

# nep4dissent

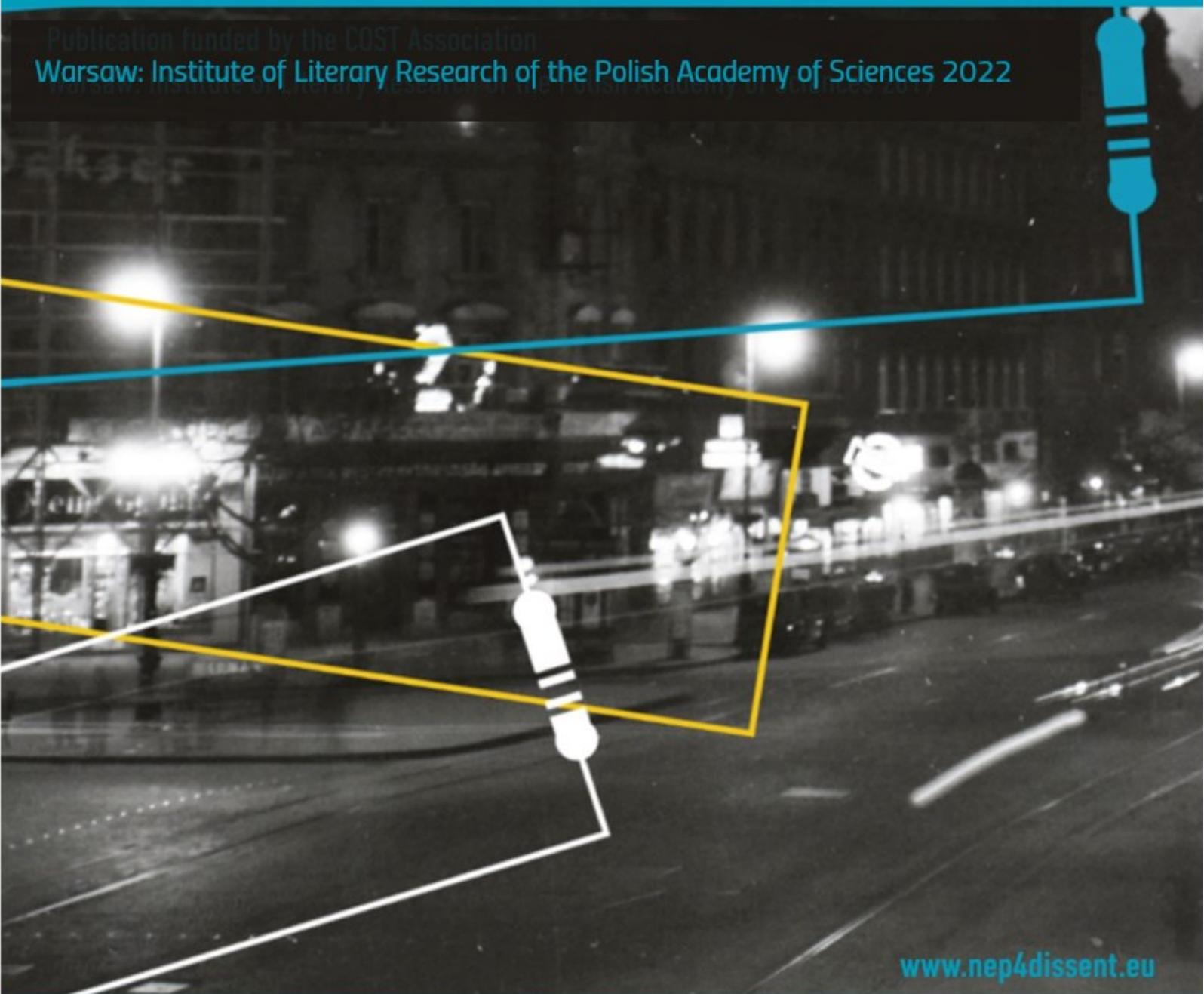
NEW EXPLORATORY PHASE IN RESEARCH  
ON EAST EUROPEAN CULTURES OF DISSSENT

## New Exploratory Phase in Research on East European Cultures of Dissent: **Joint Final Report**

Report prepared by the participants of the COST Action CA 16213

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EUROPEAN COOPERATION  
IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY



# Joint Final Report

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**More information about the project:** <https://nep4dissent.eu/>

All references can be accessed through NEP4DISSENT Zotero database:  
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All project outputs are openly available in NEP4DISSENT Collection in HAL repository:  
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## Summary

In order to achieve its main aim, NEP4DISSENT created a platform that opened the national and disciplinary siloses in dissident studies to transnational, multidisciplinary and technology-conscious research with creative dissemination capacities. The Action integrated three communities of practice: (1) knowledge producers (scholars of various disciplines), (2) knowledge mediators (archivists, librarians, IT specialists), and (3) knowledge disseminators (art and cultural heritage curators). Our network counts 320 unique contacts, including both one-time and continuously involved participants from all COST countries except for Cyprus and Moldova (and including the new members Georgia and Ukraine), as well as 2 COST Near Neighbour Countries (Kosovo and Russia).

NEP4DISSENT activities revolved around the issues identified in the Action's first deliverable, the Joint Review Report (April 2020). It was the outcome of the state of the art review conducted within the Action's Working Groups in the course of first two years, which scoped out the existing research initiatives, digital research tools, and dissemination best practices in research on East European cultures of dissent, captured the emerging trends in scholarship within this domain against the background of the state of the art, and set priorities for future research and capacity building. The conclusions of this report were translated into the Implementation Plans (ImPlans) of the Working Groups (WG), which served as a blueprint for targeted interventions into the research field.

NEP4DISSENT sizeably expanded the field of research on dissent under socialism, by including hitherto unrepresented actors and phenomena, such as religious minorities, feminists and women right activism, popular music, transnational artist networks, or the phenomenon of left dissent among socialist thinkers and artists. In all these areas, the Action gave a higher research profile to the transnational dimension of cultural dissent, in particular to how the meanings of the East-West divide of the continent, however persistent, evolved in dialogue, contestation, and work-arounds. The Action pioneered in systematic investigation of the phenomenon of post-dissent, offering insights into the processes of canonisation and contestation of the dissident legacy, and post-dissident public figures after 1989.

In all of these areas, NEP4DISSENT supported individual research awarding almost one hundred grants (fifty nine STSMs, twenty five Conference Grants, and fourteen Virtual Mobility Grants) and organised fourteen international conferences and research workshops (in addition to the three onsite and three virtual Action Summits, collocating the MC meeting with other networking events). Action networking contributed directly to nineteen publications involving Action participants from at least two different countries (three of which were supported financially), at least twenty two individually authored publications, as well as at least twenty research projects.

Capacity-building for Early Career Investigators (ECI) was an important means of triggering the new discovery phase. The Action contributed to educating a new generation of scholars of dissent, better adapted to a networked, transnational, multidisciplinary and technology-conscious research environment.



Knowledge transfer of digital research methods was of singular importance, translating into two editions of the training school “Cultures of Dissent in Eastern Europe (1945-1989): Research Approaches in the Digital Humanities”, and five smaller workshops, with over hundred participants altogether. That was complemented by training programs in comparative media systems, intellectual history of Eastern Europe, and dissent in film (three events with further fifty participants). Further, ECIs were awarded thirty one STSM grants, eleven Virtual Mobility grants, and twenty three Conference Grants.

NEP4DISSENT undertook both conceptual and practical activities to design more effective ways of incorporating knowledge about the material and intellectual legacy of cultural dissent in art and cultural heritage initiatives. The Action promoted dialogue about critical exhibition history of the socialist Europe, and about ethical questions involved in displaying difficult pasts, incl. state-security materials. The practical realisation of these debates is the virtual exhibit *Underground*, that brought together researchers, curators, and digital storytelling experts.

To increase its impact, the Action actively cooperated with EU research infrastructures such as OPERAS and DARIAH-EU, other COST Actions such as *Distant Reading*, and served as a intermediary and communication platform for project partners such as *Hidden Galleries*, *COURAGE*, *Impresso*, and *DISSINVENT*. The Action networking also contributed to the emergence of numerous new projects that carry further its agenda, including *ÉMIGRÉ EUROPE. Civil Engagement Transfers between Eastern Europe and the Low Countries, 1933-1989 (2021-2023)*, and *Resonances: Regional and Transregional Cultural Transfer in the Art of the 1970s (2021-2024)*.

Shortly before the end of the Action, as Russia invaded Ukraine, NEP4DISSENT made its final contribution to sustaining the research capacity of young Ukrainian scholars researching and documenting dissent and protest in Ukraine, historically and in contemporary times, by setting up a dedicated grant scheme and connecting givers and takers of support through *#ScienceForUkraine* initiative.



# Introduction

**Maciej Maryl and Piotr Wciślik**

In the first two years, the Action engaged in an extensive process of State of the Art Review, culminating with the delivery of the Joint Review Report (JRR), whose recommendations guided the Implementation Phase of the Action. That process consisted in several stages, as depicted in Figure 1. Before the NEP4DISSENT Kick-Off meeting in December 2017 in Warsaw, a **survey of participants** was circulated which enabled the Action members to communicate their relevant research expertise and scholarly plans. The survey responses were then expanded to form **position papers** which the Action's members submitted to the WG Review Meetings. During these meetings, WG participants pooled together research agendas, approaches, and data in order to define **focus areas** for future collaborations. The WG focus areas defined the scope of the **State-of-the-art (SoTAR) Survey**, which was designed to map the state of the art in the broader research fields which corresponded to each of the WGs' focus areas, and to provide an informed justification as to why working in these focus areas would contribute to achieving progress beyond the state of the art, thus triggering a new exploratory phase in research on East European cultures of dissent. In the case of some WGs, the participant survey, position papers, and SoTAR survey, were further complemented by interviews and literature reviews; while Action members used COST networking tools to prepare drafts of the WGs' contributions which now form the chapters of the JRR. The early drafts of the reports were presented during the NEP4DISSENT Summit in Belgrade in October 2019, and advanced drafts of the chapters were discussed during the Budapest Summit in February 2019. The report was finalised during the NEP4DISSENT Core Group meeting in Luxembourg in March 2019, and presented during the Tirana Summit in May 2019. The main aims of the Join Review Report were as follows:

- to create a broad overview of the emerging trends in this research field, which would serve as a reference for interested stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, art and cultural heritage institutions, digital research infrastructures experts and creators, as well as funding agencies.
- to scope out the possibilities for leveraging and creating synergies between existing research initiatives, digital research tools, and dissemination best practices, in order to achieve progress beyond the state of the art in research on East European cultures of dissent;
- to capture emerging trends in scholarship within this domain, against the background of the state of the art;
- to provide an informed justification for the choice of the Action WGs' focus areas, and to guide the implementation phase of the Action, defining the priorities for the activities undertaken by the WGs.

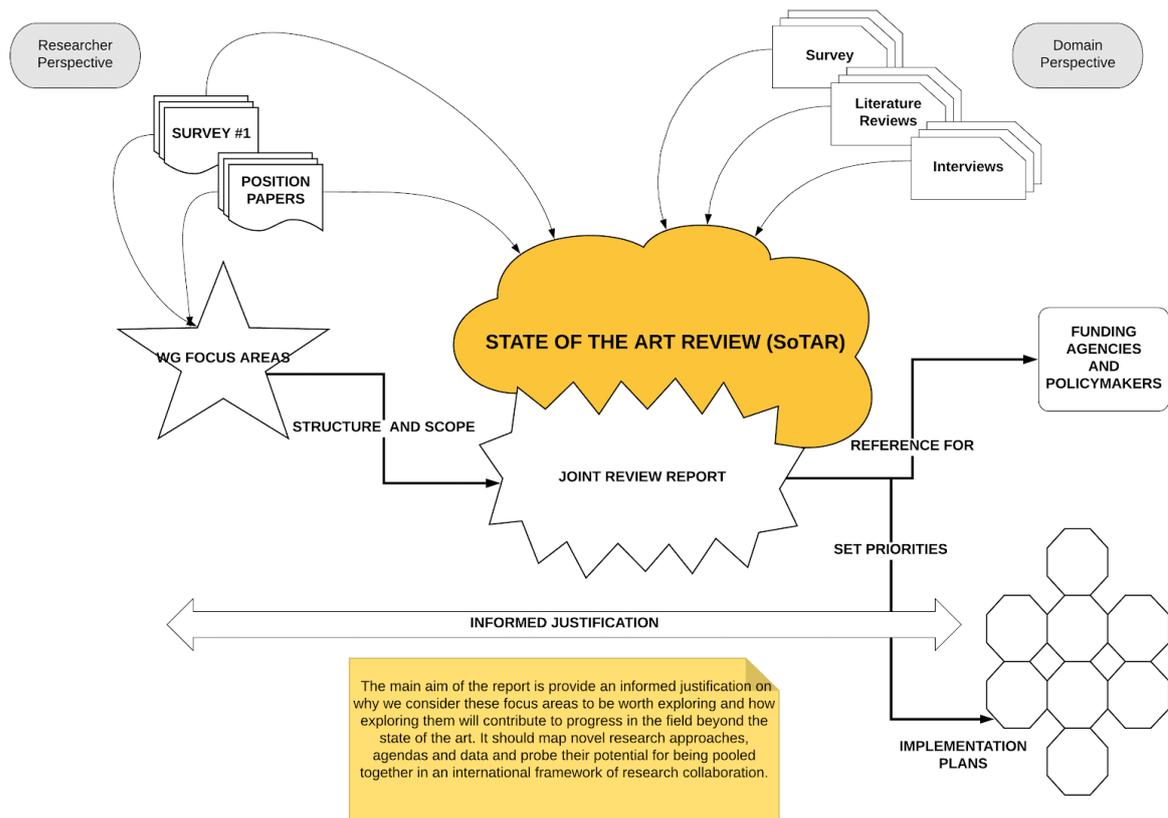


Figure 1. The process of the State of the Art Review.

While the [JRR is available on the Action website](#), the current Joint Final Report focuses on the Implementation Phase. Each of the NEP4DISSENT Working Groups worked from the JRR recommendations (see section “Agenda” in each of the chapters below) to establish **implementation plans (ImPlans)**. They were intended to serve as specific roadmaps for particular interventions in the field of dissent studies, responding to challenges defined in the JRR and allinging WG activities with the action objectives. ImPlans were updated in an iterative manner, in reaction to the outcomes of previous activities, capacity of WG participants, Action budget, and changing circumstances.

Obviously, the most consequential of these changing circumstances was the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the established patterns and modalities of scholarly mobility and created a new set of strains on scholars that resulted in delays or postponement (sometimes forever) of many initiatives of international research cooperation.

However NEP4DISSENT saw the COVID crisis not only as a challenge, but also an opportunity to revisit the idea of scholarly cooperation. Early on, in April 2020, we initiated the [Open Letter to the COST Association](#), in which we called for fundamental rethinking of scholarly collaboration practices, both to protect our networks from erosion, and to realise the full potential of what we called “remediated



networking,” that is collaboration, research workflows, and dissemination adopted to the digital environment.

While the COST Association ended up reacting favourably to our letter, by establishing Virtual Mobility Grants one year later, NEP4DISSENT was in a good position to act upon its assumptions immediately, due to a robust baseline created by its Working Group 5 “Mediating Research through Technology”, in terms of both surveys of the digital needs of our community, but also in terms of practical assistance in moving as many of our activities as possible online. We also adopted the [Virtual Networking Strategy](#) which had as its pillars:

- Remediating in the online environment the activities planned in the Working Groups Implementation Plans, and preparing virtual contingency plans for planned in person meetings;
- Creating a digital scientific record of the Action activities to enrich the Action deliverables and build better public outreach;
- Providing training (in particular to the ECI) in online environment;
- Fostering NEP4DISSENT membership engagement in particular with respect to colleagues from Near Neighbour Countries and International Partner Countries.

While research and training activities are described in detail in the subsequent chapters of the report, the section [Our Work](#) of the NEP4DISSENT website presents the digital scientific record of the Action. It is a collection of publicly accessible recordings of workshop and training sessions, publications, and the Action blog.

The transfer of digital methodologies and competencies, a theme of interest for cross-cutting WGs 5&6, allowed for creating new paths of cooperation between researchers on the one hand and cultural heritage professionals and digital humanists on the other. The pilot cooperation between WG1, WG2 and WG5, led to the Underground virtual exhibition ([h.etf.unsa.ba/underground/](http://h.etf.unsa.ba/underground/)) which presented the results of the action through interactive storytelling. The exhibition of archive materials and files from Secret Services of the former Soviet Union, describing the oppression upon Orthodox believers during the Cold War period, was presented through five interactive digital stories where the actors play historical characters and describe their destinies. The exhibits are digitised and available to all Internet users, expanding tremendously the target audience. Moreover, through targeted workshops and summer schools the action managed to train over one hundred researchers in the use of digital methods in historical research. Two summer schools were organised in cooperation with Central European University and 5 additional workshops exploring particular themes of interest (train the trainers, oral history, digital storytelling, open data, corpora).

Finally, just before the Action ended, NEP4DISSENT community reacted to the Russian invasion on Ukraine. On the 25th of February the network issued a [statement of support with Ukrainian scholars](#), calling for actions sustaining the academic community. This stance was quickly followed by concrete activities of the Action. NEP4DISSENT Science Communication officer, Sanita Reinsone has initiated



the [#ScienceForUkraine](#) initiative that serves Ukrainian scholars at risk by collecting information about support and facilitating contact with support givers. The Action also created a dedicated call for proposals and awarded four STSMs and three Virtual Mobility grants as our contribution to sustaining the research capacity of mostly young Ukrainian scholars researching and documenting dissent and protest in Ukraine, historically and in contemporary times.

The next pages of this report outline concrete activities and interventions through which the Action participants aimed at initiating the new exploratory phase in research on East-European cultures of dissent.



# Chapter 1: Culture under Surveillance

**Muriel Blaive and James Kapaló**

## Agenda

In the current preoccupation with the massive state and corporate misuse of personal data in the digital age, what stands out is direct involvement of masses of people who, more or less knowingly and willingly, leave their personal data at the disposal of institutions and corporations, and for whom surveillance is at once omnipresent and invisible. The traditional focus on surveillance as a top-down imposition, dominant in the state of the art, has left researchers ill-equipped to understand how culture under surveillance engenders a culture of surveillance, a ‘way of life’ under constant observation inscribed deeply into the fabric of everyday practices and interactions. To fine-tune that research focus to better respond to our current preoccupations, WG1 proposed a bottom-up approach, that sees surveillance, as an evolving complex of practices, sentiments, and ‘imaginaries’ with their agency distributed more broadly, if still unevenly, than we tend to assume among state, dissident, and social actors. This is a relationship which the secret police archives illuminate in a fragmentary and opaque way; it thus needs to be complemented by visual materials and oral testimonies. Within such a framework, the reality of surveillance has a more nuanced past, especially since it reflects the process of erosion of the late-socialist regimes. It also becomes a past which we can relate to in a more meaningful way from the perspective of our contemporary predicament.

The Working Group developed a shared methodology for which the following issues, categories or keywords, were identified as crucial for researching surveillance practices over culture and/or as a culture of their own:

- Periodization: the regimes under study evolved from mass repression to mass surveillance in an eroded late socialism. Situating research in a particular phase is thus crucial;
- Social control: the regimes undertook to exercise control over society by more varied means than simple police repression;
- Dissent: what constituted a social behaviour that the regime considered as infringing on its self-defined acceptable norm?
- Surveillance in everyday life: this includes the social categorization of people, curatorial practices, emotion, and any other untraditional method adept at refining our image of the past and understanding social behaviour;
- Source criticism and most specifically the methodological question of how to deal with a secret police file as a historian or human scientist;

- 
- Finally, the performance and representation of secrecy in vernacular culture and the dialectic between visibility and invisibility in social, cultural and police behaviour.

Further, members of the WG1 agreed on the following main recommendations that they expect would allow to bring the study of surveillance to a next level:

1. **Create a relational, reflexive approach to surveillance.** Transgress the binary state–dissidence relation and the focus on the secret police. It is crucial to study surveillance as a complex relationship between the state and society. This also entails an affective aspect of surveillance, as well as studying the forms of socialisation between agent and informer.
2. **Engage with the visual dimension of surveillance practices.** As the material and cultural world represented in the archives is an effect of the ‘curatorial’ practices of the secret police, the critical tools of museography and museology allow us to engage in the dichotomy between knowledge production and manipulation. Together with the surveilled communities themselves, the visual materials which were produced by the police can be explored, allowing these practices and the material gathered to be questioned. This issue is also raised by WG6.
3. **Probe new focus areas.** While not addressing the issue of surveillance directly, the materials gathered in the archives allow for new avenues of research which have been pointed out by WG members. These include addressing the relationship between repression and the establishment of an underground church; state practices and social-cultural norms introduced to exercise social control; tension between national and ethnocentric projects, such as open-air museums, which do not challenge communism directly; and the archives of the secret police as an instance which defines what the dissent and dissidence is.
4. **Learn from the experience.** Finally, one cannot overlook the timeliness of this work for our contemporary media culture, the participants of which renounce their privacy – voluntarily or not – to social media, portable devices, search engines, apps, voice-recording services, and many other phenomena of the contemporary digital milieu; all of which bears a resemblance to the state surveillance being researched by the Working Group.

## Main activities

While kick-off meeting in Cork and WG sessions during NEP4DISSENT Summits in Budapest, Belgrade and Tirana set the agenda of the group, the main conference “Culture under Surveillance - Culture of Surveillance” was planned to take place in Madrid in 2020, but was held online in October of the same year due to COVID. The conference presentations were recorded and are available on the [NEP4DISSENT Youtube channel](#). The written proceedings were submitted in January 2022 to *East Central Europe* as a journal special issue. Contributions by José Faraldo, James Kapalo, Muriel Blaive, Jens Gieseke, Konstantinos Giakoumis, Aigi Rahi-Tamm, and Anca Sincan address the following points:

- The tactics of the authorities and to shed light on individual strategies and reactions as concerns surveillance issues.
- The public image of the secret police amongst the population.
- The cultural transformation of the post-socialist era and the legacy of the communist secret police.
- The poetics and politics of ethnographic representation and the knowledge of ideological surveillance over culture in the Baltic states.
- The importance of taking the personal and emotional, and not only the systemic, into account in surveillance research.

Further, WG1 co-organized with WG4 the conference *East European Dissent between Agenda & Legacy* held in Brussels on 3-4 October 2019 (see WG4 chapter for details).

In cooperation with Selma Rizvić from WG 5 (Mediating Research Through Technology), Tatiana Vagramenko and James Kapaló (WG1) created the [The Underground](#), a virtual exhibition curating materials from Kapaló's ERC project [Hidden Galleries](#) and employing the expertise in digital storytelling of Rizvić's [digi.ba](#) group. The VR exhibition was designed to be accessible to non-specialist, and especially young, audiences and will be disseminated through public engagement events with highschools and the public. Initially this was intended to take place in Ukraine and Moldova but as a result of the invasion of Ukraine events will be organised for displaced young people.

WG1 also joined forces with WG6 (Art and Cultural Heritage Curation) to address the issue of ethics of exhibiting secret police material. Initially planned as a workshop, with COVID the cooperation moved online and generated the theme issue of the journal [Martor no. 26 \(2021\) On Visual Ethics After Communism](#) edited by David Crowley, James Kapaló, and Gabriela Nicolescu, and consisting of 12 contributions of various kinds, including peer-reviewed articles, interviews and reviews. Contributors to substantial volume explore the ethical challenges and obligations of archiving and exhibiting material which was stolen, created in circumstances of duress or without consent during the period of communist rule in Eastern Europe in the context of memory politics in Eastern Europe today. Others examine the 'affect' of displays of seemingly mundane historical material.

## Impacts

Under the networking opportunities provided by this COST action, researchers and scholars in WG1 with an interest in cultures under surveillance were able to engage in cross-national projects and activities with colleagues and practitioners from a wide variety of fields.

Foremost amongst the benefits of the diverse projects outlined above was the potential for comparative research that is unlocked by engagement with and production of non-traditional research methods and outcomes together with colleagues from WG5 and WG6. Non-specialist public engagement and impact was achieved through the production of *The Underground* VR exhibition materials aimed at audiences comprised of non-specialist and young persons as outlined above. These materials have



enormous potential for use in schools and colleges as educational materials. The collaborative publication *On Visual Ethics After Communism* is also aimed at developing awareness, expertise and skills for the public communication of complex research findings. The collaborations that emerged from these activities have laid the ground for future research funding applications and events, inspiring historians, anthropologists, digital humanities scholars and curators to reach new audiences and develop impactful non-traditional outputs from their research.

The online conference, *Culture under Surveillance - Cultures of Surveillance*, offered an important platform for young scholars from a wide range of countries and disciplines to exchange ideas and forge new networks with senior colleagues. The key activities and outputs from colleagues in WG1 demonstrate that **working across disciplines and languages and engaging with practitioners from diverse backgrounds** can produce significant advances in understanding through comparative research and societal impact through non-traditional research methods and outputs.



## Chapter 2: Culture in the Grey Zone

Zsófia Lóránd and Jan Mervart

### Agenda

Aiming at recalibration of our cognitive tools to better reflect the historically changing dynamics of socialist societies and cultures, WG2 used the concept of the *grey zone* as a common denominator for the larger trend emerging in current scholarship, which is to dismantle the sharp dichotomies and oppositions inherited from the Cold War paradigm between the oppressive state and dissident heroes. This work involves refocusing research agendas towards the exploration of particular ‘empirical realities’: social and professional groups with critical capacity, exercising autonomous, albeit limited agency from within the official structures of the state. It also sheds new light on specific ‘imagined realities’, where the grey zone stands for an intellectual, moral, or ideological position of non-alignment with respect to the dominant political cleavages of the day, which had been adopted by individuals and groups on the margins of both the official and the alternative culture. In a similar way to WG1, researchers suggest that a greater attention should be given to the social embeddedness of cultural opposition. They argue for the consideration of the phenomena of dissent in a ‘triangular space’, in which the social milieu (or milieus) functions as a collective actor and a resonance chamber for the work of two other actors: cultural dissidents, and the agents of state surveillance. The proposed approach responds to the ambivalent nature of social behaviour and allows for an analysis of the temporal transformation from late to post-communism.

WG2 identified a number of areas, some of them well researched, others less so, where deployment of the notion of the grey zone will be most productive. These are:

- **Feminism and women’s rights** - should be examined as a reality that sits uncomfortably between the claim of communism to have liberated women (often used as a justification for quelling feminist dissent) and the claim of the former dissidents, that transition from communism was a resurrection of a previously non-existent regime of human rights (in places like Poland reproductive rights were constrained after 1989).
- **Left dissent** - an instance of a conceptual grey zone which emerges out of complicity in adversity between communism and anti-communism, the legacy of left dissent had been marginalised in the scholarship after 1989, leaving dismissed, but unaddressed the question of its historical significance and its relevance for understanding the current crisis.
- **Eastern Europe as a grey zone** is a conceptualisation of symbolic geography of in-betweenness that challenges the orientalist perspective on the region.

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- **Nationalist and religious activism**, despite engaging in anti-communist memory politics after 1989, should be rediscovered as a fundamental grey zone phenomenon, whose resilience resided in the mixture of strategies of resistance and accommodation to communism.

## Main activities

Kick off meeting of the group was held in Prague on 5-6 March 2018, and the agenda was further discussed during the NEP4DISSENT Summits. At the outset of the pandemics, the work on the first two focus areas, feminism and women's rights, and left dissent, has already started and subsequently, in the interest of delivering an impactful result, the leaders of WG2 decided to concentrate on these two areas.

The workshop *Left Feminist Theory and Historiography: Between the Legacy of State-Socialist Emancipation and the Crises of Today* held in Prague on 19-20 September 2019, brought together 17 participants working on feminism in former socialist countries. It aimed to confront the current crisis of capitalism and liberal democracy with the ambivalent legacy of state-socialist emancipation. Proceedings of that workshop were published in open access in [Contradictions: A Journal for Critical Thought, vol. 4, no. 1-2, 2020](#). Another important outcome and postulate of that meeting is the reader [Texts and Contexts from the History of Feminism and Women's Rights](#), forthcoming in CEU Press in 2022, which offers an English language selection of the most representative texts on feminism and women's rights from East Central Europe between the end of the Second World War and the early 1990s.

In turn, the phenomenon of Left Dissent was debated during an online workshop held on 15 January 2021, and bringing together 16 participants working on unlicensed left-wing thought under socialism and its legacy in Eastern Europe and former Yugoslavia. The workshop filled the gap in historiography, focused on mostly politically liberal and conservative opposition streams, but also discussed the limitations implied in the intellectual position of left dissent under socialism, as well as on its relevance today. The record of that workshop is available as a [video](#) and its proceedings have been published in [Contradictions: A Journal for Critical Thought, vol. 5, no. 1-2, 2021](#).

## Impacts

Thinking of the grey zone as a concept, as well as networking scholars with interest in gender and women; left dissent; and religious and nationalist dissent benefitted individual projects as much as collaborative enterprises. These topics cover vastly developing fields, still very much in the making. Beyond the workshops and publications that were direct outputs of the work of WG2, multiple articles, books, project applications and conference panels were impacted by this particular working group of NEP4DISSENT.

Libora Oates-Indruchová's latest book, *Censorship in Czech and Hungarian Academic Publishing, 1969-89: Snakes and Ladders* (Bloomsbury 2020) is one of the most prominent examples. Peter Bugge's research and publications, as well as teaching at Aarhus University focus both on left



dissent and the grey zones. Libora Oates-Indruchová, Jan Mervart, and Zsófia Lóránd presented together with *Ádám Hudek* on the role of the grey zone concept for future research and for rethinking the research of East Central and Eastern European dissent and dissidence.

Synergy within the working group led to the successful application of the Inter-Cost project (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic) entitled “[Media and the Cultural Opposition in Czechoslovakia](#)”, which was carried out in 2018–2021. In this project, Czech research team, formed by representatives of three institutions of The Czech Academy of Sciences (Institute of Czech Literature of the CAS, Institute of Philosophy of the CAS, Institute of Contemporary History of the CAS) laid emphasis on the research of intellectual history especially during the period of so-called normalisation in Czechoslovakia. Research and interpretation of independent literary, cultural and intellectual activities in their changes, forms and various interactions both mutual as well as regarding changing political situation, official discourse and prevailing ideology were the prime focus of the project.

Activities and mutual contacts were and are further developed outside the framework of the Action. In October and November 2021, the Philosophical Institute of the CAS in Prague hosted *Márton Szarvas* (PhD candidate at CEU). Further contacts within the framework of the Action towards possible further activities have been developed between Peter Bugge, Adam Hudek, Tomáš Glanc, Kristóf Nagy, Libora Oates-Indruchová, and Jan Mervart.



## Chapter 3: Alternative Cultures

**Katalin Cseh-Varga and Rolf Werenskjold**

### Agenda

The agenda of WG2 was based on the shared belief that beyond the well-researched, canonical representations of alternative culture, burdened by excess of myth-making and elitism, there exists an uncharted terrain of cultural expressions yet to be discovered. To go beyond the state of the art requires a methodological and theoretical framework that allows for a multifaceted research which is more sensitive to the ephemeral micro- and macro-histories, more critical and reflexive with respect to the established mythologies (modes of representation created both by historical actors and the writers of their histories), and which fully understands the embeddedness of alternative culture both within the cultural fabric of society (including the sphere of licensed culture), and in the transnational flow of cultural practices and ideas. The WG3 research program built on intellectual inquiry into the genealogy of concepts used to describe the marginal and/or contentious cultural phenomena in former socialist countries (such as the ‘underground’ or ‘counter-culture’, in addition to alternative culture) and relied on cross-cutting exploration of material and virtual ‘spaces’ of alternative culture, the ‘communities’ formed around these spaces, and the ‘networks’ which connected them. Spaces, communities and networks, were the main dimensions of exploration of the following focus areas which WG3 singled out for its intervention:

- **Popular culture, everyday culture, and subculture.** Disco culture, youth subculture, modes of self-(re)presentation, and popular culture media carry a message that shows a deviation from the state’s expectations of a socialist behaviour and ways of living, but in doing so they are not challenging the state apparatus with the same aims and for the same reasons as dissident movements.
- **Aesthetic practices.** Exploration of the media of dissent in their ability to overcome any sort of aesthetic regulation.
- **Dissent as cultural transfer.** Information transfer as a constitutive element of Eastern, Central, and South-eastern European alternative cultures. Samizdat publications and their distribution, intellectual influences from outside socialist countries, intellectual exchange in self-thought collectives, the back-and-forth of artistic works and correspondences, and radio broadcasts.
- **‘In-between’ or grey zones.** Intersecting with WG2’s research interests, WG3 explores the complex relationship between artistic dissent and state infrastructure.
- **Eastern European dissent as seen from the ‘outside’.** In order to achieve a broad and historically adequate understanding of alternative cultures, one needs to consider the perception of dissent in foreign news reporting, or scholarly publications from the time. This also helps to



challenge dichotomies and forced categorizations in the historiography of socialist Europe during the Cold War.

## Main activities

WG3's main research program was advanced first through a series of workshops. Held in Tirana in May 2019 the workshop *Genealogies of Alternative Cultures* explored the historical semantics of a family of concepts designating 'alternative culture' (also counter-culture, underground etc.) across a variety of local and regional contexts in different periods, focusing on their origins, adaptations, transgressions, its uptake and obsolescence. In turn, these explorations were further systematised during the workshop *Theory and Methods on Alternative Cultures* held in March 2020 in Zagreb. Next step was preparation of WG3 main contribution, the collective volume *Creative Dissent: Alternative Cultures during Socialism and Beyond, 1945-1991* (edited by K. Cseh-Varga / M. Klimke / R. Werenskjold / M. Zubak). The volume seeks to explore the origins, practices, and transformations of alternative cultures over time in socialist Europe. It will examine how dissenting and disobedient voices questioned or ignored state directives emerged within the political, social and cultural spheres of Warsaw Pact countries, frequently circumventing or even (directly) penetrating official spaces and obstructing (or affecting) the emergence and functioning of state-managed, class-conscious communities and institutions. The work on that volume consisted of 2 progress workshops and a final conference, all held online, during which the editors and the contributors discussed and received feedback on the contributions. The manuscript is in its final stages of preparation and will be submitted to a publisher of good standing in the next few months.

In addition, WG3 pursued a number of additional activities in line with its objectives. A workshop *Dissenting Forms of Animation and Film in Socialist Europe 1945-1989* was held in Volda, Norway, in September 2019. Unlike literature, movie-making in the socialist Europe was the kind of activity that was impossible to undertake without state patronage and control. Nevertheless, the participants explored how dissent was possible even within that closely watched industry, both in animation and live-action film. The workshop led to the publication of "Dissent and Dissidents in Eastern and Central European Film", special issue of the journal [\*Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television\* vol 41, issue 3, 2021](#).

In the course of WG3 activities, samizdat as the emblematic medium was explored from new angles. The conference *Central and Eastern European Samizdat during the Cold War. Comparative and Transnational Perspectives* held online in September 2021, focused on transnational contacts and flows in the field of samizdat, as well as on the contemporary comparison of various national samizdat phenomena. The conference also brought up an important topic on samizdat as a part of the European cultural heritage and the current and innovative possibilities of its research in the context and with the use of digital humanities tools. The recording of that conference is [available on the Action website](#). Also on



the topic of samizdat, WG3 members contributed a series of two conversations in the Forum in Literary Studies. The recording is [available at the same location](#).

## Impacts

The spirit of WG3's collaboration with international scholars had essentially **influenced ongoing doctoral dissertation and publication projects**. A more nuanced and complex understanding of alternative cultures as emerging enactments and expressions that challenge the dominant social code tied to state order has impacted academics' work from within and outside of the Action. Information on the embeddedness of the GDR's artistic counterculture into the web of official culture has enriched David Ehrenpreis' ongoing book project *The Spirit of Treptow: War and National Memory in the Two Germanies* that examines the shifting meanings of the Soviet memorial in the Berlin suburb of Treptow Park. *Parallel Public: Experimental Art in Late East Germany* (2022), a monograph by Sara Blaylock, on a number of levels benefited from discussions on public sphere theory in the state socialist setting as it was debated in WG3 workshops and conferences. The Central and Eastern European countries, dissent, dissidents and alternative culture will be represented in an upcoming book on Norwegian foreign news reporting in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on the outside perspective of Nordic correspondents. Focus will be given to the period of the Cold War. Kristóf Nagy's dissertation examining cultural funds and artists' unions in the context of state formation and hegemony forging, has, similarly to the WG's aims, challenged alternative cultures' difficult relationship with state dominance.

We also expect that **proposals for research projects** will grow out of our years-long collaboration. Working towards the *Creative Dissent* volume has shown that thinking alternative culture differently means to be open towards overlooked and unexpected point of views. Transnational and transregional approaches, queer histories and engagement with Eastern philosophies beyond Marxist thought, to name just a few innovative aspects, will require further investigation. We know of preparations for a ERC Starting Grant application on the material histories of live art during the Brezhnev era. There is also an opportunity open for future cooperation with IAMHIST (International Association for Media and History) that is regularly organising conferences and networking occasions for both established and early career academics.

Since most of our members are employed at universities and a few were involved initiatives, such as *Mapping the Scenes: Digital Humanities in Cultural Studies in Central and Central Eastern Europe* (financed by the CENTRAL university network), we have taken measures to **develop university courses** and to make an **impact on study programs/curricula** that touch upon themes of alternative cultures in the Cold War. There is already a seminar planned at the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst in Basel (winter term 2022/2023) that will investigate female/feminist voices of dissent in the arts during state socialisms and beyond. Volda University College is thanks to the inspiration of WG3's activities now home to a new course titled "Visuals in Protest, Terror, Conflict and War" that has recently been added



to the institution's MA program. WG3 was also successful in influencing an IAMHIST Master Class in Media and History (January 2022) that took place at Volda. This latter initiative will be continued in future as a travelling seminar series and is already anchored in the curriculum of different universities.

WG3 can also be proud of an impact that resonates with especially those colleagues who were involved in the preparation of the *Creative Dissent* volume. The workshops, conferences and the collaboratively written introduction to the book demonstrate that in order to achieve comprehensive knowledge on the cultures and actors of dissent in East, Central and Southeast Europe we have to **work in a transdisciplinary manner, across languages and international research environments**. STSMs and workshops were the breeding ground for this methodical impact that has proven that histories of socialist alternative cultures are interlinked and that transregional investigation should be based on similarly interwoven grounds.



## Chapter 4: Cultural Memory of Dissent

Ferenc Laczó and Tamás Scheibner

### Agenda

WG4 studied how dissent has been remembered in the now more than three decades since 1989, and explored the canonization, whether on the national, regional, or global levels of post-dissidents and their dissident pasts as well as the contestations of such narratives. Three questions in particular oriented the research program of WG4:

- How has dissent and its alternatives been conceptualised across Eastern Europe over time, and how have the various actors, institutions, and narratives shaped this process of conceptualization?
- How have the biographies of post-dissidents evolved after 1989, and how have their biographical trajectories interacted with the contest over the canonization of their pasts from before 1989?
- How have political ideologies, gender, ethnicity, class, religion, and the various media impacted on what has been included in, and excluded from, the memory of dissent?

WG4 organised its research agenda around three major focus areas: (1) concepts, actors, institutions; (2) the making of narratives and their impact; and (3) dimensions and dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. For each of these areas, the WG members identified notable gaps in existing scholarship and debated the most promising directions for further explorations.

The issues that the group has focused on included:

- Different conceptualizations of dissent and of dissidents, and how these translate into different processes and practices of remembrance; which of these conceptualizations became influential or even dominant after 1989 and what that meant in terms of highlighting or centering certain actors and phenomena while neglecting or marginalizing others
- The dynamics of canonization and contestation of the dissident legacy and how it evolved over time in the context of Eastern Europe's transition, EU -accession and membership, and democratic backsliding.
- Institutional actors that have been most active in constructing the cultural memory of dissent, including both state and non-state agents, and how their policies and practices compare across countries
- The roles assigned to dissidents in the narratives of the fall of communist regimes, and how the understanding of those roles have changed with the waves of commemoration since 1989; in particular, what role these celebratory narratives played in shaping positive political attitudes towards the European project, and how and why they have been challenged
- Ideological consequences of declaring a victory of formerly dissident ideas in and after 1989, including how the contest between liberal and conservative anti-communism tended to overlook and



exclude important ideological streams of dissent, including radically egalitarian, workerist, gender- and sexuality-related, and environmentalist ones

- How the underrepresentation of women and women's agendas in the dissident mainstream and its canonical post-1989 remembrance had consequences for marginalizing or even delegitimizing the politics of gender equality

## Main activities

The program of WG4 was set up during meetings in Leuven, Belgrade, and Budapest between 2018 and early 2019. The deliberations culminated in the conference “East European Dissent between Agenda & Legacy,” which was co-organized with Working Group 1 and held at Maastricht University's Brussels campus on 3-4 October 2019. The conference included two keynotes, four panels and a final roundtable (read [this report](#) for details). Barbara Falk's keynote, “Legacies of 1989 for dissent today” was [published in Eurozine](#), and together with some other contributions, reprinted in the collected volume [The Legacy of Division. East and West after 1989](#) (CEU Press-Eurozine, 2020), co-edited by WG4 chair Ferenc Laczó and Luka Lisjak Gabrijelcic, which aimed to rethink a key transnational dynamic of post-Cold War Europe with special attention to the memory and legacy of dissent and dissidents.

Other contributions of that conference, as well as papers solicited from new authors for a workshop held on 2 July 2021 in the framework of the *Memory Studies Association* annual convention, and a panel at the BASEES Annual Conference (8-10 April, Cambridge 2022) were combined into two special issue submissions. The special issue "Canonizing and Contesting Soviet-Era Dissent since 1989: Actors, Representations, Impacts" (containing seven papers plus an introduction) was accepted by *East European Politics and Societies, and Cultures* in November 2021. The other submission entitled “Reassessing the Democratic in Legacies of Soviet-Era Dissent” (six papers and an introduction) is being finalised and expected to be submitted to the journal *History and Memory* in June 2022.

Networking within WG4 also proved beneficial for *Intellectual Horizons*, volume no. 4 of the Routledge History Handbooks series *Central and Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century*, the flagship publication of the Imre Kertész Kolleg (a Center for Advanced Study at the University of Jena funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and research) and co-edited by the late Włodzimierz Borodziej, Ferenc Laczó, and Joachim von Puttkamer.

A significant follow-up to the activities of the Working Group, which had its very beginnings at our initial workshop held at KADOC/KU Leuven back in January 2018, is the project *Émigré Europe* in which our 2018 co-host Kim Christiaens has been joined by working group co-chair Tamás Scheibner, among others. The consortium, which partly grew out of the activities of Working Group 4, has been awarded a two-years research grant by the CELSA Alliance bringing together Belgian, Czech, Hungarian and Polish universities. A central aspect of *Émigré Europe* is to understand the contribution of Eastern and Central European migrant and diaspora communities to an expanding civil society in the Benelux



countries. A particular emphasis is placed on dissidents who migrated to these countries during the Cold War.

## Impacts

When it comes to the impacts the WG4 part of the Action has had, there are two forms of short-term and four forms of long-term impact that deserve to be highlighted. The memory and legacy of pre-1989 East European dissent has not served as the object of sustained scholarly explorations across borders before, nor had the ‘post-dissident phenomenon’ (in short, the fact that many former dissidents remained prominent public actors after 1989, their past and present-day activities canonized and contested at the same time) been treated in its own right, despite its obvious interconnections with the former.

The WG has approached both the making of memory and legacy and the post-dissident phenomenon as quintessentially transnational phenomena where international recognition and canonization, on the one hand, and local forms of contestations, on the other, have often been closely intertwined. We have also aimed to pursue comparisons within Eastern Europe as attested to by our forthcoming publications in which post-dissident politics across the Visegrad Four countries are systematically compared and the varied dialectic between canonising dissidents and radicalising post-mortem anti-communism is explored across multiple countries.

The involvement of scholars from Western and Western European countries, such as Belgium, Canada, or the Netherlands (next to the chair of the WG, well-recognized experts of their subjects such as Kim Christiaens, Idesbald Goddeeris, and Barbara Falk have all contributed to our activities) has assured that the memory and legacy of Soviet-era dissent in Eastern Europe has been contextualised broadly, in a pan-European manner and crossing the former Iron Curtain back and forth. By studying the memory and legacy of dissent in close connection with the evolution of the ‘post-dissident phenomenon’, our agenda has implied an original, consciously interdisciplinary integration of historical studies and memory studies.

By necessity, the discussion of the long-term impact of our activities has to be somewhat more tentative. We do find that our two peer-reviewed special issues include a critical-mass of innovative research to trigger a new discovery phase in the field at a time when attention is shifting to the contemporary, post-89 period and the aftermath of Soviet-era dissent. How the memory and legacy of Soviet-era dissent and how post-dissident actors have shaped the politics and culture of this contemporary era is likely to receive additional attention, not least based on recent exploration in the frame of this COST Action. Next to more senior scholars, we have managed to integrate both early postdocs and more junior researchers in our conference and our publications, either as co-authors (as in the case of Daniela Bouvier-Valenta) or as individual contributors (as in the case of Agáta Šustová Drelová or Thuc Linh Nguyen Vu). We are confident that the COST Action network and its extensive intellectual and cultural resources have been especially useful to them in their individual and collective endeavors, scholarly or otherwise.



Chair Ferenc Laczó has integrated research findings on East European dissent and post-dissidents into the Focal Point “The Legacy of Division” he has co-curated for Eurozine to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the end of the Cold War and the implosion of communist regimes. This larger project on East-West relations after 1989, which has drawn on the COST Action’s WG4, has precisely aimed to inform public debates on the identities of post-socialist EU member states and of Europe as a whole by asking how East-West relations have evolved in recent decades, how perceptions and misperceptions have been transformed, and to what extent the common ideals of 1989, not least concerning European convergence and unity, have been fulfilled or disappointed.

A major ambition our WG members have formulated but which –due primarily to the disruptions of the pandemic– we have not been able to pursue as much as we had intended concerns a more global embedding of East European dissent through comparative and transnational methods. A key issue in the memory and legacy of Soviet-era dissent is how some key participants have become global icons and their ideas travelled across the globe and been received in various places, from East Asia to North Africa and South America. More thorough research that embeds Eastern Europe in its all-European context while combining that with more global approaches remains certainly a major desideratum at this point. Members of our working group hope to extend our recent work in this inspiring and challenging direction of study while also practicing inter-cultural exchange. Such a more intense exchange shall also return us to some of the key questions our WG has originally raised, such as the various conceptualizations of dissent and the principles behind inclusion in and exclusion from the canon. Such a broad and ambitious future exercise would ultimately be meant as an attempt to reconsider how criteria of democracy have been renegotiated, refined and extended to new areas in contemporary times – and what the memory and legacy of East European dissent has contributed to this crucial discussion and debate.



# Chapter 5: Mediating Research through Technology

Jennifer Edmond and Lars Wieneke

## Agenda

WG5 probed the current and potential future role of technology in supporting and promoting research on Eastern European cultures of dissent. It examined the state of digital readiness of the documentary legacy of dissent for advanced research working with the [COURAGE registry](#) of collections relevant to this field of research, the [DISSINVENT project](#) on collections of Cold-War exiles in France, and case studies of unlicensed print culture (a.k.a samizdat), and in-depth study of digitised legacy of Soviet-era dissent in Ukraine (Yevhen Rachkov's Virtual Mobility grant). Also, WG5 surveyed the uptake of digital methodologies and tools among the NEP4DISSENT community of practice, and ascertained its needs, drawing on the results of the [DIMPO survey](#), while conducting a series of interviews.

Through scoping the needs of the network, WG5 has targeted certain intersections of digital technology and scholarly practices in order to facilitate the greater uptake of digital research methods by historians of dissent:

- **Entities and mapping.** Identifying and mapping entities is an essential part of doing research digitally, and decisions relating to data models should be made with a clear understanding of their consequences. WG5 identifies mapping frameworks and contexts, as well as the questions which need to be addressed by researchers.
- **Digital storytelling for dissemination.** Digital storytelling presents a number of challenges which need to be appropriately addressed for a successful and accurate outcome. That is, if we have enough evidence, or adequate data, then digital storytelling is as successful as our digital tool can be.
- **Oral history for experiential sources.** Rooted in storytelling, oral history can supplement, enhance, and provide alternate perspectives for the historical record.
- **Dealing with issues in digital data.** The acquisition, use, re-use, and application of data not only poses technical challenges for the workings of specific tools, but also raises issues in other domains which need to be tackled. These concerns are shaped by legal, ethical, and methodological issues, but also through questions of access, curation, and management, as well as preservation.



## Main activities

To support digital methods and tools capacity-building of the NEP4DISSENT community of practice, WG5 developed a tailored program of trainings and workshops.

Digital humanities training schools formed the cornerstones of what WG5 was able to provide to the community, bringing together user needs (such as data management and entity manipulation skills) with research data (such as has been prepared in the COURAGE and *Hidden Galleries* projects, and provided by the Blinken Open Society Archives) to create a high-value experience for early career researchers or those only beginning with digital methods. The nodegoat team (Pim van Bree and Geert Kessels) was fundamental in providing a gentle introduction to data collection, curation, and simple data analysis. The WG organised two training schools *Cultures of Dissent in Eastern Europe (1945-1989): Research Approaches in the Digital Humanities* within the Central European University Summer School Program. The first edition was held onsite in Budapest in July 2019 with 23 participants. The second edition, run virtually in January-February 2021, adapted the training formula to the pandemic situation by extending the period of effective engagement from ten days to six weeks. That second iteration, with 24 participants, offered an intensive, five-day first week, which was followed by five weeks of 'training sessions' and project incubation, customised to the particular needs of participants' research projects.

In addition to the training schools, WG5 organized a series of workshops. The *Train the Trainers* workshop (as part of the Tirana Summit on May 2019, 15 participants) was a half-day general orientation event for non-digital humanists, in order to make them aware of what digital humanities methodologies might be relevant to their respective fields, to assist them in advising their colleagues and students on what key issues they may face in working with hybrid sources and methods, and to offer them a guide to resources which they can pass on to interested students or colleagues. The workshop *Solving the Shoebox Syndrome: "Digital" Oral History Content Management* ( virtual from Luxembourg, June 2020, 12 participants) addressed the 'shoebox' problem of audio or video data that has been collected, but cannot be easily reused because it lacks an appropriate storage and sharing structure. The workshop displayed techniques in "oral history digital indexing" (OHDI) that use direct-to-media timecode capabilities to get stagnant oral history collections "out of the shoebox" and into a usable environment. The *Digital Storytelling* workshop (virtual from Sarajevo, November 2020) workshop explored how technology, narrative and dissent research can come together as a productive way to communicate scholarship. The workshop *Linking your Historical Sources to Open Data* (virtual from The Hague, September 2021, 15 participants) aimed to help researchers to connect their research data to existing Linked Open Data resources. In the workshop *Exploring ELTeC* (Virtual from Belgrade, March 22-24, 2022, 15 participants), co-organized with COST Action Distant Reading for European Literary History (CA16204), trainers used techniques developed for the NEP4DISSENT participants to work with a DISTANT READING dataset and train literary researchers in linking historical data to open source knowledge bases.



Realised in cooperation between the WG5 digital storytelling expert Selma Rizvić of [digi.ba](#) group, and experts on religious dissent from WG1, the virtual exhibit [The Underground](#), was an hands-on exercise in transfer of skills. Previously, in 2019, Rizvić and her team also realised [Nine Dissidents](#), the first virtual reality film in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Finally, with Virtual Mobility grants awarded to Anton Mudrak and Taras Nazaruk of the Lviv Center for Urban History, WG5 supported the effort to document the [Ukrainian civil society response to the Russian aggression](#), by recording oral interviews and archiving related channels of the Telegram communication platform.

## Impacts

The impact of WP5 can be largely understood under the following headings:

**Giving researchers access to new, at times unexpected, methods by which to explore their research field.** The NEP4DISSENT network brought together an extremely varied community of researchers and practitioners, some of whom were highly experienced with digital methods, some of whom had no experience with them at all. WP5 was able to enhance research capacities for cohorts reflecting both of these profiles (and every point in between them), resulting in new research outputs, new research questions and new analyses of and access paradigms for existing sources. The fact that we were able to work with such a wide range of researchers also means that NEP4DISSENT's efforts within WG5 will also have a significant multiplier effect, as network members share these methods to their colleagues and in particular to their students. The fact that we were able to provide opportunities for experience with both generic and more specialised areas (such as digital storytelling and working with analogue audio data) meant that we were able to have a very wide footprint within the Action.

**Better understanding the digital methodological needs and requirements of a diverse cohort of scholars.** The members of WG5 were not merely transferring knowledge outward, but also learning a lot about the nature of the digital transition as it is taking place for dissent research, in particular in Eastern Europe. Through the interviews, publications, exchanges with other communities (such as the DARIAH Digital Methods and Practices Observatory, the COST Action Distant Reading, et al), and informal exchanges, those members of the group whose research area focuses on the adoption of digital methods were able to observe and generate significant new insights into research workflows and sources. Given the leadership roles within the digital humanities community occupied by many of the WG members, this work will ultimately have an outsize effect on how hybrid and transitional scholars are perceived and served. This is not only true within the academic space, as SME partner Lab1100, the creators of Nodegoat has also used their work within WG5 as an opportunity to refine and improve the tools they offer for scholarly research.

**Future work will be required to maximise this impact.** If sources are not available digitally, then digital methods to interrogate them are not useful. If funding and time are not available to allow



researchers to upskill and apply new methods, then the old methods will prevail. If reward structures cannot recognise the significant additionalities and benefits in terms of data preparation and management that these methods bring (at the expense, perhaps, of some traditional forms of scholarly production, as time is not unlimited) then scholars will view them as threats, rather than opportunities. These issues lie beyond the direct sphere of influence of NEP4DISSENT, but we hope that we will have given our network members a more informed basis upon which to assess and advocate for their needs going forward.



## Chapter 6: Dissent on Display

Ieva Astahovska and David Crowley

### Agenda

Working from the assumption that exhibitions play a generative role for both dissemination and innovation in the research on Eastern European cultures of dissent, WG6 reviewed both historical and retrospective exhibitions which have been central to putting dissent on display. That review allowed for creation of a comprehensive framework for discussing conceptual, curatorial, and material dimensions of exhibiting, relating collecting practices, curatorial invention in working with the collection, and the displayed manifestations of that work in museum and gallery settings. Also, the group has established that investigating critical curatorial practices before and after 1989 provides a significant learning base for cooperation between researchers and curators today, the two communities of practice that are constitutive of this WG. The following four focus areas were identified by WG6 as both a challenge and an opportunity for art and cultural historians, and contemporary curators:

- **The role of private collectors before 1989–91** as an underexplored subject. We need studies which address the impact of their activities on both the ‘narratives’ which explain the forms of cultural dissent, and on today’s museum collections.
- **Curators who worked in state institutions before 1989–91.** This subject also pertains to the interests of WG2 and WG3 in exploring the difficulties of drawing clear lines between official and unofficial cultural activities.
- **Exhibiting immaterial and censored dissent.** As many ‘dissenting’ practices – even those by visual artists – were not necessarily recorded, the question of how to display the effaced, the censored, or the ephemeral, remains a curatorial challenge.
- **Ethical considerations.** Interfacing with WG1, WG6 raises a question concerning the ethical implications of researching and displaying materials created by the authorities in Eastern Europe as part of their attempts to control and suppress opposition, such as photographs taken during surveillance operations.

### Main activities

Addressing the role of private-art collectors, self-archiving practices by artists, and critical curatorship within socialist state-institution, WG6 initiated and supported a number of overlocking initiatives. Convened by the group, an editorial workshop in the Studio Gallery in Warsaw in April 2019 incubated a project on critical exhibition histories of the socialist Europe. While this has not resulted in a singular outcome, this strong research interest is being developed in a number of different ways: Warsaw



workshop participant Christian Nae and WG3 leader Katalin Cseh-Varga have, at the same time, developed a book project exploring this within the project *Exhibitions as Sites of Artistic Contact during the Cold War*, featuring research of a number of WG members (Crowley, Cseh-Varga). Other members of the WG, Warsaw workshop participant Zsuzsa László and Tomáš Glanc are working as editors (with others) on a major project [Socialist Exhibition Cultures](#) that will result in a book. Finally, the conference *Artpool40 - Active Archives and Art Networks* (Budapest, February 2020), was a forum for transnational research on artist archives, progressive curatorial and museological practices, and the historiography of Cold War art scenes and networks. It placed a particular emphasis on unofficial and dissenting art and archiving practices exemplified by Artpool Research Centre that began 40 years earlier as an artistic self-archiving initiative. The conference has been richly documented, including [video record](#), and positively reviewed in the [Art Margins](#) magazine. With NEP4DISSENT support and input from several WG6 members, a selection of research papers was further published as a edited volume available in open access, titled [What Will Be Already Exists Temporalities of Cold War Archives in East-Central Europe and Beyond](#), ed. by Emese Kürti and Zsuzsa László (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2021).

WG6 joined forces with WG1 to address the ethical issues pertinent to displaying materials from the archives of the secret police, many times collected as evidence against dissenting individuals and groups. These discussions resulted in a theme issue of the [Martor Journal no. 26, 2021](#) (see section on WG1 for further details).

The ethical considerations were also at the heart of the workshop [Prisms of Silence](#) dedicated to communicating difficult pasts (and co-organized by the eponymous project led by WG6 co-Chair Ieva Astahovska and Dr Margaret Tali), that took place in Tallinn in February 2020, with a focus on silences about World War II and the Soviet era in research and curatorship. It resulted in a special issue of the *Baltics Worlds* journal, and was positively reviewed in [ArtHist.net](#) and [Blok Magazine](#).

Finally, complementing the series initiated by WG2, the online workshop [To the Left of Power? Radical Culture in Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s](#) explored the legacy of radical counter-cultures in former socialist countries and current research and curatorial initiatives that work with that legacy. The online workshops were attended by circa 50 persons on each day, the conference record is [accessible online](#), and the organisers have been approached by two journals to publish the proceedings.

## Impacts

Under the networking opportunities provided by this COST action, researchers and scholars concerned with the museological themes and practices addressed by WG6 were able to engage at a high level with curators and scholars from different academic fields and diverse geography across the former Eastern Bloc and Yugoslavia. These **international exchanges** stimulated the development of new collaborative cross-national projects outlined in this document. Of particular importance here is the network's contribution to better understanding of differences between 'national' experiences and the opportunities



for international comparison as well as the recording of transnational phenomena (evidenced in the comparative dimensions of all the projects outlined here). We are confident that new long term working and professional relations have been formed which will continue to have an impact on the field.

There is clear evidence of **engagement with and support for students and young researchers**. Here, Short Term Scientific Missions (STSM) play an important role, as do the public seminars and workshops organised by members of WG6: for instance, the majority of audience members in *To the Left of Power* workshop were post-graduate students, as were a large proportion of the speakers. While it is yet too early to provide evidence for the following claim: we are very confident that the materials which have been generated and shared (all open access to date) will be employed in university-level teaching in the fields of history, art history and museology.

**Non-specialist public engagement and impact** will be achieved in the public exhibitions which have recently opened (April 2022) or are planned by members of WG6 in 2022 and 2023 (typically earlier proposals somewhat delayed by the Covid pandemic). The engagement with internationalism in Eastern Bloc on the part of New Left is the theme of Dekolonizacje (Decolonisations), an exhibition in the Galeria Studio in Warsaw (Spring 2022) and, in part, benefits from research conducted under a STSM by one of its curators and WG6 member. Similarly, the key theme of socialist exhibition histories will be explored in the form of reconstructions of historic art exhibitions from the period of communist rule in a temporary show in the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź (spring 2023) curated by a WG6 member and significantly benefits from the knowledge exchanges that have occurred within the working group. The exhibition ["Difficult Pasts. Connected Worlds"](#) at the National Gallery of Art in Vilnius, Lithuania (2022), discusses the difficult and often-silenced aspects of Eastern European pasts, calling for reflection on the relationships between these pasts and their impact today through the perspective of a shared history – opening dialogue, forging connections and foregrounding solidarities between the different difficult histories that are often perceived as incompatible or in competition with each other. Further exhibitions are also being planned by members of WG6, drawing on research undertaken in STSMs.



# Conclusions

**Maciej Maryl and Piotr Wciślik**

The authors of this report believe that the Action has reached its objectives by stimulating new research on East-European cultures of dissent on the one hand and by highlighting the role of digital technologies and curatorial practices in this process. Despite the complications brought by the pandemic which complicated the implementation and forced us to postpone or reshape some of the activities. The detailed accounts of the activities undertaken by Working Groups showed a diverse spectrum of interventions into the field of dissent studies, which enabled new research and novel cooperation practices. Let us conclude this report with some remarks of a more general nature, summing up the action achievements.

**New research.** NEP4DISSENT involved 320 researchers, awarded 100 grants and resulted in more than 40 publications and 20 research projects. We believe that with this influx of new work we managed to trigger and sustain the new discovery phase in the field.

**New mobility.** During the COVID pandemic the Action managed to move its activities online which proved to be beneficial in terms of archiving and disseminating the work undertaken by the participants.

**New competences.** NEP4DISSENT exposed researchers to the digital research methods and enabled new cooperations between researchers and IT professionals.

**New exhibitions.** The Action resulted in several exhibitions, not only providing access to the visual legacy of dissent but also contributing to discussions on the ethical dimensions of representation of the recent and troubled past.

We believe that collaborations and knowledge exchange triggered by the Action will have a lasting impact on the field, enabling new, transnational, interdisciplinary and technology-savvy research on dissent in Europe.