

»But we realized that we didn't fit in there«

The impact of generational belonging on community building and network formation in post unification Germany

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Introduction

»But we realized that we didn't fit in there«, Ellen, a woman in her late fifties concludes her interview account of a reunion of East German workers who were occupied for several years in the Soviet Union with GDR's (German Democratic Republic) economic prestige project of the COMECON¹ pipeline construction. In June 1974, delegates of former COMECON member states² signed the general agreement on economic collaboration to tap natural gas resources near Orenburg in the then Soviet Union. In the following, a first pipeline section was built in Ukraine from 1974 to 1978. This section was named »Drushba-Trasse«, a combination of the Russian word for friendship and an explicitly East German term for pipeline. Being 24 years of age, Ellen left for the Ukraine in 1975 to work as a post office clerk at two construction sites. Being unmarried and due to the deficient housing market of the GDR, she was still living with her parents. The opportunity to work in Ukraine was a welcome chance to finally leave home and on top of that to even see a

1 The Council for Mutual Assistance was founded in 1949 and basically constituted the »socialist counterpart« to the Organisation for European Economic Co-Operation that emerged from the Marshall Plan and later to the European Economic Community.

2 Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, People's Republic of Bulgaria, People's Republic of Poland, GDR, People's Republic of Hungary and Soviet Union.

foreign country. She came back home in 1978 when the venture was completed. After having returned, Ellen experienced a painful odyssey in the authoritarian East German state and left the GDR for the West in the mid-1980s, after her partner had spent four years as a political prisoner. Despite all or probably because of all she has experienced, her deployment abroad occupies a glimmering position in her narrated biography.

When Ellen was already living in a West German city, thousands of East German contract workers and delegates of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth, henceforth FDJ), that officially directed the economic project, were again working with a number of East German state-run companies in the framework of a second construction venture, plainly referred to as the *Erdgastrasse* (natural gas pipeline) by political officials. This pipeline section was started in 1982 and comprised of construction sites located in the Ukraine, Central Russia, the Perm district, and Kazakhstan. The venture was eventually completed in 1993 on behalf of reunified Germany. In total, more than 15,000 mostly young, predominantly male workers applied for an occupation with the project (Belwe 1983).³ For many of them their period of life and work with the socialist

3 People applied voluntarily for a contract within the framework of pipeline construction that also included affiliated obligations, such as the development of the general infrastructure and residential areas along the pipeline for the future Soviet operators. Thus, a wide range of craftsmen was employed. Furthermore health care, cleaning, administration, catering and entertainment staff, economists and police officers were on duty. The contract period covered a minimum of two years. In the 1980s some contracts were prolonged for up to eight years. In some exceptional cases employees worked with the project in both the 1970s and the 1980s and finally worked eleven years in total in the Soviet Union, with an interruption between the construction phases. The venture was declared a »Youth Project« by GDR's Minister of Coal Mining and Energy. Therefore, the majority of pipeline workers were FDJ members who were officially delegated to the pipeline project by their home factories. Older employees also came, mainly experienced construction supervisors and engineers. In general, these workers were either members of the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, Socialist Unity Party of Germany) or SED functionaries, which had a permanent office at the con-

prestige project represents one of the key points of their lives, and thus still connects them to other people who share the same life experience.⁴ Nowadays a community of several hundreds of former pipeline labourers closes off from an out-group by strongly referring to the shared biographical event, i.e. only those who are *Trassenerbauer* (pipeline builders/pipeline constructors) – to use the group’s conventionalized label of self reference – may become a participating member of the community. For many years, two *Trassenvereine* (pipeline associations) and semi-institutionalized associations founded by former pipeline workers have developed cultural practices leading to a common group identity. The mission statement of the initial and still largest associations reads:

In September 1997 our association »Erdgastrasse e.V.« was founded. It is an alliance of former pipeline builders and likewise represents the connecting link between all pipeline builders who were involved in the construction of the »Drushba-Trasse« resp. since 1982 the »Erdgastrasse« in Russia.⁵

struction sites. The economic operation was set in an all-embracing ideological campaign launched by the SED and the FDJ, and the young pipeline workers were put centre stage.

- 4 Most of the former pipeline workers today state that they applied for a job with the venture because of the alluring prospects of high earnings, access to rare consumer goods by means of an exclusive shopping catalogue (GENEX) or simply the allocation of an apartment or university admission. In a survey conducted in 1987, 81.2% fully agreed that they wanted to earn more money than in their home employment. At the same time, 52.6% fully agreed that they wanted to contribute to an economically important project of the GDR, 42.2% fully agreed that they wanted to have an exceptional experience, 41.6% fully agreed that they wanted to acquire special skills in their professional field (Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung 1987).
- 5 »Im September 1997 wurde unser Verein »Erdgastrasse e. V.« gegründet. Er ist ein Bündnis ehemaliger Trassenerbauer und stellt zugleich das Bindeglied aller Trassenbauer dar, die am Bau der »Drushba-Trasse« bzw. seit 1982 am Bau der »Erdgastrasse« in Russland beteiligt waren« (<http://www.erdgastrasse-ev.de>, accessed on July 16th 2010, author’s translation).

Like the representatives of the above-mentioned association, all initiatives claim to represent the interests of people who were employed with the state-run project in both construction periods. However, former employees of the first construction phase remain noticeably underrepresented and marginalised within the community. Therefore, Ellen and three friends of hers believe that it was their first and last time to take part in a reunion of former pipeline builders.

This article examines the impact of generational belonging on community and network building under the conditions of social change in post 1989-Germany, by the example of the peer community of former pipeline builders. In an attempt of exploring the generational divide within the community, the ethnographic analysis combines different methodological and theoretical approaches that allow for a depiction of network building processes, and also account for segregations in network dynamics. To that end, concepts of ethnography of communication (EOC) are combined with a network analytical perspective and a theoretical approach based on Karl Mannheim's tenet of generation. The main argument of the paper is that explanations for the exclusion of first generation pipeline builders from the community require a reflection of social practices and must not be reduced to content analysis of collective memory. Therefore, the focus is on practices of community building. Special attention will be paid to the utilization of communicative means to interact, and generation specific variations according to intentions and social needs of the community members. The empirical findings will be interpreted in view of the historical context in which the community building process was embedded.

The first section of the paper is devoted to the theoretical and methodological approach. Next to an illustration of the empirical tools that were employed, the subjacent understanding of ›generation‹ in this paper will be introduced and further elaborated in the empirical part. The paper will then turn to a description of the pipeline builder's ›communicative infrastructure‹ that on the one hand has fostered social cooperation and on the other hand has been the outcome of community building. The next part focuses on how first generation pipeline builders have attempt-

ed to integrate into the community, and how they reflect about failures and constraints of integration. Reflections of first generation pipeline builders on their standing in the community will be interpreted pertaining to the structural analysis of the communicative infrastructure. As a final step, the interpretive potential of the concept of generation for the case study will be concluded.

**Theory, methodology and data:
a microsociological and emic approach to »generation«**

This article is based on a project that investigates community and network building practices in the context of transition processes by the case of former GDR pipeline labourers. The study raises the question of which social practices, linguistic performances and bodies of knowledge have fostered and facilitated the formation and maintenance of the community network since the early 1990s. In addition, reasons for a recent, yet gradual decrease of community activities since roughly 2007 will be traced. What may the rise and descend of the community tell about the present state of a post socialist society? To this end, analytical instruments of EOC are combined with a network analytical perspective. The data corpus comprises of web pages, internet forum discussions among community members (since 1999), invitation letters to reunions, observation at reunions, written documents of club rules, tape recordings of informal conversations at reunions as well as telephone conversations and e-mailing between the researcher and former pipeline builders. Furthermore, narrative non-standardized interviews were conducted during a two-years field research. This has, for instance, been the case with founding members of the associations to learn about its history. Further interviews were carried out with first generation pipeline builders who are usually unavailable in community contexts. Therefore, this article for the most part builds on non-standardized interviews produced at the homes of the interviewees.

EOC conceives of speaking and communicative interaction as a community building activity (Bergmann & Meyer 2010: 151). The primary unit of description is the »speech community«. Dell Hymes conceived of a

speech community as: »sharing knowledge of rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech. Such sharing comprises knowledge of at least one form of speech, and knowledge also of its patterns of use« (Hymes 1974: 51). A few years later John Gumperz redefined speech community as:

a system of organized diversity held together by common norms and aspirations. Members of such a community typically vary with respect to certain beliefs and other aspects of behaviour. Such variation, which seems irregular when observed at the level of the individual, nevertheless shows systematic regularities at the statistical level of social facts (Gumperz 1988: 24)

Accordingly, EOC »looks at communication from the standpoint of interest of a community itself« and considers »its members as sources of shared knowledge and insight« (Hymes 1974: 8). It is based on the premises that every community has developed a set of »linguistically distinguishable settings« (Gumperz 1982: 43) that allow to conclude on the structures of the group and the social function of their communicative performances, in addition to underlying social norms and needs. Thus it investigates the relation between activities of speech and social life by aiming at a »theory of language use« (Hymes 1972). To that end, Hymes developed his »speaking mnemonic« to promote the analysis of group specific discourses conceived of as a series of (interpersonal) speech events and speech acts among members of a speech community. The speaking model uses the first letters of terms for determinative speech components – setting and scene, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, genre – to explore conventions, functions, and underlying social structures of linguistic performances (Hymes 1974: 53-62).

Beyond doubt, EOC provides excellent instruments to explore activities of community building through communicative interaction. However its research instruments, predominantly tape recording and observations of interactions among community members of local areas (Hymes 1974: 31; Gumperz 1988: 155), are only partly applicable for the here presented study. In fact, interpersonal relationships of former pipeline builders are

maintained over long distances by means of corresponding communication facilities. After Germany's reunification in 1990, the social structure of East German localities has dramatically changed. Owing to the introduction of market economic principles, a large number of factories closed down. As a consequence of rising unemployment rates, tens of thousands left their hometowns and native areas (Paqué 2009), among them also former pipeline workers. With regard to the history of the pipeline associations since the mid 1990s, it can be safely said that the increasing spread of access to the Internet has had a significant impact on the emergence of the community. Only by means of the World Wide Web and by establishing corresponding communicative habits have former pipeline builders been able to bridge geographical distances between various places of residence.

This non-local character of the community stipulates a network analytical perspective that treats »communities as a social network rather than as a place« (Wellman 1999a: xiv). While linguist anthropologist John Gumperz still comprehended of a social network as »localities« (Gumperz 1988: 38), the sociologist Barry Wellman construed networks as »personal communities« (Wellman 1999a: xiv). According to him, »network analysis conceives of social structure as the patterned organization of these network members and their relationships« (Wellman 1999b: 16). During the past two decades, network analysts have highlighted the important role that electronic communication media have been playing for providing »companionship, social support, and a sense of belonging« (Wellmann 1999a: xiv; Haythornthwaite & Wellman 2002). However, network studies heavily rely on either surveys and statistical data or semi-standardized interviews in an attempt to trace structures of cooperation rather than acts of social cooperation. One major drawback of this approach is that it is unable to demonstrate how people respond to social circumstances and how they make reference to them in the context of network interaction. How do network members channel, define and negotiate their actions and thus make situated use of an interpersonal infrastructure that also defines the boundaries of a community? And more importantly, how do communities generate communicative interaction

structures? Accordingly, to assess the social network of former pipeline builders the non-territorial perspective of network analysis has to be combined with the decisively interactional approach of EOC.

The research design also pays attention to what scholars such as Robert D. Benford, David A. Snow and associates called the »framing/movement link«. ⁶ It starts with the assumption that framing processes are »a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements«. To this end, the concept of »collective action frames« was introduced. »Collective action frames are action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization (SMO)«. Thus, collective action frames enable for the mobilization of »potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists» (Benford & Snow 2000: 614). ⁷ More interesting, however, is that the »framing/movement link« also traces constraints on mobilization of adherents: Why do people feel attracted by certain rhetoric elements, interpretations of historical, political and economic events, and collective activities while others are not reached at all or drop out quickly after a preliminary contact? Similarly, network analysis does not merely focus on »patterns of connectivity« but also on patterns of »cleavage within social systems« (Well-

6 Following Goffman, »frame« is understood as »schemata of interpretation« that enable individuals »to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large«. Frames, thus »help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action« (Benford & Snow 2000: 614; Snow et al. 1986).

7 On the empirical level these authors seem to treat frame as equal with rhetoric rather than comprehending of framing as a process of interpersonal negotiation. Therefore, the »movement framing research« (Benford & Snow 2000) remains open to doubt concerning its methodological and theoretical comprehensibility. Nevertheless crucial analytical concepts, such as: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, frame transformation, frame dispute, frame resonance etc. can beneficially be applied to trace internal social structures of interest groups as well as alliances with out-group social actors (Benford & Snow: 2000).

man 1999b: 19). What may be the reasons that first generation pipeline builders have barely found their way into the community, although they seem to share the exceptional biographical experience of years of life and work in the former Soviet Union? What is more, they are explicitly invited to participate in the community's activities by the initiators of the associations.

These questions cannot be answered in terms of shared biographical experiences alone. It is rather suggested that groups like the peer network of former pipeline builders do not exist by reason of shared biographical experiences but because of communication about them in the social context of the network. Biographical research⁸ first and foremost sheds light on the reciprocal reorganization of narrative structures and life courses and takes this interplay as a point of departure for the analysis (cf. Rosenthal 1995; Lehmann 1983; 2007). Although it is acknowledged that narrated biographies are socially shaped (Fuchs 1984: 22-24) and subject to »interferences« in the process of changes of identity (Schütze 1983), hardly any analytical emphasis is placed on reciprocal negotiations about life histories. Therefore, biographical interviews only reveal retrospective assessments of events (Bergmann 2007: 45). Yet, there is a social world beyond narrated life histories. Accounts are the manifestation of social knowledge generated in particular contexts (Gardner 2001: 196). Given that social action is knowledge-based performance, knowledge is not only produced under certain historical conditions but also contributes to the generation and alteration of social contexts. The ex-

8 In the understanding of the social sciences, biographical research deals with the interpretive analysis of autobiographic narrations and accounts. As distinguished from life course research that explores constraints and inequalities of life chances in the context of a given social structure, biographical research makes individual interpretations of experiences its focus, whereby the individual and not the social structure marks the point of departure. The category of the generation is closely related to that of biography, however the aim of periodization of courses of time is much more pronounced. Hereby, generation research aims at bringing together individual life stories and broader socio-historical processes (Lepsius 2005: 47-48).

ploration of the latter is not a matter of the analysis of a narrator's perceptions alone but also needs to include phenomena that (partly) deprive of the narrated stories because they cannot be assessed retrospectively yet. For its main part, the study presented here focuses on social interaction among those who carry a similar biography. Collective biographical identity is considered the outcome of rather than the reason for community building. Consequently, the description of community building processes calls for a more interaction oriented concept than ›biography‹. Yet, it must not be neglected that members of the community share the experience of life and work in the former Soviet Union. In fact, semantic biographical codes, above all the common self-designation *Trassenerbauer* (pipeline builders), clearly mark the borders of the community. Such »conventionalised labels« inherently refer to »discourse strategies« (Gumperz 1988: 34). More precisely, they inform about participants and norms of group-specific interactions. Thus, mutual accommodations of life histories restrict the scope of legitimate membership. Bearing in mind the significance of life histories on the one hand and social interaction on the other hand, it is assumed that a conceptualization of the concept of generation can provide an important key to understanding community building processes of former pipeline builders. Drawing on the latest critical debate about generation research program, Mannheim's distinction between »generation as an actuality« and »generation unit« will be reinterpreted and guide the interpretation of the data in order to grasp the generational divide within the network.

In his programmatic essay *The problem of generations* (1970 [1928]), Karl Mannheim argued that generation does not primarily correspond to cohorts but to attitudes, i.e. mechanisms of distinction against preceding generations (Wohlrab-Sahr 2002: 216). A common generation location⁹ has the potential to materialize in a generation as an actuality, on condition of participation in shared historical destinies (Mannheim 1970 [1928]): 536) and »in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound

9 Generation location refers to the biological cycle and means the belonging of individuals to one socio-historical space in which they are exposed to a common range of historical events.

up with its unfolding« (Karl Mannheim 1952: 306, cited in Diepstraten et al. 1999). Thus a generation as an actuality exceeds a mere historical co-presence of individuals (Diepstraten et al. 1999). Yet, social ties and a feeling of connectivity are annullable and shiftable. On the contrary, Mannheim displays the generation unit as a far more tangible affinity (Mannheim 1970 [1928]: 525). Generation unit refers to a »concrete social group« (*konkrete soziale Gruppen*, actual social groups) within the same actual generation (Mannheim 1970 [1928]: 548). Its members develop a common vision on shared historical events and shifts in the socio-historical structure. Thus generation units are the actual manifestations of a generation materialized as a quantitatively limited, concrete group within a larger generation (Diepstraten et al. 1999). This also means that different generation units coexist. Each of them interprets experiences in a distinctive way and by adopting specific cultural practices. These concrete groups bound in generational unity are no longer characterized by loose participation of a variety of individuals. Rather they distinguish themselves through »coherent reactions« (*einheitliches Reagieren*, resp. common reaction) to socio-historical events. These coherent reactions and performances contain an associational power (Mannheim 1970 [1928]: 547).

As Mannheim thinks of specific articulations in response to socio-historical events in theoretical terms, so do sociologists, anthropologists and sociolinguistics with their different schools of thought leave no doubt that socially connecting (communicative) performances are contingent on culture and history. Likewise, network analysts have stated that »communities do not function in isolation but in political, economic, and social milieus that effect their composition, structure, and operations« (Wellman 1999b: 34). Bringing Mannheim's theoretical ideas in line with the methodological tools of EOC, the network of former pipeline builders is conceived of as a »speech community« that corresponds to a generational unit in the sense of an emically practiced discrimination between the two generations of pipeline builders from the 1970s and from the 1980s. In spite of a similar common past it is assumed that former employees from the 1970s do not belong to that generation unit, because of varying articulations and reaction in the socio-historical world

that consequently constrain their integration into the community. Historians and sociologists (cf. Jureit & Wildt 2005) have lately offered a critical evaluation of the analytical category of »generation«. They make clear that even though generation has become a fundamental interpretive category in history and the social sciences it remains a highly fussy concept open to criticism (Lepsius 2005: 47). Among other hindrances, generational research has not satisfyingly answered the question if generation refers to an emic self-description of social actors or an etic ascription by researchers for the sake of periodization. Prevailing so far has been the latter, i.e. deductive and ex post application of the concept to explain social change and continuity rather than an inductive description of how social actors themselves discriminate one generation against another. Furthermore, this deductive, mostly retrospective research program made the explanation of dynamics of a society as a whole its focus (Jureit & Wildt 2005: 22). The analytical potential for explaining processes on the level of microsociological case studies therefore remained largely undiscussed. Eventually the understanding of what a generation is has not managed to overcome its close linkage to age cohorts, a semantic that was brought forward by academics (Jureit & Wildt 2005: 25). In this respect, sociologist Rainer Lepsius speaks of a focus on *Kohortenerlebnisse* (experiences of cohorts) (Lepsius 2005: 50).

The belonging to age cohorts plays a subordinated role for the interpretation of the generational divide in the network of former pipeline employees of the GDR. By the same token it is not the aim of the paper to explain broader socio-historical dynamics of East Germany. Rather it tries to apply concepts of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge to explain practices of community building on a micro scale. Thereby, the analysis attempts to mediate between a deductive and inductive approach. Deductive is the application of notions and categories that were put forward by Mannheim. Inductive, however, is the transfer of the analytical distinction between »generation as an actuality« and »generation unit« to the case study in order to come to terms with discriminations between employees of the »Drushba-Trasse« (1970s) and the »Erdgas-Trasse« (1980s) that prevail among former pipeline builders themselves. Hence,

the term generation here refers to an emically employed »before-and-after-modek« (Jureit & Wildt 2005: 15). The pipeline builders' awareness of a temporal cohesion finds its linguistic expression in a deictic, more precisely numeric-chronological differentiation between »first and second Trasse« (construction phase). Such deictic devices »set up a frame of reference« (Saeed 2009) referring to equivalence and counterpart relations (Hanks 2005: 191-220.) Former pipeline builders of both construction phases locate themselves in a similar biographical frame and acknowledge each other – to borrow from Mannheim – as »pipeline builders as an actuality«. At once they narratively differentiate between each other, by making life experiences relevant in a frame of periodicity. This shared knowledge has to be seen as inextricably linked to performance-relevant patterns, i.e. first and second generation pipeline builders differ on the level of identifiable social practices after the end of their employment. Those pipeline workers who participate in, yield and frame activities of the associations will be comprehended as a generation unit or the »unit of agency« in the network building process.

The communicative infrastructure of the community of former pipeline workers

Since the early 1990s former pipeline workers have regularly met in small private circles. In September 1997 the core of that initial group founded the first officially registered association, and in 2000 a second association was registered. The splitting up of the community into two associations reflects the structure of the economic event. The association *Erdgastrasse e.V.* addresses former employees of the state owned companies that were in charge of the implementation of the affiliated duties of the venture, i.e. the development of the general infrastructure along the pipeline. The association *Erdgastrasse-LT e.V.* addresses former employees of companies that were in charge of the construction of the pipeline as such. After some disagreements concerning the financial organization of reunions, an *Erdgastrassen-Interessengemeinschaft* (pipeline interest group) was launched. In 1998 the original association organised a first reunion. Today, each association hosts its own get-together, with around 300 people participating. Despite some discrepancies that cannot be explained in de-

tail here, all three initiatives keep a remarkably high degree of mutual acceptance and cooperation. Biannual reunions are coordinated in such a way that no competitive situation is created. Representatives of the associations invite each other to events, web pages are linked to each other and visitors of the reunions are partly overlapping. Urgent problems that equally affect the organizations, e.g. keeping reunions alive against the background of financial shortages, are jointly negotiated. Hence, a vivid culture of companionship and remembrance has developed among former pipeline workers. It is kept alive by *Trassenvereine* (associations and interest groups) whose members organize reunions, maintain web pages, provide an online networking forum (*Kontaktbörse*), a discussion forum (*Trassenforum*), and run a small museum. A few pipeline workers have published memoirs, and the historical event is mentioned on a great deal of web pages and personal Internet blogs.

Since these days former pipeline workers are spread all over Germany and in some cases have even emigrated to other European countries (e.g. Denmark, Switzerland, Ukraine, Norway) or overseas (e.g. Canada and California), the community vastly uses means of electronic communication to stay in touch. What in 1998 started with the attempt to reunite former colleagues has developed into an organized, yet pell-mell cluster of face-to-face and virtual encounters. This pattern of interactions on the one hand fostered the formation of the community and on the other hand has been the result of community building processes. In what follows the term ›communicative infrastructure‹ will be applied to refer to the dialectic correlation between the process of community building and patterns of interaction. The appropriation of this communicative infrastructure by network members has been contingent on: their place of residence; degree of shared intimacy; degree of activity and social position within the community; access, ability and preferences in using communication tools; former occupation and resulting contemporary alliances; communicative purposes and goals; timeframe of employment with the pipeline project; and persistence of interpersonal contacts since the end of their employment.

Place of residence

To begin with, the opportunities to meet face-to-face are of course contingent on the place of residence. What sounds like a platitude, actually is a critical aspect of the development of the communicative infrastructure bearing in mind the massive move of qualified East German workforce to the West as a result of an enormously fast structural change with very high unemployment (Paqué 2009). While some former pipeline builders have not left their towns or regions of origin and still meet up with old colleagues face-to-face, others have moved to the western federal states. Geographical proximity along with a degree of intimacy thus decides about forms and intensity of social encounters among former pipeline workers.

Degree of intimacy

Apart from the place of residence, personal relationships among former pipeline workers range from close friends to acquaintances, to people who maintain no direct interpersonal contact. While some of them visit each other at home, use the telephone to talk to each other on a regular basis or go on holidays together, others only meet every two years when the reunions take place or their encounters are realised on a topic-related basis, e.g. on the online forum, where they participate in discussions. Last but not least, the community network is composed of a variety of circles of friends whose associates are not all acquainted to each other.

Degree of activity and social position within the community

The network of former pipeline workers knows persons of higher or lower profiles. Community members who actively engage in the organization of events or administration of web pages enjoy a high extent of interpersonal contact. They maintain a lot of friendships with former colleagues and due to their key position frequently make new acquaintances. Their engagement in establishing new contacts has been an indispensable requirement to reach potential adherents. Additionally, these actors are compelled to make use of a variety of communicative means for organizational purposes. Ahead of reunions they send out electronic mails and letters, make phone calls and contact the media such as regional newspapers, TV and radio stations.

Access, ability and preferences in using communication tools

From the beginning, the community has made extensive use of the Internet that afforded the opportunity to shape a non-local social space. As early as 1999 a member who was a computer scientist by training installed the first online forum. Careful examination on that networking forum (*Kontaktbörse*) provides important insights into the communicative behaviour of former pipeline builders. Over the past decade it grew constantly, until in 2009 there was a peak of 159 postings. People who make use of the forum introduce their concerns, very often search requests for former colleagues, and specify the preferred way of contacting by means of explicit or implicit imperatives, for instance »call me«, »best via mail« etc. Still, a notable number of people add mobile or home phone numbers. Also very common is public feedback about whom and how they are still or again in contact with. Analysing these postings by paying attention to what Harvey Sacks called membership categorization devices, e.g. »met [name] on the street«, »attended [name's] wedding« etc. provides information about contexts of encounters (Goffman 1983: 19) between community members. Furthermore, users often mention why and how they have found the homepage, for instance by stating that they have just got access to the Internet or how they have heard of the homepage. Also remarkable is what is called here »on-behalf-postings«, for instance by family members, in most cases children of former pipeline workers searching for colleagues of a parent. Likewise, the Webmaster himself publishes contact requests and takes over the responsibility of delivering contact details. Such performative diversities in accessing the community allow for conclusions about varying forms of interaction because of either divergent access to the Internet, varying abilities to use electronic communication devices or simply different preferences and habits of personal communication.

Former occupation and resulting contemporary alliances

The two main associations split up in accordance with the organizational structure of the pipeline project. They consequently address slightly different pools of people. However, both associations are closely linked to each other, not least because several pipeline builders socialize in both circles.

What is more, the networking forum and electronic guest books on the homepages of the associations signify clear interpersonal alliances. Most community members are not interested in contacts with any former pipeline workers, rather they build upon bonds from the past. Contact requests are narrowed and interactions are channelled by deployment of »social coordinates« that have functioned as a »navigator aid« in the network building process. Such criteria as having been applied to the establishment of relationships include: name, in most cases also nickname by which people were known during their employment, name of brigade, employer, years of employment, town of residence and occupation. Thus they search for and maintain relationships with colleagues they directly worked with, friends they lived or shared facilities with, or spent their spare time with. Likewise, space acquisition at reunions confirms these groupings. Participating observation at reunions revealed that indeed »space speaks«, as anthropologist Edward T. Hall put it (1959: 158). On the camping grounds where the meetings take place tents and camper-vans are grouped together. Friends and former colleagues of work units share their own little anecdotes or tragic memories of industrial accidents. Puzzles of the GDR past, rituals and jokes are preferably recalled, discussed, enjoyed and celebrated among trusted and privy *Trassenkumpel* (pipeline lads). However, not all contacts are coordinated in the same way. Actually, quite often new friends are made at reunions. Therefore, social strategies are constantly rectified. Initial framings that arise from earlier interactive experiences furnish expectations and thus legitimate, coordinate and facilitate social interaction. Yet, it is in the very situation of interaction that contexts are shaped and negotiated. These situated contexts yield shifts of initial interpretive frames, which again affect future events and encounters (Gumperz 1988: 167). Therefore, studies on collective action frames take the »dialectic between frames and events« as a starting point of interpretation (Benford & Snow 2000: 627). What is more, communicative cooperation among former pipeline workers is highly contingent on interactive purposes and goals, and so are the scope and means of communication.

Communicative purposes and goals

In interviews or informal conversations between researcher and former pipeline workers, interactive experiences with other community members are often addressed by specifying communicative occasions and means that have been in use. Thus indexical expressions such as »in the guestbook«, »on skype«, »online«, »in the forum«, »at the Trassentreffen« (reunion) reflect the variety of communicative settings and conventions that have become constitutive of the community's everyday life. A circle of five closer friends, for example, reported about frequent chats on Skype after one of them had a major stroke. A lot of these accounts illustrate that the expansion and maintenance of the community network has gone beyond the scope of mere recalls to the past or finding old friends. Users of the online forums indicate or overtly express their needs and expectations towards the community. In a lot of cases it is »practical« purposes, goals or problems that need to be accomplished or solved. In such cases, unlike those described above, purposes have priority over »target group«. Practical purposes to call on the community have been: exchange of opinions about reports on the GDR's pipeline project in the mass media, foundation of an aid programme for Russian orphanages in the regions of former construction sites,¹⁰ job-related topics, such as recognition of pension rights or exchanges of experiences with professional retraining and unemployment or announcements of job vacancies in Germany and the neighbouring countries. Further concerns have been the exchange of experiences with financial fraud, discussions about political issues concerning East European and East German transformation processes, planning holiday trips to Russia or Ukraine, lets of holiday apartments abroad, announcements of events organized by other clubs or associations former pipeline builders are involved in, and the foundation of a lottery betting pool, to give only a random selection. Hence, the community must not be regarded as a mere milieu to cherish nostalgic sentiments. Rather it is a multifaceted network that

10 Under the heading *Alte Freundschaft rostet nicht* (Old friendship never dies) the officially registered initiative *Tscheburaschka e.V.* was founded in 2004.

provides support contingent on and responding to prevailing purposes and needs of its members.

Timeframe of employment with the pipeline project

Although the activities of the associations explicitly address former pipeline workers, irrespectively of time frame or length of employment it does not go without notice that people who worked with the COMECON project in the late 1980s have acted as the »trendsetters« of community building and introducing new activities. They are considerably more active in online forums and constitute the main clientele at reunions. Out of a core group of 293 people that have been of interest for the study,¹¹ 265 people worked with the venture in the second construction phase or, in very few cases, both in the 1970s and the 1982-1993 period. The study came across as few as 28 people who worked (only) with the first construction phase. Still more striking is the fact that out of the group of 265 people of the second construction phase another 155 people ended their employment in 1989 or later. The end of their employment with the pipeline venture coincided with the collapse of communism. They came back to East Germany when societal transformations were imminent or had started. The majority of the founding members of the associations and the aforementioned aid programme for the support of child care institutions ended their employment in 1989 or later. These people had already established close contacts with each other during their occupation with the venture. Thus it can be suggested that the timeframe of employment has had an impact on the involvement with the community, to the effect that persisting social contacts after return from the Soviet Union were the springboard for the formation of the network. This group of people defined the framing of the associations and initiatives that have increasingly blossomed since the end of the 1990s. As stated earlier, the network is not a mere community of shared memory; rather it

11 Because they either replied to a posting of the researcher in one of the online forums respectively guest books requesting for a narrative interview about their employment with the pipeline venture or/and their involvement with the associations or because of their activities within the community network since its onset.

provides an environment for political debate and social support. The social benefit of the community has to be considered in the context of the reforms and uncertainties during the transformation process. The majority of community members entered (East) Germany's transition process as pipeline builders who had just come back from the Soviet Union and evidently continued to rely on their social ties with former colleagues during the transformation process. Network analysts have shown by the example of Hungary that network building has already been an indispensable social practice during socialism to counterbalance widespread socio-economic malfunctions and a rigid political system (Wellman & Sik 1999).¹² After the collapse of socialism, networks helped to cope with the challenges people faced, for instance unemployment, loss of economic prosperity or in the case of former pipeline builders also the heartfelt sense of loss of professional prestige.¹³ Indeed, post socialist culture favours the development of networks, since people reactivate practices that were cultivated during socialism. Practices of network building of former pipeline workers have been informed by their exceptional biographical experience. They relied on extant relationships to cope with typical problems of East German society since their return from the Soviet Union.

12 Against the background of shortages in material and consumer goods and a rigid political system that came along with inflexible administrative structures, network capital was an indispensable social resource in pursuit of individual social and economic interests in virtually all spheres of activity (work place, career management, family planning etc.). Life accounts of former pipeline builders, too, address strategies that were adopted in the attempt of propitiating the expectations of bilateral treaties between the GDR and the Soviet Union with conflicting economic and material availabilities. Furthermore, political defaults regarding regulation and control of movement within the Soviet Union and of social contacts with locals were circumvented through situated negotiations with respective supervisors.

13 The author of this paper has discussed the aspect of a heartfelt sense of loss of recognition in a recently published article about the pipeline community (Prochnow 2010).

Persistence of interpersonal contact since the end of employment

Maggi, a founding member of the association that was registered in 1998 participated in both construction phases. Her contract eventually expired in 1992. Since then she has maintained contact with former colleagues. In an interview in summer 2008 she describes the onset of institutionalized community building as follows:

Maggi: [...] ten years ago we founded the association, actually this association, we all worked on the second Trasse, on the Erdgas-trasse, right. And Hanni, who presides over the association, she worked with passports and visa, her husband worked with us [...]. And [...] we already got along well there and we stayed in touch. I stayed the longest outside and then we said: »man, it can't be true that it's all over!« Let's just, or that each working unit organizes a reunion for itself, let's just try to gather something nationwide.¹⁴

[...]

Maggi: We wrote [letters], everyone collected contact details, collected contact details and when it took place, man! And we send out [announcements] and also asked for spreading the word and so on. Who knows other people, they can all be invited. We set any date, we calculated what we might need more or less, back then it was still dirt cheap.¹⁵

14 Maggi: [...] vor zehn Jahren haben wir den Verein gegründet, eigentlich dieser Verein, wir waren alle an der zweiten Trasse, an der Erdgasstrasse, ne. Und die Hanni, die dem Verein bei uns vorsteht, die war bei uns Pass-Visa, ihr Mann der war bei uns [...]. Und [...] wir haben uns dort schon gut verstanden und wir sind in Kontakt geblieben. Ich war dann am längsten mit draußen und dann haben wir gesagt »man das kann doch nicht sein, dass das alles gewesen ist!« Lass uns doch einfach mal, oder dass jedes Gewerk sich einfach mal ein Treffen organisiert, lass uns doch einfach mal probieren, ob wir nicht mal überdimensional was zusammenkriegen.

15 Maggi: Wir haben angeschrieben, jeder hat Adressen gesammelt, Adressen gesammelt und als, es war Wahnsinn! Und /äh/ haben wir rausgeschickt und haben eben drum auch gebeten Mund-

- [...]
- Maggi: Well, then we had our first reunion with a peak of, I think, 1,400 people!
- Interviewer: God, that is really a lot.
- Maggi: Including Drushba-Trasse. [...] I did some research and everything, well meanwhile they are ... I'm already one of the youngest. And a lot of [them] are going like ›/ehm/ I haven't found this one and that not, I say, well maybe you should have taken a paper, should have written, and ›if I would have known that none of my people are coming‹ or like that, well they give that line, too, what can I ...¹⁶

The founding of associations was an act of bringing together different groups of people and several informal networks that had existed permanently since the end of the pipeline project. The example of Maggi shows that the initiators of the first reunion had not been home for more than six years or so. The organization cost them nothing more than sending out letters or doing phone calls and apart from that relying on word-of-mouth advertising. By contrast, reaching pipeline builders from the 1970s involved »research« and seizing more initiative. First generation pipeline builders obviously had no active network at their dis-

propaganda weiterzumachen und und und. Wer noch Leute kennt, kann er einladen. Hast du irgendwo Termine hingesezt, haben wir ungefähr kalkuliert, was wir da vielleicht brauchten, da war das ja noch spuckebillig. [...]

- 16 Maggi: Ja, und da hatten wir das erste Treffen, [...] da hatten wir, glaube ich, Spitze mit 1.400 Leuten!
- I: Gott, das ist ja echt viel.
- Maggi: Mit Drushba-Trasse. [...] Ich noch rumrecherchiert und alles Mögliche, na die sind ja nun mittlerweile ... ich bin ja auch schon ziemlich eine der Jüngsten mit. [...] Und viele der Art kommen natürlich auch, ›/äh/wir haben den nicht gefunden und das nicht, ich sag: naja, hättste vielleicht mal das Blatt genommen, hättste mal hingeschrieben und ›hätt ich das gewusst, dass keiner von meinen Leuten da ist‹ oder so, naja solche Sprüche kommen auch, was soll ich dazu ...

posal that enabled them to activate word-of-mouth advertising. In the end a few of them came to the reunion, but according to Maggi those taking part were not satisfied with what or better who they found. Maggi comments on the attitude of first generation pipeline builders by using what American anthropologist Claudia Mitchell-Kernan called marking, respectively mocking in terms of direct speech. By using first person singular (or plural) and voice manipulation »the marker attempts to report not only what was said but the way it was said, in order to offer implicit comment on the speaker's background, personality, or intent« (Mitchell-Kernan 1972: 176). This message form reveals characterizations and judgements on those imitated and signifies Maggi's generalised estimation of the social relations between first and second generation pipeline builders. In her point of view, first generation pipeline builders have hardly anything to contribute to the community. It can be assumed that they have been marginalised in the community building process right from the beginning, due to a lack of social ties that they probably had lost in the period of time after the end of their employment at the end of the 1970s.

Performances of first generation pipeline builders

Network building strategies and a correlating expansion of the communicative infrastructure constitute an essential distinctive social practice that members of the community of former pipeline builders have adopted throughout the transformation process. They have profoundly benefited from social ties that already had been forged during their employment with the economic venture. After all, mastery of computer-mediated communication has become a crucial requirement for participation in everyday issues of the non-local community. It is on the various electronic forums and platforms where communicative memory (cf. Welzer 2002) is performed, where reunions and face-to-face meetings are announced, where people express all kinds of requests, articulate ideas for future activities and coordinate them. The Internet also connects pipeline builders that maintain looser social relations and in a lot of cases presents the onset for mutual activity and support.

Regarding the competences that a member needs to display in order to facilitate participation in the community's activities, it might be assumed that aspects of marginalization and exclusion of first generation workers are grounded in age difference. Studies on the appropriation of new communication media have called attention to a »digital divide« that, among other things, is grounded in age differences, i.e. older people have either less access or less preferences in computer-mediated communication (Haythornthwaite & Wellmann 2002). A quantitative study on *The digital divide in Germany* from 2002 identified two factors that might also explain the perpetuated generational cleavage in the community of former pipeline workers: firstly, use of the personal computer and the Internet hitherto has been more prevalent in West Germany than in East Germany. Secondly, the Internet has bypassed age groups of sixty years and older (Wagner et al. 2002). A qualitative inquiry on generational differences in media use in Germany also found that older generations are less involved in the electronically mediated environment. Following Mannheim, the authors argue that fundamental educational competences, and thus computer skills, are acquired during adolescence or adult onset. Therefore, computer use increasingly deprives of the »conjunctive space of experiences«¹⁷ of those generations who did not grow up in the computer age (Bohnsack & Schäffer 2002). But how tenable is an argument that grounds the explanation of a generational divide in the pipeline builder's network in a universal graduation of cohorts rather than following the group specific logic of periodization? It was argued earlier on that the date of expiration of the contract and return to Germany had an impact on the involvement with the community. Those who came back in 1989 or later appeared as the trendsetters of community building. Acknowledging this, a cohort-based definition of generations of pipeline workers must be avoided. Rather, generation has to be understood by

17 Ralf Bohnsack describes generation as a »conjunctive space of experiences«, conceiving of »conjunction« as corresponding to distinction in the sense of mostly unquestioned practices that mark social belonging (Wolf & Burkart 2002: 16; Bohnsack & Schäffer 2002: 249).

strict reference to the period of the GDR's pipeline venture and when people got involved with it and when their contract expired.

Indeed, when the first online forum was installed in 1999, a lot of second generation pipeline builders were in their early or mid thirties and thus already belonged to the »technology generation« (Bohnsack & Schäffer 2002: 258) or were at least closer to it. The founding members of the associations, who – to crown it all – had a computer scientist among them, soon introduced communicative conventions that probably outdistanced older age groups, born in the 1950s or even earlier, from the network building process. A married couple, today in their mid and late fifties that met when both were working with the pipeline project in the 1970s reflect about their standing in the community as follows:

Peter: [...] It's just a shame, today I'd like to meet some of them again, but we have drifted apart, it is now 30 years ago.

Ricarda: Yeah, today one has different opportunities. Today there is the Internet and all these things, but that didn't exist back then.

Peter: [addresses the interviewer] Well, like I said, I contacted you because of your ad in the Internet.

Ricarda: [addresses Peter] Well look, when we went to the Trasse, we were both relatively young. There were a lot of people that already had family. Well, they were in their late twenties and in some cases even older. Who knows how old they are by now.¹⁸

18 Peter: [...] Ist bloß schade, ich würde gerne den einen oder anderen heute mal wieder sehen wollen, aber man hat sich auseinander gelebt, das sind dreißig Jahre her.

Ricarda: Ja, heute hat man ganz andere Mittel. Heute gibt's das Internet und das alles mögliche, aber war ja damals nicht so.

Peter: Na wie gesagt, ich hab mich ja auf Ihre Annonce gemeldet im Internet.

Ricarda: Na guck mal, als wir zur Trasse gegangen sind, wir waren noch beide relativ jung, da waren viele, die hatten schon Familie gehabt. Also die waren schon Ende Zwanzig und teilweise noch älter. Wer weiß, wie alt, die jetzt sind.

- Peter: Maybe they don't have access to the Internet and are already retired and [??].
- Ricarda: Yeah, Yeah, who knows how old they are by now. I was only 19 when I went to the Trasse, had just finished my apprenticeship.
[...]
- Interviewer: /Mhm/ So you actually tried to find former colleagues?
- Ricarda: Yeah, Yeah.
- Peter: We tried that and still do. I also carry on going on that Webpage and check out who signed in and stuff.
- Interviewer: The webpages of the associations?
- Peter: Yeah, Drushba-Trasse.de or, well, the ...
- Ricarda: But we are especially interested in our time, a lot there is after our time.¹⁹

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- 19 Peter: Die haben vielleicht kein Internet und sind auch schon im Rentenalter und [??].
- Ricarda: Ja, ja, wer weiß wie alt die jetzt sind. Ich war ja man gerade 19, als ich zur Trasse gegangen bin. Hatte gerade ausgelernt.
[...]
- I: /Mhm/ Also haben sie versucht alte Kollegen wiederzufinden?
- Ricarda: Ja, Ja.
- Peter: Das haben wir versucht und versuchen wir weiter immer noch. Ich bin auch immer wieder auf der Internetseite und guck nach, wer sich da eingetragen hat und so.
- I: Auf der Internetseite von den Trassenvereinen?
- Peter: Ja, Drushba-Trasse.de oder hier diese ...
- Ricarda: Aber uns interessiert speziell unsere Zeit [...] sehr viel ist ja jetzt nach unserer Zeit [...]

Peter and Ricarda are aware of the societal opportunities provided by the Internet and of the communicative conditions that have established among the community. For years they have been observing the postings in the forums. In 2003 they posted a search request themselves. Their request shows the same restrictive preferences as search requests by second generation pipeline builders, i.e. they are in particular looking for people who were working with their work units or at the same construction sites. Unfortunately, none of their former colleagues reacted to the posting. When Peter explains that he and his wife have lost contact and drifted apart from former colleagues, Ricarda tosses in that »today one has different opportunities« because of the Internet. The temporal deictic expression »today« and the modal particle »one« involves a comparison between social practices of first and second generation pipeline builders. Ricarda assumes that upcoming new communication media at the time when the second construction phase expired facilitated the maintenance of social contacts. Peter and Ricarda furthermore see reasons for absent reactions to their request in a lack of Internet access among first generation workers that are either their age or even older, implying that their generation is usually less active online. In addition, they suggest that skills in the use of online communication tools are acquired and employed during working life, as is most probably the case for them, a secretary and a machine operator. They presume that former colleagues might already have withdrawn from working life, meaning that retirees presumably have no access to the Internet. What also becomes apparent from their account is that at least Ricarda does not perceive the Internet and thus computer mediated communication an inherent part of everyday life. Her and her husband's online activities are explained by urging an age-related argument, i.e. stating that they have been among the youngest during their term of employment. However, later on in the interview Peter objects and distances himself from his wife's assumption, as he stresses that it was him who found the interview request online and reacted to it. Indeed, he has turned the former children's bedroom into a home office equipped with computer, Internet access, Webcam, scanner and copy machine. Despite his familiarity with

new technologies, he failed with establishing contacts with former colleagues »from our time« even when he had the opportunity:

- Peter: [...] There was lately another posting by a daughter of a former colleague [...] who turns sixty now [...] and well she looked for companions from that time, who would know him and, well, then I also scanned some pictures of him for her, sent them to her via E-mail, but she said, she replied then, she would already know them [...]. And then this also, well [??].
- Ricarda: Well, two of my colleagues, former colleagues, also worked with the AOK, I ran into them accidentally at a staff meeting. Yeah, but meanwhile ...
- Peter: But even from my own brigade, as I said, so far there has only been my former brigadier here in Michendorf, but he isn't here anymore and so nearly all contacts /ehm/ [.] have broken down.
- Ricarda: Yeah.
- Peter: That is too bad, really.
- Ricarda: Well, meanwhile it's nearly thirty years ago, right?²⁰

20 Peter: [...] Da war letztens wieder ein Eintrag drin von einer Tochter von einem ehemaligen Arbeitskollegen, [...] der wird jetzt sechzig [...] und da hat sie auch aus der Zeit Mitstreiter gesucht, die ihn kennen und da hatte ich ihr auch mal ein paar Bilder eingescannt von ihm, habe sie ihr hingeschickt per E-mail, aber sagt sie, da schrieb sie dann zurück, die hat sie schon [...]. Da hat sich das auch ein bisschen jetzt [??].

Ricarda: Ja und zwei Kolleginnen, ehemalige Kolleginnen, die haben auch bei der AOK gearbeitet, die habe ich dann durch Zufall bei der Personalversammlung mal wieder getroffen. Ja aber mittlerweile ...

Peter: Aber selbst aus der eigenen Brigade, wie gesagt, war bisher nur mein ehemaliger Brigadier hier in Michendorf, den gibt's aber hier auch nicht mehr und somit ist da jetzt fast jeglicher Kontakt /äh/ [.] abgebrochen.

Ricarda: Ja.

In fact, a closer look at the current age composition of the second generation that constitutes the majority of the community network of former pipeline builders reveals a wide range of ages, reaching from early forties of those having worked with the venture subsequent to their completion of professional training to mid sixties of those having been appointed to leading positions on grounds of professional experience. Even though it cannot be denied that today a large part of community members are noticeably younger than workers from the 1970s term, older cohorts are not outnumbered in a way that makes a generalization of age-related arguments viable. Not least Maggi, a key actor of the foundation of the associations, is already in her mid fifties. More revealing than stressing age-differences for understanding Ricarda's and Peter's problems to integrate into the community seems the recurring deictic differentiation between two timeframes that are perceived as two separate entities by former pipeline builders. Even though Peter and Ricarda see themselves as former pipeline builders, they clearly identify with a specific time frame. The cases of first and second generation pipeline workers whose biographies at a first glance show a lot of similarities²¹ reveal that membership in the community is not inevitably associated with age. Instead, it is equally imperative how biographical events correspond to historical events. It is these interrelations that yield patterns of performance and belonging. The age of former pipeline builders has been less fundamental for the community building process than the timeframe of employment, as Ricarda confirms when noting that her employment ended already thirty years ago. The self-labelling of the associations as *Trassenvereine* (pipeline associations) can not hide the fact that social belonging to the community is determined by more facts than self-identification with a label, as clarified by Ricarda's and Peter's account:

Peter: Das ist schlecht, ja.

Ricarda: Naja, nun sind ja mittlerweile fast dreißig Jahre vergangen, ne.

21 Apart from the participation in a prestigious economic endeavour of the GDR also the experience of the events in 1989 and the restructuring of the East German society.

- Interviewer: You also said some other time²² /ehm/ these reunions, you're not that much into them. Could you again a little bit ...
- Ricarda: Well, actually yes, but /ehm/ we participated in a reunion, but there was hardly anyone from our time. And when I go to such a reunion, then I'd really like /ehm/ to meet former colleagues.
- Peter: But that was already a few years ago.
- Interviewer: /Mhm/.
- Peter: [...] And the time of the Drushba Pipeline, in fact we met two couples that were from our time, but they worked /ehm/ on different sites that we didn't know.
[...]
- Ricarda: But exactly from our sites you didn't know anyone, and that isn't fun.
- Peter: Sure you
- Ricarda: └ talked to them, too
- Peter: └ talked to them, too
- Ricarda: └ but ...
- Peter: how it has been going and what they were up to there, but it wasn't what we expected from it and, well, for that reason we aren't that much into these reunions anymore.²³

22 During a telephone conversation.

23 I: Sie hatten auch mal gesagt /äh/, das mit den Trassentreffen, das liegt Ihnen auch nicht so. Können sie das noch mal ein bisschen ...

Ricarda: Doch eigentlich ja, aber /äh/, wir haben an einem Trassentreffen teilgenommen, aber da war kaum jemand von unserer Zeit. Und wenn ich zu so einem Trassentreffen gehe, dann würde ich schon ganz gerne /äh/ mit ehemaligen Kollegen mich treffen wollen.

Peter: Das war aber vor einigen Jahren.

I: /Mhm/.

Even though pipeline builders from the first construction phase feel less attracted by the social milieu of the associations, they still benefit from certain features provided by the associations. Ellen, who was introduced at the beginning of the paper, found three friends via the network forum in 2008. Their search requests appeared in the forums years apart from each other. The first of them posted as early as 2001, in 2003 a second and third friend, one of them living in Switzerland now, left a posting. In January 2008 Ellen sent her request. Just having been introduced to the Internet by her son, she looked through postings from previous years. She immediately contacted her old friends, and the four of them arranged a meeting at the reunion that fortunately took place the same year. Ellen appreciates the possibilities that have opened up to her on account of the association's online forums and will probably carry on using it in an attempt to find further friends. However, she also states that she had no feeling of belonging when attending the reunion:

Peter: [...] Und die Drushba-Trassenzeit, wir haben zwar auch zwei Ehepaare kennengelernt, die waren aus unserer Zeit, aber die waren /äh/ auf Baustellen, die wir nicht kannten.

Ricarda: Aber direkt von unserer, unseren Baustellen kannte man keinen und das macht ja keinen Spaß.

Peter: Sicher man hat sich mit denen

Ricarda: └ auch unterhalten

Peter: └ auch unterhalten

Ricarda: └ aber ...

Peter: wie es denen so ergangen ist und was die da so getrieben haben, aber es war nicht das, was wir uns da vorgestellt haben und aus dem Grund sind wir da jetzt nicht so auf diese Trassentreffen mehr aus.

- Ellen: [...] and well, then he wrote, well what do you think, shall we go there? And I said, sure we go, we have been crazy back then, so we can do it today anyway. But we realized that we didn't fit in there. I had a feeling like that.
- Interviewer: /Mhm/ Coco, too, or not?
- Ellen: Yeah, Yeah, Yeah, I don't know. We didn't say we'll go there again in two years. We haven't said that yet, right? Cause, well I actually hope that I'll find my two girlfriends [names], these two I am actually looking for. But see, I found these ones again by chance after 5 years.
- Interviewer: L That's true.
- Ellen: Right, and I think now that the Internet is increasing, it is possible [...].²⁴

Ellen does not go into further detail if she will see her friends again or not. But what becomes clear from her account similar to Ricarda's and Peter's conclusions is that first generation pipeline builders have lost a connection to former friends many years ago. Irrespectively of how many experiences these people share, they have not been able to re-establish a social and emotional connection after almost three decades

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- 24 Ellen: Und da hatt' er eben geschrieben, ja was meinte wollen wir hin, da habe ich gesagt, ja na klar, wir waren früher verrückt, also können wir es heute noch mal machen. Aber wir haben gemerkt, dass wir da nicht hingepasst haben. Hatte ich so das Gefühl gehabt.
- I: /Mhm/ Der Coco auch, oder?
- Ellen: Ja, ja, ja ich weiß nicht. Wir haben nicht gesagt, wir fahren in zwei Jahren wieder hin. Das haben wir erstmal nicht gesagt, ne. Weil doch, ja, ich hoffe eben, dass ich noch meine beiden Freundinnen da wiederfinde, [Namen], die beiden, die suche ich eigentlich. Aber guck mal die hier habe ich auch durch Zufall nach fünf Jahren wieder gefunden.
- I: L Jaja, das stimmt.
- Ellen: Ne, und ich denke, wenn das jetzt mit dem Internet immer mehr wird, das kann sein [...].

merely on the basis of memories. What essentially distinguishes the community today is not a shared memory of the pipeline project alone. Rather the network has been largely shaped by mutual support in times of extreme social uncertainty. To ease the charges of the transformation process they relied on contemporaries who were situated in an equal position; that is to say those who had just belonged to the celebrated elite of the GDR's workforce and practically the next day came back from the Soviet Union to the reunified Germany. By contrast, first generation workers were never in such a position. Therefore, their exclusion has to be explained by looking at practices, needs and intentions of those included. A correlation of the end of pipeline employment with the turnaround (*Wende*) is surely shared only by a smaller proportion of the total of more than 15,000 former pipeline builders. However it is this minority that has represented the pillar of the community building process since the 1990s. They have acted as the »unit of agency« of former pipeline builders. A shared memory of work and life with the pipeline project is an essential part of social belonging. The establishment of social ties upon a similar biography alone, however, remains a highly fragile endeavour, since the associational power springs from companionship during the transition process.

Conclusion

This paper has given an account of the impact of generational belonging on community building processes under the conditions of East German transformations. Examining the example of former COMECON pipeline builders, the article set out to determine the reasons for a notable exclusion of 1970s workers from the contemporary community that evolved since the early 1990s. This question seemed relevant in particular with reference to the mission statement of pipeline associations that claim to act for both pipeline workers from the 1970s and the 1982-1993 construction phases.

By the case of the network of former pipeline builders it has been shown that community building has not built upon memories alone but has emerged in close response to the transition process. Social actions under

these historical circumstances had a deeper formative influence on the sociality of the group than shared memories of the socialist past. A generational perspective allowed taking into account self-images and memories of community members without disregarding the structural embeddedness of their performances.

Mannheim's theoretical distinction between generation as an actuality and generation unit, together with his focus on generation-specific performances and responses to the socio-historical world, form a generation analytical perspective readily applicable for the analysis of dynamics of community building processes. It was indispensable to redefine Mannheim's theoretical assertions in accordance with the empirical findings. The data analyzed by means of EOC and a network analytical perspective were interpreted by employing Mannheim's distinction between generation as an actuality and generation unit, respectively »pipeline builder as an actuality« and »pipeline builders as a unit of agency«. For this purpose, a cohort based understanding of generation was outpaced in favour of a comprehension that strictly follows the deictic differentiation between two timeframes with which former pipeline builders identify themselves. Thus periodization offered an important key for understanding aspects of integration and marginalization in the community building process. However, generation has to be understood in strict reference to the period of the GDR's pipeline venture, when people got involved with it and when their contracts finally expired. It has been crucial for the formation of the community how single biographical events correspond to each other in the context of the socio-historical world. The group of people who came back to Germany in 1989 or later appeared as trendsetters respectively unit of agency in the community building process. Those pipeline workers who ended their employment when the transformation process started established an elaborated system of exchange, addressing a variety of topics and implementing group-specific social performances. By doing so, they have drawn on immediately available practices and resources: firstly, an existing social network of former colleagues, secondly the skills necessary for establishing and maintaining networks (a social practice that had been acquired during socialism), and

thirdly the appropriation of the increasing technological means of communication. The interplay of these three forces coalesced into a speech community and network of mutual support. Compared to those who are involved in the network, first generation pipeline builders (1970s) lack the concurrence of the expiration of their employment with the historical events of 1989 and the early 1990s and with it a shared and persistent common social practice after their return from the Soviet Union. It becomes clear from the case of former pipeline builders that the establishment of social ties merely upon shared biographical memories remains a highly fragile endeavour in the absence of a common ›social function‹ of the group in the present. Therefore, dynamics of post socialist societies can only be fully comprehended when also looking at social practices beyond the ›narrated world‹.

Transcription conventions

All names and nicknames are pseudonyms.

[...] Omission of talk in order to shorten the passage, cut out by the author in case of longer speech acts.

man Stressed speech.

/ehm//mhm/ Hesitation vowels and interjections.

well the ... Indication of unfinished sentences.

[.] Short pause.

[???] Untranscribable speech.

[addresses X] Addressee of speech indicated in square brackets.

L That's true Simultaneous speech.

›haven't found
this one‹ imitation of direct speech

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