagnation? Oder: Was ist so spannend am Betriebsalltag der siebziger und achtziger Jahre in der DDR?’ in Reante Hürtgen, Thomas Reichel (eds.) *Der Schein der Stabilität: DDR Betriebsalltag in der Ära Honecker* (Berlin: Metropol, 2001), p. 21.

Kulturbund in *Bezirk* Potsdam, for example. Between 1976 and 1981, the membership of these circles dropped by thirty per cent.⁶

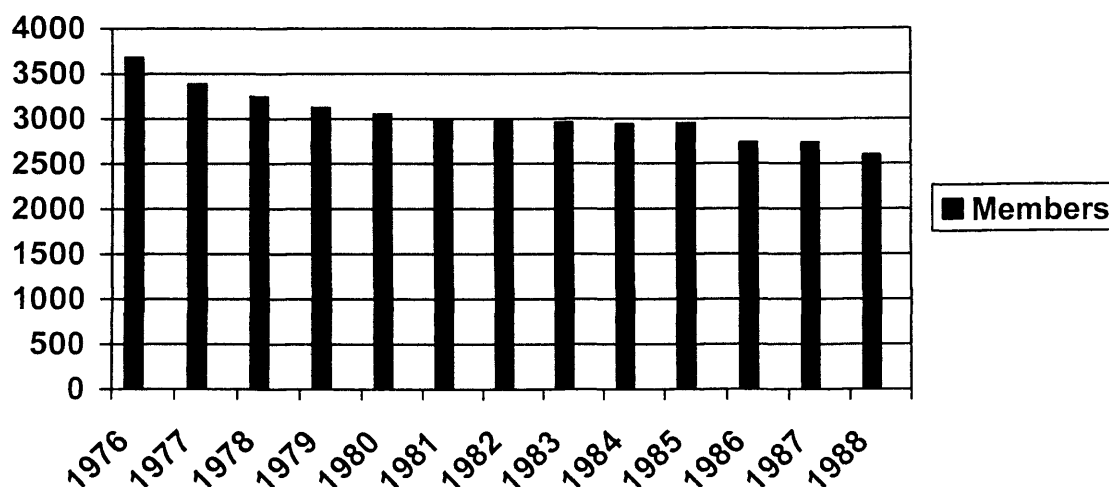


Fig. 9.2: Membership in *Kulturbund* philatelist circles 1976-1988

To a degree, this membership decline was caused by a dwindling interest in stamp collecting.⁷ But there was also another reason: many people were leaving these circles because they no longer desired to spend their free time in organised cultural structures. They had become more protective about their leisure time and were increasingly unwilling to make the sacrifices that membership in cultural circles entailed.⁸ It was impossible to replace these parting members. In *Bezirk* Potsdam, younger generations were either no longer interested in collecting, or they preferred to exercise their hobby privately, even if this meant that they would not have access

⁶ The data for this graph comes from: Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) Rep. 538 *Kulturbund* *Bezirk* Potsdam (KB) Nr. 49, *Übersicht – Philateliengruppen, Erstellt von K., 11.5.82* and BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 11 *Mitgliederentwicklung im Philatelistenverband des Bezirkes Potsdam von 1966-1988*; in factories, there was also a decline in the numbers of circle members: BLHA Rep. 503 VEB Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz (CFWP) Nr. 5188, *Abrechnung des Jahreskultur- und Sportangebotes des CFWP und der Stadt Premnitz 1977, 21.10.77* and *ibid. Vorlage zur Betriebsparteileitung, 8.5.1979*: in 1977, there were 24 circles with 429 members. By 1979, this had declined to 21 circles with 333 members.

⁷ *ibid.*, *Kurzbericht über die Regionalberatung der Kreise Jüterborg, Luckenwalde, Königswusterhausen anlässlich der 5. Regionalausstellung in Ludwigsfelde, 22.9.82*: ‘The *Kreis* secretary from Zossen reiterated the opinion of a large number of her members, who assume that stamp collecting is pointless’.

⁸ BLHA, Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 5188, *Vorlage für die Betriebsparteileitungssitzung, Vorbereitung auf die 18. Arbeiterfestspiele 1980 im Bezirk Rostock, am 10.10 1978*: ‘The choir is also experiencing certain problems. It has become clear that a few choir members no longer want to take on the increased burdens [of the membership] for different reasons. ... Other capable colleagues who can play instruments categorically refused any kind of societal work because this involves a sacrifice of their free time.’.

to the facilities and organisation of the *Kulturbund*.⁹ One report from a philatelist circle of the late 1980s pointed out, 'we were able to gain four new members for our club, which was not easy, because gaining members has become a complicated process. Many collect, but do not want to tie themselves down to an organisation.'¹⁰ The prospect of exercising a hobby as a collective cultural experience did not seem to appeal to people anymore.

The shrinking number of members in stamp collectors' circles had a direct affect on the climate within these groups: in the late 1970s and 1980s, these groups gradually became more introverted and isolated.¹¹ They relished their status of being committed specialists and preferred to stay among themselves. The artistic quality became so important to the members of these groups that they ceased to put a lot of energy into finding new members and focussed on improving the ability of the existing members instead. In the Workers' Ensemble of the *Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz*, for example, the members were so intent on raising the quality of the Ensemble that they actually started culling the membership. Once the less talented members had been ousted, more time and money could be spent training the others.¹² Other cultural groups showed similar signs of a growing concern with increasing the quality of their circle. Their members pursued highly specialist areas and took on more and more difficult cultural tasks to prove their ability and aptitude.¹³ In a sense, this was a self-perpetuating cycle: the more members left, the more introvert these

⁹ See BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 357, *Schreiben zu Problemen des geistig-kulturellen Lebens und Schaffens der jungen Intelligenz*, 24.10.75: This document states that from the mid-1970s onwards, the administrative functionaries of *Kreis Pritzwalk* were trying to counter the declining membership of the *Kulturbund*, but were unable to do so. In particular, it was difficult to catch the interest of young people, who were described as 'lethargic' and as seeking enjoyment and entertainment rather than participating in the *Kulturbund*.; *ibid. Informationsbericht Monat April 1976*, 3.5.76; *ibid. Informationsbericht Monat Mai 1978*, 31.5.78; see also BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Gransee, vom Kreisvorstand der Philatelisten an den Bundesvorstand der Philatelisten*, 23.2.79: in *Kreis Gransee* there were no philatelists under 25.

¹⁰ BLHA Rep. 538 KB DDR Nr. 28, *Auswertung des Wettbewerbs im Philatelistenverband des Kulturbundes der DDR zum 40. Geburtstag der Gründung der DDR, Jüterborg*, 10.8.89.

¹¹ This was, for example, evident in decreasing participation of these circles at organised events and competitions: Rep. 426 Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Potsdam (BfK) Nr. 249, *Abschlussbericht des 1. Bezirksleistungsvergleiches von musikalisch-literarischen Programmen der Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter des Bezirkes Potsdam*, 29.3.79: out of 15 circles for writing workers, only 5 attended.

¹² BLHA Rep. 503 CFWP Nr. 5188, *Vorlage für die Betriebsparteileitungssitzung am 10.10.1978*, p. 4; *ibid. Vorlage zur Betriebsparteileitung am 8.5.1979*: the number of members were reduced and certain key singers receive special weekly voice training; see also BLHA Rep. 401 Bezirkstag und Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam Nr. 23984/1, *Stellvertretender Leiter Abteilung Kultur An Kreisleitung der SED Pritzwalk* 10.11.83.

¹³ Landkreis Oberhavel, Kreis- und Verwaltungsarchiv, Oranienburg (LkO) 6357 Gransee, *Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit, zu Einschätzung über die qualitative und quantitative Entwicklung des künstlerischen Volksschaffens*, 23.11.88, p. 4: This report outlines that more circles want to produce artefacts collectively to be able to exhibit them, which shows a growing readiness of the members to pull together in order to produce quality works.

groups became, which meant that they focussed on increasing the quality of their circle and were less inclined to search for new members, who would be less knowledgeable. The growing proficiency of these groups then further discouraged inexperienced lay people from joining. The administrative functionaries began to pick up on this development, and tried to dissuade cultural circles from becoming too exclusive:

The basis of our whole stamp-collecting and cultural work in the *Bezirk* can only be the common experience of a community – it is the foundation of all our success! The more variable, generally educational and publicly effective we make life in the communities, the more [people] will be prepared to visit such events and help create them. It is, for example, not always sufficient, to hold a talk about the stamps of Sweden – one should also offer a commentary, backed up by photographs about Stockholm; it is not attractive enough to discuss rare stamps of old Italian states (how many people are, after all, interested in that?), one can also hold a talk with photographs about Sicily.¹⁴

Despite such attempts to make the cultural groups more inclusive, however, the cultural groups continued to shrink and to become more introvert. A very similar development became evident in the collective cultural activities of brigades in factories, though here, there was also a degree of continuity: the workers continued to appreciate some aspects of collective cultural life in the late 1970s and 1980s. Sociable occasions that focussed on lowbrow activities and were combined with alcohol consumption still had a degree of popularity. The following extract from a brigade diary of the factory *Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau* in Wildau highlights just how much pleasure could ensue from a joint evening playing Skat and drinking:

Eleven [male] colleagues and one lady played for points, sparkling wine and Kaßler.¹⁵ ... So we began. In truly German fashion, we tore the tablecloths off the table and then all participants tried to destroy the tabletops with their bare hands in the fashion of Karate experts [this is probably a reference to the heated table-bashing that can go on during a Skat game]. It did not quite work, but the repeated attempts created thirst and so the glasses became empty, the bladders filled and the door to the toilets swung around like the door to a saloon in a Western movie. ... Then the moment came. The score sheets were full (the players not quite) and the glasses were empty. ... The first winner was H.L. Thus it is clear who will arrange the next event. The last winner was R.K. Thus it is clear who wrote this account.¹⁶

¹⁴ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 16, *Philatelistenverband im Kulturbund der DDR, Bezirksvorstand Potsdam*, 31.1.87, p. 5.

¹⁵ Kaßler is a pork dish usually eaten with Sauerkraut.

¹⁶ BLHA Rep. 505 Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau Wildau Nr. 2030, *Booklet 1, Skaterfüllung März 1981*.

In the light of sociable events that were described in brigade diaries in the early 1970s, as was discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, there is nothing unusual about this account, apart from, perhaps, the references to practising Karate and to American 'Western' movies, which suggest that there were tendencies of 'westernisation' in cultural life in factories.¹⁷ In terms of its celebration of playing Skat and of socialising, nevertheless, this extract highlights that there was some continuity between the middle and the later period of the GDR. In some areas of collective cultural life, however, it was becoming evident that the desire for collective activity declined in the brigades. It is noticeable that there was even less inclination towards engaging with collective 'highbrow' activities in the late 1970 and 1980s than there had been during the middle period.¹⁸ But the 'highbrow' activities were not the only collective events that were suffering. The workers felt more and more inclined to pursue their individual desires, and there were many occasions where brigade members absented themselves from collective cultural activities, like excursions, because they were no longer willing to sacrifice their free time unless they were particularly interested in a certain event. For example, a brigade diary of the *Stahl und Walzwerk* in Henningsdorf describes how the traditional annual brigade boat trip was hardly attended in 1979. The few members who went on the excursion remarked in the brigade diary that they had a tremendous time going for a walk, having some food and enjoying the boat ride. At the same time, they bemoaned that in order to get the other brigade members along, a different kind of outing should have been planned: 'Maybe it would be wise to carry out the next boat trip as a night-time event, with organized transport to and fro, so that ... the party-animals of the collective get what they want'.¹⁹ This is a bitter remark that highlights the irritation of the trip's attendees: the majority of the brigade was only interested in attending a collective event if it involved a party. The individualisation tendencies were, therefore, also becoming evident in cultural life in factories. It was becoming more

¹⁷ Sandrine Kott, 'Zur Geschichte des kulturellen Lebens in DDR-Betrieben, Konzepte und Praxis der betrieblichen Kulturarbeit', in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), p. 191.

¹⁸ *ibid.* Booklet 2, *Persönliche Verpflichtung der Brigademitglieder 1984*: in this diary, no highbrow cultural activities are mentioned. When lowbrow cultural activities are described, there are many colourful pictures, while the descriptions get shorter; BLHA Rep 514 VEB Landbauprojekt Potsdam Nr 137, *Brigadebuch 1982*: the only highbrow event, which is a visit to the museum, attracts only 4 visitors; see also Jörg Roesler, 'Das Brigadebuch: betriebliches Rapportbuch, Chronik des Brigadelebens oder Erziehungsfibel?', in Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders, Leben in der DDR* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2000), p. 158: in the 1970s and 1980s, the brigade diaries increasingly become 'picture books' (Bilderbücher).

¹⁹ BLHA Rep. 502 Stahl- und Walzwerk Henningsdorf Nr. 471, *Eine Seefahrt die ist lustig, eine Seefahrt die ist schön*, 7. Juli (no year, but probably written in 1979).

and more difficult to keep the collective spirit of brigade outings unless the joint events targeted the worker's interest for entertainment and alcohol.

These examples highlight that cultural life had begun to change by the late 1970s. People had become more protective about their free time, they were more resolute about pursuing their interests, they increasingly desired 'entertainment culture', and they were more focused on individual rather than on collective activities. By the 1980s, the SED leadership no longer tried to undermine this development. In a desire to fulfil as many of people's interests as possible, the SED party leaders became more careful in dictating which kind of pastime activity was 'correct' or 'wrong'.²⁰ The result was a growing polarisation in cultural life in the late 1970s and 1980s. On the one hand, collective cultural life in circles became more and more restricted to the interested few, which meant that the groups became increasingly introverted. The openness to outside members had declined considerably in the face of the members' increasing focus on their own needs. On the other hand, there was a growing lack of interest in participating in collective activity, as the desire for individualism, entertainment and unwillingness to make personal sacrifices became more dominant in people's leisure time. This polarisation also bore the hallmarks of being a generational divide. The young generations turned their backs on the organised culture out of an inherent lack of interest.²¹ Yet, they were hardly encouraged to do anything else by the older generations. The older generation's tendencies towards specialisation and their exclusivity in the cultural circles was just as much part of the individualisation process as the youth's growing desire to disengage from organised cultural activity.

This growing generational divide was not only evident in the cultural sphere. In his study on generations and individualisation, Albrecht Göschel describes how there were generational tensions in the 1980s more generally. Göschel argues that young people turned away from the state on many occasions in the last decade of the GDR. They were put off by the incredible rigidity of the organised structures and they wanted to live out individual tendencies, such as homosexuality, that did not fit into the GDR's officially endorsed social structure.²² It seems that the young people

²⁰ Gerlinde Irmscher, 'Freizeitleben. Muße, Freizeit, Feierabend, Freizeit', in Evemarie Badstübner (ed.), *Befremdlich Anders, Leben in der DDR* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2000), pp. 350-373, p. 364.

²¹ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr 24009, *Rat der Stadt Potsdam, Abteilung Kultur 15.8.79*, p.1: In this report, the functionaries lament that the young people seek entertainment, and when they are presented with 'highbrow' artistic material, they engage in 'undisciplined' behaviour.

²² Göschel, *Kontrast und Parallele*, pp. 226-235.

no longer felt properly represented by the structures of the GDR. The individualisation process does not boil down to a generational divide alone, however. In cultural life, the growing desires for individual, entertaining cultural experiences were also evident among older generations. People of different ages turned their backs on collective experiences, and they pursued their own interests more vehemently in individualised private spheres. This process was also evident in very different social groups: it affected cultural circles just as it had an impact on cultural life in the factories.

Disillusionment and Discontent

In contrast to the term 'individualisation', the term 'introspection' is not commonly associated with the 1980s. Perhaps the concept is more applicable to the cultural field than to other areas of life in the GDR. Even so, it is an important concept to evaluate: the cultural groups' increasing segregation also affected the communication between participants, executive functionaries and administrative functionaries. Among executive functionaries and participants, there was a growing feeling that they were being neglected by the administrative functionaries, which fuelled an unwillingness to tolerate interference from the administrative functionaries. If the concept of the 'niche' society can ever be applied to organised cultural life in the GDR, then only in terms of the growing process of introspection that was developing in the late 1970s and 1980s.

The Participants

Chapter 8 explored how in the late 1960s and 1970s, the party had ceased to pursue the *Bitterfeld Way* with any seriousness. It had become evident that lay artistic and literary production could not rival the output of professional artists. Consequently, the celebration of lay artistic circles became a farce: these circles were still praised, but not with the same kind of ideological fervour of the 1960s. Over the course of the late 1970s and 1980s, the participants in these lay artistic circles consequently began to feel abandoned. They complained that the state no longer seemed to take their efforts seriously. The administrative functionaries increasingly dealt with them in an off-hand manner, which caused resentment. This was no longer just a case of

inefficiency at the local and intermediate level – it was a situation where the participants felt that the administrative functionaries no longer cared. Two examples will be used to illustrate this point. They come from two different areas of the cultural field, but illustrate the same point: both express disillusionment about the fact that the administrative circles had failed to award a cultural circle appropriately.

In the first example, a dedicated lay writer, who had founded a ‘circle for writing workers’ in Wittstock, wrote a chronicle about the circle’s activities over 15 years in the mid-1980s. He accounted how the circle was awarded its first medal in the mid-1970s for being an ‘outstanding people’s art collective’. The circle carried on being awarded this medal for five successive years. Over the years, the manner in which the group was awarded changed, however. The chronicle remarks:

We remember our first title, and how much this award meant to us – on this occasion there was a festive meal and presents for us. When we received the second title, we were given presents. On the occasion of the third title there was still a bouquet of flowers. With the fourth title came a note of thanks – but the fifth title passed without any trace. Our sponsoring factory did not even take notice of it.²³

In the late 1970s, the process of awarding this cultural group became less and less of a special occasion on which the group was celebrated and thanked for its contribution to cultural life. The tone of this extract shows despondency about this development. In the second example, the leader of a circle of philatelists complained about a very similar phenomenon in the late 1980s, which shows that the spirit of disillusionment had not only affected lay artistic circles, but also the hobby groups. This *Eingabe* also highlights resentment after an award ceremony was not conducted in the requisite celebratory manner:

I am addressing you with a problem, which I don’t believe is in order. In 1986, I sent in a proposal for giving an award to a particular stamp collecting circle ... Today [1 ½ years later], I was given an *Ehrennadel* [needle of honour] and an honouring document, which was already filled in and I [was told] that I was to take care of the awarding. These are quite unusual practices and go against my current beliefs. On the one hand, the *Kreis* leadership handles the awarding quite harshly, and often refuses it. In my eyes, the *Ehrennadel* is quite a high social award. That is why I cannot understand how it is handled. I am also informed that this case is not a singular occurrence in this year ... This should be a one-off case and it should not repeat itself, and more care should be shown when dealing with people. At the end of the day, individuals are behind this,

²³ BLHA Rep. 426 Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit (BfK) Nr. 249, *description of a ‘Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter in W’, Protokoll eines Zirkels*, p. 25.

who put more effort into for the development of stamp collecting than others, and they should not be thanked in an ironic way.²⁴

These two examples illustrate that there was a growing feeling of disillusionment at the grassroots during the last decade of the GDR. This situation was exacerbated by the economic difficulties of the GDR after the oil crisis in 1979. As a result of overall economic problems, cultural life suffered from drastic cuts of financial support, which meant that it was becoming more difficult to provide people with the necessary materials.²⁵ Furthermore, the transport facilities that carried people to and from cultural events also had to be reduced in the early 1980s as a result of petrol shortages.²⁶ The SED was, therefore, failing to fulfil its promise of guaranteeing equal access to all cultural facilities. This hardly served to reinstate the participants with a positive feeling about the state's provision of cultural life.

Interestingly, the growing disillusionment and frustration at the grassroots did not lead to an increase in *Eingaben* in *Bezirk* Potsdam. Quite the opposite: there was a gradually decreasing willingness to communicate with the local and intermediate administrative organs in the *Bezirk*. The following graph illustrates that between 1974 and 1988, there was a sharp decline of *Eingaben* in the cultural field that were addressed to the local and intermediate organs in *Bezirk* Potsdam.²⁷

²⁴ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 34, *Schreiben aus Schulzendorf*, 31.1.88.

²⁵ BLHA Rep 401 RdB Nr. 23984/2, *Rat des Kreises Potsdam an den Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam am 11.1.80*, p.1.

²⁶ SAPMO BArch DY 30/vorl. SED 42311, *Abteilung Kultur zur Auswertung der 3. und 4. Tagung des ZK der SED auf kulturpolitischem Gebiet (Bericht von der Kulturkommission des Politbüro am 8.7.82)*, pp. 35-36.

²⁷ This graph was compiled from material from BLHA Rep. 542 Nationale Front der DDR Bezirk Potsdam (NF) Nr. 1106, *Beschluss "Die Arbeit mit den Eingaben der Bürger im Jahre 1975"*, 16.6.76, *Anlage 1 Übersicht über die zahlenmäßige Entwicklung der Eingaben und zum Stand ihrer Bearbeitung*; then follow several booklets from different years, all bearing the same title with different dates: *ibid.*, 17.4.78; *ibid.*, 3.3.80; *ibid.*, 4.4.83; *ibid.*, 6.3.84; *ibid.*, 19.3.85; *ibid.*, 20.3.87; *ibid.*, 29.2.88; *ibid.*, *Eingaben* 1988.

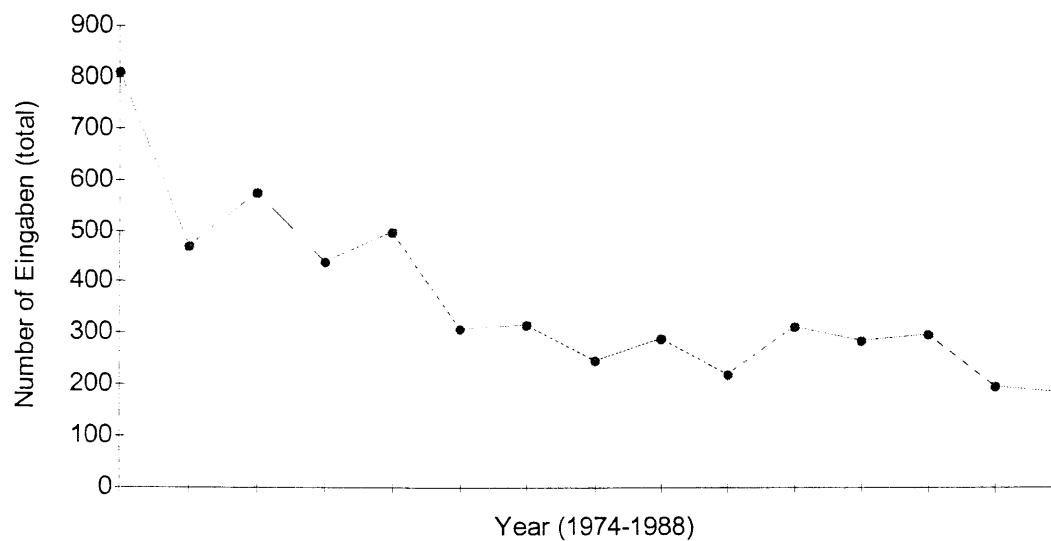


Fig. 9.3: *Eingaben* in the cultural field addressed to state organs in *Bezirk* Potsdam

What had caused this significant downward trend in the numbers of *Eingaben* in *Bezirk* Potsdam? It could be argued that there were perhaps fewer grievances about cultural life in the late 1970s and 1980s: if people were complaining less, then maybe that was because cultural life functioned more smoothly during these years. Considering the growing disillusionment at the grassroots, which has just been described, renders this interpretation implausible however. This thesis offers a different interpretation of this trend: *Eingaben* are here not perceived as a means for measuring levels of discontent but as a way to determining people's readiness to communicate with higher-ranking functionaries. Perceived in this light, the decline in *Eingaben* indicates that culturally active people had lost faith in the administrative units. Communicating with local and intermediate functionaries had been an aspect of the 1960s and early-to-mid 1970s. In the late 1970s and 1980s, people withdrew from this form of dialogue.

Before continuing to explore this argument, there is one further aspect of writing *Eingaben* in the 1980s that needs to be considered at this point. While fewer *Eingaben* were written to the state organs in *Bezirk* Potsdam as a result of a growing sense of disillusionment, the number of *Eingaben* that were addressed to the central bodies of the GDR increased immensely in the 1980s.²⁸ The above table, which

²⁸ Ina Merkel, ' "...in Hoyerswerda leben jedenfalls keine so kleinen viereckigen Menschen". Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR', in Alf Lüdtkke, Peter Becker (eds.), *Akten, Eingaben, Schaufenster: Die*

highlights the decline of *Eingaben* in *Bezirk* Potsdam, therefore shows that the communication had broken down between the participants in cultural life and the functionaries at the local and intermediate level. People either sorted out their problems amongst themselves, without involving the intermediate administrative functionaries, or they turned to the central bodies. The decline in *Eingaben* that were addressed to the intermediate administrative bodies of *Bezirk* Potsdam was not only evident in the cultural field, moreover, but manifested itself in different areas: in 1974, people wrote 48 371 *Eingaben* to the administrative organs in *Bezirk* Potsdam overall. In 1988, this number had more than halved: only 22 963 *Eingaben* were written to the administrative bodies in *Bezirk* Potsdam in this year.²⁹ In 1978 and 1979, the administrative functionaries in the Cultural Department of the *Bezirk* Council in Potsdam noticed that people were bypassing the local and intermediate organs and were instead increasingly writing *Eingaben* to central organs instead. When these administrative functionaries surveyed people and asked them why they had addressed their *Eingaben* to the central institutions and not to the *Kreis* or *Bezirk* leadership, people replied that they felt that the central organs would ensure that their grievances were addressed. In saying this, people insinuated that they no longer felt that the local or intermediate administration would address their concerns.³⁰

In those *Eingaben* that were still addressed to the local and intermediate bodies in *Bezirk* Potsdam, people actually revealed a waning sense of trust in the administrative functionaries. In one case, for example, a complainant wrote: 'Now our trust in our representative has been undermined in such a strong way, as we would never have imagined to have been possible'.³¹ Others were subtler in phrasing their views, but they also voiced the opinion that the state institutions and mass organizations did not look after their interests adequately. In 1981, for example, a

DDR und ihre Texte. Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997), pp. 285-286.

²⁹ BLHA Rep. 542 NF Nr. 1106, *Beschluss "Die Arbeit mit den Eingaben der Bürger im Jahre 1975"*, 16.6.76, *Anlage 1 Übersicht über die Zahlenmäßige Entwicklung der Eingaben und zum Stand ihrer Bearbeitung, 1974, Eingaben insgesamt*; *ibid. Vorlage über die Verwirklichung des Eingabengesetzes durch die örtlichen Volksvertretungen und ihre Räte im Bezirk Potsdam, Anlage Übersicht über die zahlenmäßige Entwicklung der Eingaben und zum Stand ihrer Bearbeitung, 1988.*

³⁰ BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 24691, *Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam, Abteilung Kultur, Betr. Eingabenanalyse 1979, 24.01.1980*, p.2; *ibid., Rat des Bezirkes Potsdam, Abteilung Kultur, Jahresanalyse der Eingaben 1978, 12.01.1979*, p. 1; see also Jochen Staadt, *Eingaben: Die institutionalisierte Meckerkultur in der DDR: Goldbrokat, Kaffee-Mix, Büttenreden, Ausreiseanträge und andere Schwierigkeiten mit den Untertanen* (Berlin: Forschungsverbund SED-Staat, Nr. 24/1996), pp. 32-34: Staadt outlines that people found the experience of dealing with the *Bezirk* increasingly frustrating in the 1980s.

³¹ BLHA Rep. 542 NF Nr. 1087, *von der Hausgemeinschaft Potsdam L., 29.5.81.*

dejected *Eingabe* was written to the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund*, which recounted how the *Kulturbund* had declined the formation of a ‘circle for Esperanto’ despite the interest of six individuals, and despite the enthusiasm of one person who was willing to take over the leadership of this circle. The person who wrote the *Eingabe* hinted that he felt very let down by the *Kulturbund*.³²

To conclude, there was a growing sense of disillusionment among participants in cultural life in *Bezirk* Potsdam in the late 1970s and 1980s. The SED had once promised that the state’s structures would look after people’s cultural interest and would further cultural life across the GDR. From the late 1970s onwards, it seemed, however, as if the administrative functionaries were no longer adhering to this promise, and were disinterested in supporting people’s cultural activities. This development was detrimental to the process of integration and communication between different agents in the cultural sphere. The more the administrative functionaries disappointed the participants, the more this fuelled tendencies of withdrawal and introspection at the grassroots.³³ The executive cultural functionaries also showed signs of disillusionment with the higher-ranking administrative functionaries, which is explored in the following subsection.

The Executive Functionaries

In some of the examples of the previous subsection, it has already become evident that the executive functionaries still sided with the participants in the late 1970s and 1980s and expressed disillusionment on their behalf (this was, for example, the case in the two *Eingaben* that were written about the unceremonious manner of awarding circles). The executive functionaries shared the participants’ disappointment and also believed that the administrative functionaries no longer looked after cultural activities appropriately. Like the participants, the honorary executive functionaries who led cultural or artistic circles also regretted that the *Bitterfeld Way* had been forsaken, and that artistically active lay people were no longer supported by the state organs with any serious dedication. In the following example, the leaders of a ‘circle for writing workers’ in the *Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz* complained:

³² BLHA, Rep. 538 KB Nr. 84, *K. aus Z. an die Bezirksleitung, betr. Esperantogruppe, 27.5.81.*

³³ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 23, *Protokoll der Leitungssitzung, 7.5.86:* Here is a functionary who blames the stagnation of *Kulturbund* membership directly on the poor quality of the local leadership.

Unfortunately, it is still the case that there are fewer and fewer 'circles of writing people'. It seems to be the case that people like to read, but when it comes to writing, only a minority dares to engage with it. But often the fault is not with the writing people ... writing only for one's table drawer [i.e. without being able to publish one's work] is no fun. What use is it for the writing person, if a piece receives a prize, and then he passes it on and in 99 out of 100 cases the reply is: 'Not suitable for publication'!! You have to lose hope with that.³⁴

This extracts highlights that there was a feeling among the executive functionaries that the state organs no longer represented the interest of those who were engaged in cultural life, which they found frustrating. The result of this growing frustration was that the dialogue between executive and administrative functionaries was beginning to break down. This manifested itself in the fact that the executive functionaries increasingly began to resent the interference of the higher-ranking administrative organs. In the late 1970s and 1980s, they largely regarded the involvement of administrative functionaries as obstructive and rarely perceived it as being helpful. The executive functionaries began to assert themselves once again as specialists with greater proficiency in the cultural field than the administrative functionaries (an element that had subsided in the mid-1960s, which was shown in Chapter 4). The executive functionaries were now so convinced of their own aptitude, and so frustrated by the administrative functionaries, that they openly questioned the state's right to be involved in cultural life at the local level, because they deemed this involvement to be unspecific and unhelpful.³⁵ This is illustrated in the following extract. In 1980, the *Bezirk* Cabinet for Cultural Work circulated a questionnaire to all 'circles of writing workers' in *Bezirk* Potsdam. One of the circle leaders used the opportunity of filling out this questionnaire to show that the administrative units knew nothing about this field, as they were too blinded by ideological aspects. Rather than giving straightforward answers to the questionnaire, the functionary attacked the formulation of the questions, in order to show that they illustrated that there was a lack of understanding about his field among the leading cultural functionaries in the *Bezirk*:

³⁴ BLHA, Rep. 426 (BfK) Nr. 153, *Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter Chemiefaswerwerk Premnitz, 22.4.1980*; this is not the only circle that complains about the inability to publish. See also *ibid.*, *Zirkel schreibender Arbeiter der VEB Isolierwerk "Bruno Baum" Zehdenick*, p. 2; for further examples of this issue see BLHA, Rep 538 KB Nr. 351, *Briefwechsel 4-10 November 1977 mit dem Sekretariat des Hauptvorstandes der CDU*.

³⁵ Other historians have identified the growing self-confidence of cultural functionaries: Annette Leo, 'Bilder für das Volk? Die Auftragspolitik von SED und FDGB in den 70er und 80er Jahren', in Renate Hürtgen, Thomas Reichel (eds.) *Der Schein der Stabilität. DDR-Betriebsalltag in der Ära Honecker* (Berlin: Metropol, 2001), pp.162-164.

Title of the questionnaire: Analysis by the *Bezirk* Cabinet for Cultural Work of the specialist area for circles in the domain of writing workers

Comment from the functionary: My machine is already playing up at this title!!!

What is a 'domain of writing workers'? Their desk? Their meeting room? Why does it not suffice to say 'analysis of the circles' work'?

Question: In which social area of time and in which areas of life are the written works of the circle's members predominantly set?

Answer: Usually, in a story, people use past, present and future ... or have I misunderstood the word monstrosity 'social area of time'? If 'time' was meant: largely, problems of the present are dealt with.

Question: Do the circle's members try to deal with material from their own societal work or other areas of activity?

Answer: They try to portray their own life (by the way, what is meant by 'other areas of activity'? One's love life? Education of children? If so, then yes, that is being written about as well).

Question: What kinds of primary ability and knowledge should a cultural leader (of a circle) have and what kinds of expectations are put on him?

Answer: 'Primarily' he should understand the field of art and literature. And then he should do his best not to speak or write using such claptrap bureaucratic German as it is being used in this questionnaire!!³⁶

What becomes evident from this extract is that the executive functionaries felt a rift developing between them and the administrative functionaries, because the latter were too embedded in bureaucracy and ideology to appreciate what was going on at the grassroots. Many low-level cultural functionaries, like the leader of this 'circle for writing workers', were becoming exasperated with the bureaucrats in the *Bezirk*.

This state of affairs was worsened by the continually growing bureaucratic tasks that the executive functionaries had to fulfil. The executive functionaries increasingly became fed up with these tasks, and did not see much point to them. For example, in 1984, the leading functionary of a club in Ludwigsfelde was asked to provide the *Kreis* leadership with detailed information about those members of the club who held a position, including details about their party membership. The leading functionary of the club misunderstood these instructions, however, and was under the impression that she was asked to provide such intimate details about all members of the club. Irritably, she replied:

³⁶ BLHA Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 153, *Fragespiegel: Fachgebietsanalyse des Bezirkskabinetts für Kulturarbeit für Zirkel im Bereich der schreibenden Arbeiter* and *Antwort 'Zirkel Schreibender Arbeiter' Geräte und Reglerwerke (GRW) Teltow*.

Why does the *Bezirk* leadership need all the names and detailed accounts of all our club members, particularly as this can change from month to month? The *Kreis* leadership has an index card about every member. On these index cards that we have been using thus far, there is no need to give details about party membership. How am I expected to find these details out? ... I am not prepared to visit these members in their homes and ask them about their party membership. I would like to ask you to tell me the purpose of this directive. So far, I have no understanding for it, and I will not undertake a single step in this direction.³⁷

This extract shows that the executive functionaries increasingly resented the interference from higher-ranking administrative functionaries in the name of bureaucracy. It also shows a distinct unwillingness to bow to the demands of state organs.

Another factor that alienated the executive functionaries in this period was the readiness of the administrative functionaries to criticise them. The executive functionaries felt that they were being held responsible for everything that went wrong, when they believed that they were putting a lot of effort into the organisation of cultural life.³⁸ The state's failure to offer constructive guidance, the higher-ranking functionaries' readiness to criticise, and the lack of appreciation increasingly angered the leaders of cultural circles in the late 1970s and 1980s. The deputy leader of a club wrote the following incensed letter to the *Kreis* Cabinet for Cultural Work in Oranienburg in 1980s, after his club was no longer considered for an award because he had failed to send in a report:

Caused by a regrettable error on my side, the report about the activity of our club was not handed in. That was a mistake and unforgivable. However, it is not really comprehensible to me that because of one missing report the work of the club as a whole won't be evaluated. Many colleagues are putting in effort in their free time to organise cultural life in our community. Because we are not doing this work on a full-time basis, I cannot understand your actions ... In future I will, obviously, not take on such tasks in the fear that I might just forget something.³⁹

Over the course of the late 1970s and 1980s, the executive functionaries felt more and more alienated from the administrative functionaries. The situation worsened to such a degree that the functionaries began to ignore specific instructions from state institutions, and instead implemented their own ideas.⁴⁰ The executive

³⁷ BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 84. *J.R.B. Klub L. an die Klubleitung der DDR, Bezirksleitung. 2.6.84.*

³⁸ As Chapter 3, pp.96-98 has shown, in the early 1970s functionaries were increasingly punished for neglecting their duties.

³⁹ LKO 24/0145 Oranienburg, *Abteilung Kultur, Stellvertretender Klubratsvorsitzender an Kreiskabinett für Kulturarbeit, in F., 19.12.80.*

⁴⁰ BLHA, Rep. 538 KB Nr. 16, *Bezirksleitung Kulturbund der DDR, Hausmitteilung für den Bezirkssekretär und Mitarbeiter im Fachbereich des Bezirksverbandes Philatelie, 21.3.83.*

functionaries were becoming less and less inclined to interact with the administrative units and take their instructions on board. The participants were therefore not the only ones who withdrew into isolated spaces over the course of the late 1970 and 1980s. The dialogue was also breaking down between the executive and administrative functionaries, because the latter were predominantly seen as a cause for frustration rather than being a tool for sorting out problems.

Conclusion

The extent to which the processes of individualisation and introspection had changed the cultural sphere in the 1980s can be seen from the period around the Peaceful Revolution. By November 1989, the cultural sphere had changed noticeably. People were no longer paying attention to the political dictates from the SED and increasingly disengaged from the organised cultural structures. The DSF, for example, experienced a sharp decline in visitors to its Soviet film screenings throughout 1989. Some of the screenings sold no tickets at all and had to be cancelled. The functionaries who reported about this phenomenon became increasingly bold about the reality of the situation, and two days before the November Revolution, a report recounted:

On the whole, these days stood in the shadow of developments in the GDR. Our people are in these days being moved by other things than Soviet films ... Furthermore, Soviet films don't have a truly enthusing effect on the population. ... Another cause is that our cinemas were showing the US film 'Dirty Dancing' with huge success, which many collectives preferred to watch to the events of the 'culture and education plan'.⁴¹

By the end of the 1980s, as a result of people's focus on individual needs and because of the growing disillusionment, new patterns of behaviour had emerged in cultural life. People had become more self-assured, and were more adamant to push through their individual needs. These developments meant that culturally active people, like the philatelists, turned their backs on organisations like the *Kulturbund* after the Wall had come down.⁴² This caused a rapid disintegration of state organised cultural life – an absence that many East Germans lament today.

⁴¹ BLHA Rep. 540 Gesellschaft für Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft Bezirksvorstand Potsdam (DSF) Nr. 791, *Tage des sowjetischen Films und des sowjetischen Buches*, 7.11.89 see also *ibid. Gesellschaft für Deutsch-sowjetische Freundschaft, Information zum XVIII. Festival des sowjetischen Films*, 15.11.89.

⁴² See chapter 5, p.137.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the developments that underpinned the functioning of organised cultural life in the middle period of the GDR. During the analysis, it became clear that cultural activities in the East German dictatorship could not be reduced to either coercion ‘from above’ or withdrawal into isolated ‘niches’. This does not mean to say that the study disregarded either the interference from state and police organs or the prevalence of autonomous spaces. Both aspects have been highlighted as important factors of cultural life. They were, however, not the only features that dominated it during the 1960s and 1970s. This thesis highlighted that cultural activities were also characterised by participation, integration and communication. There was a complex mixture of behaviour patterns in cultural life, which has so far not been adequately explored in historical analyses. In order to explore these multifaceted behaviour patterns, this study divided the actors in the cultural field into three groups of agents. The participants in organised cultural life made up one group of agents. They were not passive, powerless subjects, but individuals with a strong desire for fulfilling a personal interest. The cultural functionaries formed a second group. They were not merely the SED’s puppets, but entered their roles with their own agenda. As a third group, there were the party leaders in Berlin. They could not exercise power and control without considering developments at the grassroots. There was a high degree of communication and inter-dependence between these three groups during the middle period of the GDR, which determined the development of cultural life. The complex picture that emerges shows that ‘rule as social practice’ cannot be analysed by a division of the East German society into ‘rulers’ and ‘ruled’. There were three groups of agents, all of whom wanted to realise their aims, but were also forced to adapt to the interest-articulation of others.

By focussing this thesis on the case study of *Bezirk* Potsdam, it has been possible to analyse many different forms of cultural activity, which were exercised in factories, institutions and mass organisations and encompassed a variety of social groups. The analysis concentrated on the dialogue that existed between participants, organisers and administrators, in order to highlight the levels of inter-dependence and inter-action between them, as well as changes in the processes of

communication. Supplementing this focus with an analysis of developments in cultural policy has shown that the agency of functionaries and participants, which determined developments at the grassroots, also affected the party's cultural model. In short, the analysis has highlighted that cultural life at the grassroots, the administration at the local and intermediate level and central policy were heavily intertwined.

***Eigen-Sinn* and Communication**

People who participated in organised cultural life usually did so with a desire to fulfil a specific personal interest. Cultural functionaries, particularly if they were in executive positions, also tended to take up their roles out of personal motivations, which were primarily based on a personal inclination towards cultural activities. Gradually, the participants and functionaries learned how to ensure that they could realize their interests within the organised cultural structures. The next section traces the process of 'learning the rules' over the course of the 1950s and 1960s in more detail; for the moment, it is possible to say that in the middle period of the GDR, the participants and functionaries more or less comprehended how the cultural system functioned. Having internalised the 'rules of the game', they employed specific strategies to secure the fulfilment of their interests and were largely able to exercise their cultural activities in a way that appealed to them. Understanding the rules encompassed an awareness of when it was necessary to adhere to the dictates of the SED: there were some administrative tasks that had to be fulfilled and the content of cultural life had to reflect a degree of 'political-ideological' content. This was not the only aspect that characterised cultural life, however. The different strategies for interest fulfilment went beyond bowing to party dictates.

One prevalent mechanism for fulfilling a personal interest was the expression of *Eigen-Sinn*. In articulating *Eigen-Sinn*, the participants and executive functionaries created and maintained autonomous spaces at the grassroots. By creating these spaces, the participants and executive functionaries sought to perform cultural activities according to their own choosing. In some cases, these autonomous spaces could be a collective endeavour, which encompassed a cultural circle or a brigade. These collective autonomous spaces were a 'vertical' expression of *Eigen-Sinn*: they reflected the desire of a group of culturally active people to 'be with each other', and,

if necessary, to create distance towards the organs of authority in order to pursue cultural practices that did not entirely correspond to the SED's cultural model. In current GDR historiography, the analysis of 'vertical' expressions of *Eigen-Sinn* dominates the discourse.¹ An aspect of the *Eigen-Sinn* concept that is often disregarded in current interpretations, however, is the horizontal one: namely the notion that *Eigen-Sinn* was also used to 'to be with oneself'. Within the collective spaces of autonomy, the participants had to concede to the view of the majority, or to the position of a functionary. This prospect did not appeal to all; there were many individuals in cultural life who exercised *Eigen-Sinn* in order to create a *personal* space. In these personal spaces, they distanced themselves from other culturally active people and from cultural functionaries. Some of these individuals withdrew from organised cultural life and exercised their cultural inclinations privately because the collective experience did not appeal to them. Others, who were members of an organisation, like a stamp collectors' circle, expressed *Eigen-Sinn* 'horizontally' by not engaging in the collective culture of their group. They did not attend the group meetings or refused to share their cultural artefacts with others. The expressions of *Eigen-Sinn* cannot, therefore, be reduced to 'society' creating autonomous spaces within which distance was expressed towards the 'state'. Personal spaces were a means through which people, either as a collective group or as individuals, sought to escape from the manipulation of a controlling instance. This manipulation could emanate from the state organs, but it could also come from other culturally interested individuals.

While expressions of *Eigen-Sinn* were an important aspect of cultural life, there were other factors that dominated people's behaviour patterns. It could be quite beneficial to engage in dialogue with the organs of the state in order to address specific problems and satisfy certain interests. The desire to engage in this kind of dialogue was evident among participants, and among different kinds of functionaries. The executive functionaries' sense of enjoyment depended on cultural life being lively and functioning smoothly. Their main aim was, consequently, to ensure that cultural activities were animated and enjoyable. In order to fulfil this aim, the executive functionaries did not solely rely on withdrawal and expressions of *Eigen-*

¹ Thomas Lindenberger, for example, focuses only on the 'vertical' aspect of *Eigen-Sinn*. See Lindenberger, 'Die Grenzen der Diktatur. Zur Einleitung', in Lindenberger (ed.) *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), pp.13-44.

Sinn. They also communicated with the administrative functionaries. To a degree, they were forced to engage in a certain amount of dialogue with the administrative functionaries because of bureaucratic tasks they had to fulfil. In the 1960s and 1970s, the executive functionaries also actively sought this dialogue, however. It was not always possible for them to secure the stable functioning of cultural life, either because of material shortages or as a result of organisational difficulties. In order to address such problems, the executive functionaries tended to call on the administrative functionaries for help, advice and guidance. If the administrative functionaries did not come to their aid, the executive functionaries complained. The executive cultural functionaries were quite ready to address their complaints to the highest administrative authorities in the *Bezirk* leadership – the process of addressing higher-ranking functionaries was, therefore, not a localised affair.

The executive functionaries were not the only ones who relied on the interaction with functionaries in positions of authority; the local administrative functionaries also frequently experienced difficulties in exercising their roles. In order to address their problems, they also called on the *Bezirk* leadership for help. Like the executive functionaries, they articulated feelings of disillusionment and resentment when the support they asked for did not materialise. The interaction between various levels of functionaries was, therefore, varied and extensive. There was substantial dialogue between functionaries in very different positions of authority. The interaction between functionaries was not restricted to a personalised network or to the local area.

Like the cultural functionaries, the participants in cultural life also engaged in dialogue with various levels of authority. When they exercised their cultural interests in the organised structures, the participants were most dependent on functioning channels of communication with the executive functionaries.² In many cases, the participants relied on the executive functionaries to address the higher levels of authority in order to deal with certain problems. The dialogue between participants and functionaries was not restricted to these practices, however. In some cases, the participants were ready to embark on a dialogue with the administrative functionaries

² Thomas Ruben, Bernd Wagner (ed.), *Kulturhäuser in Brandenburg, Eine Bestandaufnahme* (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin Brandenburg, 1994); p. 209: 'Ein Kulturhaus in der Kleinstadt, z.B. Niemeck: Interview mit Peter Ehrenberg, dem Leiter des Kulturhauses in Niemeck': this former functionary describes that there used to be very close connections between leaders of cultural houses and participants – something that is no longer the case in united Germany.

without involving the executive functionaries. The participants primarily engaged in this dialogue by writing *Eingaben* to the state organs. In these *Eingaben*, they stated that they expected certain services from the organised cultural structures (these expectations were usually based on promises that were made in SED policy) and demanded that the administrative units fulfilled these expectations. These *Eingaben* were not only addressed to local administrative functionaries. If the participants had a problem with a functionary at the local level, they were quite ready to turn to higher levels of authority, like the *Bezirk* leadership, in order to sort out their grievances. *Eingaben* were not the only means for communicating with higher-ranking functionaries. Some individuals also engaged in targeted exploitation of certain functionaries. When they experienced certain problems, either with other institutions or even with another culturally active person, they approached different cultural functionaries (in many cases, they turned to the *Bezirk* leadership) and tried to utilise their authority for addressing their grievances. The participants therefore interacted with the functionaries at various levels: they integrated into the organised cultural structures and accepted certain restrictions that this entailed for exercising their cultural activity; they were ready to communicate with the executive cultural functionaries; and they even engaged in targeted dialogue with the administrative functionaries in order to address certain problems. The participants' strategies for interest fulfilment were, therefore quite varied and encompassed different forms of interaction and dialogue.

The participants in cultural life and the executive functionaries cannot, as a result, be described as passive subjects who were ruled by party dictates. To a degree, they were able to determine the content of their cultural life according to their own choosing. This did not only occur through withdrawal into apolitical, isolated niches. They made the cultural structures work *for* them. These developments had significant ramifications on cultural policy. The state and party leadership of *Bezirk* Potsdam reported the grass root developments to the central organs in Berlin. The SED party leaders increasingly realised that they needed to take developments at the grassroots into account in the official cultural model. People's interests could not be shaped and moulded according to the SED's narrow views of the 1950s. There were hobby activities that people pursued with a great deal of interest, even though they were 'lowbrow'. In the brigades, the workers were also less interested in joint outings to 'highbrow' events and preferred more entertaining,

sociable occasions. In short, the SED was forced to concede to people's desires for relaxation, fun and sociability. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the cultural model went through significant alterations in order to accommodate the people's interests more broadly. Power was not, therefore, exercised in a top-down model. Cultural policy had to be adapted to popular developments.

Periodisation

The characteristics of cultural life during the middle period of the GDR, which were described in the previous section, were not evident throughout the entire history of the East German dictatorship. They developed very gradually, and some changes occurred more quickly than others. Periodisation is, therefore, an important aspect of this discussion. It took some time for the grass root functionaries and the participants to integrate into the organised cultural system, internalise the rules of the game and learn how to utilise the structures to fulfil their interests and needs. It is, therefore, necessary to review the changes and consistencies in cultural trends and patterns of behaviour.

While there were many aspects of cultural life that were subject to change, there were others that remained constant throughout the 40-year period of the GDR. Before exploring the transformations that occurred, it is useful to outline these continuities. To begin with, throughout the history of the GDR, the main determining factor of people's engagement in cultural life was their personal interest. The desire to fulfil such an interest precipitated people's involvement in organised cultural life, or their disengagement from it. It also fuelled the strategies that people employed in the pursuit of their cultural activities. Another continuity in cultural life was the SED's consistent desire to guide and control the development of cultural activities. Any change that was made to the cultural model signified a new approach to the problem of gaining control over people's cultural development. The broadening of the cultural model that occurred over the course of the 1960s, for example, was designed to prevent the population from exercising cultural activities outside the organised structures of the regime, where people's leisure time habits could not be monitored. A final element that remained a constant factor in cultural life was the role of the executive functionaries. They worked in close contact with the population throughout the 40-year period of the GDR, and they regarded themselves as the

representatives of the participants' interests. They sought to satisfy the participants' needs where they could, and pursued their own personal motivations as much as possible. Increasing attempts to qualify and train them did not alter their motivations and habits.

Many preconditions of cultural life were characterised by consistency. There were, however, important aspects that changed over the course of the four decades. People's strategies for interest fulfilment, to begin with, were subject to significant alterations. In the 1950s, many people who participated in cultural circles showed a limited readiness to integrate into the structures of the regime. A number of the established cultural circles pursued their traditional repertoires even though this practice was not sanctioned by SED cultural policy. These acts of nonconformity only died down very gradually. The participants in cultural life continued to openly defy SED dictates up until the mid-1960s, which indicates a slow process of internalising the 'rules of the game'.

Not all strategies for interest fulfilment, however, took such a long time to develop into workable mechanisms for exercising cultural activities. By the late 1950s, various forms of communication between participants and higher-ranking cultural functionaries were already becoming evident. These developments were spurred on by the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 because, after this incident, there was no longer an alternative to exercising cultural inclinations within the cultural structures of the GDR. By the early 1960s, the participants seem to have realised the advantages of communicating with the higher-ranking cultural functionaries in order to realise their interests within the organised cultural structures. They articulated their expectations to the administrative functionaries quite readily, and expected them to be fulfilled. The manner of this dialogue, nevertheless, also changed over time. As the SED's cultural model increasingly broadened, the participants became bolder and bolder in stating their expectations. In the 1970s, they demanded that the cultural structures satisfied their interests and needs even if they were 'lowbrow'. Moreover, as a result of the changing socio-economic structures of cultural life, people also became more protective about their personal time and space. Through the greater availability of cars and televisions, people's interest articulation became more focussed on entertaining and relaxing forms of leisure time. This process precipitated the tendencies of individualisation that dominated cultural life from the late 1970s onwards.

With regard to cultural functionaries, their roles also began to change. From the late 1950s onwards, the responsibilities of functionaries grew in terms of the administrative and organisational tasks that they had to fulfil. As these tasks increased, the functionaries were increasingly reproached if they failed to fulfil their roles adequately. As a result of this development, the executive functionaries began to rely on the dialogue with the administrative functionaries in order to fulfil the increasing demands of their jobs. If they were reproached for not performing their tasks properly, they attributed the blame to the administrative functionaries and demanded help from the state organs to sort out their problems. Through the increased communication with the administrative functionaries, the executive functionaries became gradually more aware of when they had to abide by certain rules to avoid confrontation with the higher-ranking organs of the state or the police units. This furthered the smoother functioning of cultural life, as it eliminated a lot of the conflict potential that had still existed in the 1950s, when the executive cultural functionaries had supported the participants in their acts of defiance and had, hence, been regarded as part of the problem of disruptive cultural life.

The communication between functionaries, and between functionaries and participants was, therefore, largely an aspect of the middle period of the GDR. It had emerged because the participants and executive functionaries increasingly recognised the advantages that this dialogue entailed for fulfilling their interests and needs. Over the course of the 1970s, however, certain developments in cultural life also began to erode the process of interaction and communication. With the growth of the administrative burdens over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the cultural functionaries were increasingly laden with the tasks of writing reports and keeping membership statistics. In the first half of the 1970s, many executive functionaries still tried to sort out their problems by engaging in communication with the administrative functionaries and asking for their help. By the late 1970s, however, many executive functionaries were becoming disillusioned: they increasingly articulated the opinion that they were given more tasks but received less and less support from the administrative functionaries. Consequently, many executive functionaries began to withdraw from the dialogue that had characterised the middle period of the GDR.

Similar developments manifested themselves among the participants. The broadening of the cultural model had increased people's expectations of the cultural

activities that were provided within the organised structures. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the participants lamented that the administrative functionaries no longer seemed to take their interests and needs seriously. The feeling that the state organs no longer supported cultural activities caused resentment and disillusionment at the grassroots. Gradually, the participants became less and less likely to address the local and intermediate administrative functionaries with their grievances. The dialogue that had existed between participants and administrative functionaries was breaking down. An added complexity was the increasing process of individualisation, which meant that people in the GDR sought more private, individual interest-fulfilment rather than engaging in collective cultural experiences. As a result of these factors, the nature of cultural life altered quite significantly in the 1980s. Fewer and fewer people engaged with organised culture. In those cultural circles that remained, the participants and executive functionaries cherished their specialist status and became increasingly isolationist, preferring their own company to interacting with the outside.

It can be said that integration and communication were aspects of cultural life that characterised the middle period of the GDR. Compared with the suspicion and defiance that characterised the 1950s or with the disillusionment and introversion of cultural life in the 1980s, the 1960s and 1970s were two decades in which people were ready to exercise their cultural inclinations within the organised cultural structures and interact with various cultural functionaries. There was, of course, still outside interference in cultural life at the grassroots during this period, but it neither threatened the articulation of people's interests nor caused permanent withdrawal into niches. These developments, nonetheless, did not signify long-term stability. Grass root functionaries and participants had to be willing to integrate into the organised structures. Moreover, there had to be a fundamental belief that interaction with the state organs was an adequate mechanism for fulfilling personal interests and addressing grievances. The developments of the late 1970s and 1980s show how quickly the processes of interaction and integration could be uprooted in the face of growing individualisation and disillusionment.

Cultural Life in the GDR and the Wider Contribution of this Research

The SED never regarded leisure time pursuits as a personal affair. Controlling people's activities in their free time was an instrumental mechanism through which the party leaders hoped to turn East German citizens into 'socialist personalities'. The intention was to provide a limited and specific range of cultural pursuits to educate people about Marxist-Leninist philosophy, to instil them with intellectual qualities and to increase their productivity at work by providing recreation and relaxation. The party leaders consequently regarded control over people's cultural pursuits as a central element of constructing socialism. Monitoring cultural life became even more important in light of potentially damaging Western cultural influences, which needed to be countered by ensuring that people only engaged with socialist culture. As a result of these different factors, cultural life in the GDR was a central aspect of SED policy and there was a continuous effort to establish wide-ranging state-organised cultural structures throughout the East German state. For the SED, control over cultural life was one of the most important ways for reaching people's hearts and minds and securing their support for the Socialist project.

Despite the centrality of this issue for the SED, the analysis of organised cultural life in the GDR has received little attention in historical research. Yet, it is an area that is highly illustrative about social practices and about the failure of the party's educationalist goals. Individuals who engaged with cultural activities desired to fulfil their own personal cultural inclinations, even if they pursued cultural activities within the organisation of the state. In pursuit of their interests, they relied on a combination of *Eigen-Sinn* and communication for realising their own goals. This had a considerable effect on the nature of organised cultural activities: people's strategies for interest fulfilment and the input of cultural functionaries determined the development of cultural life in East Germany just as much as the party's dictates and restrictions. In other words, it was possible for people and functionaries to re-negotiate the preconditions of cultural activity in the organised structures: cultural life at the grassroots developed very differently to how the SED party leaders had imagined it. The utopian notions that the SED pursued in the 1950s, which aimed to restrict cultural activities to 'highbrow' and educational pursuits, were gradually abandoned in the face of popular interest-articulation, and were replaced with a much more pragmatic approach. Over the course of the 1960s, the SED increasingly chose

to cater for all interests to prevent people engaging with cultural activities outside the organised structures.

Not all aspects of SED policy were as negotiable as the cultural field. As the theoretical introduction to Part Three has highlighted, there were certain areas where the SED policy could not be questioned or negotiated. Aspects of the dictatorship such as the leading role of the party, the construction of socialism, the Wall or the militarisation of East German society were clearly not negotiable. It would be wrong, nevertheless, only to focus on these aspects and to argue that all areas of social and economic policy were similarly non-negotiable. The case of cultural life is not unusual or isolated: it was not the only field where the SED party leaders were deflected from their original ideas as a result of interaction between different groups of agents. Degrees of latitude and highly complex processes of interaction between party, functionaries and people also existed in other fields of social and economic policy, including both agriculture and industrial production.³

To conclude, it is necessary to recapitulate briefly on the main findings of this study and on the theoretical implications that these findings have for research on the GDR. This thesis has focussed on the role of functionaries as a central aspect of life and rule in East Germany. As a result of the prevalent position of functionaries, it is not useful to divide the GDR into 'state' and 'society', or into 'centre' and 'periphery', and to characterise these as dichotomous entities that existed either in isolation or in juxtaposition of one another. The interaction and inter-dependence between different groups of agents was far too prevalent to justify such an approach. Cultural life in the GDR can neither be described as an imposition of central policies on a passive populace, nor can it be reduced to evasion of political dictates in the localities. The participants in cultural life actively sought to satisfy their interest within organised cultural structures and employed various strategies for achieving this aim. The party leaders increasingly responded to these popular developments and adapted cultural policy so that it addressed people's interests more broadly.

³ Cf. the results of AHRC-funded project based at UCL, entitled 'Normalisation of Rule? State and Society in the GDR 1961-79', which was directed by Mary Fulbrook. Similar patterns of interaction and negotiation emerged during the middle period of the GDR in the very different areas of social and economic policy in industry and agriculture as evidenced in the work of George Last and Jeannette Madarász. For detailed discussion of the concept of 'normalisation', see Mary Fulbrook, 'Ein ganz normales Leben? Neue Forschungen zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR', in Heiner Timmermann (ed.), *Das war die DDR, DDR-Forschung im Fadenkreuz von Herrschaft, Außenbeziehungen, Kultur und Souveränität* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2004), pp.115-134; Jeannette Madarász, 'Normalisierung im Kontext der Betriebspolitik der sechziger Jahre', in *ibid.*, pp. 322-332; Esther von Richthofen, 'Normalisierung der Herrschaft? Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR 1961-1979. Kulturelle Massenarbeit in Betrieben und Massenorganisationen im Bezirk Potsdam', in *ibid.*, pp. 573-591.

The party's accommodation to popular cultural trends is by no means designed to replace the 'top-down' view with the 'bottom-up' view, which would do little more than reaffirm the structures of the totalitarian model. Instead, it is designed to highlight the inter-dependence, interaction and reciprocal influence between different groups of agents. This communication and interaction existed as a result of the agency of cultural functionaries. The functionaries bridged the gap between 'rulers' and 'ruled', because they fulfilled many different roles in the administration and organisation of cultural life. The leadership of the state administration in *Bezirk* Potsdam was in direct communication with the central levels: they aimed to implement developments in cultural policy at the grassroots, but they also brought popular trends to the attention of the party leaders, which precipitated changes in the SED's cultural policy. These functionaries were not only party representatives. They also engaged in dialogue with cultural functionaries in lower positions, and they were utilised by the participants for addressing certain grievances. The local administrative functionaries also played a key role in processes of interaction and integration, because they engaged in an even more extensive dialogue with people operating at the grassroots. During the middle period, participants and executive functionaries actively sought the dialogue with these different levels of administrative functionaries in order to fulfil their interests. At the same time, however, the dialogue was not evident at all times. There were staff shortages in the administrative organs, which meant that the state could not exercise firm control over cultural life. As a result, a degree of autonomy could develop at the grassroots. Cultural life at the grassroots was, therefore, simultaneously a product of state organisation, of integration into organised structures, and of *Eigen-Sinn*. By dividing the individual actors in cultural life into three groups of agents, who interacted with one another, it is possible to combine 'institutional' and 'social' history. By firmly embedding the role of cultural functionaries into the analysis, it has been possible to explore the relative autonomy of popular developments, the mechanisms of administering cultural life and the impact of social developments on political developments at the central level.

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