

With the onset of deindustrialization processes in the 1960s, the discourse on industrial heritage in Western Europe and North America had gained new relevance. Social visions of the future have been negotiated, but also the political and cultural loss of significance of the working class. Under different political auspices, the industrial heritage also played an important role for the European socialist states. These different traditions and the diverging deindustrialization processes in Western, Central and Eastern Europe led to the fact that Western European industrial regions have dominated research to date and mainly determined the epistemology for researching industrial heritage. Additionally, discourses, modes of appropriation, actors and processes of industrial heritage-making in the post-socialist states after 1989 have not yet had a prominent place in transformation research.

Against this background, the project compares practices, discourses, actors and processes of industrial heritage-making in East Germany and Poland in the post-socialist transformation. It examines bottom-up initiatives (sub-projects 1 and 2) as well as cultural policy and large-scale industrial cultural projects (sub-projects 3, 4 and 5) since the early 1990s. The project therefore critically scrutinises the thesis of cultural forgetting of industrial heritage in the 1990s and 2000s. The focus lies on the continuity of industrial heritage concepts, practices and actors across the political caesura of 1989/90, the reciprocal transfer between West and East and the co-construction of spatial references (regional, national, European) of industrial heritage.

The project combines analytical perspectives of research on memory actors, spatial concepts and concepts of time. Thus, it contributes to questioning, expanding and redefining the Western-dominated epistemology of the discourse on industrial heritage.

It also focuses on the significance of industrial heritage for the memory culture in East Germany and Poland and thus enriches incipient contemporary historical research into post-socialist transformations. The German-Polish comparison makes it possible to highlight differences and similarities in industrial heritage-making after 1989. On the one hand, it can be assumed that the different social transformation processes - in Poland particularly characterized by the admission to the European Union in 2004, in East Germany by the incorporation of the GDR into the FRG - were of high relevance for the different conditions under which the industrial heritage emerged. On the other hand, the similar socialist practices and groups of actors, which reflect continuities over the caesura of 1989, are likely to have been decisive for the commonalities to be explored in the industrial heritage-making during the transformation.