

COST Action IS1203: In Search for Transcultural Memory in Europe (ISTME). Short Report of the activities in the years 2012-2016

The aim of ISTME was to contribute to consolidating, developing and setting new agendas for the creative but fragmented field of interdisciplinary Memory Studies in Europe. Taking as its point of departure new theoretical insights within the field, the action made efforts to reorient Memory Studies, marked as it was by methodological nationalism thus focusing on national memories, towards the study of transnational and transcultural memories. The action explored possible alternatives to national models of memory in an increasingly globalised, networked and mediated world and made efforts to develop methodological and conceptual tools for the study of the transcultural dynamics of memory. The action focused on the questions of transculturality, agency as well as mediation and reception. The researchers participating in the action thus conducted a large number of studies about how memories are transmitted and received across borders in Europe, i.e. how memories of one and the same event are mediated and remediated not only in different media but also in different linguistic, cultural and political environments. Since memories are connected to identities and inform social action we asked: What happens when such a transfer takes place? Can it contribute to changes of identities or to the creation of new ones? Can it contribute to more open, including identities and broaden the community, extend the circle of those with whom we identify? Can transcultural memory work be helpful for accommodating divisive memories in Europe, thus promoting solidarity and integration?

The action focused especially on the remediation and reception of the so called difficult memories such as the Holocaust and Nazism, Communist crimes, memories of dictatorships (i.e. in Spain or Greece), genocide and wars. In this way, we wanted to contribute to a better understanding of how dark and disputed memories are transmitted across cultural borders and what effect they have on the societies where they circulate and are used for different purposes. Moreover, besides studying the transnational and transcultural processes of remediation and reception we paid attention to the question of agency. i.e. the role of memory actors and their politics of memory. We also searched for reconciliatory ways to handle existing conflicts between memory cultures in Europe, which can be seen as a utopian endeavor. However, the role of humanities, social sciences and arts in society is not only to help people to understand what is going on in our world but also to help them imagine a better future and urge them to try to change the world in this direction.

The action was constructed around three working groups of which the first focused on political actors, the second on mediation and the third on migration. In this way we were able to pay special attention to the role played by politics, media and migration flows in crossing and renegotiating cultural and national borders and in evoking “imagined memory communities” beyond that of one’s own national or ethnic group.

ISTME started at the end of October 2012 and lasted for four years ending in October 2016.

The 1st Management Committee (MC) meeting in Brussels in October 2012 gathered 30 founding members from 22 COST member countries in Europe. Thereafter the action was growing constantly and in its last year the Management Committee consisted of 57 researchers from 36 countries, including 33 COST member countries, 2 Near Neighbourhood Countries (Ukraine and Georgia) and 1 International Partner Country (New Zealand). Apart from the 57 MC-members the action involved 44 researchers who acted as MC Substitutes. The action has also been open to other researchers that participated as specially invited guests in the working group meetings or plenary conferences and PhD

schools of the action, as well as were the recipients of grants for shorter research visits, the STSMs (Short Term Scientific Missions).

ISTME was able to include many researchers from countries with lesser research resources and therefore targeted by the COST policy of inclusiveness. Of 36 countries involved 16 belonged to the category of ITC (Inclusiveness Target Countries), and 24 out of 57 MC Members and 18 out of 44 MC Substitutes came from these countries.

Our action was also successful in targeting gender equality with upholding a good balance between female and male participants. Among MC members there were 25 male and 31 female researchers while among the MC Substitutes 19 were male and 25 female.

ISTME managed to involve many early stage researchers in its activities. Besides being represented in the MC and acting as substitutes they have been given priority in the distribution for grants as visiting scholars (STSM). The action granted 30 STSMs. Grantees went to a large variety of countries (e.g. Macedonia, Romania, Poland, Georgia, Sweden, Germany, and France).

ISTME targeted early stage researchers in other ways as well. With the aim to educate a new generation of scholars in Memory Studies we assigned a significant part of our resources to organise training schools for PhD candidates and postdocs. Four such training schools were conducted, one in each year of the action, in Copenhagen 2013, Budapest 2014, Kaunas 2015 and in Dublin 2016. All together the PhD schools gathered 57 funded participants plus a number of other young scholars coming with their own funding or being young researchers from the local organizing university.

The ISTME-action organised a large number of conferences and WG-meetings/workshops. These were as follows:

- 1) The plenary, kick off-conference “In Search of Transcultural Memory in Europe”, Copenhagen, May 2013
- 2) A Work Group meeting for all WGs in Krakow, September 2013
- 3) The plenary conference “Transculturality and Memory”, Skopje, April 2014
- 4) “The Memories of Communism in Europe: actors, norms, institutions”, WG1 meeting, Paris, 2014
- 5) “Digital memories”, WG2 Meeting, Budapest, September 2014
- 6) “Memory on the Move. Theory and Methodology of Memory and Migration”, WG3 Meeting, Budapest, September 2014
- 7) The plenary conference “Agency and Transcultural memory”, Kaunas, March 2015
- 8) “EU Politics of Memory”, WG1 Meeting, Florence, June 2015
- 9) “The audiovisual production of transcultural memory in Europe”, WG2 Meeting, Dubrovnik, September 2015
- 10) “Migrants’ Memories and Digital Media”, WG3 Meeting, Dubrovnik, September 2015
- 11) The plenary conference “Transcultural Memory and Reception”, Sofia, April 2016
- 12) The final Plenary conference “Locating and Dislocating Memory”, Dublin, September 2016

As a result of networking within the action a number of researchers involved cooperated to apply for research funding to different, both national and international, funding bodies. At least 17 applications of this kind were submitted and 10 of them were successful - 4 received funding from EU, 1 from

another international organization and 5 were financed nationally. Examples of such successful applications are:

- 1) Marie-Curie project (Stijn Vervaet) on “Post-Yugoslav Literature and Art as Curators of the Socialist Past” at Utrecht University in collaboration with Prof. Ann Rigney, who hosted the project 2015.
- 2) Marie-Curie project (Marek Kucia) on “The Europeanisation of the Holocaust Memory in Eastern Europe” at Lund University in collaboration with Prof. Barbara Törnquist-Plewa who hosted the project 2014.
- 3) “Europeanisation of Cultural Heritage in Poland and Sweden”- a project financed by the Polish Science Foundation, with Swedish and Polish members of ISTME as partners – 2015-2017.

Furthermore, ISTME gave rise to new Memory Studies networks initiated by the participating scholars. These networks were:

- 1) The network “Mobile and mobilising memories: the centenary and its effects on First World War memory in Europe”. Project Leaders: Silke Arnold-de Simine (Birkbeck, London) and Tea Sindbaek Andersen (University of Copenhagen)
- 2) The Iceland-Ireland Memory Studies Network. Project leaders: Sigrun Alba Sigurdardottir (University of Iceland) and Gerardine Meaney (University College Dublin)
- 3) RCAC Zagreb, Croatia (regional network for contemporary arts and culture, new media/Macedonian Center - International Theater Institute Network). Project leader: Ivanka Apostolova (EURM European University, Skopje)
- 4) The Research Network on Transnational Memory and Identity, founded 2015 by CES (Council for European Studies). Project leaders Aline Sierp (Maastricht University) and Jenny Wüstenberg (Freie Universität, Berlin)

It should be added that the leaders of the last mentioned of these networks, Aline Sierp and Jenny Wüstenberg, in 2016 when ISTME came to its ending took the initiative to create the international organization Memory Studies Association, as an arena for the future meetings of memory scholars from different networks. The inaugurating conference took place in Amsterdam, 3-5 December 2016.

The ISTME-action resulted in many publications. The researchers were principally free to publish in the publications they found most suitable for their scientific output. However, they were also offered the opportunity to disseminate their research results via publications sponsored from the actions’ funds. Action members thus together published three collected volumes and three thematic issues of the scientific journals. Each Working Group produced a special issue of an academic journal:

WG1 Cecile Jouhanneau and Pascal Bonnard (eds): *The Memory of Communism: Actors, norms, institutions*. Special issue of *European Politics and Society*.

WG2 John Sundholm and Barbara Misztal (eds): *Memory on the Move: Theory and Methodology of Memory and Migration*. Special issue of *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture*, Volume 7 Number 1 2016.

WG3 Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (eds): *Audiovisual Memory and the (Re-)Making of Europe*. Special issue of the online, open access, and peer reviewed journal *Image and Narrative*, 2017.

Collected volumes

Sindbaek-Andersen T. and Törnquist-Plewa B. (eds) “Disputed Memory. Emotions and Memory politics in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe”, de Gruyter: Berlin/Boston 2016.

Törnquist-Plewa, B, La Rosa M and Bernsand N (eds): “In Search for Transcultural Memory in Europe”, CFE: conference series, Lund University, 2017

Sindbaek-Andersen T. and Törnquist-Plewa B. (eds): The twentieth century in European memory - transcultural mediation and reception, Brill 2017 (forthcoming).

ISTME also had the ambition to disseminate its research results outside academia. Thus, many action participants wrote articles on memory issues in newspapers and cultural magazines. They further gave interviews on radio and TV, cooperated with theater groups and museum curators, and were involved in educational activities (in the form of short summer courses) targeting media professionals and teachers. One participant even prepared a report for the United Nations on questions of memory and transitional justice in Serbia.

In conclusion, after our years of activities we may state that our COST Action In Search for Transcultural Memory in Europe fulfilled its main goal - to contribute to bringing further the development of Memory Studies. The action has enhanced the understanding of how transcultural memory works and has extended empirical knowledge of the circulation of memory narratives and practices across national and cultural borders in Europe. It added to the education of a new generation of memory scholars, and hopefully it also contributed to disseminate among broader layers of society knowledge about how memories of the past are used and misused.

Finally, we want to use this report to express our gratitude to COST for the grant without which most of the achievements mentioned above would not have been possible. A special word of thanks goes to the action’s Science Officer Dr Luule Mizera and administrative officer Rose Cruz Santos for their administrative support during these four years.

We would also like to thank those participants in the action who played the most active roles: first and foremost, Tea Sindbaek Andersen, vice chair of ISTME, and Working Group leaders (in alphabetical order) Astrid Erll, Carlos Closa, Zdzislaw Mach, Georg Mink, Barbara Misztal, Ann Rigney and John Sundholm.

We are also grateful to those MC-members who took upon themselves specific tasks. Tea Sindbaek Andersen, Mitja Velikonja and Steffi Hobuss worked in the committee evaluating applications for STSM grants; Andrea Petö was responsible for monitoring gender equality questions and Galina Goncharova for monitoring the involvement of early stage researchers and the involvement of the countries targeted by COST Inclusiveness Policy.

A word of thanks should also be directed to all local organisers of the conferences and workshops in Copenhagen, Krakow, Skopje, Budapest, Paris, Kaunas, Florence, Dubrovnik, Sofia and Dublin. Without your work and enthusiasm there would not have been an active, well-functioning COST-action.

Last but not least we thank the administrative coordinators of ISTME, Niklas Bernsand and Marco la Rosa, at the office of the grant holder, Centre for European Studies at Lund University. Your efficient work deserves praise.

Barbara Törnquist-Plewa

Chair of ISTME, COST-action IS1203

Lund, 11 January 2017