

Press Release

“Borders of Friendship”

Tourism between the GDR, the CSSR and Poland

June 26, 2022 – April 30, 2023

New exhibition at Museum of Utopia and Daily Life

Opening

June 26, 2022, 14.00

As the “Iron Curtain” divided Europe, travel between the East and West became a sensitive political issue. Eventually, the main reason why the GDR collapsed was its citizens’ demand for freedom of travel. Even travel within the so-called “Community of Socialist States”, which described its internal frontiers as “friendship borders”, was initially very limited. Before travelling abroad, people were required to apply for a visa or similar official document. They also needed to take their passports with them.

In January 1972, almost exactly fifty years ago, restrictions on border-crossings between the GDR, the CSSR and Poland were surprisingly eased. Bilateral agreements allowed travel between the three neighbouring countries without needing a passport or visa. In the West, the amazed media called it “an almost revolutionary step”.

The Museum of Utopia and Daily Life has taken the anniversary of that date to shed light on the resulting transnational mobility, as well as the forms and experiences of private foreign travel that emerged as a consequence.

In the GDR, tourism was among the most popular leisure activities. Already in the 1960s, holiday travel to other Socialist countries was no longer a rarity, as people became more prosperous and enjoyed more free time. In 1968, the suppression of the “Prague Spring” and its political repercussions temporarily hindered foreign travel. However, the subsequent rapprochement between the East and West also led to efforts to open up towards other countries within the Socialist bloc.

The GDR, the CSSR and Poland continued to ease their regulations: from 1972 onwards, easier border-crossing transformed travel between those countries into a mass phenomenon. Within a year, millions of people had taken advantage of the new laws, spending their holidays in neighbouring countries, as well as going on day trips and shopping tours. In fact, travel intensities among East Germans were as high as anywhere in the world.

In late 1980, the border with Poland was closed in reaction to the emerging Solidarity movement, while the border with the CSSR remained open. That changed in October 1989, as East Germans attempted to emigrate via the West German Embassy in Prague, an event that had a decisive effect on the end of the GDR.

This exhibition presents a broad spectrum from the collection of the Museum of Utopia and Daily Life, as well as numerous loaned private exhibits. They are supplemented by examples of the visual culture of travel, such as series of slides, photo albums and 35 mm films produced by families.

Visitors are invited to add to the exhibition with their own exhibits, comments and memories.

An exhibition by the Museum of Utopia and Daily Life, in cooperation with the Center for Interdisciplinary Polish Studies at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). The exhibition is co-funded by the Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Eastern Germany.

Cooperation

The exhibition is a cooperation project by the Museum of Utopia and Daily Life, and the Center for Interdisciplinary Polish Studies at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). Since the summer of 2021, students have been making key contributions to this exhibition under the supervision of Dr. Mark Keck-Szajbel, who has carried out extensive research on the “Borders of

Friendship” and wrote his dissertation on the subject.

An international summer school is being held from June 27 to July 9, 2022 as part of this cooperation. (Time)Travel along the borders of friendship. The Center for Interdisciplinary Polish Studies at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) is organising excursions to Poland and Czechia, as well as to Eisenhüttenstadt, to investigate the historical “friendly borders”.

The Museum of Utopia and Daily Life is also part of the initiative “We Build Bridges”, supporting the bid by Frankfurt (Oder) to become a location of the Future Centre for European Transformation and German Unity (Zukunftszentrum für Europäische Transformation und Deutsche Einheit).

Preview

We invite all interested media representatives to visit the exhibition in Eisenhüttenstadt for a preview at **12.00 on Thursday, June 23, 2022**. Please contact us if you wish to attend.

Contact:
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Museum Utopie und Alltag
Standort Eisenhüttenstadt
Erich-Weinert-Allee 3
15890 Eisenhüttenstadt

Opening

June 26, 2022, 14.00

Welcoming words

Florentine Nadolni, *Museum of Utopia and Daily Life*
Rolf Lindemann, *Councillor, Landkreis Oder-Spree*
Prof. Dr. Julia von Blumenthal, *President of the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder)*
Prof. Dr. Dagmara Jajeśniak-Quast, *Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Polish Studies at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder)*

Introduction to the exhibition content

Dr. Mark Keck-Szajbel, *Center for Interdisciplinary Polish Studies*
Axel Drieschner, *Museum of Utopia and Daily Life*

Musical accompaniment

Hannes Zerbe, piano

Location

Garden of the Museum of Utopia and Daily Life

Accompanying programme

The museum offers regular tours of the exhibition. Please note the number of participants is limited. Please therefore book your tour in advance at the reception desk of the Museum of Utopia and Daily Life, Tel. 03364 – 417355 or by email: museum@utopieundalltag.de
Tours begin at 14.00 on August 28, September 25, October 30 and November 27.

July 6, 2022 As part of the academic series “White Nights Without Frontiers” (“Weiße Nächte ohne Grenzen”), the Director of the Museum of Utopia and Daily Life Florentine Nadolni will discuss the exhibition’s origins with the researcher Dr. Mark Keck-Szajbel and the students Benedikt Becker and Antje Wilke. 17.00, Senatssaal, main building of the European University Viadrina, Grosse Scharrnstrasse 59, Frankfurt (Oder). A subsequent reception marks the 30th anniversary of the Viadrina.

October 2, 2022 Book presentation:
“Sortiermaschinen: Die Neuerfindung der Grenze im 21. Jahrhundert” (trans.: “Sorting machines: The Reinvention of the Border in 21st Century”), by Prof. Dr. Steffen Mau, 16.00, Museum of Utopia and Daily Life, Eisenhüttenstadt

November 4, 2022 “Die Schlüssel” (trans.: “The Keys”), GDR 1972/74, Friedrich-Wolf-Theater, Eisenhüttenstadt
Part drama, part documentary, the film portrays a young couple from Berlin on their journey to Kraków, Poland. Produced in 1972, the first year of the “open border”, the film reveals an inquisitive, unprejudiced perspective on the neighbouring country.

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Images



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