

Transformations from Below: Shipyards and Labour Relations in the *Uljanik (Croatia)* and *Gdynia (Poland)* Shipyards since the 1980s

(Transformationen von unten: Arbeitsbeziehungen in den Werften Uljanik (Pula) und Stocznia (Gdynia) seit den 1980er Jahren)



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Project abstract

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Abstract

This project will explore changes in labour relations in two shipyards: *Stocznia Gdynia* (Poland) and *Uljanik* in Pula (Yugoslavia/Croatia) from around 1980 up to recent times. The major objective of the comparative study of the two enterprises is to historicize transformation from socialism to market economies and to explain it from a perspective “from below”. For that purpose, the project assumes the social and cultural resources for transformation were already formed well before the end of communist rule. The project will focus on three levels of analysis:

- 1) workers and other groups in the enterprises
- 2) social milieus shaped by the workplace but also by structures outside the factory gates
- 3) the shipbuilding companies as arenas of historical change

We intend to study the many paradoxes and ambiguities of transformation from a historical-anthropological and social history perspective. The emphasis is on the (self-) transformations of individuals, groups and social relations, on their perceptions, expectations and actions. By focussing on workers and their interaction with managers, we will highlight the importance of everyday practices on the shop-floor for the outcomes of transformation. The project will also reveal old and new divisions among the workforce and how old and new milieus shaped experiences of social

change. Workers' strategies of accommodation, appropriation, and subversion are important elements in this social drama. Another aim is to evaluate (dis)continuities between socialism and post-socialism in order to understand specific temporalities of change.

The project assumes that the two shipyards are perfect sites for the exploration of these questions. For that matter, their business history will be analysed as well. Shipbuilding is typically an industry in which the nation state is closely involved, yet at the same time shipbuilders have been facing intense global competition. Therefore, the two shipyards provide excellent case studies for the detailed exploration of the interdependence of global, national and local changes and their impact on local industrial communities.

The project team will encompass four senior researchers (including the directors) and one doctoral researcher. The ultimate goal is to produce detailed but broadly contextualized micro-histories that will shed new light on the transformation of socialism to capitalism in East Central Europe.

