Chapter 6

Communication and Compromise: The Prerequisites for Cultural Participation

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Throughout the forty-year history of the GDR, the SED aimed to fill people's free time with ideologically sound and intellectually stimulating cultural activities. First, in mass organisations such as the *Kulturbund* and in factories, GDR citizens were encouraged to apply themselves to the pursuit of a particular artistic or cultural endeavour by joining a cultural circle. The party leadership pledged to provide such circles for any officially sanctioned artistic activity or hobby, which meant that, theoretically, no individual had to pursue a cultural interest outside the state-organised cultural network. Secondly, state institutions, like cultural houses, and mass organisations, such as the FDGB, organised events and activities in order to capture those people in their free time who were not members of cultural circles. Through these two strategies, the SED leadership hoped to guide and control people's free time, and hoped to further the process of turning East Germans into 'socialist personalities', who were morally upright, intellectually stimulated, and, above all, instilled with socialist values. The SED leadership wanted to attract people away from the lures of Western 'lowbrow' mass entertainment by providing only 'decent' and 'qualitative' leisure time activities.[1]

The nature of state-organised cultural activity developed quite differently to how the party leadership had imagined it, however. People who became involved in cultural activity usually sought to satisfy personal interests, and they

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1. Stiftung Parteien und Massenorganisationen, Bundesarchiv (SAPMO BArch) DY 30/IV 2/1.01/407, *Kulturkonferenz 23–24. Oktober 1957, Referat von Alexander Abusch*, pp. 73–75.

had their own ideas about what shape they wanted their cultural activity to take. Already in the early years of the dictatorship, an independent spirit manifested itself among culturally active people, which remained a prominent aspect of cultural life for the remainder of the GDR. Many cultural functionaries recognised this fact, and rather than stringently enforcing the party-political line, they adapted the organisation of cultural activities to suit the interests and needs of the participants. This state of affairs was not, however, a threat to the SED's claim to power. On the contrary, it served to stabilise the state-organised cultural structures, because it secured the participation of many interested individuals who felt that the organised cultural structures represented their interests, and who consequently identified with state-organised cultural life to a degree.

In analysing these developments in cultural life, the concept of 'normalisation' provides a highly useful tool, particularly for evaluating the GDR's middle period, namely the 1960s and 1970s. During these years, many areas of life and rule in the GDR experienced a high degree of stability, routinisation, and predictability. Moreover, during these years, the majority of the population showed that they had internalised the 'rules of the game': they had learned how to construct their lives according to their own liking without engaging in non-conformist behaviour. They were able to utilise limited forms of agency, for example, the interaction with state organs, in order to control and steer developments in a desired direction. This becomes particularly apparent in the analysis of cultural life. As the following analysis will show, people were not powerless subjects of the SED. Through a mixture of complex behaviour patterns, which included the targeted dialogue with local, intermediate, and central functionaries, they ensured that the state-organised cultural facilities represented their cultural interests and desires.

Straddling the Line between Ideology and Reality: Cultural Functionaries

In historical analyses, the GDR is often divided into 'state' and 'society'—two entities that are described as existing in separation of, or even in juxtaposition to, one another. This dichotomy is evident, for example, in totalitarian theory, which argues that all power emanated from the party-controlled state organs and that the populace could only accept or resist party control.[2]

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2. For an overview of the totalitarian theory and its flaws, see Konrad Jarausch, 'Care and Coercion: the GDR as Welfare Dictatorship', in Konrad Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), pp. 52–54; see also Mary Fulbrook, *The Two Germanies 1945–1990: Problems of Interpretation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 1–10.

This dichotomous characterisation of the GDR is not only apparent in the totalitarian model, however: it is also evident in certain social analyses of the GDR. It is, for example, reflected in the model of the 'durchherrschte Gesellschaft', and in some applications of the *Eigen-Sinn* concept. While both of these concepts are social analyses and argue that people had a degree of control over their own lives, they still describe social developments as being delimited from governing and administrative processes.[3] 'State' and 'society' are, to summarise, frequently described as static, well-defined entities, while intersection, interaction, and interdependence between 'rulers' and the 'ruled' are not sufficiently taken into account in current GDR historiography. The insufficiency of this approach becomes nowhere clearer than in the analysis of functionaries. Historians whose argument follows the totalitarian theory often characterise functionaries as being a part of the SED's power apparatus, and thus see them as part of the 'state' category.[4] But is that characterisation really legitimate? There were many different functionaries, fulfilling a variety of roles. These functionaries cannot merely be regarded as the long arm of the SED. In the cultural field, they interacted and communicated with each other, but they also communicated with those people who were culturally active. They were at the same time guarantors of a limited degree of autonomy of cultural life at the grassroots and of the interference of state organs in cultural life. As a result of their ambiguous role, functionaries need to be regarded as a group within their own right, which means that the 'state' versus 'society' dichotomy has to be abandoned.

The group that is here summarised under the heading of 'cultural functionaries' is a very large one. It comprises, for example, functionaries working in the upper echelons of the state and party organs in *Bezirk* Potsdam, who were in close communication with the central decision making bodies in Berlin. On the other end of the spectrum were those functionaries who led remote cultural circles, and exercised their functions as infrequently as once

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3. The term 'durchherrschte Gesellschaft' was explored in different contributions to the edited volume Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr, eds., *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1994). See Jürgen Kocka's summary of the debate: 'Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft', pp. 547–54. The term means: a 'ruled' society, but the idea is that this is a society where rule cannot extend everywhere because there are certain boundaries. The term *Eigen-Sinn* was introduced by Alf Lüdtke in *Eigensinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1993). It was adapted to the GDR by historians like Thomas Lindenberger in 'Die Grenzen der Diktatur. Zur Einleitung', in Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur. Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1999), pp. 13–44, and it is here that the dichotomy becomes evident: Lindenberger argues that people could only exercise 'Eigen-Sinn' in their immediate surroundings, which had no impact above the administrative level of the *Kreis*. Cf. Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grassroots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945–65* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 64–65.

4. See, for example, Klaus Schröder, *Der SED Staat* (München, 1998), pp. 407–12.

a month. These functionaries could not have been much further removed from the SED's ruling elite. In between these two sorts of functionaries were a multitude of individuals who were in charge of running the GDR's cultural network: on a full-time and part-time basis; in administrative, consultative, and organisational roles; some were artistically gifted, some pursued a particular hobby, and others were looking for a way into a political career; some were utterly inept and others highly committed. While appreciating the differences between these various positions, this chapter focuses on the commonality of these functionaries: they all relied on communication with each other and on compromises with the participants in order to make the state-organised cultural system work.

It is best to divide cultural functionaries of *Bezirk* Potsdam into two factions: firstly, there were those functionaries in the administrative units, working in the *Bezirk*, *Kreis*, City, and Community Councils and in the trade union leadership of the factories. They were responsible for disseminating the party's political dictates to the localities, for ensuring that the cultural network was functioning, and for overseeing the bureaucratic demands that arose. These functionaries will be called the 'administrative functionaries'. Secondly, there were those cultural functionaries who were responsible for the actual running and organisation of the cultural facilities, in cultural houses and clubs, in mass organisations and in factories, or as the leaders of individual circles. Individuals in this group tended to take up their roles out of a strong interest in cultural life and artistic endeavours. They were rarely in pursuit of a political career.[5] These functionaries will be called 'executive functionaries'.

Most cultural functionaries tended to complain about their working conditions, as they believed themselves to be over-burdened and poorly paid.[6] Frequently, once an individual had been recruited into a position in the cultural field, he/she quickly became dissatisfied, and left the position after a short while. This was particularly the case with leaders of cultural houses, who had a great deal of responsibility, but who also had to contend with

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5. These functionaries had often pursued a particular interest in cultural activity for a long time before taking up their positions: see, for example Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) Rep. 538 Kulturbund (KB) 35, *Schreiben Philatelistenverband P. an das Kreissekretariat P. des Kulturbundes, 16.8.64*: the leader of this stamp collector's circle has been collecting stamps for 50 years. See also BLHA Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 249, *15 Jahre Zirkel Schreibender Arbeiter in W.*, p. 1: the person who founded this circle had engaged in literary activity for over 25 years. These functionaries got a sense of enjoyment out of the cultural element of their work, and resented outside interference if it interrupted their cultural work: Landkreis Oberhavel, Kreis- und Verwaltungsarchiv, Oranienburg LkO III 92 Gransee, *Protokoll der Kulturgruppen Vollversammlung am 13.4.62*.

6. See, for example: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 31, *Schreiben von der Kreiskommission Brandenburg an den Bezirksvorstand*, 25.9.66: this is an example of a functionary who complains about his workload.

immense material shortages.[7] As a result of the high functionary turnover, the levels of qualification among cultural functionaries could be quite low: in some cases, positions were vacant for so long that the criteria for hiring someone were substantially watered down and people were taken on board who were not fully trained for the position.[8] There were other problems that faced cultural functionaries. In face of the economic problems that dominated the GDR, cultural aspects ranked quite low on the general agenda.[9] As a result, the difficulties of cultural functionaries received little attention from the higher levels of authority, particularly in the factories. Consequently, many cultural functionaries felt they were fending for themselves, and that no one cared about their difficulties.[10]

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, these problems were recognised by the party leadership, and the state administration did try to address them. The SED leadership believed that functionaries could only tackle their growing workload if they underwent excessive qualification and training. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the efforts to train cultural functionaries remained a prevalent factor in the administration of cultural life. This applied to functionaries across the board—the functionaries who were in charge of cultural activity in a single factory brigade, as well as the directors of the Cultural Department in the *Bezirk* Council were told to attend relevant training programmes.[11] These training programmes primarily focussed on giving functionaries a detailed understanding of the political and ideological goals of the party, which was followed up with cultural training,

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7. BLHA Rep. 401 Rat des Bezirkes (RdB) Nr. 22562, *Information über Kaderprobleme auf dem Gebiet der Kultur*, 13.11.72. The problems with high turnover were also evident among other functionary groups: BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22562, *Einschätzung der Arbeit zur weiteren Qualifizierung der Kaderentwicklung der Fachorgane der Kreise* 28.6.77, p. 3; BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 22561, *VE Lichtspielbetrieb Potsdam, Kaderanalyse der Belegschaft,* 30.9.71.

8. BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1758, *Vorlage des Sekretariats, Bericht über die Verwirklichung des Aufrufes zur Initiative der Bibliotheken der DDR aus Anlass des 100. Geburtstages Lenins*, 5.5.1970.

9. BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1685, *IV. Protokoll der Beratung mit Kulturfunktionären aus den Kreisvorständen FDGB, Klubhäusern und Kommissionen Kultur und Bildung der BGL der Betriebe in Potsdam* 30.9.64 and Neuruppin 28.9.64. See also ibid., *Bezirksvorstand, Abteilung Kultur, Einschätzung der Beratung mit hauptamtlichen Gewerkschaftsbibliotheken*, 21.10.64.

10. Ibid.; see also BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35, *Schreiben an den Bezirksvorstand Potsdam*, 18.4.70.

11. The increasing focus on the importance of qualifying functionaries began in the late 1950s: BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1075, *Industriegewerkschaft Metall Zentralvorstand,* 18.3.57: here, a functionary is reprimanded for not turning up to the requisite qualification courses; BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 2245 *Klubhaus Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg, Klubleitung an den Bezirksvorstand Potsdam*, 17.2.60: this document concludes that *Kulturobmänner*, who were in charge of cultural life in brigades, are to be trained better. The number of available qualification courses and attendances increase over the 1960s and 1970s: see for example BLHA Rep. 401 Rat des Bezirkes (RdB) Nr. 22558: here is a statistical analysis sent from the *Bezirk* Academy to the *Rat des Bezirkes* on 11.2.1983, which shows the steady increase of participants in the annual teaching cycles—in 1973/73 there had been 99 participants, whereas in g82/83 there were 237.

to enable an understanding of the cultural model of the SED.[12] To a limited extent, the efforts to qualify and educate cultural functionaries showed some effects, but only among those functionaries who worked in the upper echelons of the administrative faction. Among this group, tough recruitment principles were applied to ensure that only politically 'sound' individuals and well-trained candidates could rise to positions of responsibility.[13] Among cultural functionaries in intermediate and local administrative and executive positions, however, the overall political and cultural qualification of functionaries did not improve drastically, because it was far too difficult to fill these positions to apply strict recruitment and qualification guidelines. Frequently, those functionaries who were recruited in the 1960s and 1970s lacked either political or cultural training (or both) and in some cases, they had political backgrounds that were dubious to the SED (some even had a Nazi past).[14] As the levels of political and cultural training were quite poor among cultural functionaries, it would be misleading to simply describe them as well-qualified, reliable, and loyal puppets of the SED.

What did this mean for the development of cultural life? One important factor that needs to be considered is that, while the intermediate and local functionaries may not have been reliable and loyal pawns of the party, many of them took up their positions out of an attachment to cultural activity. Their primary interest was to see cultural life flourish. In order to achieve this aim, however, the functionaries relied on the animated participation of interested individuals from the population. People only participated, however, if the state-organised cultural life met their expectations. This meant that functionaries had to engage in continuous dialogue with the participants and had to respond to their interests and needs, even if that meant compromising certain party dictates.[15] The executive functionaries engaged in this kind dialogue with the participants throughout the history of the GDR and they showed a readiness to make compromises in order to fulfil popular in-

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12. BLHA Rep. 426 Bezirkshabinett für Kulturarbeit (Bfk) Nr. 243, *Laientheater–Mittelstufe (no date, written after the second Bitterfeld conference in 1964, but before the seventh party conference in 1967)*: this is a set of questions for an oral examination of students studying 'lay theatre'. The main focus is on political-ideological content, but technical aspects like the fire regulations are also a part of the course.

13. The pressures of ensuring the political reliability of leading functionaries of the 'administrative group', particularly in the 1970s, are evident in BLHA Rep. 538, KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe aus Kleinmachnow, an das Bezirkssekretariat des Kulturbundes der DDR*, 17.8.78: in this *Eingabe*, a person remarks that he was not considered for a leading administrative position because he was not an SED member.

14. BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 33652/4, *Konzeption zur Qualifizierung der haupt- und ehrenamtlichen Leitungskader auf dem Gebiet der Kultur und Volkskunst 27.12.71–Anlage II, Analyse über die haupt- und ehrenamtlichen Kulturkader im Kreis Königswusterhausen*: here, the lack of qualification among various administrative and executive functionaries is striking; see also footnote 8.

15. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

terests. Of course, these functionaries had to fulfil certain political dictates, but they did so at a minimum, and otherwise implemented their own ideas to ensure that cultural activity represented the desires of the participants. In cultural circles, for example, the leading functionaries ensured that at public events, the cultural groups performed or exhibited 'progressive' socialist material. The daily repertoire of the groups, however, was aligned with the expectations of the majority of the active members, even if this meant that it had a low socialist content.[16]

Because the executive functionaries were so willing to adhere to their own interests, the participants came to regard them as their representatives and not just as the long arm of the SED. Even the executive functionaries saw themselves as the people's representatives, and were increasingly prepared to take on this role vis-à-vis the state organs. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the executive functionaries became more and more confident about making compromises that adapted to the interests and needs of the participants.[17] Furthermore, in the 1970s, they increasingly challenged functionaries in higher levels of authority when they felt that the interests of 'their' participants had been neglected by the state. They addressed the higher-ranking functionaries on behalf of their participants in a very demanding and annoyed tone and insisted that certain problems were rectified.[18]

The readiness to compromise and adapt to the situation at the grassroots did not remain restricted to the executive functionaries. Towards the late 1960s, the intermediate administrative functionaries had also begun to realise the advantages of responding to people's interests and needs. Rather than enforcing strict, educationalist guidelines, the intermediate administrative functionaries now also tried to secure higher levels of popular participation by focussing on popular interests and needs.[19] In the following

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16. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 29, *Protokoll der Kreisdelegiertenkonferenz des Kreisverbandes des Philatelistenverbandes der DDR, Oranienburg, 5.9.70*, p. 2; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 31, *Protokoll über die Kreiskonferenz, 23.5.70*, pp. 1–2; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 615, *Bezirkskommission Foto, zwei Jahre nach der letzten Bezirkskonferenz, vier Monate nach der Bezirksfotoschau, 39.3.68*, pp. 1–2.

17. BLHA Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 249, *Letter from E.S. to R. in the Bezirkskabinett für Kulturarbeit Potsdam, 28.9.1972*, p. 2: this is an example of a functionary who was criticised by the higher levels of authority for putting on plays that were not of sufficient artistic quality, but he vehemently defends his decisions, arguing it was more important to draw people away from their televisions than to concentrate on artistic content.

18. See for example BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, *Schreiben von dem Kreisvorstand des Philatelistenverbandes an den Bezirksvorstand des Philatelistenverbandes im Kulturbund*, 6.05.79: here, a functionary complains on behalf of the members of his philatelist circle that they had not been sent their stamps.

19. This change could occur because of a changing climate that was developing in cultural policy: the strict application of educationalist principles was abandoned by the party leadership over the course of the 1960s in favour of a greater focus on people's interests and needs. This political change is briefly outlined in the section 'Normalisation of rule' of this chapter.

example from 1972, the minutes from a meeting of the *Kreis* leadership of the *Kulturbund* in Falkensee highlight this newly developed readiness of administrative functionaries to compromise:

> *The chair*: According to the plan, there has to be a monthly Wednesday talk, but that is not realisable. From experience, it can be said that Wednesday talks are not as well frequented as club evenings on weekends. . . Financing the Wednesday evenings is far too costly considering the attendance levels.
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> *Friend 1*: The *Bezirk* conference was quite resolute about how important it is for the Kulturbund to stage these Wednesday talks.
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> *Friend 2*: We need to decide on the character of these Wednesday talks. Having a club evening with the brigades is out of the question. Most of the workers have to get up at 5am, and go to bed at 10pm in order to be ready for work in the factory. What would be best would be to have Wednesday talks with relatively few people and find experts from their own ranks. Club evenings with brigades have to take place on weekends.[20]

Though this example may seem quite stilted, it nevertheless emphasises an important point: it was the functionaries' ability to compromise that underpinned the functioning of the organised cultural system. The SED's institutions were carried, and some of the SED's dictates were fulfilled, but at the same time, the participants in the cultural sphere were not driven away by inflexible and unrealisable party guidelines.

The functionaries' growing readiness to compromise and their increasing assertiveness was an important aspect of cultural life: without a close connection between functionaries and participants, the organisation of cultural life would have been seriously hampered. Bad relations between functionaries and participants could result in people's withdrawal from the cultural network.[21] The interaction between functionaries and participants was not the only aspect of functionary work, however. While adjustments were made to people's interests, cultural functionaries were still a part of a wider cultural network and had to interact with other functionaries.

Over the course of the 1960s, cultural functionaries were increasingly required to perform bureaucratic tasks. These demands ranged from organising a certain number of 'political' events to keeping detailed records on all of their participants. If the local functionaries did not fulfil their duties

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20. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 363, *Protokoll in F.; Kreisleitungssitzung,* 15. 11.72, pp. 1–2.
21. BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 Volkspolizei Kreisbehörde Brandenburg Nr 124, *M., Volkspolizeikreisamt Greifswald, 24.1.72.*

adequately, they were reproached by functionaries at higher levels.[22] By the 1970s, it was not uncommon for the administrative functionaries to perform 'checks' on the executive functionaries to see whether the latter were fulfilling their duties. In the worst cases, the outcome of these investigations could be a demand for functionaries to chastise unruly participants, and if necessary, to exclude them from the cultural group or circle.[23] In some cases, the executive functionaries were even prevented from exercising their hobbies if they had not performed their duties properly.[24] This interference of the state organs in the affairs of local cultural groups meant that the autonomous development of cultural life was always restricted, and that compromises with the participants could not be taken too far.

Yet, this does not mean that cultural life can be reduced to repression and state control. It is important to realise that the dialogue with functionaries in higher positions of authority was not merely enforced on the local administrative and executive cultural functionaries. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, many of these lower-ranking functionaries actually began to seek interaction with their superiors. This development occurred as a result of the increasing bureaucratic and organisational tasks that the intermediate and local functionaries had to deal with. As these tasks increased in the 1960s and 1970s, local functionaries increasingly turned to the administrative functionaries for help, guidance, and advice in order to deal with their growing workload. They wanted guidance and assistance from the higher levels of authority instead of criticism from afar. This was already becoming evident in the early 1960s. For example, at an FDGB meeting in 1963, the leader of a clubhouse made the following complaint:

> Our room is in a catastrophic state. Here, people meet for gymnastics and do all sorts of things. But we do not receive means for any kinds of repairs. It is looking very bad. There are always some functionaries from the leadership who appear and criticise, but no one helps.[25]

Towards the later 1960s and 1970s, the local functionaries increasingly turned to higher positions of authority with their concerns. By the 1970s, they even asked leading functionaries in the *Bezirk* administration to inter-

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22. BLHA Rep. 538, KB Nr. 30, see correspondence between W., K., and K.

23. BLHA, Rep. 471/15.2 Bezirksbehörde Deutsche Volkspolizei Potsdam Nr. 940, *Einschätzung des Männerchors 1882 in B, 18.11.68*.

24. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 25, *Schreiben Kü. an W.* 14.2.72; ibid., *Antwort von W.* 15.2.72; ibid., *Antwort von G.*,16.2.72.

25. BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1682, *Protokoll über den Erfahrungsaustausch mit Klubhausleitern und Sekretären für Kultur der Kreisvorstände der FDGB, 21.5.63*, p. 7, Kulturhaus Neuseddin.

vene at the local level in order to sort out certain problems. A stamp collector's circle in Pritzwalk, for example, ran into a few problems fulfilling the demands for increasing the membership and keeping the circle going in the early 1970s. The circle leader wrote to the head of the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund*, expressing:

> Had I known then what kind of work I was taking on, I would certainly not have done it. What is missing is not good will, but the right people, who would then also take on a youth group. I myself don't know what to do anymore in order to activate the work in Pritzwalk. We would really appreciate some help.[26]

When this help did not materialise, the local functionary in Pritzwalk expressed feelings of anger and resentment towards the *Bezirk* leadership of the *Kulturbund*:

> Years ago, we were promised help from the *Bezirk*. Not just once, but several times. Nothing happened. Our members regard that as a failure to appreciate our circle and its work. Our disappointment still lasts today. We are of the opinion that we can't talk about our problems in Potsdam, but only in Pritzwalk.[27]

These appeals for help were also becoming evident among cultural functionaries who worked in the factories. Here, too, levels of discontent were high among executive functionaries if the organisation of cultural life was ignored by the factory leadership or by the trade unions.[28]

Low-level administrative and executive cultural functionaries did not therefore necessarily resent interference from higher-ranking functionaries, but actually sought it when they could not deal with the organisation of cultural life on their own. This shows that functionaries constantly engaged in dialogue in two directions: they responded to the participants' needs *and* they willingly integrated into the state-organised cultural network. Functionaries do not, therefore, slot either into the 'state' or 'society' category. They created cultural structures that were acceptable to the population, and yet ensured that these cultural structures were tied to the state organisation.

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26. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35, *Schreiben an den Bezirksvorstand Potsdam*, 18.4.70.

27. Ibid.

28. BLHA Rep. 547 FDGB Nr. 1685, *IV. Protokoll der Beratung mit Kulturfunktionären aus den Kreisvorständen FDGB, Klubhäuser und Kommissionen Kultur und Bildung der BGL der Betriebe, in Potsdam* 30.9.64 and *Neuruppin* 28.9.64. See also: ibid., *Bezirksvorstand, Abteilung Kultur, Einschätzung der Beratung mit hauptamtlichen Gewerkschaftsbibliotheken*, 21.10.64.

Playing by the Rules and Using the Rules:
The Participants

What about those who participated in state-organised cultural activities? Some historians, like Rüdiger Henkel, argue that pursuing cultural activities within the state structures of the GDR meant losing one's freedom of self-expression. Henkel insists that state-organised cultural activity was not a private affair in the GDR, but became an area that facilitated the fulfilment of the SED's totalitarian aims.[29] In contrast to this, other historians highlight the limitations of central control over cultural life that resulted from understaffing and underfunding, which made it impossible to monitor and guide every aspect of organised cultural life. These historians support the notion that cultural life existed in 'niches', which meant that cultural activity had a great deal of autonomy, as long as people did not challenge the supremacy of the SED.[30] Both reflections about the levels of control, and about the autonomous development of cultural life in the GDR are very important aspects for understanding this sphere of people's everyday lives. Nevertheless, the participants' behaviour patterns cannot purely be viewed from either angle. People's engagement with cultural activity cannot simply be boiled down to either repression or withdrawal.

Those who participated in organised cultural activities had to tolerate a degree of interference from the state's or the party's organs throughout the existence of the GDR. As early as 1949, the SED introduced a regulation for the registration of all cultural associations (*Vereine*), which decreed that their independent status was to be abolished. From now on, all cultural groups had to be registered with a state institution, a mass organisation or a factory. In the name of bureaucracy, the details of all members of these circles were to be recorded meticulously, and the functionaries were expected to write regular reports about the circle's progress. If these requirements were not fulfilled, then the administrative units could prohibit the groups from carrying on with their activities.[31] This officially required registration enabled the administrative bodies and the police units to monitor

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29. Rüdiger Henkel, *Im Dienste der Staatspartei, über Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR* (Baden-Baden: Nomas Verlagsgesellschaft, 1994), pp. 221–37.

30. Simone Hain 'Die Salons der Sozialisten: Geschichte und Gestalt der Kulturhäuser in der DDR', in Simone Hain, Michael Schroedter, and Stephan Stroux, *Die Salons der Sozialisten: Kulturhäuser in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996), p. 53; Meier, Helmut Meier: 'Der Kulturbund der DDR in den 70er Jahren: Bestandteil des politischen Systems und Ort kultureller Selbstbetätigung', in Evemarie Badstübner, ed., *Befremdlich Anders, Leben in der DDR* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2000), pp. 599–625.

31. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 25, letter from K. to W. on 14.2.72, letter from G. to K. on 16.2.72, and letter on 15.2.72 from W. to K.

and control cultural development in these circles throughout the 40-year history of the GDR. They analysed whether a cultural circle was progressing in the 'correct' way, whether the leaders of the cultural groups were reliable, law-abiding citizens, and whether the members of the cultural groups were trustworthy individuals.[32] If such analyses found an element that gave cause for concern, then action could be taken by interfering directly in the cultural group. One choir in *Kreis* Pritzwalk, for example, came under investigation in 1965, because it frequently sang at church events, and when doing so, seemed to know the required songs very well, whereas it sang the *Sozialistenmarsch* and the *Gefangenenchor* from the opera Aida 'not with rejection, but showing as little enthusiasm while singing these songs as they do singing other songs . . . the main focus is the melody . . . the text does not attract much interest'.[33] The fact that mere lack of enthusiasm whilst singing a particular song could attract negative attention shows the limits of autonomy of cultural groups.

The members of cultural groups and circles were thus not free from outside intervention. At the same time though, this control was not perpetual and absolute: in many cases, the administrative units were too busy to occupy themselves with the streamlining of every single cultural circle. This becomes evident by looking, for example, at the so-called 'culture and education plans' in factory brigades. From the late 1950s onwards, the SED leadership wished to engage more workers in cultural activities through the brigade movement. Increasingly, brigades that participated in factory award schemes were expected to plan a certain amount of cultural activity that the members would participate in throughout the year. By the 1970s, the brigades were expected to draw up annual 'culture and education plans' as part of their commitments for competitions. These plans were meant to include activities of 'highbrow' culture, as well as intellectually stimulating and educational events. Only very few brigades adhered to these educationalist goals of the party, however. Most brigades organised events of a 'lowbrow' nature that appealed to a majority of brigade members, such as evenings of playing card games, boat outings with families or dances.[34] The factory leadership and the trade unions were

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32. See BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 Bezirksbehörde der Deutschen Volkspolizei Bezirk Potsdam (DVP) Nr. 308, Nr. 309, and Nr. 310.

33. BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 310 *Protokoll über die Ermittlungen zur Überprüfung der Tätigkeit des Männerchors L. in B.*, pp. 1–2, side 73–74. See also all reports in BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 940: this file contains several analyses of the amount of 'progressive' material in their repertoire.

34. BLHA Rep. 506 VEB IFA Ludwigsfelde Nr. 1758 *Kultur- und Bildungsplan*, 27.9.72. To see variations between brigades, compare BLHA Rep. 502 Stahl- und Walzwerk Brandenburg Nr. 2072, *Wettbewerbsbeiträge der Brigaden TK1 Meisterbereich 2/S. III, Wettbewerbsverpflichtung 1970*, with BLHA

too busy to ever control this development. In the 1960s, there were still concerns about the inability to guide people's cultural development. One report written by the *Bezirk* Council in 1968 expressed such concern: 'Party decisions are not put into practice. Cultural life and the development of the Socialist personality are more or less left to chance'.[35] Over the course of the 1970s, though, these practices became increasingly accepted by the local and intermediate administrative cultural functionaries in factories. The responsible functionaries did less and less to counter the workers' refusal to engage with 'highbrow' activities, and the workers became bolder about their inclination for 'lowbrow' activities.[36]

This shows that people had some scope for shaping cultural activity according to their own desires. Nevertheless, the limitations that existed due to actual and potential interference from state organs should not be left out of the picture. As a result of the existing demands and constraints that were present alongside some degree of leeway for more autonomous developments, people engaged in a variety of complex behaviour patterns: they subjugated themselves to outside interference, they withdrew, and they interacted with the functionaries who administered and organised the cultural network of the SED. This complex combination of strategies will now be outlined. Over the course of the argument, it will become evident that through this combination of behaviour patterns, people could regain a sense of self-determination over their cultural activity: they gradually learned that they could steer the course of events in their favour, not just by withdrawing from, but also by integrating into the organised cultural structures.

It is important, first of all, to analyse why people engaged with cultural activities that were organised by the organs of the state, thus subjugating themselves to outside interference. To put it simply, people participated in these activities because they felt that they could adequately exercise their interests and needs there. By the 1960s, many people realised that they could exercise their cultural inclination most effectively within the state-organised cultural structures, because these provided materials,

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Rep. 502 Stahl und Walzwerk Brandenburg Nr. 2072, *Wettbewerbsbeitrag der Brigade 'J.G.'*. The first contains more sociable commitments, whereas the second includes more activities of 'high culture'. See also Sandrine Kott, 'Zur Geschichte des kulturellen Lebens in DDR-Betrieben, Konzepte und Praxis der betrieblichen Kulturarbeit', in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 39 (1999), p. 189.

35. BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 6449, *Probleme des Teilsystems Kultur im Industriegebiet Teltow*, 3.5.68, p. 1.

36. BLHA Rep. 503 Chemiefaserwerk Premnitz Nr. 4189, *Erfüllung der kulturpolitischen Aufgaben unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Durchsetzung der sozialpolitischen Arbeitskultur, 30.10.74*; ibid., *Kultureinschätzung zur Vorlage–Erfüllung der kulturpolitischen Aufgaben, 15.11.74*; ibid., *Vorlage für die Betriebsparteiabteilung, Einschätzung über kulturelle Fragen, 18.11.74*.

equipment, organisation, and the chance to meet other like-minded people with whom to discuss one's interests.[37] The interests that people sought to satisfy within the organised structures varied. Some individuals wanted to pursue a particular hobby, or a specific cultural activity, such as stamp collecting, singing or painting, and joined a cultural circle for that reason. In many cases, people who became active in cultural circles had engaged with its particular activity beforehand, and, once they were members of a cultural circle, they tended to stay in it for a period of time.[38] The fact that people had a personal interest in a particular kind of cultural activity made them quite protective about it. They had a tendency to take themselves quite seriously as representatives of this activity, and because the activity was important to them, they wanted the state administration to take it seriously as well.[39] Nothing other than a strong personal interest would have motivated these individuals to become so active in cultural circles and so protective about their hobby; being culturally active could be a time-consuming exercise that required a lot of dedication and sacrifices. People had to attend rehearsals and meetings, and spend their free time practising or collecting.[40] As a result of the time constraints involved in participating in cultural activities, a high proportion of culturally active people were retired—particularly in the Kulturbund.[41] This was a great thorn in the flesh for the SED leadership, who wanted young people and workers to become involved in state-organised cultural activity. In the 1970s, the state administration frequently called

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37. Increasingly, the participants wanted their circles to be registered with an institution that looked after their interests adequately. If the participants of one circle felt let down by the carrying institution or organisation, they ended their contract with it and registered with a different organisation. See, for example: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 24, *Deutsche Kulturbund AG Philatelie Nauen, Rechenschaftsbericht für das Jahr 1969, 4.4.70*, p. 2, and BLHA, Rep. 426 BfK Nr. 196, *Zirkel Schreibende Arbeiter, VEB EPW Neuruppin, 20.11.78, Kündigung der Trägerschaft über unsere Zirkel.*

38. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 29, *Mitgliederliste der AG Philatelie Birkenwerder, 30.6.72:* The average membership of this circle is 10 years.

39. BLHA Rep. 505 Schwermaschinenbau Heinrich Rau Wildau Nr. 2031, *Sammeln aus Spaß an der Freude*, pp. 1–2: in this brigade diary, a collector of match boxes described his hobby with loving vocabulary and remarks resentfully that the *Kulturbund* shows little interest in this cultural pastime; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 306, *Erster Zwischenbericht über die durchgeführten Jahreshauptversammlungen, Bezirksleitung Potsdam an den Zentralvorstand*, 6.5.64, p. 2. Here, *Kulturbund* members complain about paying fees, which are not used for their benefit, but for attracting new members—they demand that they, as fee-paying members, are taken more seriously.

40. BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 702, *Einschätzung zur Verwirklichung der Direktive des ZK vom 14.3.62 zur Verbesserung der kulturellen Massenarbeit der Klubs und Kulturhäuser*, 26.11.62, p. 4, side 39; This remained a prominent factor in cultural life: BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 234, *letter from Sch. to J on 10.6.80*: here, dedicated members sacrifice their holiday to attend a cultural event.

41. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 294, see for example *Statistischer Jahresbericht 1974*: out of 9,500 *Kulturbund* members in *Bezirk* Potsdam, 1,332 were 'non-working people' (a figure was mostly made up of retired people).

upon the executive functionaries to combat the so-called 'over-ageing' of cultural circles.[42]

Not everyone became active in state-organised cultural life in pursuit of a particular hobby, however. There were many who largely desired relaxation, fun, sociable pastimes, and interaction with other people. This is particularly evident in cultural life in the factories. The example of the 'culture and education plans' in brigades has already been mentioned, where workers committed themselves to cultural activities that were largely of a 'lowbrow' nature. Particularly favourable were outings with families, or festive evenings with a cultural content that was not too challenging, and that included food, dance, and, of course, drink.[43]

The fact that personal interest was such a strong determinant in joining cultural activities is an important factor in cultural life. It meant that when people participated in organised cultural activities, they did so with a particular expectation: they wanted to see their interests and desires fulfilled. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, people increasingly demanded that their needs should be attended to by the state. They had internalised a specific part of the SED's cultural rhetoric: the SED insisted that the organisation of cultural life rested with the state and that there was no 'privately' organised cultural life. This meant, however, that in the eyes of the culturally active population, the state organs had the duty to provide an interesting and stimulating cultural life that lived up to people's expectations. In other words, over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, people were increasingly aware that they could wield the SED's own rhetoric to their advantage: if the provision of cultural life was perceived to be inadequate, people engaged in targeted dialogue with various functionaries in order to ensure that the situation altered. They were devising ways of 'playing the rules' such that organised cultural structures increasingly suited their needs.

Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, participants frequently communicated their expectations and irritations to higher levels of authority by writing *Eingaben* (letters of complaint). Admittedly, *Eingaben* are a very difficult source, and should be treated with care. They were written by individuals who wanted to have a certain aim fulfilled, and who hence used a certain kind of language with which they hoped to achieve their goal. This means that *Eingaben* are not necessarily an adequate reflection of what people really thought and felt. Nevertheless, in this instance, they are a

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42. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 357, *Quartalsbericht I/76;* BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35. *Schreiben Pritzwalk an Potsdam am 18.4.79.*

43. See footnote 34.

useful source, because they show what people had come to expect from the SED.[44] In many cases, people complained about a functionary who had not done his or her job properly, or about a lamentable state of affairs that they expected to see rectified. A frequent mechanism of articulating a complaint was to write an *Eingabe* as a group in order to give the complaint more weight. This practice was evident throughout the middle period of the GDR. In the following *Eingabe* from 1973, for example, a male choir complained bitterly about not having been given an award that the members felt the choir ought to have received:

> We expect our artistic and social achievements to be acknowledged, and we will simply not be satisfied with being under-valued by not being given the award . . . we expect not only an apology, but also a noticeable improvement in the assistance that is given, particularly to those groups that have for years, despite great difficulty, been active in the area of culture.[45]

There are very many similar examples throughout the 1960s and 1970s of cultural groups who collectively complained to a higher level of authority because they felt that the state institutions and functionaries needed reminding about how to do administer cultural life properly.[46] Just as in the case of local cultural functionaries, participants in the cultural sphere did not simply withdraw from state intervention—when they felt that it benefited them, they actively sought dialogue with higher authorities in order to sort out shortcomings inherent in organised structures. The participants therefore realised that official structures not only imposed control, but that they could also be exploited for their own purposes: they could utilise SED rhetoric and force higher ranking cultural functionaries to do things *for* them.

Collective complaining was not the only form of communication that existed between participants and higher-ranking administrative functionaries: in some cases, people took matters into their own hands and

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44. Felix Mühlberg, "Konformismus oder Eigensinn? Eingaben als Quelle zur Forschung der Alltagsgeschichte der DDR", *Mitteilungen aus der kulturwissenschaftlichen Forschung*, February 1996, pp. 331–45; Ina Merkel, Felix Mühlberg, 'Eingaben und Öffentlichkeit', in Ina Merkel, ed., *Wir sind doch nicht die Meckerecke der Nation! Briefe an das Fernsehen der DDR* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, erweiterte Neuausgabe, 2000), p. 15.

45. BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 20294, *Eingabe des Männerchors der E.B.K. an das Ministerium für Kultur über die Handhabung des Auszeichnungswesens*, 8.11.73.

46. To see examples from the 1960s: Stadtarchiv Potsdam (StA Potsdam), Nr. 2773, *Eingabe Grenzbahnhof Frankfurt/Oder, 14.8.63*: here, the workers of a brigade complain about functionaries in the city administration in Potsdam; StA Potsdam, Nr. 2773, *Klub H. Potsdam, an die ständige Kommission für kulturelle Massenarbeit beim Rat der Stadt 4.10.63,* pp. 1–2: here, the members of a club complain about the state of pubs in Potsdam.

addressed higher levels of authority as individuals. Frequently, these individuals turned to the state administration in order to settle a personal dispute. This was particularly evident in the *Kulturbund*. People who had been members of the organisation for a long time believed that their membership entitled them to institutional support from the organisation when they had personal problems. In some cases, they involved the *Kulturbund* when they had a dispute with another institution, hoping that the backing of the *Kulturbund* would increase their chances of settling the issue in their favour.[47] Not all cases revolved around battling with institutions, though: some *Kulturbund* members tried to use the organisation to help them settle personal differences with other individuals with whom they had a dispute. This could go as far as asking the *Kulturbund* to track down one of its members to settle a monetary dispute.[48]

The articulation of expectation through *Eingaben* and the targeted exploitation of the state organs for securing a personal advantage shows one crucial factor of cultural life in the GDR: as time progressed, people increasingly tried to realise their interests *through* the state organisation. They realised that interacting with organised cultural structures could bring with it certain advantages, such as institutional support for settling personal disputes. But communication with higher-ranking functionaries was only part of the picture. People did not just integrate into organised cultural structures in order to fulfil their cultural interests. When they saw their interests would be better fulfilled by withdrawing from public cultural life, then they did so. The clearest evidence of this withdrawal can be found in people's interaction with the church: particularly in the villages, the church could provide an alternative to state-organised cultural facilities. In the 1960s, many young people sought church-organised cultural events, because they resented the lack of personal freedom that existed in state-organised cultural activity. Within the realms of the church, these youths were allowed to pursue their interests, such as playing Beat music.[49] But young people were not alone in frequenting cultural events in the church. In the 1970s, when the relations between the church and the SED were beginning to relax, attendance at cultural church events rose considerably. The church organised sociable afternoons with tea and coffee, and

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47. BLHA KB Nr. 175, *Eingabe Frau G, 11.5.69*, BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 32, *Eingabe 14.8.70*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 30, *Brief an den Deutschen Kulturbund Potsdam am 16.10.68;* BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 19, *Brief von Bundesfreund N., am 17.7.80.*

48. BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 35, *Brief vom 20.11.66*; BLHA Rep. 538 KB Nr. 19, *Eingabe W., Karl Marx Stadt, 31.8.81.*

49. BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 Kreisbehörde Brandenburg Nr 124, *Einschätzung der Kirchenarbeit im Monat Februar in 27.2.68.*

they supported musical groups that preferred to sing religious songs.[50] When people felt that they could not fulfil their interests and needs within the state institutions or mass organisations, either because of political constraints or because of poor organisation, they increasingly attended these kinds of church events instead.[51]

To conclude this section, it can be said that people who participated in cultural activity employed different behaviour patterns and strategies to ensure that their cultural interests were satisfied. As a result of inadequate controls, they were able to steer the cultural repertoire in a direction that appealed to them. Here, they benefited from the cooperation of local and intermediate functionaries, who were willing to engage in compromises because they wanted to keep participation levels high, but could only do so by responding to popular interests. Another strategy that was employed by the participants was interacting with state organs in order to address certain grievances. On many occasions, people were therefore more than happy to realise their interests *though* the organised cultural structures. At other times, nonetheless, the participants preferred to withdraw from the state's cultural network in order to exercise their cultural inclinations elsewhere. By making use of all of these different coping strategies, people could regain a partial sense of self-determination: to a degree, they could control the nature and development of their cultural lives.

Conclusion: The Normalisation of Rule in the Sphere of Organised Culture

The analysis of the previous two sections has shown that over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, cultural life developed in a way that simultaneously satisfied the interests of the participants and upheld the influence of the state over the organisation and development of cultural activities. An important factor that contributed to this situation was the functioning of channels of communication among functionaries at different levels, and between functionaries and participants. Local functionaries did their best to shape cultural activities so that they suited the interests of participants and in order to keep discontent at bay. At the same time, they engaged in dialogue with functionaries in higher positions of authority. Participants also engaged in many kinds of dialogue with cultural functionaries

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50. BLHA Rep. 401 RdB Nr. 6450, *Rat des Kreises Potsdam an den Rat des Bezirkes, Kurzinfomation–Aktivitäten der Kirche im kulturellen Bereich, 18.20.71.*

51. BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 Kreisbehörde Brandenburg Nr 124, *M., Volkspolizeikreisamt G., 24.1.72.*

in order to maximise the fulfilment of their interests. They had learned how to use the rules of the game to their advantage. In order to attend to their needs, they interacted with the executive functionaries, but they also turned to higher-ranking administrative functionaries with certain grievances. The participants can consequently not be described as passive subjects of the SED having had no power over their own destiny at all. To a degree, they can be seen as actors who knew how to regain a limited degree of control over their own cultural lives.

The high levels of integration and communication that are here shown to have characterised the 1960s and 1970s had not always existed in cultural life. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the situation had been quite different, and it changed only very gradually over the course of the late 1950s and early-to-mid 1960s. During the first decade of the GDR, participants and executive functionaries had frequently engaged in acts of nonconformity and resistance in order to protect established cultural traditions. In the early 1950s, many cultural groups that had existed before 1945 tried to resist being incorporated into state-organised cultural structures, and it took a lot of effort on the part of the state administration to introduce the 1949 ruling.[52] Moreover, even after these cultural groups finally acceded to the 1949 ruling and gave up their independent status, the members often did not become more acquiescent to the cultural project of the SED. Throughout the 1950s, many culturally active individuals engaged in acts of nonconformity in *Bezirk* Potsdam. These acts could range from having contacts to cultural groups in West Berlin to upholding traditions that had been forbidden in the new dictatorship.[53] Some of these acts of nonconformity still occurred in the mid 1960s.[54] What made the situation worse was that in these cases of resistance and nonconformity, many local executive functionaries supported the participants. This meant that the interaction between administrative and executive functionaries was, in these years, not functioning properly. The state authorities and police forces responded to this situation with a very heavy-handed approach. They intervened directly in the cultural groups to make them

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52. See, for example BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Nr. 930, file section 'Chor B.' VR/ I/21, *Überprüfung der Chorgemeinde B., Volkspolizeikreisamt Potsdam, 11.8.56*; BLHA Rep. 471/152 DVP Nr. 936, file section 'Skat Klub' Sachgebiet E, *Bericht, 2.2.60*, side 2.

53. BLHA Rep. 472/15.1 DVP Nr. 268, *Maßnahmeplan der Abteilung Erlaubniswesen bis zum 15. Jahrestag der Deutschen Volkspolizei, 5.1.60*, p. 4, side 26: here, cultural groups had contacts to groups in West Berlin. BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 308, *Beschlussüber die Ermittlungs des Männerchor W. 16.3.61*, side 169: in 1957, it transpired that this choir sang songs like 'Deutsches Vaterland', and 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles'; see also BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Kreis Rathenow Nr. 88, *"Spaatz"* (without a date, but probably written in 1957, which was when the event took place).

54. BLHA Rep. 471/15.1 DVP Nr. 310, *Betreff Sängertreffen in der Gemeinde B., 5.7.65*, p. 2, side 92.

more conformist, but achieved only further alienation of and resentment among participants and local executive functionaries.[55]

It was only over the course of the 1960s that dialogue and compromise became part of the established routine, and that people began to fulfil their interests by integrating into the organised cultural structures and using them to their advantage—a development that has been outlined above. Participants and functionaries were not the only ones whose behaviour became more pragmatic over the course of the 1960s and 1970s. It became more and more obvious to the party leadership in the early 1960s that a heavy-handed approach and an educationalist cultural model threatened to alienate the population.[56] Over the course of the 1960s, adjustments were made in cultural policy as a result. By the late 1960s, the party leadership recognised that people's interests and needs were highly diverse, and that this diversity had to be reflected in organised cultural life in order to reach more people in their free time. Consequently, the party leadership now advocated catering for 'lowbrow' as well as 'highbrow' cultural interests in order to appeal to more people.[57] This was officially endorsed in cultural policy after the regime change from Ulbricht to Honecker in 1971.[58] It is important to stress that these policy adjustments were made in reaction to developments at the grassroots. The party leadership recognised that people's interests and needs could not always be steered, moulded, and controlled from above. It was necessary to adjust the party's cultural model to popular developments,

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55. See, for example, BLHA Rep. 471/15.2 DVP Kreis Jüterborg Nr. 54, *Sachstandsbericht Verein T.*, 24.7.58, *Verfügung, 30.7.58; Aktenvermerk, 6.2.59.*

56. Ideas about making reforms in cultural life and taking people's interests into account began to appear around the introduction of the youth communiqué in 1963: SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/9.06/92, *Für ein kulturvolles Leben der jungen Generation (No date, but the youth communiqué is mentioned, hence it has to be have been written later)*; SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/36, *Information über einige neue Probleme im künstlerischen Schaffen der DDR, 21.10.65,* pp. 12–14.

57. In the late 1960s, these ideas were becoming more and more prevalent, which can be particularly seen around the introduction of the 5-day week in 1966: SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/90, *Bericht der Abteilung Agitation über die Erfahrungen der massenpolitischen Arbeit unter Berücksichtigung der Einführung der 5-Tage Woche in den Industriegebieten*; SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/90, *Kurze Darstellung neuer Probleme in der kulturellen Massenarbeit (no date, but the introduction of the 5-day week is mentioned, so it must have been written in 1966 or after)*; See also SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV A 2/9.06/1, *Hausarbeit: theoretisches Grundsatzmaterial zum siebten Parteitag*, 12.1.67, pp. 8–10. This development was also advocated by cultural theoreticians such as Dieter Heinze and Gerd Rossow, *Der Parteiarbeiter, kulturpolitische Aufgaben nach dem VII. Parteitag* (Ost Berlin, 1968), p. 33.

58. See, for example, SAPMO BArch DY 30/IV 2/1/458, *Protokoll der 6. Tagung des ZK, 'Zu Fragen der Kulturpolitik der SED', Berichterstatter Genosse Kurt Hager, 7.7.72*; for developments in cultural theory, which furthered this process, see Helmut Hanke and Manfred Weißfinger, Christa Ziermann, *Kultur und Freizeit. Zu Tendenzen und Erfordernissen eines kulturvollen Freizeitverhaltens* (Ost Berlin, 1971), p. 11; and SAPMO BArch, DY 30/IV A 2/2.024/7, *H. an Hager, 13.10.70*: H. attached two theoretical essays about the tendencies in recent cultural development. The second essay is: *Helmut Hanke, Die sozialistische Kultur in den siebziger Jahren*, pp. 9–10.

in the same way as the culturally active population was forced to accept outside interference from state organs in cultural activity at the grassroots.[59]

These developments reflect a process of 'normalisation' in cultural life. There is a clearly discernible development over the course of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s towards stabilisation, routinised implementation of compromise, and internalisation of the 'rules of the game'. Whereas the 1950s were characterised by resistance, nonconformity, coercion, and alienation, the 1960s were increasingly dominated by high levels of integration and interaction between participants and functionaries. Among all actors in the cultural field—functionaries, participants, and SED party leadership—there was a growing sense of pragmatism in the 1960s and 1970s. This manifested itself in the compromises of the functionaries, in the changing behaviour patterns of the participants, who realised their interests by integrating into the organised structures, and in the greater acceptance of a variety of interests and needs in official cultural policy.

In the analysis of cultural life, it has become evident that the application of the normalisation concept is a very useful tool for analysing the middle period of the GDR. The importance of cultural functionaries as a 'hinge' is particularly evident during these years. Functionaries played a major role in adapting political dictates to the situation at the grassroots, while simultaneously ensuring communication with the administration. They enabled a degree of autonomy in cultural life, but they also upheld the structures of the cultural system. These developments benefited the participants. As a result of the functionaries' willingness to compromise, and because they learned how to take advantage of the cultural system, people could regain a sense of control over their own lives. Their ability to fulfil their interests and needs did not just result from withdrawing into 'niches', but also occurred as a result of willing integration into the organised structures. To conclude, coercion from the central party organs was not the only factor that determined cultural life in the GDR. The satisfaction of people's interests was an equally influential factor. This means that the foundation of cultural life in the East German dictatorship was perhaps more similar to that in free, democratic Western societies than one might assume at a first glance.

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59. Manfred Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR: 1945–1990* (Köln: Ed. Deutschland Archiv, 1995), p. 139.