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THE EXPERIENCE OF COLLECTIVE TRANSFORMATIONS:
THE WOMEN’S CENTRE SUNDINE IN EASTERN GERMANY DURING UNIFICATION

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Anthropology
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The transition from socialism meant radical and rapid socio-political and economic transformations for East Germans and in terms of employment would disadvantage women due to the gendered restructuring of the workforce. A women’s project movement surfaced in response to this development, attempting to create a grassroots network both to support women coming to terms with the new unified German society and to employ them on government sponsored work programmes. The study of a Women’s Centre in Stralsund follows a heterogeneous constituency of women during this transformation, focusing on the experience of the institutional transformation of the Centre and the women’s involvement, collective responses and practices between 1989-1994. Setting up projects channeled the women’s movement’s efforts into participating in the institutional transfer from West to East. The dependency on state funds partially contributed to depoliticize the movement and its projects as women prioritized the importance of these local projects and the opportunity to work on government sponsored work programmes over pursuing social change. The Centre was used by women as a public space to discuss their different ideas about women’s issues and concerns in terms of their changing role in the unified Germany. Identifying the priorities in the agenda of women affiliated with the socio-political space of the Women’s Centre addresses questions of the limits and possibilities for collective politics. The women’s discussions concerning collective political practices and the purpose of the Centre were based on their heterogeneous experiences with the political system of the GDR as well as their diverse experiences of unification. Subsequently, social integration impacted on different sets of women differently, limiting possibilities for collective politics. Some women on the work programmes emphasize work collectivity over women’s issues, relating to their experience of being integrated through work collectives of the past and the emphasis on work. In fact, work is central to how women at the Centre define their practices as “women’s work”. Women’s diverse ideas about and their understanding of work do not just associate it with employment; the practice of “women’s work” constitutes a political category and their ideas about work are connected to their political activism.
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CONTENTS

Abstract ii
Acknowledgments iii
Table of Contents iv

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION 1

Part I
• Setting the Scene 1
• Research in Times of Social Transformation 4
• Field Methods 6

Part II
• Historical Attitudes 12

Part III
• Outline of Thesis 17

Chapter 2 HISTORY OF UNIFICATION AND WOMEN 22

• Introduction 22
• The Unemployment Debates 24
• Regional Disparity: Unemployment in Mecklenburg-Pomerania: 36
• ABM and the East German Women’s Project Movement: 45
• Conclusion 64

Chapter 3 ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTER 66

Part I
• The Women’s Day Strike, March 8th, 1994, in Stralsund: 67

Part II
• A Prelude: The Battle of the Past and the Present: 88
• Conclusion 105

Chapter 4 INSTITUTIONAL TRANSITIONS: THE WOMEN’S CENTRE SUNDINE 107

• Introduction 107
Part I
• The DFD Counseling Centre Sundine 1973-1990 108
Chapter 5 THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF COLLECTIVE POLITICS: THE WOMEN’S CENTRE 1993-94

Part I
• Post-Unification Institutional and Personnel Changes
  168

Part II
• The Decline of the “Opportunities for Change”:
  187
• Conclusion
  211

Chapter 6 THE ROLE OF THE WOMEN’S PROJECTS IN SOCIAL INTEGRATION: WOMEN’S VIEWS IN TWO WORK SETTINGS

• Looking Back at the Experience of Integration: The Work Collectives
  214
• The Centre: “We Are A Good Team”
  218
• The Wool-Project: Experiences of Long-Term Unemployed Women:
  227
• Conclusion
  247

Chapter 7 “WOMEN’S WORK” AS SOCIAL PRACTICE IN THE CENTRE PAST AND PRESENT

• Introduction
  249
• The History of “Women’s Work”
  252
• Hilde: “Women’s Work” with the DFD and the Union
  253
• Elisabeth: “Women’s Work” with the DFD and the Union
  255
• DFD Neighbourhood Groups: “We did what we (women) wanted
  258
• Ema: “I have always felt responsible for the common good”
  262
• Martha: Centre Employee in the Present
  265
• Karina: “I was into women’s work but not necessarily politics”
  266
• Conclusion
  270

CONCLUSION

272
Annex

- List of Abbreviations 284
- Figure 1 285
- Figure 2 286
- Figure 3 287
- Figure 4 288
- Figure 5 289
- Figure 6 290
- Figure 7 291
- Figure 8 292
- Figure 9 293
- Figure 10 294
- Figure 11 295
- Figure 12 296

Bibliography 297
Chapter 1  INTRODUCTION

Part I
Setting the Scene

Conducting anthropology ‘at home’ meant coming to terms with the process of how unification occurred - how it affected me as a West German woman and how it affected a heterogeneous group of East German women. It is often forgotten that German unification was pushed through within a year after the fall of the Berlin Wall, on November 9, 1989. At that time, it was assumed by many Germans in both East and West that the opening of the German-German border would eventually lead to unification following a slow process of negotiations between two countries. The unification treaty following article 23 of the Basic Law clearly was not the only option to end forty years of separation (see e.g. Dümcke and Vilmar 1996). The decision itself lacked public consultation. As Borneman (1992:320/321) reminds us, it was not made by the people in East and West:

[Unification] was a deal forged and ratified not by the people (as would have been acquired by Article 146 of the Basic Law), but by German bureaucrats and politicians, in a manner similar to the unities achieved in 1648, 1815, 1866, an 1871.

Unification in 1990 meant that the German Democratic Republic (GDR) became incorporated into an enlarged Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) “due less to popular pressure than to strategic manipulations of national feelings by the West German elites” (ibid.). A process of democratic renewal that had been initiated by the civil movement (Bürgerbewegung) in the GDR demanding the reform of socialism, and by some people was called the Wende, or the “peaceful revolution”, ended in the transition from socialism. The term Wende\(^1\) is often synonymously used to describe both these processes. I prefer the term Wende over “revolution” because people still use it in the present and also because the “revolutionary” beginning, in fact,

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\(^1\) The term had previously been used in the Federal Republic for the conservative Wende of the shift from the Social Democratic government of Helmut Schmidt to the Christian Democratic government of Helmut Kohl. Wende denotes a political turning point. The terms “revolution” and Wende are used by different people to include different protests and time periods. For example, many people include within the “revolutionary” movement GDR citizens fleeing the country in 1989. The time period of the Wende can span the time of initial protest beginning in the spring of 1989 to the coming down of the Wall in the autumn of the same year and beyond, until unification in October of 1990.
turned out to be a conservative *Wende* that ended the aspirations for "revolutionary" renewal and any autonomous development of the GDR which reached a peak after the opening of the Berlin Wall.

This event, on November 9, 1989, was unexpected for Germans on both sides of the divide. It followed the large civil movement demonstrations that demanded democratic reform of socialism in the summer and autumn of 1989, and the mass flights of GDR citizens since May 1989 through neighbouring socialist states when Hungary opened its borders. Five days prior to the opening of the Berlin Wall, at a significant rally in Berlin’s Alexander Platz, GDR writers such as Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym spoke to the crowd that gathered about their hope for a revolutionary renewal of socialism. After the fall of the Wall, this renewal process was attempted in the provisionary set up of "Round Tables", the symbol of "revolutionary" change. The East German women’s movement emerged out of the non-state movement in the GDR and in response to the "Round Table" ensuring that women’s issues and concerns were incorporated. Generally, this process of opening up and "overthrowing the old structures" initiated by the formation of diverse initiatives and grass roots activities also had the character of a social movement. This was particularly the case for the women’s movement, which was critical of classical political systems and had a theoretical commitment to organizational autonomy. Thus, women activists early on expressed skepticism about the political system of the FRG as it became clear that the process was heading towards unification.

With the first free election in the GDR in March 1990, which was largely interpreted as a vote for unification, it became apparent that the GDR citizens who had initiated the process of "revolutionary" change had not gained the support of the East German voters to further their

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2 Merkl (1993:84) comments: "The GDR revolution was a broken-off endeavor because the question of national unification, as earlier in German history, won out prematurely over the question of political and social reform, leaving no room for an autonomous development of the GDR".

3 A small minority of East German civil groups had already existed illegally throughout the 1980s. They challenged the national celebration of the GDR’s 40th anniversary, officially celebrated in the capital on October 7, 1989, with an organized protest against the annual parades on the very same day. Many protesters were arrested, but it turned out to be the socialist regime’s last demonstration of power.

4 The "Round Table" represented the move for democratic reforms inspired by the opposition movements. The "Round Tables" were unofficial, multiconstituency advisory bodies during the interim government of Hans Modrow between November 1989 and the Volkskammer (GDR parliament) elections in March 1990.
process. The provisional status of the “Round Table” that existed at the time of the political opening was replaced by a newly elected GDR government which was now in charge of negotiating the unification treaty. In particular, the women’s movement lost its political influence as a result of the national question of unification superseding the desire for social change.

The decision to move towards unification “closed the brief, and very open, liminal period of social questioning, democratic will formation, and attempted revolutionary renewal” (Borneman 1992:318). Instead, the aspirations of the women’s movement and its initial attempts to democratically reform socialism were transformed and their strategies altered in the process leading towards unification. The impetus of the women’s movement and ability to transform society, however, was still needed for the process of institutional transfer from the West to the East. The women’s movement continued to establish, under the conditions of the West German state, an expanded network of projects for women and was actively involved in the process of transforming institutions as part of the establishment of new Western structures in the former GDR. One such group and project is the grass roots organization and Women’s Centre I studied in Stralsund.

The following is an ethnography of some East German women’s experiences of the transformations in their local Women’s Centre, its related projects, and institutions elsewhere in the city of Stralsund in Mecklenburg-Pomerania, i.e., one state of the new German federal states or Eastern Germany. The democratization espoused by the women’s movement at the time of the Wende and the conditions created by unification shaped the purposes and performances of the women’s projects.

My research was informed by a desire to explore how a particular group of women was experiencing the socio-political and economic transformations in order to understand how the

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5 After unification the more technical term new federal states (Neue Deutsche Bundesländer) for the territory of the former GDR [and old federal states (Alte Bundesländer) for the old FRG] was mostly used but was slowly replaced by other terms such as Eastern States (Östliche Bundesländer), Eastern Germany (Östliches Deutschland) and even East Germany (Ostdeutschland) [formerly used by many West Germans instead of GDR, often meaning to imply that one questioned the legality of the other German state’s existence]. Although I use the term new federal states and Eastern Germany interchangeably, as I move from the more technical background information into the ethnography I prefer to adapt to people’s pattern of speech and thus use the term Eastern Germany.
differences in this internally diverse GDR society were translated into and became integrated in a unified Germany. It was also motivated by a concern about the newly arisen nationalist fervour which has accompanied the process of unification. For the East German women's movement these concerns were tied to a fear that women's issues would be completely overruled by national ones. As I carried out the research, the women's movement aim to initiate change, their redirected strategies upon unification, and what happened to their projects in the process, became much more significant to my research as I studied diverse women's groups within the context of the women's projects. The experience of actually conducting research in times of social transformation ultimately changed not only my research design, but also the topic and the writing of this ethnography. An experience of this kind poses the challenge of conducting anthropological research in times of social transformation.

Research in Times of Social Transformation

Conducting research in post-socialist societies brings to the forefront the challenge that these phenomena of transformation pose to the social sciences in general. How a transformation process which is characterized by the transition from a socialist planned to a capitalist market economy evolves is still being disputed. There exists no single theory and the challenge that these phenomena pose requires that adequate concepts and models for researching these processes be developed. As Verdery (1991:419) points out, a number of social scientists "flock to" this phenomenon of the transition from socialism in Eastern Europe, among them anthropologists whom she sees as playing a major role.

In Eastern Germany, the number of anthropological studies is limited (e.g. Borneman 1992, 1997; Rocksloh-Papendiek 1995). There exist, however, a huge number of mostly macro social science studies that have accompanied various aspects of the transformation processes. Many studies are establishing and fostering an uncritical epistemology and tend to reproduce a Western view of the East. In fact, many of them derive their authority to interpret East German history and experiences from the mere fact that they are Western experts- that is West German

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6 Verdery (1991:419) suggests that to understand the transition from socialism, research needs to be informed "by conceptualizations of the social order that went before". She does this through a theoretical model of "socialism" based on ideas developed by social theorists, i.e. intellectuals of societies undergoing transformation. In contrast, I study non-experts' views and experiences of the transformation process.
experts (compare Fritze 1997:57). Particularly, coming to terms with the GDR past requires an interpretation of everyday life. This allows for an understanding of how individuals used to make decisions and take action (Fritze 1997:58). In depth ethnographic studies of Eastern Germany could be one way to challenge this one-sided view and interpretation of the past and present that sometimes describes East Germans simply as either ‘losers’ or ‘winners’ in the transition process. Also a number of published collections of personal or life histories exist, particularly of women, reflecting on the experience of life in the GDR and the Wende, in the tradition of Maxie Wander’s (1987) GDR women’s biographies in Guten Morgen Du Schöne (see e.g. Fischer and Lux 1990; Grell and Wolf 1992). Doing anthropological research, however, combines the level of the larger processes of unification with the level of everyday experiences. The task of anthropologists is to revalidate people’s everyday experiences, tell stories in their own words (Jackson 1996:36); and ethnographic studies provide a method to accomplish this project. They can allow East Germans to voice for themselves how they experienced the transformations.

Existing studies and analyses of the transformation processes in the post-socialist societies of Eastern Europe lack the gender perspective which the feminist critique has long called for, particularly since women’s issues have been overruled throughout the era of restructuring. Thus, the feminist critique foregrounds social phenomena; though we do not find ethnographies on women’s experiences of the transition (with the exception of Müller 1991; Rocksloh-Papendiek 1995), the women’s movement, or its process of institutionalization. Feminist studies of former GDR peoples’ experiences of the transition emphasize that women experienced this transition differently than men. Institutionally inscribed gender inequality under the specific conditions of state socialism created different struggles for women when entering the market economy (Dölling 1991; see also Nickel 1994, 1993b). In Eastern Germany, a body of literature exists which explores how women’s experiences, expectations, life courses and concepts were shaped by their socialization in the GDR, and how this socialization equipped them to cope with the transition (e.g. Bütow and Stecker 1994; Dietzsch and Dölling 1996).

Participants of a Conference on Germany in Toronto (1992) might remember a discussion that was fueled by the fight over the authority to define the GDR past. It is no coincidence that many East Germans and observers of the process of unification used the analogy of “colonization” and compared it to the situation in the United States after the civil war, the Mezzogornio in Italy or other regions which had historically experienced internal colonization.
However, what we know about the transformation processes and women’s experiences, particularly in the North American academic community, is mostly based on data from sites in and around Berlin and the industrialized south of the former GDR and often extrapolated from interviews with university educated women and intellectual leaders of the women’s movement (Dodds and Allen-Thompson 1994; Funk and Mueller 1993). This is also the case with regard to German studies of the women’s movement which focus on centres in Berlin or Leipzig (Liebsch 1994; Hömberg 1992). When I was first searching for a particular site in Berlin, one female East German researcher and women’s activist encouraged me to move out of the city.\footnote{She suggested seeking a site, as she phrased it, in “an underresearched area”.} In the German as well as the North American academic community, studies of the transformation (in anthropology, sociology and women’s studies) are rare in areas such as Mecklenburg-Pomerania. This is one of the reasons why I chose to carry out research in Mecklenburg-Pomerania. Specific to this region is that as a result of the region’s different experience of restructuring, many people have moved westwards in search of employment (Spiegel 38/1995:134ff.). By focusing on women in Mecklenburg-Pomerania, we can expand our understanding of the specific links between the economic and the socio-political processes of transformation. In the following, I describe the issues involved in conducting ethnographic research, how I intended to study the phenomena, and how I modified my field methods.

**Field Methods**

Women’s experiences of the everyday illustrate the tension between the economically induced restructuring and the social actors’ perception and experience of dealing practically with these radical changes in their lives. Beginning with an ethnography of the particular, my concern is with how these processes take place at the level of the everyday. But this generates a challenge to ethnography in two interconnected ways: It means doing ethnography ‘at home’ and it means breaking out of some confines associated with the conceptualization of the ‘field’ (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

Doing anthropology ‘at home’ raises particular issues for anthropologists, including the questions of distance and otherness. Since the 1970s this kind of anthropology, however, in
studies such as Myerhoff’s (1978) has shown how to apply a technique of reflexivity where self and other are under scrutiny. As Myerhoff (1978) demonstrates, to gain an insider’s view (of one particular group) equips the anthropologist with new visions which change one’s perspective not only on one’s own society but also one’s self. In the 1980s, Marcus and Fischer (1986:38) suggested that anthropology functions as a form of cultural critique of the familiar and that this could be extended to those anthropological studies in one’s own society. Usually based on performing anthropology abroad, “it should be a style of cultural criticism it could perform at home” (Marcus and Fischer 1986:133). These authors portray the appeal of anthropology for this purpose, by using Paul Willis’ (1981) Learning to Labour as an example, to lie in “the idea of the ethnographer’s function as uncovering, reading, and making visible to others the critical perspectives and possibilities for alternatives that exist in the lives of the subjects” (Marcus and Fischer 1986:133).

Gupta and Ferguson (1992:14) acknowledge Marcus and Fischer’s sensitivity to the issue but criticize their fundamental conception of cultural critique, particularly the problematic conception of notions like ‘home’ and ‘abroad’. Gupta and Ferguson (1997) suggest that we have to look critically at our methodological tools. These authors state that we can learn from how anthropology ‘at home’ is perceived within the discipline. That is, our constructions of the field and otherness are bound and continue to instill a hierarchy. This leads us to perceive anthropological studies ‘at home’ as not necessarily the ‘real’ anthropology and, therefore, those who conduct this anthropology are not considered the ‘real’ anthropologists (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:13). Applying a critical comparative method ‘at home’ and elsewhere, however, means moving beyond the classical conceptualizations of the ‘field’. “Problematizing the field”, as Gupta and Ferguson (1997:3) suggest, “follows from a now widely expressed doubt about the adequacy of traditional ethnographic methods and concepts to the intellectual and political challenges of the contemporary postcolonial world”. If we expand their critique of the classical anthropological field and the parameters of our discipline, at least for those of us who work in post-socialist societies, we need to incorporate reflections on the challenges posed by the end of the “Cold War” era. These authors do not suggest, however, abandoning the way we acquire

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9 The end of the Cold War has left its imprint or legacy on a unified German society and for West Germans the problem of conducting research with East Germans could lie in the general tension between the power dynamics of the way unification had occurred- a process through which East Germans found themselves “second class citizens” in a unified Germany.
our knowledge; we should develop attentiveness to location and preserve certain aspects of the fieldwork tradition (1997:36); that is, shifting the form of political commitment to seeing “anthropological knowledge as a form of situated intervention” (1997:38) and creating fields as “sites for strategic intervention” (1997:39).

Those assumptions on which fieldwork is built, namely, the distinction between “field” and “home” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:12), are given a twist in my research since I grew up in West Germany; that is, for those among whom I did research “on the other side”. (Many people continued to use this as a metaphor although it ceased to exist in terms of a spatial separation). Moving from West Berlin to a small town in an agricultural/industrial area of the former GDR I was both an insider and an outsider, simultaneously at ‘home’ and ‘not home’. Furthermore, my particular anthropological research on issues of women, the women’s movement and the transformation to post-socialist society led me to problematize those ideas about the field in terms of its traditional commitment and political engagement. A common interest in socio-political spaces for women had turned the field into a place of learning, interaction, intervention and alliance-making. This will become clearer in a moment when I present my experience with the life history method that I choose for studying women’s experiences of the transformation processes.

Interviewing East German women as a West German woman meant entering a dialogue with people with whom I was both close and at the same time far apart because of our different experiences formed over forty years by two distinct political and economic systems. In the socialist and the capitalist systems, different everyday practices, life styles, and systems of reference had developed, including a different use and interpretation of the German past and German cultural and institutional traditions (see e.g. Lüdke 1997; Hausen 1997). In uncovering these different readings of the past and how they influenced the experience of transition in the present, I decided to use a life history approach. As we know from feminist studies, the life history can be used to create a counter-history against dominant interpretations. To view the life history as “a form of everyday discourse” allows one to study the creation of coherence (Linde 1993:52) and to uncover, as Ginsberg (1989a:62) did. for example, some critical realignments of personal and social history in the past that led to people’s political activism in the present (see
also Ginsberg 1989b). In this sense, I intended to focus on biographies through which those individual, generational and gendered experiences of the transformation process could best be understood.

In West Germany there has existed a wide variety and growing body of biography and life history literature that focuses on the subjective construction of self and the structure of sociocultural reality (e.g. Fuchs 1984; Kohli 1884; Voges 1987; Bude 1987). Using an interpretive and linguistic analysis, this biographical research has been expanded to incorporate the transition phenomenon (e.g. Fischer-Rosenthal 1995; Alheit 1995; Kreher 1995). I had planned to use this literature again, as in my previous research (Schimkat 1990), as a starting point and to focus on the role of the narrative in a period of personal transition and to explore how individuals modify their biography in the process of adjustment from the East to the West. Attempting to explore the relationship between personal narration and the experience of the socio-political and economic transformations by focusing on the narrative form, I assumed that women’s life histories open an avenue “to understand how women themselves interpreted their own life experiences” (Personal Narrative Group 1989:13).

My interest was in women’s subjective experiences of the “lived reality” of the GDR, of the Wende and how gendered identities would be reformulated in the context of women’s changing roles in unified Germany. However, my idea to mainly use a life history approach to gain insights into the relationship between women’s daily lives and the socio-political and economic transformations (see e.g. Sacks 1989) and to focus on the relationship between the experience of transition and the modification of the narrative was altered as I entered the field.

Exposure to the field site led to a rethinking of what I would study. In January of 1994, I had visited Stralsund in search of a field site and entered the Women’s Centre like any tourist. As I presented my research interest to the representatives of the Centre, we decided on a cooperative venture and I was officially granted access by the supporting institution, a government office, at the time. During the course of my research stay, I made contact with diverse groups of women in different institutions, some associated with this government office
for women and others with a grass roots group. Conducting research within the context of local institutions, particularly the Women’s Centre, changed my research design.

The Centre was a meeting place for diverse groups of women. My idea to begin an oral history project of the Centre took shape when I discovered a few weeks into my stay what everybody I met took for granted: it dated back to GDR times. This history was, on the one hand, taken for granted, and on the other hand, silenced. I approached women with the idea of collecting oral history narratives and their positive response, perhaps because they thought it would be important to preserve the memory of the Centre, allowed me to combine my initial project with a project relevant to these women.

I view the oral history as a life story directed towards recalling events and experiences with the particular institution of the Women’s Centre and giving them meaning. It is a focus on the individual and her experiences, but it is also an understanding of how she sees the world and how she acts (Grele 1985:44), particularly, her view of what direction their agency took in the times of the *Wende* and what these institutions for women came to mean.

What I call oral histories denotes a focus on the individual’s relation to, experiences with, and interpretation of social events and the transformation within the institutions for women. Life histories I collected in the context of the Centre or other institutions focus on the individual life sequence or course. The situational and broader contexts (transition from full-time employment) in which these life histories were narrated, made me realize that to encourage women to talk about their lives I would have to ask about their work histories. Questions such as “can you tell me in what profession you used to work” and “what happened with the *Wende*” constituted a starting point and an access to women’s life histories. This clearly seemed to confirm the importance of work in women’s lives and also their current struggle to regain stability.

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10 Oral histories of the Centre usually begin with how the narrator became to work with/for and affiliated with the Centre and interpret the history of the institution and its transformations. In contrast, life histories usually begin with the social network (e.g. family) in which the narrator was born. Many interviews I collected from now on began with narratives about the Centre in which the life history of the narrators was intertwined or followed from it.
I continuously conducted/recorded life history interviews throughout my stay, but I was often told life stories of events in the past and about the stressful period of transition outside the interview process. This seems to suggest that I acted as a catalyst for the telling of these stories which turns out to be a different role than one of the ‘participant observer’. I played different roles during my stay as I collected oral/life histories, gave talks at the Centre, taught English classes, and attended meetings at the Centre. Because of my research interest I was possibly perceived as a ‘women’s researcher’ (*Frauenforscherin*) as I became more involved with women in offices, groups and projects, my interest shifted towards how women articulated their experiences of the transformation processes within the broader framework of these settings. I attended several meetings, particularly at the Centre, and took field notes or recorded them.

These conversations and the life/oral history narratives I collected with individuals and groups allowed me to see how women perceived the relationship between structural and individual changes and how they viewed the new gender inequalities which were being established. It also became increasingly clear to me that life histories conducted in the context of an institutional setting and of practice give us a better idea of how people’s sense of themselves and their place in society continuously shifts. Practice, hereby, (following Schütz 1973, Bourdieu 1977) is conceptualized as part of the everyday life in which individuals encounter the changing realities they must cope with.

People have quite different ways of dealing with the discontinuities caused by the transition in their lives. One way is through reconstructing their past. This is based on a series of factors: their past position in GDR society, their position in a unified Germany, and their experience of the transition. One major theme that developed early on in my research, was the transition from a ‘work-place society’ where employment was a right and duty to the experience of unemployment. Another theme that emerged from the stories I was told is the experience of how immediate social networks such as the family and the neighbourhood were undergoing

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11 I noticed with the life histories that the actual process and construction of telling one’s whole life history, i.e., to reflect on one’s earlier life and the changes, was at the time an exhausting endeavor for many of those women who had volunteered life history interviews once we developed a closer relationship. They told me that, to their own surprise, they were quite exhausted and sometimes distressed afterwards.

12 In the German academic setting my research would be considered women’s research and those who carry it out are considered women’s researchers. The term women’s researcher (*Frauenforscherin*) is not used in English but I literally translate this term when I refer to the German context.
transformation. These stories then became modified by women’s ongoing interaction with one another and their common experiences and crises. This becomes clear as women talk about their experiences of the recent past (the *Wende*) in the Centre. How present-day interaction, discussions and exchanges influence the way these women talk about the past and their role in the present is connected to the issue that there was only a very short period when people felt they were in control of their own lives and of possibilities for the future society. This interaction was heightened because they saw a moment of possible collective “praxis” (compare G. Smith 1991, 1997). But this moment closed with unification and they experienced a sense of frustration, confusion and discouragement. This led them to further re-interpret their GDR past and the recent transformations. It is within this context that women describe what happened to them, as both individuals and members of groups in relation to transforming institutions. The cooperative venture of an oral history project and the opportunity to participate in women’s individual and collective activities, alongside analyzing the media and conducting library research, constitute the basis on which I explore the aforementioned themes in the locale of Stralsund. History plays a part in mobilizing collective activities/action and it is this background I turn to next.

**Part II**

**Historical Attitudes**

History for Stralsundians includes an often distant past. People need to know their history occurs because they see themselves in terms of a local history that dates back centuries, specifically, to 1234 when the former Slavic fishing and ferry settlement was granted city rights (Ewe 1991:10). To give an example, the city today is again called “Hansestadt Stralsund” which relates to its medieval membership in the merchant organization *Hanse* (the Hanseatic League). With the *Wende* and unification people redefined the way they related to this history. Their use of history is often part of learning to take their lives into their own hands.

At the end of my research stay in Stralsund, I received a gift from one of the grass roots *Initiative* woman: a book on the history of Stralsund. The book included the following dedication: “so that you will keep alive a good memory of Stralsund I give you a little goodbye present for your voyage to far Canada”. As I read through the historical details and, particularly,
the city’s merchant history, I was reminded that Stralsund via its port had always been connected with far away places in the world and some Stralsundians had traveled the world, even in GDR times.

This reality seems to contrast with another attitude I found very commonly expressed. After some people had used the new opportunities to travel to France, Italy, Denmark or other places, they often decided to spend their future holidays again on the Baltic Sea (near Stralsund) as they had done in GDR times. Whether this was out of an appreciation for the surrounding landscape’s beauty or out of local patriotism is not easily determined. People in Stralsund tend to argue, like the local author of an article on the revival of old city festivities, who states that “patriotic expressions were based on certain realities” (Hacker 1994:52). In support of this statement he had used a quote written by a local at the beginning of this century which sums up this attitude in an interesting manner:

Let others travel whose purses are bulging and swelling, let those others travel and praise Rome and Niagara Falls, Ceylon, Geneva and blue fjord, let the whole horde travel. We from Stralsund travel not, we don’t do it, we do not need to, we have everything at home (ibid.).

Similarly, I had heard some women with limited resources explaining why they had not traveled since the opening of the German-German border. “I am not somebody who travels, I never was” (woman of the wool-project). But it was those women and men who were better off in the unified Germany who would point out the beauty of the old city and its surrounding area. “A nice place on this earth” was how an engineer at the ship building wharf expressed his local patriotism. One woman, a trained librarian and then employed for the city, had praised the charm of urban decay and voiced her concern about the way historic buildings of the old city would be restored and rebuilt and whether the old city of Stralsund might be turned into a museum town resembling those tourist towns in West Germany. Residents of the old city would often articulate their satisfaction about the rebuilding of the old city’s structure that had already been accomplished. In contrast to this approximately 10% of the population, residents of the suburban areas were less enthusiastic. Most people, however, even those who had moved to Stralsund for employment or with their partner who was from the area, shared a strong sense of belonging to this place and identified with the locale and its surrounding area.
In the recent history of the Wende, the city also played a role in the way collective action was mobilized. That is, in 1989, initiatives were founded for the preservation of the old city. The civil initiatives (Bürgerinitiativen) called for the preservation of the city’s buildings and sued for the recovery of the cultural historical monuments (see e.g. Ewe 1991). Many of the architectural buildings still display the former wealth of the city in medieval times when Stralsund together with other cities of the Hanse such as Lübeck, Rostock and Hamburg strove to develop in the 14th century. Its medieval economy was based on trade (Handel) and Stralsund’s merchants became mediators (Zwischenhändler) between those countries of the east (Russia) and the west (Flanders, England), the north (Scandinavia) and the south (France, Spain) (Ewe 1991:14). In the 15th century, the city of Stralsund blossomed together with the Hanse. Thereafter, as the Hanse declined, Stralsund’s economy and political significance declined with it (Ewe 1991:18).

Since the city became a member of the Hanse, ship building has been part of Stralsund's economy. It is described as one of the main crafts which dates back to the 13th century when the profession of “Botmakers” was first registered in the city books (Ewe 1991:16). In the GDR, Stralsund was industrialized and, particularly, the “sea industry”, including ship building and the fishing industry was planned and developed. Stralsund was developed as an industrial city with the so-called people’s wharf Volkswerft (Ewe 1991:40). The Volkswerft as such was established in 1948. This big ship building wharf was bought by the Bremer Vulkan Werft after unification and in this context Stralsund and its wharf appeared a couple of times in the media over the past few years. After local industries such as the fish producing and milk producing factories, as well as a branch of the electronic company Robotron collapsed with the Wende, the Volkswerft remained one of the main employers in the city. In GDR times, with 8000 employees it was “one of the biggest export enterprises of the GDR” (Koltz 1994:9). As the wharf drastically downsized it was often women who lost their employment.

Stralsund’s women’s projects in support of the unemployed also appear to have some historical links. The cultural and communal project called Fayencenhof in which the grass roots organization plans to house its women’s projects is a historic site: a factory which was established in the second half of the last century. Around the same time, a wool factory was established in the old city with about twenty looms. Thus, modes of production from the past
seem to be linked with the present. Today, unemployed women are taught some traditional handicrafts like spinning wool in a work programme called “wool-project”. Tacitly, it seems that some of these traditions are directly and indirectly linked with projects of the women’s grass roots group.

Since the Wende people have made changes by themselves. In Stralsund, the aforementioned initiative for the preservation of historical buildings was formed. In the region, as part of the civil movement in 1989 (October/November), initiatives for an independent state of Pomerania made themselves heard and voiced peoples’ desire to leave behind a “command economy” and “democratic centralism”, and to reform the administrative structure of the GDR.13 As claims for an independent Vorpommern were voiced in the process of unification (see Rutz, Scherf and Strenz 1993) the historical regions were remembered by the people (Hajna 1995:183).14 Unification brought with it the question of how to territorially organize the GDR (see Rutz, Scherf and Strenz 1993). Finally, five federal states, the so-called new federal states (Neue Bundesländer), were reintroduced on the territory of the GDR, one of which was Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, hereafter called Mecklenburg-Pomerania. This is the most northern and eastern state of the unified Germany. Its northern boundary is the Baltic Sea, in the west it borders on the state of Schleswig-Holstein, and in the east, Poland.

With about 75,000 inhabitants the city of Stralsund lies in Vorpommern, that is, the northern-eastern part of the new federal state of Mecklenburg-Pomerania (see fig. 1, annex p. 285). While other parts of Mecklenburg profited from their proximity to the West German border, Stralsund seems both infrastructurally cut off and, at the same time, dependent. To give

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13 In the GDR, according to Hajna (1995:82) a centralistic principle was introduced which hollowed out the communal government. The states (Länder) in the territory of the Soviet Occupation Zone (SBZ) and the GDR existed until July of 1952, when with the introduction of districts, which were ordered into so-called Bezirke and Kreise, the existence of the states (Länder) was practically negated and became ineffective. In the north, an enclosed coastal district (Küstenbezirk) was founded (crosscutting historical divisions) in order to protect the sea border of the GDR (Hajna 1995:109) and in cities such as Stralsund the military was present. When the GDR government established the coastal city of Rostock as the capital of the district, it radically broke with traditional ways of thinking about territorial ordering (Hajna 1995:110).

14 However, under Nazism, from 1933 until the end of the Second World War, the federation principle was reduced in favor of a centralistic one, the so-called Gleichschaltung der Länder (bringing into line of the states) in the Third Reich. While during the Weimar Republic the states (Länder) were relatively powerful or autonomous, they lost this status and, in 1933, Stralsund as a government district was dissolved. Under allied occupation the old territorial structures were revived; and in 1946-47 the state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was founded out of formerly different areas (Landesteilen) mainly Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Mecklenburg-Strelitz and the Prussian Province Vorpommern.
an example, on Mondays in Stralsund one cannot buy fresh milk or other fresh dairy products before noon. It is around this time of the day that the trucks will have made their deliveries of fresh dairy products which are imported from the old federal states since the local factories collapsed. As in many other middle sized cities of Eastern Germany, shopping malls are built at the periphery of the city, and Stralsund continues to draw people from the surrounding countryside for their shopping. People from Stralsund expand their shopping trips either towards cities such as Lübeck and Kiel in Western Germany, or visit the Polish market across the border where fake designer items are sold.

Modernization and industrialization in this region had always appeared to be contradictory to local practice and had occurred at a different pace. The famous phrase supposedly made by Bismarck (founder and chancellor of the German Reich), “If the world comes to an end I would like to be in Mecklenburg-Pomerania because it will disappear a hundred years later”, testifies to this different pace. This statement is often quoted today in the local media in order to explain a certain regional distinctiveness and to assign a local peculiarity to the processes of modernization and social change which, as people view it, historically have always taken place differently in this region of Germany. There are also plenty of regional portrayals that characterize this open and flat land and its people as a “backward” place. Thus, it is not surprising to have heard statements that the GDR state had shaped peoples’ everyday lives differently in this marginal and mostly agricultural region than in the centres of power such as East Berlin and Leipzig; and that the Wende occurred differently as well.

The social movement in the northern part of the GDR also began to surface later than in East Berlin and Leipzig. Probst (1993) describes the local and regional differences of the (civil) social movement in Rostock and thus explains the distinctive timing of its surfacing. As one woman in Stralsund states: “While people demonstrated in Leipzig in the autumn of 1989 nothing was happening in Stralsund”. This later germination period is also true for the women’s movement activities in Stralsund. But perhaps this is due less to a “northern mentality” than to the fact that unlike women in East Berlin, for example, they had not formed solid and tight-knit
women’s networks prior to the *Wende*. Women in Stralsund, however, point out local characteristics of their institutions for women.\(^{15}\)

In 1994, the city of Stralsund published a book entitled “Four Years of a City”. Despite the city’s 760th anniversary, it does not dwell on its entire city history but rather on the most recent events of the *Wende* and unification; historical events and connections (such as with Sweden) are used to construct a new image of the city with a once glorious past and potential for the future. For example, a moment in Stralsund’s remote past is commemorated publicly in the summer months and turned into a spectacle to amuse locals and tourists: this is the *Wallensteintage* (days of Wallenstein). During the Thirty Years War, in 1628, the city successfully protected itself against Wallenstein’s attack. Subsequently, the city of Stralsund signed an “alliance contract” (*Allianzenvertrag*) with the king of Sweden (Ewe 1991:20). In 1648, the so-called *Westfälischer Friede*, the peace treaty, ended the Thirty Years War with substantial consequences for Stralsund’s further development. With the *Westfälischer Frieden*, *Vorpommern* (that is, part of Pomerania) and the, at times, independent city of Stralsund became an “autonomous territory” (*selbständiges Territorium*) under Swedish rule (Hajna 1995:30).

Today, political and new economic relationships are established with Sweden on the basis of this past. One might say that the recent historical shift with German unification presents another caesura for the city’s history and future in the way Swedish occupation or the Westphalia Peace Treaty once did. History informs peoples’ sense of belonging, the way they talk about the shift in their lives and the different ways of dealing practically with the changes.

**Part III**

**Outline of Thesis**

Both the particular history of this region and current conditions such as high unemployment have shaped the purpose and performance of the women’s movement in Stralsund and its women’s projects. This is not, however, an anthropological study of organizations (Wright 1994) or policy-making (Shore and Wright 1997), but rather of women’s\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) For example, in the past, it was the Women’s Centre’s name that differed from other *DFD* centres; in the present, it is the combination of the Office for the Equality of Women and the Office for Women and Family (the *Amt*) that is considered “unique".
experiences with transforming institutions and of the possibilities and limits for collective agency in the years following unification. To explore the basis on which women’s collectivity and collective activism used to be formed in the past and has been formed in the present, developed into a major theme in the analysis of the ethnographic material. I became aware that part of what people were describing to me was, in fact, how a grass roots initiative and women’s projects became institutionalized. This issue was tied to creating employment for women. I therefore explore the relationship between the subjective meaning of employment for women, their sense of community and collectivity experienced through work, and how this is related to the collectivity of political action against the arising new inequalities. More specifically, it is a study of transforming forms of collectivity shaped in a context of social, political and economic change or the transition from socialism to capitalism. Collectivity and community have been repeatedly described as features that were lost with the transition from socialism as the GDR society dissolved. Collectivity, however, is a necessary feature of social and political organization, and with the Wende new groups, e.g. women’s groups, formed and this collectivity translated into political action. These new forms of collectivity which surfaced with the social movement were soon channeled by the processes leading towards unification. A rather brief opening in which questioning and discussing of existing structures could occur closed again. This study investigates the diverse social and political practices of women in a small town and the forms of collective activities they continued to pursue.

We begin with the broader setting of unification, transformation, unemployment and how it was dealt with, particularly, by the women’s movement (chapter 2); we then move to the collective responses of women to the issues brought out by unification and how they were related to women’s past experiences (chapter 3). This leads us to explore the conditions of one local women’s project in the GDR past and how it was transformed during the democratic opening (chapter 4); and then institutionalized under the Western system when possibilities for collective action had changed (chapter 5). Then we learn about the role the women’s projects play in socially integrating their members through employment and how this elicits particular ways of talking about collectivity from different women (chapter 6). The above will provide an understanding of how ideas about work, societal responsibility and political activism, shaped by past experiences, are understood by different women and applied today (chapter 7).
Chapter 2 introduces those discussions centering around the problem of how East Germans can be integrated into an enlarged West German society. The socialist system of the East and the capitalist system of the West represent very different forms of economic, political and social organization. The key to understanding the question of German unification and how it is generally discussed in the unified Germany is “employment” or more generally “work” (Arbeit). “Work” stands for securing people’s livelihoods, standard of living, prosperity and stabilizing the new system. The state’s regulating interference in the employment market, particularly in Eastern Germany, constitutes the necessary background for understanding why and how government sponsored work programmes could become combined with matters of concern to the women’s movement. After unification, the intention of the movement to build a women’s infrastructure and support women in their quest for employment joined with the state interest to find mediators for distributing government funds (mostly work programmes). These changes in strategy (on behalf of the women’s movement), following the days of reforming socialism and participating in the democratization of GDR institutions and society, influenced the setting up of a “women’s project movement” (Frauen-Projekte-Bewegung, Kenawi 1995a) in the unified Germany. This “women’s projects movement” denotes the way in which social services were provided for women who have been most strongly affected by the transformations. Members of the East German women’s movement (and other observers) reflected on this development and their assessment of how the movement became depoliticized provides us with a first idea of the women’s movement’s quandary. The final section of this chapter deals with the way the women’s movement impacted on local restructuring in Stralsund which is reflected in the infrastructural set up of a Shelter, a Centre, an Office for the Equality of Women, and another women’s project, the wool-project.

In chapter 3, I set the stage for understanding how East German women decided to become politically involved. I do this by describing two ethnographic encounters: International Women’s Day and its local manifestations in Stralsund (Part I) and a dispute between locally active women in a women’s Centre (Part II). The basis for women’s activism in Eastern Germany differed from that in the West due to different ideas about collective mobilization and

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16 The term employment connotes a variety of German terms such as Arbeitsverhältnis, Erwerbsarbeit, Beschäftigung.
forms of protest. The example of the International Women’s Day protest shows that the extent to which East German activists use what is open to them in terms of collective politics from the West German women’s movement, and what some of them refuse to take over, is due to their different ideas. These ideas are clearly shaped by women’s experiences of the past and I take this up in the second encounter. As the dispute in the Women’s Centre shows, they try to separate themselves from the idea of associating the Centre with a “command structure”, while at the same time trying not to lose continuity. What shaped women’s experiences of the past was the institutional framework in which people were organized and gathered. In the present, institutions remain the starting point for many women wanting to become socially and politically involved. The women’s projects and, particularly, the Centre are examples par excellence of this institutional framework.

In order to gain a better understanding of the role that institutional factors played in officially bringing together women, I describe the Women’s Centre’s history in chapter 4 (Part I). This allows us to understand their particular historical experience with the mass organization for women, the DFD\textsuperscript{17}, in the GDR. It shows how politics were bound to state institutions and policies. Part II deals with how these “top down” structures were overthrown as part of the democratization process which the social movement, here, the women’s movement initiated. Some local women’s activism at the time translated directly into transforming the existing structures. For example, a women’s grass roots group formed which influenced most effectively the local restructuring process until the March 1990 elections. With this opening we see the potential for collective agency at a particular historical moment. Once this moment passed, the grass roots group lost the momentum to shape the new institutional structures, but it continued to develop various projects outside the Centre, while the Centre itself came to be supported by a government office. Within the re-structured Centre, new groups continued to form, e.g., those women who became employed and completely revised the Centre’s concept in the process. The employees all became affiliated with the grass roots group, the Initiative, while they worked at the Centre.

\textsuperscript{17} A list of abbreviations can be found in the annex on page 284.
Chapter 5 describes this very different situation in 1994, when the particular grass roots group called Initiative, begins to support the Centre but most employees are no longer members. The shift in personnel in the Centre testifies to the fact that collective activities are not necessarily aimed at initiating change nor are members becoming politically active. The Centre employees do not combine employment with women’s issues and this is due to their very different experiences of the Wende. Most employees and users view the Centre as a social service institution for women. Although this is, in fact, a requirement to receive government sponsored work programmes (ABM’s) for running the Centre, the women of the non-profit organization, Initiative, wish to provide a permanent space where women will not just gather but where they will also become politically involved. These events show the limits and possibilities of collective politics four years after unification within the context of the Centre project which functions to socially integrate women.

Chapter 6 focuses on the employees’ views in two work programmes (ABMs), the financial base of these women’s projects, and the possibilities the employees perceive in terms of social integration. It explores how women in two work-place contexts, the Centre and the wool-project, define their groups in particular ways, namely, as “team” and “collective”. This is based on their different experiences and interpretations of the GDR past and the recent transformation, and their position in the unified Germany. In particular, the wool-project women’s narratives provide insight into how the processes of social differentiation are being experienced. Whether these new collective experiences at the work place will translate into something ‘beyond’ remains open.

Chapter 7 draws together many of the threads of the previous chapters. Here I argue that the notion of “women’s work” can serve as a political category. Women’s ideas about work are connected to their political activism, but we learn in this chapter that these ideas are quite varied. However, women’s ideas about work do not just associate it with employment; rather a broader sense of what work entails is captured in the expression “women’s work”. Then, because of the broadness of the term, we see how the idea of “women’s work” becomes a political idea that articulates in different ways women’s sense of their political role in the new Germany.
Chapter 2  HISTORY OF UNIFICATION AND WOMEN

Introduction

In 1990, as Germany started on the road to unification, disturbances and instability lay ahead. One manifestation of this instability surrounded debates on how the East German population would be integrated into the society of unified Germany in terms of employment. These debates were carried out by experts in politics and social sciences at a high level of abstraction which related to mass unemployment in the process of transformation. For feminists, these debates surrounding the crisis of unification lacked an emphasis on and often even acknowledgment of the gendered nature of the restructuring process. From their perspective the issue of large-scale unemployment cannot be separated from gender because it is precisely these issues which determine changing expectations of how women fit into the new unified Germany.

The changes in the employment market in the transition from a planned to a market economy have affected women and men differently. It is to this discussion that I turn, after providing some general views regarding the extent and character of unemployment in Eastern Germany. A discussion of women's disadvantages in the employment market provides us with some of the arguments that are being used to explain the extreme gender specific differences; and furthermore suggests how debates on unemployment and an analysis of the transformation process could be dealt with by incorporating and linking gender to the analysis of the socio-economic and political restructuring process. Moreover, these feminist studies share with other studies the common understanding of the GDR as a “work-place society” which treats employment as an integral part of women’s and men’s lives in the GDR. Incorporating this particular view suggests that the major integration of people is through work and therefore institutions and programmes which rely on the state’s involvement or position have to be in place for this to happen. In the GDR, the state was deeply involved in shaping these institutions. Although in the united Germany the state is also involved (e.g., by creating government sponsored work programmes), the expectations of how the state should deal with unemployment were seen rather differently by most experts and ordinary people. Many
experts' general assumption was that high unemployment in the East was an unavoidable result of economic restructuring during the transition from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy. One such juncture where state policies regulating employment and ordinary people's experiences actually meet are the government sponsored work programmes (Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen - henceforth ABMs).

What follows is a presentation of this particular state incentive which was devised for dealing with large-scale unemployment in Eastern Germany (and which constitutes part of the financial transfer from the West to the East). As with the general debate about unification and unemployment, the discussions about government sponsored work programmes mainly talk about men and their integration into the employment market through these schemes. However, there is an interesting intersection between these government sponsored work programmes and the “movement of women's projects”: namely, government policy to regulate employment and the women's movement's concerted effort to prevent women from being pushed out of the employment market. Thus, the government employment policy met with the institutionalization of the women's movement through women's projects on government sponsored work programmes (ABMs). It is this intersection which has become important for contextualizing my ethnographic data. The question that arises is how ordinary people, in this case women, are using the institutions which are in place for integrating people through employment as their society undergoes transformation. The debates within the women's movement provide us with an idea of the feminist discourses on the national level. This in turn allows us to ask how feminist discourses at the national level filter through and are interpreted by women at the local level, in government offices, grass roots groups and women's projects. What kind of techniques and resources are being used by women to battle the unfavorable developments in the employment market? How do women as individuals and members of groups (grass roots or institutionalized women's networks) negotiate the issues with government institutions? The local women's infrastructure of Stralsund, of course, was shaped by the federal, regional and local government policies to deal with women's issues (Offices for the Equality of Women) and the grass roots activities of the women's movement in establishing government institutions and women's projects. What kind of local women's infrastructure was established in Stralsund? How do, for example, women in Stralsund get access to these projects?
The Unemployment Debates

Since large-scale unemployment in the new federal states is a result of economic restructuring from a socialist planned economy to the West German model of a social market economy\(^1\), it has become the centre of attention or focal point of analysis as well as a measuring stick for the success of unification in public debates. In other words, it is this government induced process of restructuring and its effect on the population in Eastern Germany that has occupied part of the debates. Today, employment is one important factor influencing the social integration of former GDR women and men into the society of the united Germany. In the GDR, work constituted a right and duty for women and men and companies provided diverse social services, most of which have now been privatized in the market economy. Mass unemployment is the most obvious symptom of social change in the new federal states and it is also predicted to have a long-lasting effect on the future development of the social transformation process (e.g. Kretzschmar 1992:5/6). Therefore, the degree to which unemployment disturbs a developing sense of social cohesion and stability in Eastern Germany is often depicted as a problem of German unification and its ‘crucial test or proof of worth’ (Bewährungsprobe) (e.g. Schaper 1995:46).

Unification was decided by politicians and these policy makers with their scientific supporters view this government induced process of restructuring and its accompanying reduction of the workforce in the new German federal states as a necessary result of rebuilding the East (e.g. BMFJ 25/1993:3). The degree of state intervention in regulating (un-)employment policies is widely disputed among politicians, experts and ordinary citizens in East and West; however, other than articles published by the press there is hardly any

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\(^1\) According to the OECD Economic Survey (1991:127), the politics of unification that guided the transition from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy were stimulated by a “Big Bang” approach. Rapid privatisation of GDR-state companies and enterprises was initiated by a trust agency, Treuhandanstalt, who was the major institutional actor responsible for creating the framework for the process of transition from a planned to a market economy (Kühl and Wahse 1994:121). In effect, it was a vast destruction of many former GDR companies. In this sense, during the phase of transformation from a planned to a market economy, the institutional influence of the Treuhandanstalt and its politics greatly impacted on the restructuring of the east German employment market (Kühl and Wahse 1994:121) This “Big Bang” resulted in a heavy employment crisis in the new federal states. (Schmidt 1995:13). Until the beginning of 1994, unemployment figures rose to 15.7% in the new federal states (Schmidt 1995:13).
empirical evidence in the social science literature of how unemployed women and men view this kind of state intervention.

In these (dominant) public discourses on transformation, unification and unemployment two issues are easily forgotten or rather downplayed: the interwoven processes of transformation in East and West which could justifiably be called dual transformation that were set into motion with unification, and the gendered nature of this restructuring process (see Nickel 1995a,b). The following exemplifies these issues: A recent ‘reform debate’ concerning the employment market and employment policies focuses on the conditions of transformation, but it is “forgotten” that most of the current problems had already begun to become visible prior to unification (Dahms and Wahse 1994:52). As Nickel (1995a,b) points out, the transformation in East Germany needs to be analyzed within the context of the ongoing crisis of transformation in the West which “is hitting (eastern) women harder than (eastern) men” (Nickel 1995b:66). Therefore, one should not celebrate or lament female ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ but rather it is “more useful to address the transformation crisis in the Federal Republic of Germany and ask how it is affecting women at various levels..”. In fact, a developing literature on women and transformation focuses on analyzing various gendered issues, particularly, in relation to the restructuring of the workforce. In the GDR, an endemic shortage of labour existed that made it necessary to integrate women into the workforce, whereas in the capitalist society of the united Germany a surplus of labour determines employment market forces.

Since 1990, the disadvantages of women in the employment market have been an integral part of research on the transformation process in the new German federal states. Many studies have shown that the “economic restructuring did not take place in a gender neutral manner” (Schenk and Schlegel 1993:74; see also Schlegel 1995; Nickel 1993a,b, 1995,a,b; Alsop 1994). “Women are the first to be fired and the last to be hired” was a popular slogan of 1990 within the East German women’s movement (compare Behrend 1992). Women, in particular, were laid off and this was ‘not a voluntary retreat’ (Schramm 1994:54). As many authors have pointed out, “With the low demand for workers, women’s positions are being further marginalised” (Alsop 1994:37). It is this kind of analysis that helped me to contextualize my ethnographic data.
A closer look at some of the statistical data shows that in 1993, the unemployment average for the year differed for men (11%) and women (21%) (Datenreport 1994:96). Although a comparison of unemployment figures between the new federal states displays differences, the general trend is that unemployment rates for women between 1990 and 1994 more than doubled, as did the general unemployment rate which in Mecklenburg-Pomerania went from 8.7% to 16.9% during this time (Sozialreport II/1994). Women came to be viewed as one of the “problematic groups”, along with foreigners, the elderly and the disabled (Datenreport 1994:94, Erster Frauentatuationbericht Stralsund 1995:19). Although female members of the workforce in the GDR were well trained and in general are still highly motivated and willing to make far reaching compromises with regards to their professional mobility, such as furthering their qualifications, retraining (Müller-Hartmann 1993:309) commuting and geographically re-locating in order to be employed, it remains problematic for women to be re-integrated into the workforce (Schenk and Schlegel 1993:374). Studies show that there was no significant differentiation along gender lines with regards to retraining and work place mobility (Bertram 1993:205). However, compared with men, opportunities for women to find employment are significantly lower even after women took qualification courses and were retrained.

In 1993, long term unemployment (defined as one year or longer without work) in the new federal states rose to approximately 31% (Datenreport 1994:100) and was predicted to be on the rise (Kühl 1993:159; Krieger and Lompe 1994:8). While Kühl (1993:159) predicted massive long-term unemployment and unemployment among women, he failed to link the two. Nickel (1995b:67), on the other hand, recognizes the connection by pointing out that “..the structural data on long-term employment in the new federal states speaks a clear language: long-term unemployment has become a women’s problem.” or, as an article in the women’s magazine Im Zentrum (Sept. 1995:2) characterizes the problem, “unemployment still has a female face”. That is to say, the feminist interpretation of the (statistical) facts indicate more clearly that structural set-ups exist which cause women particular disadvantages. As Alsop (1994:37) points out:

Women's experience in the labour market will be influenced by the interaction of gender with other social factors, as well as by the skills they can offer and the development of employment opportunities in the region in which they live.

The interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data provides ample evidence of the gendered restructuring and links it to labour market development and policies. My data builds on this evidence and shows how women deal with and respond to these particular pressures by using those institutions supported by government funds to adjust to and battle their disadvantaged situation in the employment market.

**Issues of Gender**

The discussion of women's unemployment and disadvantages in the employment market provides us with some of the arguments that are being used in explaining these extreme gender specific differences and why they exist despite women's desire to remain employed. In the more orthodox literature on unemployment in the new federal states, however, unemployment among women is discussed as a side issue. Depending on the author's point of view, the analysis of this phenomenon is linked with other mitigating factors. For example, the literature posits the reasons for high unemployment among women in the context of the restructuring process (e.g. BMFJ 1993:4). One argument is that the reasons for high unemployment among women date back to life in the GDR when women worked in those economic sectors which are now no longer compatible with the market economy because of increased downsizing (Dunskus and Roloff 1991:83; BMFJ 1993:4). In this literature, East German women's desire for employment is often depicted as a phenomenon which (still) distinguishes them from West German women (e.g. Sozialreport IV/1994:25). Another way of stating this is to emphasize that employment for women is still seen as natural (BMFJ 1993:6; Dunkus and Roloff 1991).

The feminist literature also highlights women's unbroken desire to be employed, but instead of just describing it as natural they emphasize the devastating effects of unemployment and perceive it as a potential for resistance (Behrend 1994, Nickel 1995b). As Nickel (1995b:67) states, "East German women are resolutely resisting the social ostracism that is
transmitted to them via the labour market”. Furthermore, what distinguishes feminist studies from other kinds of approaches is that they go beyond a discourse that simply acknowledges the value of employment for women past and present. Feminist studies closely investigate why women are disadvantaged within a context of the pre-conditions of the internal structure of the GDR (e.g. Rocksloh-Papendieck 1995) and its gender relations (e.g. Dölling 1991,a,b). While some studies emphasize analysing the chances and handicaps for women in the employment market and the way women were affected by employment market policies, others explore the changes in an individual’s life courses and employment biographies since the conditions of combining family and employment have changed (i.e., losing the GDR state benefits for women).

One pivotal argument in these studies is that men have begun taking over even more leading positions in the economic sector than before and women are being pushed out of formerly female dominated sectors (see Nickel’s example of credit institutes, 1993a). However, this alone does not explain the degree of gendered restructuring in the new federal states which had already begun with the Wende. Alsop (1994:32) expands on this point:

In part, the preference for male labour can be attributed to the subordinate position of female labour in East Germany prior to the Wende. In the GDR women’s roles were enlarged rather than redefined [double burden]. Women took part in paid labour outside the home yet continued to have primary responsibilities for the organization of housework and child care. Women therefore entered the labour force on different terms to men, which in turn restricted their employment choice. ... Women’s subordinate position in the labour force was reflected and reinforced through their lower level of wages......

This line of argument suggests that East German women did not enter the new Germany on an equal footing with men (see also Nickel 1995a,b); and that women’s status and degree of equality (equity) in the GDR translates into their discrimination and disadvantage in the employment market of today. In this vein, Gerda Jaspers (1993:112) notes that “the existing gender specific and hierarchical division of labour in the GDR has an after-effect (wirkt nach) and supports (fördert) female unemployment” (my translation). Moreover, several feminist researchers point out that gender inequalities in the period following the Wende worsened and as a result new forms of patriarchal relations are being established (see
Labour force considerations remain key for the role that was ascribed to women in the past and is being ascribed to them in the present.

A second position in literature is taken by Nickel and Schenk (1994) in arguing that employment market analysis (*Arbeitmarktheoretische Ansätze*) is unwieldy (*sperrig*) and unsatisfying for explaining gender specific differentiation particularly in the new federal states. These authors argue that there hardly exists any difference in men's and women's approaches towards employment (*im Erwerbsanbebot und -verhalten*) (Nickel and Schenk 1994:275). Nickel and Schenk (1994:276) note:

The gender specific conflicts of adjusting and the disparities in the new federal states cannot be made transparent through the internal logic of the employment market and those processes of selection resulting from it.... (my translation).

Furthermore, Nickel and Schenk (1994:277) also question the 'power of explanation' (*Erklärungskraft*) of feminist approaches to the phenomenon. The authors argue that these approaches will only address gender inequality successfully if they take up the challenge of integrating issues of societal transformation. While these arguments are persuasive, this paper is more concerned with the micro-level and the way gender issues play out in the everyday context of the transformation process.

This micro-level approach can also be seen in an array of biographical research literature which links women's subjective experiences to the larger transformation processes (see e.g. Dölling and Dietzch 1996, Weihrich 1993, Meyer and Schulze 1995). For example, Dölling and Dietzch (1996) analyse women's taken for granted biographic concepts that are continuously geared towards combining both employment and family even under a unified Germany. Some of the biographical research has explored women's views, strategies and ways of dealing with the situation of being disadvantaged in the employment market and how these are influenced by their life concepts formed in the GDR based on the notion of women's employment. As I discovered, the best access to women's life histories including particularly their experience of the transformation was through work histories. This finding also suggest that employment is a central issue in women's lives and life concepts.
The importance of paid employment for women is based on the experiences they had in GDR society where employment (despite gender inequalities) was an integral part of both women and men’s lives. However, it is not only feminist and biographical research which uses this argument, but other bodies of literature which point out the employment orientation of the GDR and describe it as a “work-place society”. It is to those discourses that I now turn as they are instrumental in understanding the significance of employment and how people are socially integrated.

The Meaning of Employment in the GDR and of Unemployment in the New German Federal States

A number of writers base their understanding of the present conditions of unemployment on their views of the GDR as a “work-place society”, though the ways in which they make this characterization, differ. In this literature, the GDR society has been repeatedly described as a ‘work-oriented society’ (Arbeitsgesellschaft) (see e.g. Landua et al. 1993, Reißig 1994), ‘employment-society’, ‘full-employment society’ (Vollbeschäftigungsgesellschaft) or ‘work-place society’ (Arbeitsplatzgesellschaft) (Rietzschel 1995:14). There are essentially three discourses that revolve around this position: modernization approaches, life world approaches, and socio-psychological approaches. I will deal with each in turn.

Modernization approaches such as Winfried Thaa et.al. (1992) describe this employment orientation as a phenomenon that may attract the Western glance but in fact represents all other Eastern European societies. These authors attempt to reconstruct and explain the specificity of ‘work centration’ (Arbeitszentrierung) as inspired by official GDR ideology, and supported by societal values which are based on the Protestant German work ethic (Thaa et.al. 1992:76/77). Whereas these authors’ intention is to reconstruct historically the specific characteristics of GDR society, other authors place emphasis on comparing different types of modern societies. The latter is part of a social science discourse which aims at contrasting socialist with capitalist industrial societies by showing how industrial societies

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3 For a critical analysis of applying (western) modernization theories to the communist societies see Mühlberg 1994:65/6. Nevertheless, Mühlberg (1994:67) continues to suggest a modernization theory approach for analysing the collapse of the GDR.
of the socialist type differ from highly efficient modern capitalist societies (Rietzschel 1995:14). This particular discourse often appears to be caught up in an evaluation of two different systems, namely, East and West. As the following example shows, this evaluation can continue to influence the analysis of the present transformation process: Rolf Reißig (1994:8) characterizes the ‘work-oriented society’ and ‘industrial society’ of the GDR as the ‘dowry’ (Mitgift) as well as the ‘burden of heritage’ (Erblast oder Altlast)⁴ that the GDR brought into the ‘union’ with the BRD. He voices his concern about obstacles that this kind of ‘work-orientation’ might create in the future because it could possibly block innovation, initiative, responsibility, creativity etc.. While the author would see this in economic terms my data shows that a particular ‘work-orientation’ could possibly make it more difficult to overcome and replace those hierarchical structures of work organization with alternative ones in a women’s project. In other words, people’s ‘work-orientation’ penetrates into other spheres of life as well.

This can be seen by approaches which aim to understand the meaning that employment has for the life world and/or life course of former GDR people. Besides acknowledging that labour was one of the central ideological concepts, they propose that it was a feature that influenced and structured people’s everyday lives. In this fashion, Kohli (1994) problematizes the historical reconstruction of the GDR as an ‘employment-society’ and as one aspect of the current analysis of the transformation process. For Kohli (1994:38), the feature of being an employment society is one of the most prominent contradictions of GDR society. Within the context of modernization theories, Kohli (1994:39f) describes three dimensions of the ‘ politicization of labour’ (Vergesellschaftung der Arbeit) as specific to the modern socialist GDR society. These are the degree of ‘employment participation’ (Erwerbsbeteiligung) - by this Kohli (1994:39) refers to (women and men) being in the workforce over an expanded life span; the ‘ideological revaluation’ (ideologische Aufwertung) of labour which Kohli (1994:41) believes was supposed to recruit and motivate workers; and a ‘company centered social policy’ (betriebszentrierte Sozialpolitik) which turned the work place into a social place with diverse

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⁴ The ‘one-party-system’ (R. Henrich) and the ‘paternal state’ (R. Aron) are the phrases which Reißig uses to describe the ‘burden’ of socialist heritage. The positive ‘dowry’ is the ‘greater human potential’ ( "mehr an mitmenschlichem Potential") [of East Germans compared to West Germans] - a phrase he borrows from the politician and GDR expert Geißler- which is believed to have developed in the various collectives in which GDR society was organized (see chapter 6 on the notion of the collective).
functions and tasks such as day cares, kindergartens, recreation facilities, training schools (*Betriebsberufsschulen*), institutions for adult education, medical care, housing service (my translation) (Kohli 1994:42/3). While Kohli (1994) links this feature to the kind of biographical research he carries out, many social scientists using a modernization approach do not explore or seek to understand the “meaning of labour in the life of the individual” (see Rietzschel 1995:14) or the “meaning of the work place for the interpretation of one’s life world” (*Lebenswelt*) (Krieger and Lompe 1994:10). The latter, however, stresses this feature of GDR society in order to gain a better understanding of the individual’s experience of the transformation process. My research fills a gap by exploring how individual women used agency to influence the restructuring process through setting up women’s projects on government sponsored work programmes which in turn help women to come to terms with the personal and social effects of having lost their jobs.

The link between transformation processes and the effects on and responses by individuals can be seen in the recent literature on the “psycho-social” effects of unemployment on former GDR women and men in the new German federal states. This literature often emphasizes the typical orientation towards full employment during GDR times. This approach aims at understanding the present situation of unemployed individuals and, therefore, draws upon the particular image of a perished GDR society devoid of labour. As a result of the previous full time employment of GDR men and women immense value was attached to paid work for the development of a socialist personality and society. It became synonymous “with accomplishing meaningful tasks” (Maier 1996) in society. Employment was seen as a basic value of life but it encapsulates more than paid work. In general, employment in the GDR was

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5 In analysing the social and individual differentiation of GDR society Kohli (1994:45f) emphasizes its gendered nature and continues to explore the meaning of employment for the course of an individual’s life.

6 Furthermore, as Rietzschel (1995:13f) points out, the cultural importance of the “world of labour” (*Arbeitswelt*) in the individual lives of East German men and women needs to be analysed while taking into account historical structural and social changes such as those after 1945. Though this is a promising approach, it will not be attempted in this thesis.

7 The GDR state’s employment politics were based on a ‘full time employment guarantee’ (*Vollbeschäftigungs garantie*) (Schmidt 1995:11) or “de-facto-Arbeitsplatzgarantie” (Jürgen Zerche 1994:2).

8 Perhaps one needs to be careful in relating the notion of “accomplishing meaningful tasks” solely to paid employment because Barbara Rocksloh-Papendieck’s (1995) interviews with women of agricultural collectives and industrial workers show an extended informal economy existed, which collapsed at the same time as people lost their employment in the formal economy. Thus, the particular women she interviewed lost their “second income” (1995:113).
seen as “a part of life” and as “natural or self-evident” (Petra Dunkus and Juliane Roloff 1991:1).

Employment (Berufstätigkeit) was not only simply a desired activity but also the norm for social behaviour in general. Not to work went beyond the imagination of most [GDR-] citizens” (Voigt and Hill 1993:113).

Insofar, then, as these social scientists see the GDR as a work-place society, they all share in their conclusion that unemployment was a completely new phenomenon (see Datenreport 1994:76; Vera Dahms and Jürgen Wahse 1994:29) for the individual as well as the collective (societal) experience. In the GDR, an employment market was missing and unemployment insurance simply did not exist (see Zerche 1994:2). Instead, an employment guarantee existed: “work was not only a right but the duty of every individual, both male and female” (Alsop 1994:30; Nickel 1994). Thus, unemployment officially did not occur and made social policies to support the unemployed obsolete. According to Müller-Hartmann (1993:307), the results of sociological studies show that neither East German ‘society as a whole’ (Gemeinwesen), nor individuals had developed a collective or individual strategy to deal with unemployment (Meyer 1992; Schröder 1993:96; Voigt and Hill 1993:107). That unemployment constitutes a new experience was an important observation which I repeatedly found confirmed in personal narratives of women who experienced it. In the Women’s Centre of Stralsund, however, women were attempting to find collective responses to the institutional transformations and one might argue that the movement of women’s projects itself with its attempt to create employment for women was an initial and immediate response to this phenomenon.

Micro-sociological approaches which look at the “(psycho-) social” effects of the experience of unemployment are interested only in individual responses. Occasionally they portray women and men as active agents who do not accept unemployment and develop their own initiatives to find employment. In so doing, the women and men often are caught within the given structural framework of state policies and the employment market. Thus, their attempts to find employment through their own initiative often remain unsuccessful because of the market situation (Müller-Hartmann 1993:308/9). These authors try to balance the state’s and the
individual’s responsibilities and claim that individuals need to develop certain skills for mastering the new situation of their lives, which can only be acquired through a long learning process and practice of new strategies (e.g. Müller-Hartmann 1993:308). Similarly, Kieselbach (1993:57) points out that the social construction of unemployment allows the individual to develop explanations and ways of mastering unemployment. To avoid these stereotypes of Easterners who need to learn one might rather speak, as Koch does, of the need to consider the social-cultural and psychological resources in addition to the loss of orientation and social networks in a crisis situation (see Thomas Koch 1992:320). While this body of literature explores the individual response to unemployment it does not do justice to the collective experience. The creation of women’s projects is just one example of the need to address the collective responses to unemployment.

**Expectations, Policy and Analysis**

We see then very different notions of the state’s role and the individual’s role in society both in the scholarly literature, and the opinion of ordinary people (your average citizens). Experts depict unemployment in the new federal states as a result of structural factors. Experts on (un)employment policies agree that the federal state, the provincial states, and the communes need to establish the basic conditions for these structural changes to take place (see Grundmann 1992:19; Kuhl 1993). These pundits basically support the existing state incentives such as government sponsored work programmes (for more details see p. 40) and suggest a particular use of these state incentives to reduce the effects of high unemployment, even though they maintain that this unemployment will continue to exist. In other words, they accept that mass unemployment is an unavoidable result of economic restructuring during the transition from the socialist planned to a capitalist market economy. Some experts are well aware that the solutions, i.e. policies to regulate unemployment which would answer the citizens’ ideas and expectations, are not going to occur (Sozialreport IV/1994:25).

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9 Kieselbach (1993:48), for example, suggests an unemployment policy that is designed to find “acceptable forms of re-employment” in order to mitigate the social and psychological effects of unemployment that are beginning to become more and more visible. What Kieselbach (1993:49) and others (e.g. Hahn 1993) suggest already exists in form of Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (ABM).

10 Here, the citizens expectations are related to their work-orientation, which as these specialists argue is not a product of the past but only developed since 1990. They do so in order to explain the significantly higher work-orientation in the East compared to the West.
response to these people the sociologist and women's researcher Nickel (1995b:67) maintains that the state's incentives need to be increased and that it is the state's responsibility and the politician's (and social scientist's) working within the state structure to ensure employment for everybody. This view concurs with ordinary people's expectations. The women I interviewed, like many other East German women and men, tend to view unemployment as a problem that requires a societal rather than an individual solution and demand that it is the state's responsibility to create jobs.

Ordinary people's expectation of both the state's role and their interpretation of the national discourses about unification and unemployment in Eastern Germany are different from those of experts, most of whom are from the West. Thus, the set of debates on unemployment and restructuring are limited in that they are often written from a West German perspective which does not capture East Germans' experiences of transformation and as a result homogenize these experiences.

In addition to the aforementioned perspectives, there exists yet another view concerning the interplay between state incentives (policies) and individual initiatives. This is the middle range level, such as local government officials who carry out these policies. Here I refer to another group of informants who were themselves local experts (e.g., government officials) employed in a diverse range of institutions, projects, and organizations designed to educate people and/or to support unemployed women and men (e.g., the unemployment centre, women's Centre in Stralsund, and public library). The common popular experience and complaint was that the capacity of projects, programmes, etc. which the institutions offered was not being fully utilized. In light of this matter, they resorted to the following explanation, namely, that former GDR citizens had yet to overcome the attitude of the past. That is to say, they created an image of the former GDR citizen as one who is still passively waiting "to be taken by the hand" as in GDR times. Some social science studies choose to interpret this

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11 Nickel (being East German) is aware of the unpopularity of her opinion among some West German sociologists. In fact, she attacks Claus Offe for his suggestion that we need to give up on the idea of full time employment (Nickel 1995b:67). The problem of unemployment is a current theme of recent EU conferences and G7 meetings (1996). There is a discourse concerning the meaning of employment that intersects with other discourses on how to manage growing unemployment in Germany and elsewhere.

12 It is common for those who live in the face of unemployment in the new federal states to expect the community/municipality or Kommunen to solve the problem of unemployment (see Hahn 1993:213).
phenomenon as the individual's 'deficit in the capability to act' (*Handlungsdefizit*): Rather than a state induced phenomenon, the East German individual is depicted as "deficient". This view lacks an understanding of the continuous social practices despite an overwhelming structural discontinuity in the transformation and unification process.

Let us now see how these national discourses on employment play themselves out at the middle-range level within institutions where integration takes place. After describing unemployment conditions in the region, I turn to a discussion of a set of practices, specifically the "ABM", i.e., the government sponsored work programme and its accompanying notion of the second labour market, as a middle range level for examining the way in which the broad level of policy meets with the daily experiences of ordinary people. The government programmes provide a resource for the re-integration of people into the workforce. They became available for people to use as society is transformed. After a brief overview of the government sponsored work programmes the focus will turn to how women's groups came to negotiate these resources in response to the effects of unification on women's chances of finding regular employment.

**Regional Disparity: Unemployment in Mecklenburg-Pomerania**

Since the collapse of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the restructuring of the employment market, unemployment\(^\text{14}\) has became a permanent feature in the new German federal states. In particular, in those areas which are mainly agricultural mono-structured economies, such as the infrastructurally underdeveloped region of Mecklenburg-Pomerania, long-term unemployment has come to shape the reality of many people's everyday lives\(^\text{15}\) (see

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\(^\text{13}\) According to Koch, Thomas and Woderich (1993:276) "the reasons for 'deficits of the capability to act' lie in those 'blockades to act' (*Handlungsblockaden*) that were developed during times of 'realistic socialism' (*Realer Sozialismus*)." Koch, Thomas and Woderich (1993:276) claim that it is the description of this phenomenon, that is, the deficits in the way social actors constitute themselves in the transformation process that unites macro- and micro sociological research and findings.

\(^\text{14}\) For literature on structural changes of the employment market as a result of the transformation process see for example, Bender and Meyer (1993), Berger (1992), Berger and Schulz (1994), Brinkmann and Wiedemann (1994), Huening and Nickel (1993), Landua et al. (1993) as well as for "psycho-social" effects e.g. Mueller-Hartmann (1993).

\(^\text{15}\) Consequently as statistics for Mecklenburg-Pomerania and other new federal states show, East Germans' patterns of marriage (dropped by half), divorce (doubled) and rate of births (dropped by half) dramatically changed in
This happened to such an extent that one can speak of agricultural areas where entire villages lost their economic function and became a 'gathering place for the unemployed' (Grundmann 1992:13). Whereas the problem of many cities is constituted by the (physical) decay of old neighbourhoods and the revaluation of the inner cities (Grundmann 1992:13) which is certainly true for Stralsund.

As a result, considerable regional differences developed which can justifiably be described as displaying a 'north-south trend' (Nord-Südgefälle) (Vera Dahms and Jürgen Wahse 1994:41; Siegfried Grundmann 1992:23). Mecklenburg-Pomerania, the most northern new federal state, constantly displayed the highest unemployment figures throughout the restructuring period (Vera Dahms and Jürgen Wahse 1994:41). These regional differences are, on the one hand, the result of the economic structures that pre-dated unification and, on the other, the result of the post unification economic development and the region's new location within the infrastructure of the unified Federal Republic of Germany. For example, the former economic orientation towards Eastern bloc countries is now reversed. Regions which for forty years existed in the shadow of the German-German border now profit from their closeness to it. (Grundmann 1992:13) A look at the map of Mecklenburg-Pomerania in Wochenpost (July 4th, 1996:3) shows the same pattern for the new federal states in general (see fig.2, p. 286): The most problematic area in terms of economic development lies in the north-east, where Pomerania borders Poland.

In 1994, during my field work, according to Sozialreport (1994) statistical unemployment figures in Mecklenburg-Pomerania varied between 21% and 24% but the 'realistic' unemployment figure was between 31.8% and 36.2%. These unemployment figures not only include those people who received unemployment payments, but also those who were on short-time-work, in re-education programmes, who commuted to the old federal states, response to this transformation (Sozialreport II/1994). For a discussion of this phenomenon, what Hans Mittelbach has called "defensive reactions" see his article. Furthermore, the birth-rate dropped and has brought attention to the impact of the transformation process on women's behaviour (see e.g. Sonja Menning 1995).

16 Due to declining employment opportunities a considerable number of inhabitants of Mecklenburg-Pomerania migrated to the west (Spiegel 38/1995, p.134f.). This, however, is the case in many regions and municipalities/communities in the new federal states.
received early retirement payments, or were employed in a work programme (ABM). Many of
the women I interviewed received or had received some kind of payment (mostly from ABMs).
Before we take a look at these government supported incentives, let us look at the reasons for
high female unemployment (21.4% for women vs. 13.7% for men) specifically in Stralsund.

Women’s High Unemployment: The Case of Stralsund, Mecklenburg-Pomerania

Restructuring in the region of Mecklenburg-Pomerania resulted from a process of de-
industrialization. Along the coastal strip of Mecklenburg-Pomerania, ship building (with
wharves in Rostock, Stralsund, Wolgast) was the dominant industry in the region. In this
industry, women were mainly employed in administration and organizational jobs. They also
predominantly worked in the light textile and consumer goods industries, the electronic
industry (which had been established over the past decades), and in the food sector. (Gensior
1995:82) The food industry also comprises the agricultural sector where many women gained
specialised occupations in the area of either animal or plant production. Gensior (1995:83/84)
points out that 40% of women in agricultural, forest or food production industries who had a
university and technical college degree (Hoch-und Fachschulabschluß) worked in
Mecklenburg-Pomerania and Brandenburg. Female employees in these areas have been
particularly affected by unemployment through the structural changes of the GDR agricultural
industry and the virtual break down of the agricultural cooperatives. Other women workers
were similarly affected when some of these industries turned out not to be compatible with the
market economy. In Stralsund, for example, the largest GDR electronic company Robotron
closed, as well as a sugar factory, a dairy production factory, and a meat production factory.
Several women I met and interviewed had either worked at Robotron, the Volkswerft, i.e., the
local wharf, for a locale textile company or in the agricultural sector.

The development that followed the break down of these GDR industries can explain the
high rate of women’s unemployment. Among the women I knew in Stralsund, some of the
highly educated women in these sectors became employed with the city (administration) while
others could not find permanent employment. That is the case because new employment was
created in trades for which mainly men were qualified. By 1992, the newly structured
administration had reduced its personnel; and so had the service sector due to the decreased ‘buying power’ (*Kaufkraft*) of the Stralsundian population. (Erster Familienbericht der Hansestadt Stralsund 1994:39) The fact that no new industries could be created particularly affected employment among women. Furthermore, employers openly preferred men and in particular no longer hired single parents and elderly employees (ibid). (This is confirmed by many stories I was told.)

Previous to unification more women than men were trained in and worked in the service industry, social services and education. Rising costs since unification, for example, had reduced the number of workers required in social services, education and the service sectors (Erster Familienbericht der Hansestadt Stralsund 1994:41). Thus, re-employment for women would not increase. Consequently, not only are unemployment rates for women high but also studies on unemployment in Mecklenburg-Pomerania have shown that women’s chances of being re-integrated into the regional labour market remain minimal (Voigt and Hill 1993:104, Erster Frauensituationsbericht der Hansestadt Stralsund 1995:18). This includes the regional non-sponsored first labour market as well as the government sponsored so-called second labour market. My study builds on this analysis showing how women, as individuals and groups, reflected and acted on these conditions. Insofar as I shall argue that work is crucial for social integration, this becomes a problem which extends well beyond the labour market or “the economy” narrowly conceived. The way in which government incentives were designed for those areas which were strongly affected by the economic restructuring in the new federal states and how the use of them plays out differently for women and men follows in the next sub-section.

*Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen (ABMs) and the Second Labour Market*

Since October 1990 [unification] the West German Employment Promotion Law (*Arbeitsförderungsgesetz*) has been expanded to the new Länder [new federal states]. ... Short-time work payments (*Kurzarbeitergeld*), training and retraining grants (*Ausbildungsförderung*), and programmes to facilitate employment acquisition (*Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen*) have been the main element of budgetary

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17 The Family Report of the city of Stralsund (1994) was prepared and published by the local government Office for Women and Family. It simply states the facts and does not further comment on women’s discrimination in the local employment market.
While there were many employment market policies, in this section I will focus on just one: the labour-market measures. These include those “programmes to facilitate employment acquisition”, which I have decided to call “government sponsored work programmes”. As we will see below, these do not necessarily lead to the acquisition of permanent employment in the new federal states, that is, a job in the non-government sponsored first labour market, and this is especially important to understand because it leaves individuals without realistic future prospects.

In the post unification era, government sponsored work programmes (Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen) were established throughout the new federal states. In West Germany, these work programmes were proven instruments, existing since 1969, that regulated the employment market and kept unemployment low. Other instruments, however, such as Beschäftigungsgesellschaften are now being tested in the new federal states for the first time. Amongst other measures such as ‘short-time work payments’ (Arbeitzeitverkürzung bei vollen Lohnausgleich) and ‘retraining grants’ (Ausbildungsförderung) these incentives constitute the government supported “second labour market”. As is revealed in a handbook which is published by the Federal Centre for Political Education these instruments of regulation are meant to support “the growing number of people who cannot adjust to the demands of the highly productive economic sectors” (Schaper 1995:46). The purpose of the second labour market is to improve the economic conditions for employment (Kühl 1993:18). The state incentives are supposed to keep the regional employment markets attractive, the workforce trained etc. and over all they act as “value creating” measures which reduce the cost of unemployment in the long run. (Kühl 1993; Krieger and Lompe 1994). The role of the ABM is ideally to support the regional employment market until enough unsubsidized employment is available (Kühl 1993). In this sense, the ABM is supposed to act as a bridge to the first labour market.19

19 In practice, however, it will be difficult to re-integrate a large part of the population and a second labour market will remain in the future (Kühl 1993:159).
It is important to note that in the context of radical economic restructuring in the new federal states the ABM is not comparable to those measures in the old federal states (Sozialreport IV/1994:10). With the establishment of ABMs in the new federal states important changes were made. This applies to its implementation as well as to its practice. First, in the new federal states the ABM is applicable according to different criteria. That is, the criteria of long term unemployment (i.e. being unemployed for a year or more) and “public usefulness” (Gemeinnützigkeit) of the ABMs need not be fulfilled [both apply in the old federal states] (see Krieger, Lompe 1994:20). Second, in the old federal states ABMs are usually held in an area of one’s profession, whereas in the new federal states ABMs are mostly held in an unfamiliar occupation. In other words, in the old federal states the emphasis is on the ABM-holders’ re-integration into his/her occupation whereas in the new federal states it is on acquiring new knowledge. Often this newly acquired knowledge remains unusable. Thus, the general purpose of the ABM to interrupt unemployment and to give the individual a chance for re-access into permanent employment is only partially matched in the new federal states. It interrupts one phase of unemployment but is less of a guarantee for finding employment and often ends again in unemployment. In other words, although ABMs are supposed to create employment it is known that this and other measures can only temporally alleviate the pressure of unemployment (Dahms and Wahse 1994:45).

ABMs, therefore, provide no prospect of reintegration into the first labour market and takes on a different function. Although ABM should provide a “bridge” to the first labour market, in practice it seems to serve as a trained reserve workforce. Because of the situation of the employment market (which can turn even highly educated men and women into ‘marginals’) the second labour market has become accepted by a wide range of experts and politicians. However, there is considerable discussion about how and in what way the second labour market should be restricted or supported (see e.g. Im Zentrum) Part of this debate

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20 For further details on some of these instruments see e.g. paragraph 249h AFG or the “society for the development of employment etc.” (Gesellschaften für Arbeitsförderung, Beschäftigung und Strukturentwicklung (ABS) (see Dahms and Wahse 1994:45ff).

21 Between 1990 and 1994 the percentage of East German employees hired on the basis of active government sponsored support varied between 14 and 23% (Schmidt 1995:13). In the new federal states ABM work programme numbers doubled from 1991 to 1992 (Datenreport 1994:92) as unemployment numbers rose.
focuses on the necessity of reforming the *ABM* (see current development and suggestions to adjust the level of the *ABM* in the East to the level in the West). As Krieger and Lompe (1994:48) conclude:

> the question of whether there should exist a second employment is not the issue, but the problem is one of reaching consensus about the degree of financing, a renewal of its instruments and its interrelatedness with other political fields (my translation).

These authors suggest measuring the success of incentives according to the effect that they have on the participants in these programmes, that is, whether they stabilize their lives, provide them with qualification or help to prevent the decay of their qualification (Krieger and Lompe 1994:8). Furthermore, they suggest incorporating the subjective point of view when reforming and developing new strategies.\(^2\) Thus, they broaden their perspective to include both the level of policies and the individual level regarding the set of government supported practices called *ABMs* etc.. This also points to the fact that the *ABM* not only functions to maintain a ‘second’ trained workforce but also has a social function to stabilize people’s lives. The latter is an important aspect for my analysis which looks at the interrelatedness of *ABMs* with potential alternative practices in the projects of the women’s movement. My interest is in how the conditions for the *ABM* affected individual and collective action in the projects. As we will see later in the critique of *ABMs* from within the women’s projects which to a large extent depended on the work of women in these government sponsored programmes (see p. for discussion in the Berliner Magazine for Women called *Im Zentrum*), they discuss the value of *ABM* rather in terms of its subjective meaning and communal effects than in terms of retraining and qualification.

One also has to reckon in and take into account the major difference between the *ABM* and regular employment. *ABM* is given for one year, renewable for a second, and provides approx. 2/3 of a regular salary. If the likelihood of finding permanent employment is low, this, however, is more desirable than unemployment (Krieger and Lompe 1994). That is, in many cases it only interrupts unemployment and gives the individual participant in an *ABM* work

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22 Krieger and Lompe’s (1994) study is one example of how the subjective view of *ABM*-holders can be incorporated. However, it is surprising that up to now only a few critical analysis of *ABM* from a sociological perspective have been attempted (ibid.).
programme the advantage of prolonging the period of their eligibility for unemployment payments (*Arbeitlosengeld*). Kühl (1993:155/6) observes that in order to avoid unemployment as long as possible many unemployed people attempt to become members of work programmes. Furthermore, because *ABM* employment is associated with the second labour market it is sometimes viewed as devalued. *ABM* holders do not have the same status and security as individuals who are regularly employed. But as Krieger and Lompe’s (1994:40) study shows, women in *ABMs* generally experience positive feedback from family and friends who see the *ABM* as an alternative and only rarely feel stigmatized because they do not have regular employment. In Stralsund, women in *ABMs* told me that they experienced both.

In general, women’s chances to be re-integrated into the workforce after one year of *ABM* are low; thus *ABM* for women more often than for men leads back into unemployment (Im Zentrum 3/2 March 1996:11) - about twice as many women remain unemployed after having been in an *ABM* re-education programme (Krieger and Lompe 1994:42,46). Furthermore, not only are women’s chances of finding permanent employment after an *ABM* slim (as shown in a comparative study on Magdeburg [East] (3%) and Braunschweig [West] (6%)) but also their chances of receiving *ABM* are low. Women are under-represented in the number of *ABMs* that are distributed by the employment centre (Krieger and Lompe 1994:13, Erster Frauen situations-bericht Stralsund 1995)\(^{23}\) However, this largely depends on the regional employment centres which distribute the *ABMs* and whether there exist supporting policies that are guiding their distribution. That is to say, although women are pushed to the margins of the employment market they are not likely candidates for these *ABM* work programmes. The number of *ABM* programmes for women usually does not reflect the actual unemployment figures because *ABM* funds are not equally distributed according to the percentage of unemployment for women and men. One reason for this is that the distribution of *ABMs* for women depends on the availability of projects in areas where women are typically represented (or respectively underrepresented such as construction etc.) and on the employment centre (Krieger and Lompe 1994:20/1). Unless there are regional or federal employment policies for women, which the local employment centres need to follow, the

\(^{23}\) In their Magdeburger study Krieger and Lompe (1994:20) call it the fact of women’s disadvantage.
distribution remains inadequate for the rate of women’s unemployment. This dependency on
the employment centre for distributing these resources can be seen in the women’s projects in
Stralsund where they distribute ABM applications and select possible candidates for these
employment measures and accept them.

To sum up, in the new federal states the ABM became a redesigned instrument that was
supposed to help cope with and soften the effects of large-scale unemployment and to allow
individuals to (re-) integrate in the employment market (or at least a certain degree of social
integration). The ABM is supposed to develop and maintain an attractive regional employment
market and to improve individual employees’ qualifications even though it does not lead to
permanent employment. In a similar vein, as with the general debates on unemployment and
unification, the discussions about the ABM mainly focus on men (or lack a gender perspective)
with the exception e.g. of Krieger and Lompe (1994) who also strongly emphasize the
subjective experience and value (or well-being) of those in the programmes. Otherwise, there
are gaps in the literature on the ABMs with regard to an emphasis on peoples’ personal and
gendered experiences, particularly, when it comes to incorporating gender into an analysis of
the ABM. This can particularly be seen with the “women’s project movement” (Frauen-
Projekte-Bewegung) which are nowhere mentioned in the literature on the ABM.

As I skimmed the literature on ABMs in search of information on these government
programmes and their relation to the women’s projects (which often depend to a large degree
on this kind of financial support), I realized that I would need to resort to other bodies of
literature in order to find an angle that could help me investigate this relationship. In particular,
I turned to the literature on the East German women’s movement in order to explore the
discussions and paradigm changes in response to the social-political and economic
transformations following the Wende and unification. In the following I will explore the
relation between women’s disadvantage in the employment market and the government
sponsored work programmes through the use of ABMs for the “women’s project movement”
(Frauen-Projekte-Bewegung) in the new federal states.

24 For example, as in Stralsund, these can be ABM funds to particularly support women (see Erster
Frauensituationsbericht 1995).
ABM and the East German Women’s Project Movement

The “women’s project movement” (Frauen-Projekte-Bewegung) is directly linked to the employment policies in the united Germany because the idea to establish a women’s network to a large extent was realized with ABM funds. This network consists of individual projects all over the East and is connected to the western network by a common information infrastructure. In Eastern Germany setting up this infrastructure was new and became the central development of the women’s movement after unification. In turn, this development depoliticized the movement and its projects.

The term women’s projects in Eastern Germany has at least two meanings, one refers to a common effort of establishing a project movement in the East, and the other refers to very localized individual projects. The term project refers to both the local and the supra-local level and it already implies that there exists a certain framework in which ideas, plans etc. are unfolding. The sum of these projects is supposed to sustain the movement. The individual projects occasionally network, exchange information and create platforms on a regional and federal level. The term women’s project movement implies, however, that women in the individual projects apply separately to be funded by the ABMs.

As a result, ABMs are important for two reasons - they provide a meeting point for government policy and ordinary people, and they have become potential sites for alternative political practices once they are linked to a social movement such as the women’s movement. Since unification many existing vibrant women’s projects and new ones came to be supported by ABM sponsored work. The new projects, in particular, developed in response to the growing number of unemployed women in the new federal states which the East German women’s movement had, Cassandra-like, predicted. In other words, the “women’s project movement” of the East came to create employment for women through ABM work programmes. Its predecessor, the GDR women’s movement (which originated after the Wende), had aimed at

25 In the 1980s and 1990s many projects in the alternative movement of the West (including the women’s movement) were supported by government sponsored work programmes. However, a critical analysis of the effects of ABM on the women’s project movement in the East (and West) is missing. Because women’s projects are run on ABM basis they could provide a focal point for the study of unemployment policies for women as well as the impact of these policies on alternative practices and concepts.
setting into motion a process of institutionalization in order to create an impact on politics and to build a women’s infrastructure and women’s culture, i.e., a public space for women. Post-unification ABM work programmes became available as a source of funding these projects.

At the same time, the reality of women’s high unemployment motivated socially and politically engaged women of different backgrounds to create employment for women through these projects. As a consequence, women’s projects in some cases came to employ women who previously had not been involved with the women’s movement. It was through this employment that some women came into contact with the projects for the first time. In addition, women’s projects developed a new function as distributors of government funds. The conditions under which ABM programmes were introduced in the new federal states (see section above) allowed for these projects to be set up and equipped in a relatively short period of time. However, the consequences were detrimental to the East German movement of women’s project. The close interrelation between government subsidies and the women’s projects drew attention away from the women’s movement, thereby making the degree to which these projects constitute sites for alternative practices questionable. However, to understand how sites for alternative practices developed in the GDR and surfaced during the Wende, I will present a brief history of the preceding non-state women’s movement in the GDR and the post-Wende foundation of the Independent Women’s Association before I turn again to the use of ABMs for the “women’s project movement” (Frauen-Projekte-Bewegung). The analysis of the local women’s projects in Stralsund and collective mobilization builds on the material that will be discussed in the following section.

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26 To describe the process of institutionalization of the East German women’s movement as a “catch up” development when comparing it with the women’s movement in the West (e.g., Nave-Herz 1993:122) is debatable. Despite the fact that both movements evolved through similar phases (self-experience, constitution of groups; feminist projects, institutionalization) the historical contexts in each case appear to be very different (see Rosenberg 1996).

27 In the West women’s projects often fought for comparable equipment over years.
The Predecessors: A Brief Review of the Non-State Women's Movement and the Independent Women's Association

The East German "women's project movement" developed in the post unification area (Oct. 1990) when state funds in support of community based ABM projects became available. It has its roots only partially in the 1980s “non-state women’s movement” of the GDR (Kenawi 1995a:109) and the post-Wende East German women’s movement which originated in a short period with an overarching (GDR-wide) organization, namely, the Independent Women’s Association (*Unabhängiger Frauenverband*-henceforth *UFV*). Although this is not the place to discuss in detail the history of the non-state women’s movement in the GDR or the Independent Women’s Association that preceded it 28, I would like to point out that it was in this environment that consciousness raising took place and sites for alternative political practices were first developed in GDR and the post-Wende times. To begin with, women’s groups in the GDR were self-organized groups and had formed in opposition (often meeting under the umbrella of the church or in academic circles). They built important social networks in which they began “to formulate a collective response” (Feree 1993:97, Kenawi 1995a, b). These women’s groups were not under the direct control of the state (except indirectly when observed by the secret service police) (Kenawi 1995b:11). In these settings, the women (among other issues) critically reflected on issues of peace and human rights etc. as well as their role as women in the GDR. That is to say, it was here that alternative and feminist perspectives were developed and the discrepancy between the official/theoretical equality and the actual “double or triple burden” for women in the GDR was discussed. This small section of the female GDR population did not accept the official version of the successful emancipatory project. Furthermore, these “submerged networks” were critical in formulating an oppositional consciousness and had already begun to emerge into autonomous activity in May of 1989 (Feree 1993:97/98). With the Wende, the opportunity had risen to make women’s issues public and to criticize the existing institutions such as the only legitimate socialist women’s organization, the Democratic German Women’s Federation (*Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands*- henceforth *DFD*).

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28 For detailed information on the women’s movement in the GDR see the following literature Kenawi (1995b), Horning (1993), Zimmermann (1991), and for the *UFV* Hampele (1993b), Diemer (1992).
After the *Wende* in the GDR, these women’s groups became politically involved in recasting socialism and were in the forefront of raising women’s issues in the newly created public sphere. Anne Hampele described these women activists’ aspirations and their aim to raise women’s consciousness as follows:

Women wanted to create a space in society for the different women’s groups to form within the public sphere a possibility for women to become aware of their situation. They also wanted to prepare and to enter politics and participate in power (Hampele 1993b:182).

The majority of GDR women’s experience, however, was solely concerned with the state policies for women and not with alternative feminist practices. According to Merkel (1990:68), “the women’s movement was aware of the difficulties of creating a political (*handlungsfähige*) public sphere for women after 40 years of conservative women’s policy during which terms such as feminism and sexism were disqualified” (my translation). The women activists of the *Wende* planned to build a new women’s organization in order to replace the only official socialist Democratic German Women’s Federation (*Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands-DFD*). Moreover, as Kolinsky (1992:276) notes, the East German Women’s movement was “in emphatic opposition to the official Democratic German Women’s Federation (*DFD*)” and “modeled on the new women’s movement of the West.” However, as part of the opposition movement, the women’s movement was dedicated to and engaged in reforming socialism.

During the *Wende* the political will of the women activists to participate in power was manifested in the foundation of the Independent Women’s Association (*UFV*) (compare Schwarz 1990). At the women’s congress of groups and initiatives at the *Berliner Volksbühne* in December 1989 it was decided to found a group representing their common political interest (*UFV* 1990a:60). Being part of the opposition movement, the *UFV* represented women’s interests at the Round Table discussions and “secured government commitment to an active equal rights policy for women” (Feree 1993:98, see also UFV

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29 Kenawi (1995b:43) believes that the foundation of the *UFV* marks the transition from the GDR non-state women’s movement to the women’s movement in the new federal states.
1990a). Moreover, as a women’s association the *UFV* defined itself as a GDR wide “umbrella organization” which aspired “to facilitate political cooperation between groups and local initiatives” for women (Hampele 1993b:185). In the beginning, the *UFV* “advocated a radical reform of socialism” (Hampele 1993b:184) and attempted to influence the politics of reform. However, around the time of the first free elections in the GDR the differences among *UFV* members and their ideas about how to achieve these aims emerged. According to Nave-Herz (1993:118) the politically active women of the movement disagreed on the issue of unification. In December 1989, the manifesto “*Ohne Frauen ist kein Staat zu machen*” (No new state without women, Feree’s translation) showed that the majority of the *UFV* were committed to socialist perspectives/aims. While later, in February 1990, at the official date of the *UFV*’s foundation, their programme addressed unification as a possibility (Diemer 1992:348f). Furthermore, in the *UFV* manifesto *Ohne Frauen ist kein Staat zu machen* of December 1989 unification was associated with a backward development for women which found its expression in the metaphor of “women back to the hearth” (Merkel et al. 1990) or “back to the kitchen stove” (De Soto’s translation, 1993). This concern with unification was worded in the manifesto as follows:

> It would mean we must again fight for the right to work, fight for a place in the kindergarten, for meals at school. It would mean giving up most of what was achieved with difficulty, instead of lifting it onto a new qualitatively [different] level (my translation) (Merkel et al. 1990:3).

However, a few months later at the official founding date of the *UFV* (Feb. 1990), when the *UFV* had already registered as a party for the upcoming first free election in March 1990, the declaration addressed the issue of unification in a different fashion: “The *UFV* stands for: the unification of Germans in a mutual reform process which respects the inner sovereignty of both German states ....” (my translation) (see “*Frauen in der Offensive. Das Programm* 1990, S.16f’ quoted in Diemer 1992:349). The *UFV*’s modified strategy certainly was an adjustment to radically developing political circumstances. In contrast to other political groups who successively developed a Western orientation and constructed the old communist regime (*SED-Regime*) as the enemy, the *UFV* had an ambiguous relation towards both unification and the *SED-Regime* because of the social policies for women in the GDR (Diemer

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30 For further details on the role of the *UFV* within the opposition movement see e.g. Susanne Diemer (1992).
According to Diemer (1992:350) it was this ambiguity and contradiction (Gebrochenheit) in relation to SED-policies (in particular social policies) and an FRG-perspective that constituted central conflicts for the UFV in positioning itself.31

With the elections in March 1990, the UFV failed as a party because it only received the support of a small number of voters. Political efforts to put feminist issues on a national agenda were increasingly unsuccessful (Feree 1993:100).32 Not only did the UFV loose its political influence but it also had to resign its status as an official political party. Furthermore, the UFV had to acknowledge that they “did not represent or mobilize masses of women” (Hampele 1993b:189). The elections had shown that the majority of women did not accept the UFV as the legitimate political representative of their interests (see Rosenberg’s 1996 reference to Einhorn 1995, Rosenberg 1992). The March 1990 elections were considered a vote for unification33 and ended the utopian dreams of socialist reforms.34 In consequence, the UFV changed its strategy in particular with regards to social policies for women.35 As Hampele (1993b:184) notes:

Social policy was conceived as a determinant of women’s opportunities. This view became more clearly expressed as the ensuing reform policies began to dismantle the social achievements [prior to unification].

As unification approached, the state guaranteed benefits in the old GDR were threatened. This forced the UFV’s strategy to change into one of defending women’s benefits (like day care etc.). In other words, it “forced women into the role of defending what already

31 Moreover, although the UFV aimed to present itself as a unified front (tried to achieve a collective female identity) internally the UFV according to Diemer (1992) was going through a process of erosion. In addition to the inner erosion process, structural obstacles (e.g. to succeed within the opposition movement and as a party in coalision with the Green Party) prevented the UFV from having a larger impact on the transformation process (Diemer 1992). Or as Merkel describes the UFV’s conundrum it was situated in a contradictory field of wanting to be recognized as a political party and thus, being forced to gain its own profile in parliament, and to decide for political allies; while at the same time its plural approach to unite women across party boundaries was neglected (Merkel 1990:68).

32 For example, Departments for the Equality of women were not established independently as planned.

33 The victory of the Christian Democratic Party in the GDR, because of its affiliation with the ruling Christian Democratic Party of the FRG, represented the GDR voters’ choice of unification over other alternatives such as a reform of socialism.

34 “The legal assimilation of East Germany into the FRG completely eliminated the orientation to reform” (Hampele 1993b:184).

35 Once the UFV had started with criticism of existing institutions. For example, the UFV’s women’s movement criticized the GDR policy for women and family because of the double burden it had created for women.
existed” (Hampele 1993b:184) and “to protect what had been taken for granted” (Feree 1993:101). Thus, the UFV’s claim for women’s equal treatment in the labour force turned into a defensive struggle to maintain employment for women since the right to employment ceased to exist after unification. Increasing unemployment among women affected individual women’s lives as well as the programmes and design of women’s projects.

Although the UFV’s attempt to run as a party and to put feminist issues on the national agenda failed, it had successfully created a women’s network and women’s culture through the women’s projects. Furthermore, the local struggles for funding these women’s projects, which offered a wide spectrum of programmes (Hömberg 1992), under the conditions of the Western administrative system and policies, were successful as well. However, the use of funds administered by the state through ABM work programmes is one factor that came to change the setting and “politics” of the East German women’s project movement (as we will see later in detail with the local women’s projects).

The Women’s Project Movement: Depoliticization of the Projects

Some scholars who have studied the development of the East German women’s movement have described the institutionalization of the projects under the conditions of the Western government’s social policies as a process of depoliticization (Kenawi, Böhm, Merkel, Behrend)36. This perspective is grounded in their own personal politics and their active participation in the women’s movement. It is based on their experience that unification had blocked their earlier attempts at reform and their significant political voices. As these activists’ aspiration for societal change became increasingly more difficult to put into practice, the women’s projects became depoliticized.37 In the attempt to preserve pre-existing conditions for women and to secure employment for women, setting up a women’s culture and opting for

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36 The women’s movement and projects became depoliticized (Tatjana Böhm 1993; Ina Merkel, personal conversation Jan. 1994).
37 There exist historical parallels to this process. For example, Ursula Schröter (1994:51) describes the end of the bourgeois women’s movement in Germany of 1933. At the time a depoliticization of claims concerning women’s issues was accompanied by a lack of the basic notion of societal change. Schröter (ibid.) notes: “Eine Entpolitisierung der Forderungen geht damit einher, daß in der Diskussion um die Frauenfragen in der bürgerlichen Frauenbewegung, nicht die Vorstellung grundsätzlicher Veränderung der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse vorhanden ist”.

elementary societal change became a secondary issue. Furthermore, instead of radical amendments for change, usually connected with the UFV, women’s projects now required a close cooperation with the West German bureaucracy. The irony is that it was the nature of the West German bureaucratic structures and forms of financial support (Förderungsformen) such as ABM that did not allow those organizational forms of solidarity associated with the women’s movement to continue (Ina Merkel, conversation Jan. 1994). For a moment in history, the women’s movement had escaped the grip of the paternalistic GDR state, established its presence and influence in public, only to find itself (after unification) in a newly created relationship of dependency with the West German state. (How this process unfolded in the particular locale of the women’s network in Stralsund and the possibilities and limits for collective politics upon its institutionalization will be illustrated in chapters 3, 4, 5.) During unification, the loss of political influence of the UFV and the disillusionment of many activists lead to personnel changes in the projects as the projects themselves shifted their focus. As Hanna Behrend (1994:69) states:

In the early post-Wende days, most of the women’s groups that were established pursued political feminist aims and affiliated with the UFV. ... As it became clear to them how little power they had to bring about changes they had hoped for and how they were unable to prevent the loss of rights and privileges they had had in the GDR many gradually drifted away from purely political activities into socio-cultural, ecological, educational, business and art projects.

Thus, institutionalization shifted the focus and content of women’s projects. Kenawi (1995a) summarizes this development of women’s political retreat as a major shift for the women’s movement. In the process leading to unification the women’s projects’ emphasis on a political agenda to reform socialism shifted towards an engagement in “social work” (Sozialarbeit). Because one criterion for obtaining government support such as ABMs for the projects is by fulfilling the requirement of communal or public interest (Anspruch der Gemeinnützigkeit), government sponsored work programmes (ABMs) for women were often set up as services to the community, e.g. in the area of social services or “social work”. These women’s projects in a sense came to mirror a social service agency for the state (self-definition of the women’s project movement) (Kenawi 1995a:110). Moreover, in making the transition from a political force towards securing employment for women and providing services in the
public interest, according to Kenawi (1994, 1995a), the political agenda of the East German women’s movement has been replaced by the necessity to conform to the acceptable funding proposal style ("application lyrics") for government sponsored work programmes (ABMs).\(^{38}\) Kenawi (1994) criticizes these "application lyrics" for having become the content of the projects; thus, the creation of employment serves "as an end in itself" (Selbstzweck). Furthermore, Kenawi (1994, 1995a) concludes that the new women’s project movement (Frauen-Projekte-Bewegung) is "growth-oriented", thus serving to stabilize the system and in the process losing its visionary character.

This observation is equally applicable, however, to other women’s movements (e.g. in West Germany, Britain, US) who lost their overarching goal in the process of securing and expanding access to state subsidies (Rosenberg 1996). For example, once the West German women’s movement came to institutionalize their projects, these "projects gradually accepted and enforced upon themselves the norms and the standards of public social service agencies" (Rosenberg 1996:150).\(^{39}\) The East German women’s project movement has gone through a similar process of consolidation. My research builds on this analysis but explores the degree to which the institutionalization limits and allows for initiating social changes in the case of Stralsund’s women’s projects.

What can be concluded from this literature perhaps is that there are two differences between the Eastern and the Western movement: First, the issue of timing, i.e., this institutionalization happened at a time of radical and rapid social transformation. Second, the movement underwent a process of institutionalization under a different state (FRG) than the one it came up against (GDR). Both facts influenced the formation of the women’s project movement. This can be seen by the women of various backgrounds who became recruited in the process of establishing women’s projects (see chapter 4). Because of the breakdown of social networks and groups in tandem with the new experience of unemployment, these local women’s projects often served as a meeting place for women who were seeking a new

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\(^{38}\) In Kenawi’s (1995a) analysis and documentation of the origins of the East German women’s movement she distinguishes between the non-state women’s groups of the 1980s in the GDR (who were in the opposition under the umbrella of the church) and the women’s project movement of the 1990s.

\(^{39}\) "The 'project movement' [West] has since come to be regarded by a number of feminists as the beginning of the end, or self-destruction of the women’s movement" (Rosenberg 1996:149-150).
orientation in their lives. Women of various backgrounds, who had not been involved in autonomous feminist activity, became attracted by the women’s projects. When I conducted research one would meet these active women at the projects.

It is therefore essential that I shift my focus from the feminist women’s activists towards the majority of women who had not previously been involved with the East German women’s movement. To explore their motivation to become involved with the women’s projects will help us to understand the rise of the women’s project movement as well as its depoliticization. The ideas I draw from the analysis of East German women’s activists and observers of the movement provided a starting point from where I could begin to understand this process at the local level, particularly, women’s views within these projects.

Simultaneous loss of state benefits for women and the rising numbers of unemployed made employment an urgent matter for the majority of East German women. It was at this moment of loss when the meaning of employment and state benefits for women was first felt by the majority of women in the GDR that they became involved in the women’s movement. It was only after unification that the majority of East German women developed and voiced insights that were closer to the UFV positions prior to the election. This was partially due to the growing knowledge that social (welfare) policies in the West were not as developed as the array of consumer goods - a misjudgment of women’s conditions in the West (Rosenberg 1991:148). According to Kenawi (1995a:109), even within the women’s project movement it was only after the Wende when GDR women were more strongly confronted with discrimination in their daily lives and consequently with an ideological reorientation that more of them became interested in feminism and women’s issues.

When comparing women’s rights in the GDR to the rights and roles of women in the FRG (e.g. low employment for women, no self determined abortion law, no guaranteed child care etc.), from most East German women’s perspectives, the role for women appears to be based on a rather conservative model. In general, the conservative West German model contradicts GDR women’s experiences and desires. In contrast to women in the FRG, employment and family were synonymous for GDR women. In a sense, the experiences of
being disadvantaged in the employment market has increased some women's awareness of their position in the unified Germany. Hanna Behrend (1994:78) describes what many women seemed to experience:

An increasing number of women have become aware that they are now living in an even more rigidly patriarchal state than before. ... The bulk of East German women leave nothing undone to find a job, be it full-time, part-time, ABM or a temporary and dequalifying (unskilled) one. ... The struggle against being deprived of their former right to paid employment is, however, so far the only really universal form of resistance.

It is this struggle to keep "a foot in the door" (Behrend ibid.) of the employment market and to mobilize collective action against the new inequalities being established vis à vis the employment market, in combination with the particular design of West German social and employment policies, that forced the women's projects to hook up with the government supported work programmes. The existing projects remodeled and expanded their programmes. New projects originated in the area of social services creating community services through ABM programmes. Though temporary employment in an ABM is no substitute for full-employment, the exclusion of women in the employment market often left them no other opportunity but to accept ABM in these areas. Behrend (1994:67) describes this pattern for female academics in ABM:

Most of the socio-cultural projects are really unpaid services to the community for which the state is responsible and which the authorities are increasingly shifting on to women, who put up with underpayment and lack of decent prospects because it is the only way in which they can find the self-fulfillment their work has always provided them with.

Many studies focus on highly educated women and socio-cultural centres in the big cities (such as Berlin) while my study focuses on women's projects in a small town and largely agricultural area where the infrastructure for women is limited. The application requirements for ABMs, however, have similar ramifications.

40 Hümberg (1992) describes this for the EWA Centre in Berlin. But also other groups such as the DFD and initiatives not affiliated with the UFV started projects for women.
Today an infrastructure of women’s projects exists in the new federal states (especially impressive in Berlin where a vast number of the more than 200 projects are located in East Berlin) that employ a considerable number of women. The continued existence of these projects, however, is highly dependent on government support and is in constant jeopardy. Federal and regional continuing support might differ for individual enterprises but the projects depend on both. In this situation, one common argument for maintaining ABM women’s projects, namely, that they are creating community services through ABM programmes, has become an important claim.

**ABM and the Critique from Within the Women’s Project: Institutionalized Women’s Policies (Frauenpolitik)**

In the early to mid 1990s, the dependency of the ABM project on the state was problematized by those women working within the political structures of Offices for the Equality of Women (Gleichstellungsstellen) (for more information see p. 59) and women’s projects financed by these government sponsored work programmes. For example, the Offices for the Equality of Women were viewed as the most obvious signposts of the government support of women’s policy and thus, questions about their role were raised. Were they trying to achieve equal rights or to reform society? (Gleichstellung oder Gesellschaftsveränderung?) (see Mechthild Cordes 1996). Since the mid 1990s, as cutbacks were threatening the mere existence of the projects, the issues of depoliticization or dependency on the state have been overridden by discussions over unemployment policies, the ABM, policies for women, and the maintenance of the women’s projects (see issues of the women’s magazine Im Zentrum 1994-96). Critiques voiced early on in the initial phase of establishing women’s projects on ABM hold the federal employment market and its cut back policies accountable for constituting a burden for an active regional employment market policy. Nevertheless, these debates show a critical awareness of the interrelatedness between

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41 A good example of this is, e.g., the monthly women’s magazine called “Im Zentrum”. Although this is a Berliner Magazine (itself another ABM project) it allows for general insights into the federal employment market policies and the distribution of financial aid it also shows the relationship between the women’s projects and regional and federal employment market policies and their impact on local women’s projects.

42 In 1991-93, an ABM stop, though later counterbalanced by the federal government (Bund) with a programme to stabilize ABM, was felt in many of the projects and made regional employment market policy difficult (Im Zentrum 1994).
these government policies and the women’s projects. This can be seen by the discussions about attempts of individual states to counterbalance the federal policies with regional support programmes for women, employment (etc.). Out of this critical analysis by women within the institutionalized women’s policies (administration) that developed, they called to task the regional and community policies in supporting the women’s projects. Im Zentrum (October 1994) published an interview with an Officer for the Equality of Women (from one of the Berliner districts) who claims that it is the regional/communal policy which is responsible for women’s employment; and, furthermore, it is also directly responsible for the maintenance of women’s projects and the integration of long-term unemployed. In Stralsund, where ABM support was not the problem yet, the Equality Officer engaged in government committees supervising the economic restructuring and criticized the gendered nature of it.

In the fourth year of unification, the problems with the temporary nature of the programmes and the difficulties in maintaining the projects had become more tangible and were articulated as follows: the March 1994 and February 1995 editions of Im Zentrum problematize the federal ABM policies in addressing the difficulties of stabilizing the women’s projects due to the temporary nature of the work programmes. The problems criticized in Im Zentrum overlap with the criticism of activists I had described earlier (see p. 52) regarding the connection between social work and the laws (Arbeitsförderungsgesetz) that allow for the installment of government sponsored work programmes (Im Zentrum February 1995; September 1995). In addition, the ABM was seen as a problematic instrument of current employment policies and an obstacle to running the projects (Im Zentrum, September 1995). My study shows that ABM rules were not the only obstacle in running certain projects but that further local restructuring of the administration which, in fact, created further dependency of a local project on ABMs, caused additional instability.

All of this demonstrates that the rigorous critique of the way women’s projects and the ABM related to each other in the context of threatened funding cutbacks shifted in a different

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43 Often regional unemployment policies were designed to support (women’s) projects (e.g. in Berlin, see interview with the senator Christine Bergmann, Im Zentrum, March 1994:2).
44 Therefore, in Berlin a women’s project network (POP) opted for a regulation which give projects minimal support (Kernförderung). In Stralsund, this exists in a sense because the leader of the women’s centre is permanently employed.
direction, one which not only lamented the cuts\textsuperscript{45} and argued for community support but also demanded an employment policy that gives women 'realistic chances' and helps to maintain the structure of the women's projects (Im Zentrum, March 1996). All of this not withstanding they knew very well that it had become more difficult to elevate, in particular, the long-term unemployed into the first labour market. The debate among the different women's groups, however, shares with the national debates its different views about the state's involvement. Strategies and arguments regarding the first and second labour market among the different women's groups and networks range between acceptance and support of the second labour market (e.g. DFD) and fighting for employment in the first labour market. Just as in the debates on the national level, in the women's project scene we find opinions were divided on how the problem of unemployment and the state's involvement could be solved. In Stralsund as well we find a variety of opinions on the subject and a tendency to accept these state resources without too much questioning.

In short, several members of the East German women's movement have critically commented on and described the loss of the movement's political vision. This went hand in hand with the instability in many projects due to the constant change of ABM personnel who often replaced the original founders. Some former political activists, however, still fight for women's equity from within local government institutions. Some women's perspectives from within the institutions for women, shown through the publication Im Zentrum, raises the question: How do women, who were hired on ABMs, perceive the problematic relationship between the ABM and the women's project movement? In chapters on the women's projects in Stralsund we will return to this question and present the views of particular women involved in local projects. At this point, I will look at the specific situation in Stralsund with regards to the ABM and the women's project movement and briefly describe the women's infrastructure in the town.

\textsuperscript{45} The latest cut backs of 1995\textsuperscript{6} were threatening the survival of many projects (Im Zentrum, Nov 1995, POP-Nachlese).
Women’s Political Activism and the Women’s Projects Infrastructure in Stralsund (1994)

To begin with, the women’s infrastructure in a city such as Stralsund does not display the diversity of projects found in larger cities like East Berlin. The number of women engaged in the women’s government office, or the projects themselves, is small. As a result, there are not as many women’s projects competing for government resources. When additional government funds became available (for the region) in 1994, the specific problem in Stralsund was to find a women’s non-profit organization that could administer these funds. In 1994, in Stralsund, the aforementioned discussions concerning ABM and the thereby created dependency on the state (or the issue of depoliticization) were not a matter of public concern. Perhaps this is not surprising since unemployment figures in the region surpass average figures in the new federal states. Furthermore, the city of Stralsund had an Office for the Equality of Women according to state requirements (see p. 60) and an Office for Women and Family, but hardly any autonomous women’s projects.

In Stralsund, the UFV had had no representative although the activities of a local Initiative group in the (post) Wende period were comparable to those of the UFV (Independent Women’s Association). After the Wende in Stralsund, one local grass roots women’s group, the Women for Women Initiative (Initiative Frauen*Frauen e. v. henceforth Initiative), was formed and later acquired official status as a state registered association. Although this group in many respects resembled those women’s groups and projects that originated during the Wende in East Berlin and other urban centers, it was also different, for example, with regard to group membership. The fact that the Initiative did not become a member of the GDR-wide umbrella organization for women’s projects (the UFV) can be interpreted as an

46 In 1994, the federal government (Bundesanstalt für Arbeit) granted additional ABM for Mecklenburg-Pomerania that were meant to particularly support women. Although the Family Report of Stralsund had proudly stated that in December 1993 women participated in more than 50% of the ABM (1994:43) it was only in April 1995 (after the federal government granted extra ABM for women) that ABM employment for women was adequate for the rate of women’s unemployment in Stralsund because more social work projects had been established (Erster Frauen situationsbericht Stralsund 1995:20).

47 The Women for Women Initiative became a Verein (e.V.), that is, a state registered association. In the following I will use the abbreviation Initiative when referring to this women’s group in Stralsund.
expression of this difference.\textsuperscript{48} How the group and their projects developed also followed a slightly different time pattern compared to some projects in the bigger cities.

Similar to the \textit{UFV} (who influenced politics on a national level) the \textit{Initiative} exercised political influence on the restructuring of local government institutions in Stralsund and, therefore, the \textit{Initiative}'s political activism was strictly local. One further difference was that the \textit{UFV} had its greatest political influence in the winter of 1989-90, whereas the \textit{Initiative} was only created at the beginning of 1990. As a result the \textit{Initiative}'s influence on local politics was more limited in time because the impact of the East German Women's movement on the restructuring process generally was diminished with the GDR \textit{Volkskammer} elections in March 1990.

Furthermore, in search for support the \textit{Initiative} members oriented themselves towards official government women's networks in the city of Kiel in the bordering western federal state of Schleswig-Holstein instead of the \textit{UFV} in East Berlin, then still capital of the GDR (where the \textit{UFV} was founded and had its headquarters). In Stralsund, the \textit{Initiative} suggested and supported the foundation of an Office for Women and Family (\textit{Amt für Frauen und Familie}). This Office was set up in addition to the required "Office for the Equality of Women" (\textit{Gleichstellungsstelle}), which had to be established in towns with a certain population. In May 1990, the communal laws of the GDR, and later the unification contract between the GDR and the FRG, required that the "Offices for the Equality of Women" be set up in communities with more than 10,000 inhabitants.\textsuperscript{49} Since unification these institutions were meant to guarantee the realization of paragraph 3 of the Basic Law which gives women and men equal rights. Whereas in the old federal states establishment of these Offices is not compulsory, that is not regulated by law (with the exception of Schleswig-Holstein, see Wilken 1992:7), in the new federal states the communal constitution (paragraph 26) requires the foundation of \textit{Gleichstellungsstellen} (see Wilken 1992:12). There exist, however, no federal laws which

\textsuperscript{48} The \textit{Initiative} is no exception e.g. women's groups in Schwerin, the capital of Mecklenburg-Pomerania, did not accept the \textit{UFV} as their political speaker (\textit{Interessenvertretung}) because they experienced the \textit{UFV} as too radical and anti-men, a position these women did not share (Kenawi 1995a:286).

\textsuperscript{49} The Political Round Table in Berlin demanded the position of \textit{Commissioner for the Equality of Women}, which was indeed created at the governmental level after the elections in March 1990, but "was not a separate ministry as demanded, but a Commissioner of the State Council of Ministers, under the Ministry for Women and Family" (Hampele 1993b:186).
regulate the establishment and competence of these Offices (Wilken 1992:11) and accordingly, "Offices for the Equality of Women" are being incorporated within the local government structure in many different ways. In Stralsund a supposedly "unique" solution was found, as announced in the Women's magazine Esprit in 1994, which combined the Office for the Equality of Women with an Office for Women and Family (Amt für Frauen und Familie). This Office for Women and Family described itself as an absolute "novelty" in the landscape of women's organizations in the new federal states (Erster Familienbericht der Hansestadt Stralsund, May 1994:111). The Equality Officer (Gleichstellungsbeauftragte) was simultaneously the leader of the Amt für Frauen und Familie and through this combination the Office for the Equality of Women was integrated into the local administrative structure (Dezernatszuständigkeit für Frauen und Familie). That is to say those two offices were structurally combined at an administrative level.

During the establishment of the combined Office, locally called the Amt, the Initiative lost its political influence and the positions in the administration became filled with non-Initiative members. The combined Office for Women and Family/Equality of Women (Amt) also came to support two projects which the Initiative had been interested in running. These included the Women's Shelter (Frauenhaus) and the Women's Centre (Frauentreff) (for a detailed history of the Centre see chapter 4). In other words, the newly institutionalized women's office and women's policy (Frauenpolitik) represented by the Amt had an advantage over the other women's groups, such as the Initiative because they were part of the administrative structure. Subsequently, the combined Amt became the employer for the two largest and infrastructurally most relevant women's projects in the city: the Women's Shelter (Frauenhaus) and the Women's Centre (Frauentreff).

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50 Wilken (1992:15ff.) describes different models of organization and their effectiveness in terms of guaranteeing equal rights for women.
51 Since January 1996 the Office for Women and Family no longer exists. With its focus on family policies it could be viewed as a remnant of social policies in the GDR (see chapter 4) and thus, constituted a transition phenomenon. However, this view is certainly debatable.
52 Wilken (1992:38) mentions that their often exists a competitive relationship between the institutionalized and the autonomous women's policy and that the Office for the Equality of Women often makes the mistake of not sufficiently acknowledging the activities of the autonomous groups.
Both projects were run on regular funds from the city government in combination with ABM funds. Both were projects inspired by the rise of the East German women’s movement after the Wende. In the GDR, women’s shelters did not exist and thus their establishment after 1989 was modeled after those in the West. In Stralsund between November 15, 1990 and March 7, 1993 an emergency lodging (accommodation) had been set up which was frequented by 86 women and 127 children, until on March 8, 1993 (International Women’s Day) a Women’s Shelter was opened (Frauenhaus brochure) in a villa on the periphery of the old town of Stralsund. The Women’s Centre (Frauentreff Sundine), however, (located in the old city of Stralsund) had previously been part of the local infrastructure as a centre of the only official Democratic German Women’s Federation (DFD) before it became part of the new women’s network in Stralsund. In other words, as western institutions were transferred into the East, the Amt “took over” the Centre from the DFD. It is this transition from a Centre of the state organized women’s organization to a project affiliated with the new East German women’s movement that made the Centre and women’s engagement and experiences with it, as it was being transformed, a particular interesting focus of study (see chapter 3, Part II, 4).

With unification, both local projects, the Shelter and the Centre, required ABM work programmes in order to operate. In both cases the Amt took care of the administrative procedure (ABM applications, job hiring etc.). The Amt further initiated other projects on an ABM basis (e.g. parent- and children gathering place in February 1993 and one for their own Office in 1994). Usually, the Office for the Equality of Women co-operates with the other projects and groups to organize communal events, especially in the area of public relations (Öffentlichkeitsarbeit). These Offices also supervise and support women’s projects with their applications for ABM or facilities and generally help the projects find financial support (see Wilken 1992:37). In Stralsund, the Amt was more involved in the women’s projects than most Offices for the Equality of Women and directly supervised them. In 1992/93 the Amt began to

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53 As Krieger and Lompe’s (1994:22) point out, only a minimal percentage of ABM projects is supported by voluntary groups (Freie Träger), i.e., non-profit organizations, unlike many women’s projects. Most of the projects are run by either Beschäftigungsgesellschaften or through civil service (Öffentlicher Dienst).
look for non-profit organizations (Freie Träger) that could be in charge and were able to take over these projects.  

In 1994, during my stay the Initiative became the non-profit organization of the Women’s Centre and the official employer of the ABM work programme. I will explore the ramifications of this transfer in chapter 3 (Part II) with a discussion of changing the name of the Centre and in chapter 5 with the direction the project took and the decline of the opportunities for change. At the time the Initiative planned to incorporate the women’s Centre into a bigger women’s cultural project which they envisioned to be housed under the roof of the so-called Fayencenhof - a community project- upon its completion. This Fayencenhof was the umbrella association for diverse community projects in the old town of Stralsund (in which the women’s project was one). Here the Initiative planned to house and integrate their current and future projects- a plan which demonstrated their community orientation necessary for being granted ABMs. At the time the Initiative had previous experience with an ABM programme, the wool-project for the long-term unemployed (see chapter 6). This women’s project was founded by Initiative members and was created out of their concern about unemployment among women in the locale of Stralsund. Thus, the Initiative had begun to take on the role of a ‘social service agency for the state’ (Kenawi 1995a:110) by establishing the wool-project in 1991 and extending this role in 1994 when they became the supporting institution of the Women’s Centre.

The Initiative was not the only association (institution) that had been establishing projects for women. Others included the Amt (as the official representatives of women’s policy), and the former DFD, now DFe.V. which ran some women’s projects in the countryside. Hampele (1993a:301) refers to a double structure of DFD and UFV projects which developed in some cities. In Stralsund, the Amt supported projects as well. Thus, there existed a multilayered structure of projects. Apart from these women who were engaged in the women’s project movement, there also were some active women in the unions, the Social...

54 The Amt was aware that they might be closed down in the continuous process of administrative restructuring. In fact, the Office for Women and Family- the Amt - dissolved in 1996, leaving only the Office for the Equality of Women behind. This has been called the Frauenbüro (Women’s Office).

55 This had first been established in 1992. By the mid 1990s wool-projects run on ABM had become quite common in the agricultural area of Mecklenburg-Pomerania.
Democratic Party, and the Amt who all continued to meet in the Women's Political Round Table attempting to influence governmental policies. The Women's Centre became a meeting place for these diverse women's groups. It provided a space in which women of diverse backgrounds began to reestablish new social networks and create new groups. It was here where the Women's Political Round Table and those other women’s groups met to coordinate their protest for the International Women’s Day of 1994.

Conclusion

The diverse debates presented in this chapter share a common assumption which suggests that the integration of East Germans into the society of united Germany is through work. In a society that is “running out of employment”, however, other institutions have to be in place to integrate people. Government sponsored work programmes, originally designed in the West to re-integrate the unemployed into the labour market, were re-designed to cushion the social effects of large-scale unemployment in the East. The fact that this kind of employment in the so-called second labour market could not lead to permanent employment is made more obvious by the women employed by ABMs. There are, however, gaps in the literature on the gendered and personal experience of the ABM as well as the link to the women’s movement. The importance these government sponsored work programmes came to have for the women’s movement is directly linked to the effects of unification for women (e.g., high unemployment). In order to create and to sharpen public awareness on how women were being pushed out of the employment market, feminists engaged in the employment debates. The women’s movement strategies were adjusted as women’s groups came to use government sponsored work programmes in order to counteract unemployment among women. In fact, the women’s project movement developed out of the intent to employ and to train women, and to simultaneously create, establish, and expand a women’s network. In this process women of

56 Political Round Tables came into existence during the time of the Wende and played a major role in the attempt to reform socialism. Birgit Sauer (1995:108f) suggests viewing the Round Table as a rite of passage in a time of crisis which occurred in eastern European states after the collapse. Their relevance is seen in the introduction of political innovation as well as maintenance of continuity. The latter exists in terms of “geheimbündische Strukturen realsozialistischer Politik in parlamentarischer Form” and establishes a new exclusion mechanism. In Stralsund, the institution of the Round Table worked rather separately from the women’s project that I studied closely.
different backgrounds came to join the women’s project movement. Subsequently, this led to a depoliticization of the movement and the projects as the institutional transfer from West to East became the most important development.

The feminist critique of this movement and how these projects were institutionalized hinges on its failure to initiate social change and its subsequent depoliticization. However, this literature does not provide an idea of how women in these projects perceive their negotiations with the government institutions and situate or position themselves within the women’s movement. In other words, it does not portray women’s agency in these processes although it outlines the changing conjunctures surrounding unification. These changes were seen as related to how the shift from a planned to market economy affected women’s position in the unified Germany. What is not drawn out when addressing the issue of depoliticization is that the women’s projects came to emphasize the provision of services for socially integrating women. As the projects came to serve this function their role as catalysts of the women’s movement changed.

To conclude, we learned about how the women’s movement emerged and the women’s project movement developed in a unified Germany. A brief overview of the emerging infrastructure in Stralsund showed that the women’s groups and projects went through a similar process as the women’s movement in the wider East German society. I now move to the more specific focus of my ethnography itself and the quite complex and problematic ‘readings’ at the local level of this broader discourse on gender and employment. We have seen the general setting of the ethnography as well as the broader discourses on employment, gender, unification and integration. I now turn to the example of the unified German women’s movement and how its larger unified national themes were interpreted in Stralsund.
Chapter 3 ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS

The fore-going discussions showed the need to match broader understandings and conceptualizations of women’s experiences in the new federal states with a more complex and possibly diverse set of experiences. The following two examples of very immediate experiences which I had early in Stralsund point precisely to the diversity of women in the East German women’s movement as they attempted to unite with the one in West Germany. The section on the International Women’s Day Strike in the locale of Stralsund will reveal how the women’s movement in Stralsund positions itself publicly. It also allowed me to familiarize myself with the role of certain groups and institutions such as the Amt and the Centre in organizing such an event. Whereas the description of this ethnographic encounter provides the specific context of the ethnography, the controversy between women of different backgrounds at the Centre gave me a way in on a practical as well as on a more analytical level.

The following accounts of two ethnographic encounters in Stralsund show how the debates on issues of unification, employment and gender are experienced at the local level. Firstly, I describe the experience of the Women’s Day Strike where we learn about the broad national discussion of the issue within the women’s movement, especially as it is propagated by the West German women’s movement. Then we explore how the message of the strike symbol (Streik-Motto) is understood quite differently by different people and in particular by women in East and West. This is further demonstrated by the interpretation of the symbol in Stralsund. While this piece of ethnography pictures a public performance which allows for insights into the everyday experience of the national discourses in the women’s movement, the second piece of ethnography describes a different kind of celebration which provides another way of seeing an everyday experience of the transition. Here I show what is happening nationally in the context of a local institution designed to support (unemployed) women and the different ways in which these women experience the transition through my interpretation of a conversation and dispute over the name of the Women’s Centre on the occasion of a meeting/celebration at this Centre.
Part I

The Women’s Day Strike, March 8th, 1994, in Stralsund

The Women’s Day Strike of March 8th 1994 provided a condensation, for me, of a number of features of the way women in West and East Germany understood their position. In what follows, therefore, I attempt to situate the strike as it occurred in Stralsund, my fieldsite, within the broader currents of Germany as a whole. We begin with the national call for a strike, and how its motto was interpreted by various people. Then we turn to East German perceptions more broadly, before we discuss the specific experiences in Stralsund.

The Women’s Day Strike illustrates the different ways in which women in East and West understood the strike. It also shows that those involved in political protest in the present have experienced a very different kind of past. The different experiences with a state designated women’s day in the GDR and the FRG are one example of how differently the state provided a framework for the recognition of women in society. Before I begin my ethnographic account let me briefly introduce these historical differences. The GDR state used March 8 - International Women’s Day¹ - to officially honor women’s contribution to the common good of society, especially, in the spheres of employment and family. For example, Clara Zetkin medals were awarded to women as part of the official celebrations (see e.g. Norddeutsche Neueste Nachrichten-NNN March 8, 1975 Jg. 23/57, p. 1). However, the International Women’s Day was not only a state recognized celebration of women’s achievements, it was a regular work day with official events in the afternoon, recognized by family members and a part of everyday life for women and men.

In West Germany (FRG), Mother’s Day celebrations on the second Sunday in May similar to the celebrations in Canada, recognize women in their roles as mothers and are associated with the giving of flowers and a special acknowledgment of mothers’ annual achievement in service of their families. While in the GDR the International Women’s Day was a state supported celebration, in the (old) FRG only a small spectrum of the female

¹ The International Women’s Day, largely concerned with the issue of women’s suffrage, was first held in Germany and other European countries after Clara Zetkin had suggested it at an international socialist women’s conference in 1910 (Copenhagen).
population, namely, those who were affiliated with the women's movement and adhered to socialist ideas, celebrated and protested on this day. In West Germany, it is not gift giving or receiving of flowers, but political action and rallies that have been at the centre stage of International Women's Day.

In unified Germany, the International Women's Day is neither a state framed performance nor a national holiday. As a woman from Eastern Germany (Berlin) put it, women in the East after unification had to choose which day they would like to celebrate, i.e. either Mother's Day or International Women's Day. However, those women of the women's movement in East and West who became politically active and engaged at the 1994 International Women's Day not only demonstrated their unwillingness to silently accept the current political development but also attempted to unify the different forces fighting for the women's cause in post unification Germany.

A Nationwide Call for the Women's Day Strike: The National Event

Women say No! The reconstitution of a greater Germany is happening at the cost of refugees, at the cost of the 'others', the weak, the poor and at the cost of women. For this reason we call for a Women's Strike! With this we intend to protest against the dismantling of basic rights, against the dismantling of social services and the growing poverty of women, against the rescinding of already achieved women's rights, against the destruction of the environment and against the preparation of German participation in war (my translation) (Streikkomitee Köln/Bonn; UFV, Berlin).²

This concern regarding national politics is found in the introduction to the nation-wide flyer which was published by the organizers of the Women’s Day Strike (Streikkomitee Köln/Bonn; UFV, Berlin) and distributed across the United Germany. I had picked up this flyer at the International Women’s Day in the Stralsund’s Office for the Equality of Women. Through my main contact at the time with women employed in the Office for the Equality of Women/ Office for Women and Family and the local Women’s Centre, I became involved in the preparations for Women’s Day. Women at the Office supported my collecting of flyers and

²These concerns relate to post unification German policies and events such as the change of the asylum law, the attacks on asylum homes (in Rostock or Hoyerswerder) or German military involvement in former Yugoslavia and social policies involved in the restructuring of the east since the accession of the GDR (German Democratic Republic) to the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany).
handouts in order to send this material to a documentation centre in Bonn, which aimed to keep a record of the nationwide event.

The 1994 International Women’s Day, was organized nationwide under the slogan of the Women’s Day Strike. It had been a nationwide call that was developed by women both in East and West at a meeting in Kassel (Almuth Nehring 1995:64) but it was put into practice following a decentralized approach (Ulrike Bagger 1995:91). On March 5th the German Women’s Council (Deutscher Frauenrat) had called for a protest rally in Bonn. On March 8th, the local strike committees organized the activities of the Women’s Day Strike (Junge Welt Beilage 29.1.1994) under the slogan “now the clock turns 13” (Jetzt schlägt es 13) - another way of voicing “now is enough”. The chain of events and protests across unified Germany was symbolized by two events, one at the most northeasterly geographic point of Germany, Cap Arkona, located on the island of Rügen in Mecklenburg-Pomerania and the other in the southern region of Bavaria on top of the mountain called Zugspitze. At 13:00 hrs. [true to the slogan (“Jetzt schlägt es dreizehn”)] women activists simultaneously unrolled their banners (UFV Berlin et al. 1995:86, Report Streikkomitee Regensburg 1995:173) displaying the same slogan “From the North to the South: Germany (using the capital letter “D” for Germany drawn onto a German Flag) [is] in the Hands of Women”.

It is interesting to note that the geography of the united Germany was emphasized in the banner. Thus, the nation is described in terms of a geographical north and south axis and not in terms of a political axis East and West which characterizes life in the united Germany. Was it a conscious attempt to conceal those boundaries that are constructed around East and West? Perhaps this slogan symbolized both the attempt to unite (or rather bridge the gap between) the women’s movements in East and West and the difficulties of achieving this aim and of overcoming the crises of the women’s movement.³ According to Schindler (1995:33), women in East and West have to overcome more than forty years of separate experiences and, she thus perceived the function of the preparations and activities as furthering a different ‘being with

³ Both of which have a very distinct history: the East German women’s movement had originated in autumn 1989 during the time of the Wende and the West German one had developed in the 1960s. According to Christine Richter (Berliner Zeitung 1994) the radical-feminist movement of the West is in a crisis due to the fact that it has not come to terms with the processes and affects on women in Eastern Germany; and the East German women’s movement has not situated itself in the united Germany yet.
one another of women in East and West’ (Miteinander von Frauen in Ost und West). However one evaluates the success of this 1994 Women’s Day event in terms of uniting the women’s movement, the fact remains that the organization of the nation-wide protest day required national, regional and local alliances between diverse groups of women. In this sense the national Women’s Day Strike served to counterbalance a tendency towards individualized political engagement for women and deliberately aimed at creating and encompassing women’s networks. Generally speaking the organization itself was an attempt to acknowledge the differences within the women’s movement (in East and West and across the political spectrum) and to act together politically in order to overcome the crisis of the women’s movement (Schindler 1995:34): a crisis which is characterized by fragmentation as well as depoliticization. Political activists have often described the shift by the East German women’s movement from an active agent in the process of reforming socialism, towards a movement of women’s project in the post unification era for securing employment for women as an example of this depoliticization. The call for a nation-wide strike was an attempt to counterbalance this development, and it in part successfully did so. The discussions and reflections surrounding the strike, however, particularly brought to the forefront the differences between women in East and West. Now I turn to why the strike symbol was chosen and the way it was read and interpreted.

The Strike Symbol and Its Implications

As a political means of expression the initiators had chosen the symbol of the “strike” for this nation-wide protest, thereby situating the women’s strike within two traditions of the women’s movement. Firstly, the 1994 women’s strike in Germany drew on a history of similar forms of protest in other western European countries since the mid 1970s (see Kaplan 1992). Secondly, the strike was perceived as following the tradition of the historical Women’s Movement dating back to pre-World War times - as it had only been “appropriated” by the GDR state (Kaplan 1992:108). For example, Gisela Notz (1995) makes a reference to this history of Germany’s radical and socialist tradition prior to the Nazi period as she formulates this notion of legacy in the title of her article on women’s involvement in labour strikes at the
beginning of the century: “Comrade Luxemburg certainly would have signed the call for a strike”.

However, the notion of the strike was problematic for several reasons: Most unions did not back a full-day-strike because of no-strike agreements with companies (Staunton 1995:67). For example, the union ÖTV supported a protest day but did not support industrial action (Arbeitkampf) (Steinmeister 1995:45). Also, the strike with its diverse political claims for women did not fulfill legal criteria because it was not directed towards any specific employer (employee grievances, e.g. salary) (nicht tarifliche Forderungen gegenüber Arbeitgebern) but rather was directed at society at large.

But in the context of the Women’s Day Strike, for women to strike is not only industrial action (Niederlegung der Erwerbsarbeit) but also action outside of the employment sector - a refusal to perform “the daily unpaid work for family and society” (see e.g. Ingrid Steinmeister 1995:46) or “unpaid work in the productive and reproductive sector” (my translation) (Gisela Notz 1995:28). From this perspective a women’s strike may include the following forms of protest and action; as the national flyer suggests:

Women will lay down their housework (Hausarbeit); lead company actions which might go as far as a strike (bis hin zum Streik); boycott shopping (Kaufstreik); no longer politely smile; not be nice; refuse to make coffee, and send the children with their fathers to work (den Männern mit auf die Arbeit geben). Conspicuous and impudent we will demonstrate our common interest and our solidarity.

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4 Many popular individuals as well as women’s organizations and networks signed the call for a Women’s Day Strike in order to raise support for the strike. Notz assumes Rosa Luxemburg’s sympathy for the strike. As a co-founder of the communist party in Germany Luxemburg published, among other works, “Mass strike, Party and Union (1906)” (reference quoted from Kaplan 1992:105).

5 For more details on the legal implications of a strike see Steinmeister (1995:39ff); for a further discussion of the attitude and the support of the unions see Baureither (1995:59).

However, though many activities unfolded all over Germany, in East and West, there were not too many actual strikes. To understand why this was so, we turn now to look at how the notion of the strike was taken up in the East, and especially in Stralsund.

**The Notion of the Strike in the East**

The motivation for organizing the nation-wide International Women’s Day in 1994 as a Women’s Day Strike differed accordingly for members of the women’s movement in East and West. Though from the West German perspective the accession of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) constitutes an extension of the existing political community, from the East German perspective it has been a complete dissolution and integration of its elements into a different political community (Bettina Westle 1992:463). In the East the acceptance and resonance of the Women’s Strike was therefore lower and it was aimed at a different target. While in the West it was intended to reactivate feminist political action (*Politikfähigkeit*) and to unify activities of the “institutionalized” and the “autonomous” women’s movement, in the East it meant instead to encourage and support the experience of common political resistance under the conditions of the political system of the FRG (Schindler 1995:31). As Schindler (1995:31) explains her experience, it was an attempt to resist “feelings of powerlessness” (*Ohnmachtsgefühle*) in the “shapeless” political system of the FRG. Furthermore, Schindler (1995), like many other activists and analysts of the Women’s Day Strike, notices that the strike was perceived differently in the East and thus concludes that the experience of unemployment as part of the economic restructuring in the East following unification was an obstacle in accepting this kind of strike. Schindler (1995), who is a member of the East German women’s movement, self-critically notes that the Committee, which called for the strike, did not try hard enough to examine the applicability of the term strike for the East. She suggests that the kind of ideas that are associated with the term strike in the East make it difficult to apply them:

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7 In “A letter from Stuttgart” (West), written by the local equality officer Brigitte Schmalzl (quoted in UFV Berlin et al.1995:95/6), she describes the local activities and comments “Overall a very successful strike day although hardly anybody struck. It developed a tender feeling of community between women who before did not have anything or not much in common” (my translation).
Strike in the East is synonymous with the hardest battle (\textit{Kampf}) of employees against the destruction (\textit{Plattmachen}) of the GDR-economy and for the preservation of their companies and work-places. For example the hunger strike of the Kaliwerk workers of Bischofferrode or the fight of the metal workers for the Warnow-Warf- with the strike term East Germans associate the experience in part with existential employment battles (\textit{Arbeitskämpfe}) (my translation) (Schindler 1995:32).

These strike examples, in particular the hunger strike of the workers in Bischofferrode (Eastern Germany), became well known in the early 1990s. They serve as a symbol of the complete and brutal takeover of the socialist companies in the East by capitalist ones from the West.

However, it was not only this association with the term strike that led many women to reject its use, but also the Western forms of protest directed outside employment and towards the „reproductive sphere“- hence, a form and practice unfamiliar for many women in the East. The following assessment by Kloweit demonstrates this. Kloweit argues that how the strike was perceived in the East shows that rejection in part is related to the fact that International Women’s Day for former GDR women was associated with a very different kind of Women’s Day celebration in socialist times. Women’s Day, among other differences, was celebrated with one’s work collective members in one’s company. Kloweit, in a somewhat ironic tone, describes how she experienced and saw through (understood) the celebration of the International Women’s Day in the GDR but how she could not understand the one in 1994. Kloweit (1995:37) points out:

Women’s strike. What do you mean by it? That all women should not do anything this day? Not cook, not shop, not go to work. Splendid idea, I will do it. But you must guarantee that they in my company, which is now called a firm, on the ninth won’t put the chair in front of the door. ... I should do something together with others? There are no others any longer, my dear, they have all been sent home socially cushioned. Those [women] - not cook one day! They don’t have anything else to do. If they don’t go shopping, they won’t hear their voice all day long and no other voice either.\footnote{She depicts an experience of many women in the new federal states when making reference to the anxiety of being laid off and having to cope with the social and personal implications of unemployment. Maier (1996) points out that women tend to cope easier with the social and personal effects of unemployment because they have a housekeeping role to fall back onto.} Now it is enough, you say, say supposedly all women. It is quite possible [you are right] but they do not mean the same (Christiane Kloweit 1995:37).
Kloweit resists the homogenizing tendency of the slogan “now it is enough”. She reminds the reader that certain expressions, words, phrases and slogans can potentially be filled with different meaning for speakers in Eastern and Western Germany. This is a perfect example of a slogan that had a different meaning for women in East and West although it was meant to unite. As this author indicates calling for a strike and publicly stating “now it is enough” had different implications due to East and West German women’s specific experiences before and after unification. Kloweit emphasizes the particular experience of former GDR women who lost not only guaranteed full-time employment but also the state benefits enabling them to combine family and employment. The compatibility of family and employment was specific to the GDR. It is this experience of either having been threatened with losing their current employment or being sent home to receive unemployment insurance, welfare and other social assistance which constituted the core of concerns for the majority of East German women. As we will see this is confirmed by the local activities at the Women’s Day Strike in Stralsund.

Furthermore, one also finds confirmed Kloweit’s sensitivity towards relations of power within the women’s movement. Kloweit addresses a feeling of uneasiness (“you say, say supposedly all women”) that some East German women have about West German feminists defining the cause and determining the direction/action of the women’s movement in the unified Germany. As other observers of ‘East meets West’ within the women’s movement have noticed there exist not only almost insurmountable differences and misunderstandings (Funk 1993b) but also a tendency by Western feminists to define the situation, exercise control and determine the course of action that is supposed to be taken. It is in light of this dynamic that one has to read the local interpretation of the national symbol by women in Stralsund. I now will turn to my ethnographic example and present a depiction of how a group of women in Stralsund adjusted the symbolism of the strike and called a strife day.
Women's Day Strike (*Streik*) versus Women's Day Strife (*Streit*)

Setting and Public Performances

Through an ethnographic account of the publicly celebrated International Women’s Day in Stralsund I intend to familiarize the reader with the setting and those women’s concerns which were made public on this particular day. The topics which were voiced by diverse local women’s groups were those I came to hear in many conversations (and personal narratives) during my stay in Stralsund. These were issues such as unemployment among women, women’s incorporation into the work force, the compatibility of women and family responsibilities and the question of equality: issues that were taken for granted in GDR times and which have been questioned since unification. As these issues were no longer guaranteed by the GDR state, women began to reformulate these notions as they politically engaged in fighting against women’s disadvantages in the employment market and for family oriented social policies.

On March 8th, 1994, as on any other weekday, *Ossenreyerstraße*, the main business street of the old city, with department stores such as *Horten* (a west German shopping chain) and Stralsund’s book stores, was crowded with people strolling along the pedestrian zone. Ossenreyer Street connects the Old Market (*Alter Markt*) square with the more spacious New Market (*Neuer Markt*) square, which in socialist times used to be called Lenin Square.\(^9\) (see map, fig. 3 in annex, p. 287) This is the main route through the old city as is shown by the steady stream of shoppers, visitors and tourists, especially in the summer.

It was on *Ossenreyerstraße* that the Women’s Centre *Sundine* was located. Early in the afternoon members the Union for Civil Servants, the *ÖTV*, set up their booth in front of the Women’s Centre and while the women handed out information brochures the men distributed red roses to female pedestrians as can be seen in the enclosed photo (see photo, fig. 4, p. 288). Some passers-by stopped for a brief talk or a hot drink at the booth.

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\(^9\) “Strike” in English describes an activity whereas “strife” describes a state of being. In German both expressions can be simultaneously used as a noun and a verb and thus both depict an activity. Instead of the word dispute women in Stralsund chose the equivalent term “strife” to counterfeit the notion of the “strike”.

\(^10\) In the two Ewes’ (1991:120) depiction of the old town (and its atmosphere) Ossenreyer Street is described as the connecting street which runs through the so-called *Apollonienmarkt* and the lower part of the *Mönchstrasse*. 
Walking from the Women’s Centre along Ossenreyerstraße towards the Old Market one passes a small place called Town Hall Square (Rathausplatz) on the right, where a daily market is housed, with several fast food vendors, vegetable and clothing booths; to the left a construction site, a book store and the department store Horten. Here, where Ossenreyerstraße narrows, a group of young women, who were distinctively dressed in ‘alternative’ clothing (contrasting with the more uniform dress code of most Stralsundians), had set up an information desk and hung a banner across the street. This banner was erected at eye level and almost forces a pedestrians to read the ironic statement being made in reference to the discovery which Galileo was forced to dismiss: “The two basic truths are: The earth is flat and men and women are equal”; and: “Who does not fight ends up at the hearth” (Wehr sich nicht wehrt endet am Herd) (see photo, fig. 5, p. 289). The metaphor of women being sent “back to the hearth” was one slogan of the East German women’s movement and epitomized East German women’s publicly voiced concern following unification. In 1994 it was still a powerful message to convey how women experienced the transformation and integration into a gender conservative West German society.

Following Ossenreyerstraße one enters the Alte Markt square right beside the town hall with its old gothic red brick facade which is one of Stralsund’s tourist show pieces. Beside the town hall is the old parish church of St. Nikolai and opposite is the newly restored Wulfram house which is advertised as the most beautiful house of its period (Anni and Herbert Ewe 1991:112). At the Old Market (Alte Markt) hundreds of years of Hanseatic history become palpable by looking at the restored houses of architectural styles of different epochs such as the renaissance, the baroque and those of the 19th and early 20th century. Today these historical buildings house diverse restaurants, cafés, and a kiosk where one can purchase newspapers and postcards etc.. Some of the newer buildings contain a Youth Club (JUKS) and house the DGB (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund) union office. At the latter a banner displays the slogan of the DGB union (who had called for a protest day) “women must have the same chances in life as men”. Last but not least, the city government resides in the old town hall. It is therefore no

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11These women laid out brochures and information material on the Balkan war and rape in Bosnia. A day earlier some of the young women had come to the organizational meeting of the Round Table at the Women’s Centre and inquired about getting permission to collect money for women in Bosnia. Their problem was that the needed permission from a communal association (gemeinnütziger Verein); and the equality officer suggested that they turn to the Youth Club (JUKS).
coincidence that the rally took place at the Old Market because the women’s protest was addressed to those representatives currently in charge of local politics. Despite the national theme of the “Strike Day” on International Women’s Day, the manifold protests which were scattered across Eastern and Western Germany generally displayed a local face.

Local Interpretations in Stralsund

In this section I focus on how women in Stralsund interpreted the “strike”. Their political practices will reveal how this particular national protest was criticized and localized. In Eastern Germany, in general, women had a problem with accepting the idea of the strike and in Stralsund, in particular, the local strike committee reformulated the national motto of a strike into a “strife day” (Streittag). This local committee was represented by the Women’s Political Round Table which organized and coordinated many activities. In fact further research proved it was only in Stralsund that the national motto was re-interpreted as a strife day. National themes were being taken up if they addressed women and the effects of dismantling the social policies that affected them. The content of the flyer distributed by the local Women’s Political Round Table in Stralsund adhered to national themes in the following way:

Women to the hearth- men to the work place. No!!- Therefore, Women’s Strife Day on March 8th, 1994.
Women into the kitchen- men into politics? No!!! Therefore,....
Men the salary- women the welfare? No!!!....
Women obey-men earn, women pay-men are being paid, judges decide-women suffer?... (Flyer announcing the call to participate in the protest).

These slogans thematized a whole list of concerns that women wanted to argue or dispute (instead of striking for) on this particular women’s day. These themes speak to the fight against women being pushed out of or marginalized in the employment market. Furthermore, these slogans express women’s insistence on their right to employment and their

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12 During the Wende protesters also gathered at the Old Market. Since unification throughout the year different events were celebrated in the Old Market such as the historical spectacle of the “Wallensteinstage” and the Christmas Market, whereas in GDR times official state instigated rallies took place in the New Market (as photos in the Stralsund Chronicle, Ewe 1984, show).
13 The Women’s Political Round Table consists of women, most of whom are also politically active in other settings such as unions, through party membership (Social Democrats) or employed at the Amt. However, in preparation for the strike other local groups were incorporated and participated at the meetings (the DF e.V. which is the predecessor of the old DFD and the grass roots Women for Women Initiative).
desire to build and maintain their own economic independence. The slogan “women back to the hearth” denotes that these East German women resist the pressure to adjust to what they perceive as the typical role for West German women - being a housewife. Though many women in West Germany are employed, they often work part-time and their overall participation in the labour force has been considerably lower than in the former GDR. Generally, “changes towards greater equity were half-hearted and slow” (Kaplan 1992:124) regarding women’s position at work and in the work force in the post war period of the FRG. Within this context (or based on this comparison) we have to understand East German women’s protest directed against what, in some literature on West German women’s role, is referred to as the three “k’s” of children, kitchen, church (Kinder, Küche, Kirche); and their claim for a place in the realm of political decision making.

In the following I will present these women’s reasoning in reformulating the idea of a strike: These politically active women argued that the majority of women in Stralsund were afraid to strike because of their fear of losing employment; and that they themselves preferred less confrontational means than the strike such as a dispute or discussion to fight for their aims. As one woman summarized the consensus during a meeting to organize the activities (which took place at the Women’s Centre): “here one cannot strike like [women] in the West and for example hand over the children to the men and not make the coffee”. (field notes preparatory meetings) These women clearly distinguished their situation from that in the West and saw one major difference being based on a different kind of gender relation. How can we understand their way of distinguishing their situation from those of women in West Germany? (Does the statement imply that there is more equality in the East and less in the West?) In many personal conversations with married women in Stralsund, their remarks indicated that these women perceived the relationship with “their men” to be different from the type of relationship a West German woman would have with her husband or partner. Based on their assumption that gender relations in the family and in the work place differed in the West, consequently East German women perceived a different kind of tension and located the struggle for women’s equity not necessarily between the sexes but in their fight for employment (in solidarity with East German men against the desolate situation in the employment market). It is from this vantage point that women concluded that their protest
needed a different venue of expression. As this example demonstrates differences in opinion on the use of the idea of a strike did not necessarily impede women’s activism.

The way of articulating a different point of view regarding the strike, gender relations and equity has often been misunderstood, in particular, by West German observers. For example, Almuth Nehring (1995:62) describes what reaction she most commonly experienced in the East and concludes:

Why should I strike? I do not strike against my husband, he helps a lot in the household! ... There the term ‘strike’ only registered with a few. The joy to provoke was not shared by many. The strike for many new FRG citizens is too closely related with their experience of the past four years, that for the first time in their lives they had to strike for the existence of their work place. They did not relate this experience to the fact that women were fired first (my translation).

I agree with Nehring’s implication that gender relations in East and West are perceived and constructed differently. Her interpretation of these statements, however, I disagree with, at least in part. The rejection of the strike and the discomfort with this form of protest does not necessarily mean that women would not connect the experience of the general economic restructuring in the East with the fact that they were first fired as Nehring suggests. As my analysis of the International Women’s Day in Stralsund suggests, these activists were well aware of these relations. Furthermore, the “women’s strike” day in Stralsund shows that the issue was not so much about whether one should protest but rather how to do it.

Because of the evidence of political activism I found in Stralsund among women who rejected the idea of a strike, I suggest, therefore, that one must search for different explanations of why the idea of the strike was so easily discredited in the East (as Schindler has argued)\(^\text{14}\). One must be careful about dismissing the East German women’s response to the strike notion as a sign of political inactivity. We might, for example, account for choosing different forms of protest by the different histories of the Women’s Movement and women’s organizations in

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\(^{14}\) According to Schindler (1995:32/3) the media had its part in discrediting the strike idea in the East, e.g. calls to no longer politely smile or pass on the children to the men so they take them to work, were interpreted by some women as strike against their husbands, instead of a fight against social structures which reproduce women’s discrimination.- Not agreeing with the Western protest forms is often interpreted as not perceiving the prevailing forms of discrimination against women.
East and West. In the GDR, the only legitimate German Women's Federation (DFD) had claimed the legacy of the turn of the century women's activists (within the socialist tradition) whereas in the West the women's movement, which surfaced in the 1960s, had to rediscover the women's activists' legacy. Moreover, in western Europe the so-called second wave of the Women's Movement in the 1960s developed its particular forms of protest (see Kaplan 1992). It seems that it is in part for this reason that a women's strike encapsulates a notion of action that is perceived as a typical Western form of protest.

By disagreeing with or not conforming to the strike, however, these women were not necessarily rejecting political action. Contrary to what Schindler (1995:32) believes - that the strike metaphor did lead to the loss of women's support in the East - the women's protest in Stralsund shows that these women were inspired by the call for a nation-wide strike day but in coming to terms with their critique of the national metaphor, they were at the same time localizing the protest. By creating their own motto of the "strife", these women of Stralsund criticized the strike notion while still participating in the national events. As the equality officer/leader of the Office argued, "they should have thought through the idea of a strike or strife day" in the central committee because although it fits the West (es passend für den Westen sei), it is not applicable in the same fashion in the East. This appeared to be the consensus among the group of the Women's Political Round Table and others who organized most of the activities. (Field Notes, March 7th, 1994) Moreover, this reinvented symbolism of strife was reaffirmed by the local Stralsund newspaper:

In Stralsund this day's Women's Strife Day (Frauenstreitstag) was organized by the Women's Political Round Table and the unions (Stralsunder Zeitung in OZ 1994:11).

Thus, the authority of the Political Round Table was acknowledged. It is interesting to note that this group had the power to rename the event and to determine a new metaphor in

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15 Roland Roth (1994a:415) points out that by localizing the protest a heterogeneous local milieu picks up certain themes (and forms of mobilization) from a regional, national or international movement and finds ways to link these regional or national themes to local concerns.

16 The equality officer had participated in regional meetings and was the spokesperson in the meeting prior to the rally.

17 As in other cities in Mecklenburg-Pomerania and elsewhere in the Eastern Federal States the local strike committees consisted of female union members such as the ÖTV, IG-Metall, different local Initiatives, Equality Offices etc. (see Schindler 1995:32, Denis Staunton 1995:67).
Stralsund. This is due to the membership which connected these women in the local strike committee with other local offices and institutions such as the Office for the Equality of Women. Some of these women were working in local institutions and had access to a number of resources. The Women’s Political Round Table had through its individual members used this existing infrastructure such as the Office for the Equality of Women, the Union office and the Women’s Centre Sundine to coordinate the activities.¹⁸

However, the groups of women who participated in the local event (and came to the meetings at the women’s Centre) were more heterogeneous in opinion than the slogan of the Women’s Political Round Table might suggest. It is interesting to note that an anonymous flyer signed by “some women and men” embraces the idea of the strike: “March 8th- imagine, it is a women’s strike!” However, to make this idea appealing to the majority of local women, who are married, have children and are used to juggling family responsibilities and employment, this flyer asks them to imagine that “mammy strikes”. In a playful manner it imagines children playing without supervision, secretaries dropping polite female behavior, thus reinterpreting the suggestions of the nationwide flyer (quoted in section one). Also, this imaginative exercise is followed by a more radical and progressive claim, again following more closely the agenda of the national flyer, “to protest violence against women, incapacitation (Entmündigung) through paragraph 218 (which legislates the abortion law) and discrimination against lesbians!”, issues that are otherwise often missing from the agenda of local pamphlets. This local flyer also emphasizes the economic discrimination of women in the employment market and gives the following details¹⁹: “Within Stralsund and nearby areas alone, 4715 women are unemployed (as of January 1994), that is more than half of all unemployed in this area” (anonymous flyer). Furthermore, these authors made it very clear that they perceived the cost of the social dismantling (see national flyer), which is decided by the Christian Democratic Union headed federal government, being paid to a large degree by women through “high female unemployment, increase in expenses for child care institutions

¹⁸ Schindler (1995:32) points out that the mobilization in the East did not build on an autonomous women’s infrastructure but relied on existing women’s associations such as the UFV, the DFD, associations for the unemployed, unions, parties and the Equality Offices. In the case of Stralsund the local women’s strike was organized by a diversity of groups including the Women for Women Initiative, DFD and the Office for Equality.

¹⁹ The strike argument focused immensely on the situation in the employment market and local problems.
and reduction (Einsparung) of means for women’s shelter among others’. In so doing national and local issues were intertwined by this minority of women who supported the idea of a strike.

This group, which supported the notion of a strike, was the grass roots Women for Women Initiative. They can be viewed as the women’s group in Stralsund which, with its feminist leanings, was closest to the UFV (the umbrella organization of the East German Women’s Movement) who had supported the national call for the strike. The transformed socialist Democratic German Women’s Federation (DFD) also participated in the protest. In terms of their political orientation they were close to PDS, the predecessor of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), and they added an election topic to the agenda of the International Women’s Day. Their flyers suggest an examination of the different parties’ agendas and support for women in the 1994 so-called Super Election Year in Germany, when elections were held at the federal and regional level.

The Main Rally at the Old Market (Alte Markt)

We see then, from these rather different views of the strike, that when in the late afternoon (4:30 p.m.) of March 8th, 1994, a cold and gray day, a small crowd of a few hundred women, some children carrying balloons and union flags and men gathered in the Old Market Place around the tables erected by the unions ÖTV, IG-Metall and the different parties, there was already a variety of ideas about the strike in the air. Red umbrellas with the label of the Social Democrats (SPD), IG-Metall or ÖTV appear like coloured highlights scattered across the centre of the square- a marked territory fenced in with clothes lines (see photo, fig. 6, p. 290). On one clothes line violet and white bed-sheets are flapping in the wind which express the slogans of the day. Here one reads: “equality of chances”, “women’s self help group”, “same right for employment”, “we women are against social dismantling!” Another bed-sheet on a clothes line voices the concern of many women today, a majority (more than 90%) of whom used to work full time in the GDR which had guaranteed its female and male citizens

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20 From this flyer the reader is also informed about other events than the one at the Old Market organized by the Women’s Political Round Table and the Unions such as an information booth and flyer action in the pedestrian zone at 15.30 and a concert given by Bettina Wegner in a near by centre in Bielkenhagen.
full-time employment: “10 desires of an employed woman and mother: employment for everybody who wants to work-regardless of age and gender, shortened employment hours for women and men- so that parents have more time for their children, part time work as temporary measure in alternating (wechselnden) family phases with a guarantee to work full time” (see photo, fig. 7, p. 291) - other claims refer to a family-friendly city planning, support for single mothers and “communal thinking and acting for a women and family friendly future”.

The local grass roots group Women for Women Initiative shows its presence with a children’s carriage packed with household utensils, child care items and items typically associated with women’s activities such as knitting and make up (see photo fig. 8, p. 292). The Democratic German Women’s Federation has also set up one of the tables. I recognize some of the women from the preparatory meetings in the Women’s Centre Sundine. I have come with the leader of the Women’s Centre and talk with her and some other women (e.g. from the Initiative or the Political Round Table) whom I had previously met at the Centre.

Women are standing together in small groups, exchanging personal news and talking about the event. Once the speeches begin they attract protesters’ attention (see photo, fig. 9, p. 293); speakers stand outside the fenced-in territory directing their speeches towards the crowd while facing the town hall. The speakers do not stand on a podium but rather at ground level with the crowd. Many women listen with serious faces to the speeches which repeat the themes of unemployment, the compatibility of family and employment and social policies (see photo, fig. 9). The equality officer is the main speaker at this event. Other speeches at the rally are delivered by female union members (also a member of the Round Table), a female official from the Employment Centre and a representative of Pro Familia. These speakers present the institution they are affiliated with and add themes such as the preservation of child care facilities, violence against women, “paragraph 218” of the Penal Code regulating abortion, and some notes on the basic constitution debate in Mecklenburg-Pomerania. They deliver their speeches with the same seriousness that is displayed by the audience. The crowd applauds but there is no cheering, whistling or loudly voiced protest. If the reader expected a more eventful description of the rally at the Old Market he or she will be surprised that this long planned and
organized event was rather uneventful and did not interrupt the daily procedures of city life in Stralsund. It shows a much more pressing reality: one which is characterized by the theme of unemployment and the importance of finding work for women and men.

When the speeches were over and the people who gathered on this cold afternoon had begun to leave, I walked back to the Women’s Centre on Ossenreyerstraße in order to help with the preparations for the celebration party. Here I again met women of the different groups who came together to celebrate the successful organization of the event. It was only later during my stay in Stralsund that I learned more about their different agendas and personal as well as collective histories (or history as a group); and about their evaluation of the Women’s Day protest. The responses of the activists varied. Some women from the Amt perceived the rally at the Old Market as success and spoke of a “good turn out” of protesters while some DFD women had the opposite impression and in comparing it with early DFD activities remarked that “once we assembled more women“. Apart from their diverse opinions, it seemed more important than the topic was the actual gathering of women at this International Women’s Day. I will now turn to the responses in the regional and local newspaper which confirm this conclusion.

The Presentation of International Women’s Day in the Regional Newspaper Ostsee Zeitung (OZ): Revival and Strife Announcement

When I remember the various preparations and actual activities which unfolded on Women’s Day in the old city of Stralsund, I am again surprised, as I was back then, when I read through the regional newspaper Ostsee Zeitung (OZ) and its local section of the Stralsunder Zeitung, in search of articles on the International Women’s Day, how little was mentioned of the event. (In particular, if one compared it with other commercial events at the Old Market.) There is one article (on page 3, by Andrea Richter) in the regional section and a couple of announcements concerning events in Stralsund in the local section. The article in the Ostsee Zeitung criticizes the existing model of how to combine family and employment for its

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21 The International Women’s Day of 1994 presented the opportunity to meet many of the women who associated themselves with the Women’s Centre Sundine. The Women’s Centre served as the meeting place for women to congregate and coordinate women’s day activities in the city of Stralsund. It was at this venue that I first met the diverse group of women who comprised and used this institution.
huge discrepancy between theory and practice. As a case in point, popular female and male federal politicians’ professional careers are compared and it is shown how they differ.\textsuperscript{22} This issue of the compatibility of employment and family parallels one of the theme of the women protesters in Stralsund.

However, in the Stralsunder Zeitung of March 8th, 1994 (p.11)\textsuperscript{23}, something else stands out, namely, that this 1994 International Women’s Day protest is depicted as a revival of those International Women’s Day celebrations which were commonly held in the GDR. International Women’s Day in the GDR was celebrated on many different levels: in the family as well as in the company, in some of the political organizations as well as in social institutions such as child care institutions. After unification these activities had stopped (personal talk with K.A.). It is therefore interesting to find the following note in the newspaper which interprets this year’s event as a revival of a socialist custom in a new guise:

> It is once again March 8th - a date which for many [people] sticks in their minds. More than four years after the \textit{Wende} International Women’s Day has come back. However (doch), it is not flowers or coffee and cake (\textit{Kaffeetafel}) which will give this day its character but the massive protest of women against their current situation in society (Stralsunder Zeitung in OZ 1994:11). (my translation)

In other words, there has been a revival of gathering on this particular day. Though the purpose of this gathering changed from a celebration of “women’s societal achievements and contributions” to one of “massive protest”, an actual sense of community was being restored. The local newspaper, however, does not dedicate much space to this event and only mentions the official organizers of the events and in so doing favors the local interpretation of the strike motto, strife:

\textsuperscript{22} The article was titled “Career or children” (\textit{Nachwuchs}, more literally ‘raising the next generation’) and focuses on women in politics, using a small diagram which gives figures of women in parliaments. Drawn on a world map it is indicated “where women are in power”, that is, where women are leaders of states such as Tansu Ciller in Turkey or Gro Harlem Brundtland in Norway. This corresponds with topics of casual conversations. Here sometimes speakers compared women in politics in the GDR and the FRG and ironically commented on it by stating that Margot Honecker, the wife of Erich Honecker, was the only female parliament member or rather Politburo member in the GDR. The main argument of the article is based on a comparison between popular women and men in German politics and arrives at the conclusion that women in politics rarely have a family or started their political career after raising their children. This is used to criticize the existing models to improve the compatibility of family and employment which are offered by different parties.

\textsuperscript{23} More specific in the “Good day, dear reader” column of the Ostsee Zeitung one finds a short notice about the International Women’s Day in Stralsund.
In Stralsund this day’s Women’s Strife Day (Frauenstreittag) was organized by the Women’s Political Round Table and the unions. The main meeting (Hauptveranstaltung) is a rally from 16.30-17.30h at the Old Market. .... (Stralsunder Zeitung in OZ 1994:11).

In daily conversations with women I met at the women’s Centre in Stralsund, those who described the International Women’s Day celebrations in the GDR emphasize the social aspects, that is, the congratulations and flowers that they received on this day (at their workplace and from relatives). These narratives describe to a lesser extent the official celebration, meant to acknowledge women’s achievements and contribution to society, and emphasised instead the way people socialized and partied within this official framework.

By 1994, this official framework was non-existent and along with reviving the International Women’s Day gathering or celebration, historical notions of this day were emphasized and used to activate protesters. Historical references were made not only in Stralsund as the following quote from the Berliner Zeitung (22.2.1992, Marina Richter) demonstrates: here a statement from one of the strike committee members (Rita Bünemann) was presented in which this woman argued that “since Clara Zetkin had founded the International Women’s Day in 1910 it is the perfect occasion to draw attention to the drastically worsening conditions of thousands of women’s lives” (my translation). Both examples evoke historical arguments. The Stralsundian press, however, made reference to the idea of a “massive protest” and the celebration of this day in the GDR (OZ). In so doing, the image of the former mass celebrations in the GDR and the protest of the West were being combined. The particular history of East German women’s past experiences with the International Women’s Day now transformed into a potential for activating protest. Yet this raises more questions than it answers: How and why were certain notions and practices revived while others were not? How can transformation phenomena such as the above be depicted and analysed? In particular, how can these carry overs be studied? How can practices be described which seem to adhere to a reference system from the past?
Conclusion

I began by describing the particular event of the International Women’s Day and by problematizing differences between those women engaged in the women’s movement in East and West. In addressing how Western feminist forms of protest and practices are perceived differently and at times contested and rejected by East German women, we are reminded that political phrases and terms have different meanings and significance for women in East and West based on their different historical experiences. For example, Siklova (1993:80) “predicts a hindrance to our mutual understanding for a long time”, while Funk (1993a) notes that feminism has to take into account the experiences with a different political system. Social and political practices in the East, as the example from Stralsund shows, differ according to experience of a different societal and political system. The far reaching effects of these divergent experiences with the political system of the GDR on social group formation in the present are portrayed in the next chapter.

Despite the heterogeneous responses among local protesters to the women’s situation at large, the national call for a strike and the idea of protesting, the main rally’s protest at the Old Market demonstrates how important these kinds of gatherings are not only to protest against women being pushed out of the employment market but also to create a sense of communal life or collectivity. The protest on International Women’s Day also shows how East German women can build on old social-political traditions and forms of action or practice in the new political system of the united Germany; and the extent to which politically active East German women use or refute what is open to them in terms of collective politics from the West German women’s movement.
Part II
A Prelude: The Battle of the Past and the Present

This section continues to show how women’s experiences with the political system of the GDR still informed their practices. This time, however, it is shown how their experiences of ‘politicized’ daily life in the GDR translated into and played out among a particular group of women, gathering for a meeting and celebration in support of the local Women’s Centre.

An important part of the everyday experience of transformation has been the transfer of institutions from the West to the East. The Women’s Centre in Stralsund is one such place which was transformed from a DFD counseling Centre to an institution designed to support women. Since the Wende opened up a public space in which new groups could congregate, old social networks broke down as new ones formed. One might say that the Women’s Centre represents a local level enterprise in which the larger processes of institutional and social transformation, and how people perceived them, became visible.

During the last four years following unification the Women’s Centre changed its status, concept, employees and clientele as its associated institutions were transformed. With unification in 1990, a new Office, the Amt, took over from the former GDR mass organization, the DFD, and in 1994 the Amt transferred the Centre to a non-profit organization, the Women for Women Initiative (Initiative). The Initiative was a grass roots group that had been at the forefront of initiating social change and was therefore viewed as being related to the East German women’s movement. Though the Centre in many ways shared several features with other projects of the women’s movement, it also had its own characteristics which were the result of its history as part of the old DFD women’s organization.

In March of 1994, the non-profit organization Women for Women Initiative (Initiative) held its first meeting24 and an Inaugural Celebration (Einweihungsfeier) at the Women’s Centre “Sundine”. It was with this second transfer of the Women’s Centre that the different ways in which these women experienced the transformation were articulated as they engaged

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24 Usually the Initiative women met at the facilities on Mönchstrasse which also housed their wool-project.
with the Initiative and some of the political tensions between women of different backgrounds were revealed. By focusing on the debate around the name of the Centre I show how these diverse women re-formulated their understanding of the old DFD women’s organization and the new women’s movement. These women had experienced the political system of the GDR differently and in the debate around the name they made reference to these different experiences of the past in order to explain their reaction to and perception of the present transformation. The debate around the name change for the Women’s Centre illustrates the transformation process as different politically motivated groups and individuals contest the definitions of past and present events. Thus, the same political, economic and social transitions were experienced differently by individuals who were members of different groups in the past. This is demonstrated in the way in which they interpreted what happened nationally and how those issues voiced by the East German women’s movement on the national level filtered through to the women who gathered in the interest of their local Women’s Centre.

The Meeting and Inaugural Celebration of the Initiative at the Women’s Centre

The following ethnographic account will provide the reader with a sense of the atmosphere in the Centre and the diverse women who used and were associated with the Centre at that time. This account will also reveal the interaction between Initiative members and the role of the Initiative as a non-profit organization. Furthermore, the conflict between the different members of the Women for Women Initiative group provides an insight into some differences and underlying tensions between the different women associated with the Centre. This conflict surfaced and centered around the issue of renaming the Women’s Centre at the time when the Initiative became a non-profit organization.

In post-socialist Germany the changing of names associated with socialism has been part of the dismantling of socialist insignia. Busts of Marx and Lenin have been removed, and places have reverted to their former names; for example, the city of Karl-Marx-Stadt is now Chemnitz, and Lenin Platz in Stralsund is Neuer Markt. Since “Sundine” does not have a political connotation it raises the question of why the name change was discussed at all.

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25While usually diverse women’s groups did not seek confrontations in public and did not address their differences in disputes, this incident presents one such occasion.
Obviously, the name was perceived as in some way political because it belonged to an institution founded by the GDR, although in a different fashion from those public places and institutions named after Lenin, Luxemburg and others. What follows is a brief excursus on the origin of the name *Sundine* and how it became transposed onto the Women’s Centre.

**Who is Sundine?**

*Sundine* is a coined feminine sounding name with local flavour. *Sundine* is the feminized version of *Sund* which is the term for bay and signifies the geographical location of Stralsund at the *Strelasund*, that is the strait between the mainland and the island Rügen. The name *Sundine* became associated with the *DFD* even though it was first used for a public enterprise which dates to the year 1827. Back then a weekly newspaper was first published under the name *Sundine* (*Zeitschrift für Unterhaltung und Geistesverkehr*). It is an ironic coincidence (or perhaps an indication of the importance of local idioms) that here the publishers addressed the importance of naming public items in their first issue as follows:

"The name does not matter, one occasionally says [hears]; but the title enhances a man’s [reputation] and a book. For papers, particularly, the sign of announcement is more important than one should think, and sometimes it is easier to make a book than to create a fitting and likable title. Therefore, the opinions differed how one could and should name these papers. But it appeared to be most simple to name a local enterprise, which came into being upon local desires, after the city where it originated..." (*Sundine. Zeitschrift für Unterhaltung und Geistesverkehr. Königliche Regierungsbuchdruckerei, 1827:1*).

The founding committee of the *DFD* counseling Centre took up the suggestion of an expert in advertising to name the *DFD* Centre after this local Stralsund Weekly from the 19th century called “*Sundine*” (interview with Elisabeth, see also OZ Nr. 279 26/27 Nov. 1983). A local *DFD* authority, Elisabeth (former *Kreisvorsitzende*) included in her story the Centre’s

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26 In adding the feminine ending -ine a name is created that is comparable to Sab-ine, Christ-ine or Undine. The latter name Undine is quite an unusual German name but it is used by the writer Ingeborg Bachmann in one of her stories titled “*Undine geht*” (Undine is leaving) (in: *Das Dreißigste Jahr. Erzählungen*, 1961). Peter von Matt explores the *Undine* figure in German literature and traces its origin to the myth of a female water nymph which originated in the Danube area. However, though this suggests a possible different version for the choice of the name no references were made to the *Undine* figure.

27 These editions of the weekly newspaper *Sundine* can be found at the city archive of Stralsund.

28 Several women suggested that I interview Elisabeth once I became interested in the history of the Centre in GDR times.

29 Elisabeth’s story of the *Sundine*’s origin provides additional information that cannot be found in the newspaper articles (which appeared on the day of the opening in 1973).
beginnings and how the Women’s Centre became named Sundine. On the occasion of the Centre’s 10th anniversary an article was published which closely associated the name with the Centre: “Sundine” ist zum Begriff geworden” (OZ Nr. 279 26/27 Nov. 1983). According to Elisabeth, the Centre became well known as Sundine. Elisabeth also tells a story that the employees of the Centre were sometimes referred to as Sundine. For her the name Sundine “is typically Stralsundian” (ES:3) and the association with the DFD did not bother her but was part of her personal history as well as the GDR history she identified with. But for other younger non-DFD women it was associated with a GDR past which they had opposed and/ or not participated in (and they were happy to have overcome). The interview with Elisabeth was carried out weeks after the debate over the name at the Women’s Centre. Elisabeth might even had heard of the discussion during the inaugural celebration. If she had participated, she certainly would have opted for keeping the name.

How the actual conflict surfaced and how the issue was addressed might not be typical but it certainly is a transformation phenomenon. The debate around the name of the Women’s Centre reflects women’s diverse attitudes towards and experiences of the political system of the GDR. As we will see, the dynamics of this debate were characterized by a tension between members closely affiliated with the old DFD Women’s Organization and those leaning towards the new East German women’s movement while other members and visitors remained passive participants in this meeting.

The Setting

Let me begin with the setting at the Women’s Centre and the course of this first Initiative meeting following the women Centre’s transfer. Usually the Initiative group met at their own facilities on Mönchstrasse. Unlike other meetings of the Initiative which were publicly announced and open to any women, this meeting was set up to exchange information, decide on certain formalities and celebrate the inauguration of the Women’s Centre as a new project of the Women for Women Initiative. It was this ambiguity between an official meeting and a celebration that characterized the atmosphere of this event. I was invited by the leader of
the Women’s Centre and another Initiative member to join this meeting and the inaugural celebration (Einweihungsfeier).

This occasion also marked the new role that the Initiative had taken on as the non-profit organization of the Centre. It was a bigger project than the wool-project (see chapter 2, p. 62) and included far-reaching responsibilities as well as increased administrative work for Initiative women, most of which would be undertaken in their spare time. Perhaps this explains why the occasion was characterized by a constant shift between official meeting and celebration. This ethnographic account also provides an impression of how the Initiative worked, organized their activities, became involved in present negotiations for future projects and used ABMs for their projects.

The meeting was scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on March 22, 1994. Only a few women were gathered in the front room of the Women’s Centre on Ossenreyerstrasse when I arrived. The facilities of the Centre comprise one main room, a kitchen in the back and a small office space which is located between the front room and the kitchen. Facing the pedestrian zone (Fußgängerzone), a big (former) store window exhibits different displays every month including items crafted by local artists or by the wool-project. Information about the Centre and its programmes are typically displayed as well. The main room is approximately forty square meters. It is longer than wide and stretches from the entrance beside the decorated store window far into the back. The walls are decorated with hand-crafted paintings and hangings. One hand-crafted white hanging depicts a dove, others show more colourful flower motifs or landscapes some of which are painted on silk. One wall is almost completely taken up by wooden shelves and drawers. Little knickknacks, books, silk painted pictures, and blue glass crystals are sitting on the upper shelves. In a glass cabinet ceramics by local artists which can be purchased by the public are on display. A big oven radiates heat during the winter months. The Women’s Centre is also equipped with a TV, VCR and stereo. During regular opening hours single tables are scattered across the room each with four chairs around it.

For this special occasion the furniture has been rearranged in anticipation of the guests. The square pine wood ‘Ikea-type’ tables are moved together into a long row which occupies
the centre space of the room. Today they are covered with red tablecloths and decorated with flowers and candles which give the setting a festive character. In two spots several bottles of German Mosel wine surrounded by wine glasses sit on the table. A buffet with salads, sausage, bread and a cheese platter is set up on the big wooden shelf.

**Mitfrauen and Visitors**

When I enter the Centre four women are standing around the warm oven. They are: **Linda**, the current leader of the Centre, a thirty-two year old woman, who in the GDR used to work at an agricultural cooperative (see biographic details in chapter 5) and only recently became involved in this project. **Linda** was a volunteer at the Women’s Centre before she was hired as the leader. **Marie** is not only a member of one of the Initiative’s government sponsored work programmes, their wool-project, and but also does administrative work as their secretary or managing director (Geschäftsführerin) for this project, the Initiative, and now the Centre (in cooperation with **Linda**). She used to work for Robotron, the GDR company which produced electronic equipment. Also, a young woman in her twenties from the wool-project is part of the group. She had previously worked at one of the textile factories in Stralsund. Another woman in her forties, who I had not met before, introduces herself as **Karina**. (During the course of my research I will come to know her quite well. For more biographic details see chapters 4, 5, 7). She used to lead textile circles and folklore collectives in the GDR and had previously been employed in the Centre as a member of a government sponsored work programme. During that time she joined the Initiative.

One by one or in groups of two or three different women arrive. The newcomers go around shaking hands with those already present. Soon seventeen women are assembled for the occasion. They are talking in small groups while they sit down at the festive table. I stay with **Linda**, **Karina** and **Marie** who take their seats at the foot of the table and I sit between **Linda** and **Karina**. At this end of the table two women from another community Centre in one of the

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30 Throughout the writing of this thesis I have attempted various devices and formats that might help the reader handle the changing persons in the different phases of the Centre I present in chapter 3, 4, and 5. In this section I use bold face to help the reader keep tabs on participants. In chapter 4 I employ boxed texts and in chapter 5 single spaced blocks of text to provide important biographical information about key people.
suburbs of Stralsund (*Freizeitgestaltungszentrum*) join the group. They engage in a conversation with Marie who seems to know them.

While individual women chat with one another I talk to Linda. She explains that the Initiative members refer to themselves as *Mitfrauen* instead of *Mitglieder* (members). The German term *Mitglied* has a double meaning as does member. *Glied* can mean “limb, joint” or “penis”, “member”. Broken down into its linguistic elements one could translate *Mitglied* as “with a limb” or “with a penis” or “member” in this sense of the term. Of course it is in reference to the latter meaning that the Initiative members invented the new term *Mitfrauen* (literally with women). It shows that these women are familiar with the Western feminist awareness of language and power and upon putting this notion into practice have created a new term. Linda inquires about my opinion on this. I reply that I had not heard this expression before but that it is not an uncommon change of language in women’s groups with which I have been familiar in the West.31 Linda is unfamiliar with the Initiative’s and feminist linguistic practice in general and sees no reason to change her patterns of speech. The “revolt of language” (Lewis 1995) of the post Wende era has affected many speech patterns but at the same time other typical GDR dicta are still being used. Earlier in the day Linda had asked for four women to support her and said: “we need four men to do the job”. The use of similar phrases I had heard many times during my stay in Stralsund. I also noticed West German visitors’ irritation and more vigorous attempts to correct the language use than I observed with East German women such as the Initiative members who adopted a feminist discourse.32

In my conversation with Karina I learn that she was employed on a government sponsored work programme (*ABM*) in the Centre and that she would like to get another *ABM* position here. She has been a member of the Initiative for two years. Renate, who sits next to Karina, also used to be employed in the Centre (she held a regular position between June 1990

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31 The introduction of certain (sometimes new) linguistic forms has been part of the creation of a feminist discourse in Western Europe and North America in the 1970s and 1980s. However, in the GDR context the Initiative’s invention intersects with a “revolt of language” that was part of the political events of the Wende (for details on the “revolt of language” see Derek Lewis 1995:297).

32 Funk (1993b:320) points out that “in the united Germany, language, as the articulation of a lifeworld, is itself a contested issue. West German women are resentful and irritated by East German women’s use of linguistic forms that West German women fought long and hard to overcome”. Funk refers e.g. to the different grammatical forms when signifying e.g. one’s profession. To give an example *Leiter* refers to a male leader and *Leiterin* to a female leader. The leader of the Women’s Centre was often referred to as *Leiter*. 
and September 1993). Renate is a (former) DFD-member who had already visited the Women’s Centre when it functioned as a counseling centre of the DFD. Through her post-Wende employment at the Centre she came to know the Initiative and to participate in some of their events. Renate is forty-three years old and used to work as an engineer for a GDR company; today she works in the same profession but for the city administration (for more biographic details see chapter 4). Another former employee of the Centre (on ABM), Klara, who became affiliated with the Initiative during her employment at the Centre (see chapter 4), sits next to Renate. Klara was trained as a librarian. Originally from Dresden, she studied in the southern city of Leipzig where she had been a member of a peace circle (Friedenskreis) which typically met under the protection of the church. In Stralsund she had also made contacts with church groups and knew those founding members of the Initiative (such as Irene who could not participate in this inaugural meeting) through her contacts with the local peace circle. An indication that the Initiative had changed since it first gathered is that neither Irene, an integrating figure for the Initiative nor Birgit, the former leader of the Women’s Centre, joined the meeting.

Towards the middle of the table sit several active Mitfrauen: those who have not been affiliated with this grass roots group via employment. For these women the grass roots group was a support group and discussion forum in times of societal transformation as well as a base from which they had influenced local restructuring processes and politics. These are: Gabriele, the current spokeswoman of the Initiative, a woman in her late thirties who became active with the Wende and had organized the single-parent interest group in addition to her engagement with the Initiative. Jutta, the treasurer, and Margit, both women in their late forties who used to work as technical employees at the ship building company Volkswerft in Stralsund and had protested against the fact that women were first to loose their jobs at the Volkswerft. Jutta regularly participates in Initiative meetings and Margit had presented another Initiative project (Fayencenhof) at the women’s breakfast on International Women’s Day at the Sundine. Anne, also in her forties, had been a member of the peace circle and the Neues Forum which initiated the Wende in Stralsund and who, besides being an active Initiative member, is also a locally active member of the Green Party (Grüne/ Bündnis 90).
At the opposite end of the table, close to the entrance, three women from the wool-project are seated followed by Uta, the instructor of the wool-project. She is engaged with the Initiative and simultaneously employed in a government sponsored work programme in the wool-project where she trains long-term unemployed women in traditional hand-crafted techniques. The three wool-project women are in their twenties and thirties and became members of the wool-project after a period of long-term unemployment (see chapter 6, Part II). They had worked as seamstresses in textile factories in Stralsund. Their relation with the Initiative is through the wool-project. Uta, a forty-nine year old former restaurateur, is also engaged with other Initiative projects. Elisa, an artist, who is presently involved with the local theater, is one of those Initiative women from the alternative artist scene most of whom no longer participate in meetings or do so only occasionally.

Between Meeting and Celebration

Food and beverages remain untouched as Gabriele, the spokesperson of the Initiative, opens the meeting. Because a relatively large group of women has gathered and a long agenda needs to be covered, the Initiative members decide not to follow the usual pattern of their meetings. Generally, every participant introduces herself at the beginning of the meeting. This practice was viewed as a basic democratic procedure among those groups which originated at the time of the Wende (see Probst 1993).

Today, Gabriele announces that the Women for Women Initiative had gathered to celebrate the takeover of the Sundine. The official date is the first of April 1994. Also, she says “this is our late celebration of the Women’s Day”. (On March 8th the Women’s Centre was still in the hands of the Amt and although e.g. Margit and Jutta had participated in some of the activities at the Centre and at the Alte Markt (see Part I) and some had joined the party at the Centre afterwards, the Initiative had not come together as a group on International Women’s Day, a sign that the organization of the protest in Stralsund was dominated by other groups.

For details on the wool-project women’s experience with long-term unemployment and their membership in an ABM work programme see chapter 6.
In the following speech, Gabriele lists the conditions under which the Women’s Centre was taken over from the Office for Women and Family (Amt): Linda will remain permanently employed as a leader. Gabriele explains that because the leader’s salary is being paid by the [city] community (Kommune), every year the Initiative will have to apply for a renewal of the contract. In sum, the community supports the Centre with 65,000 DM (approx. 58,000 Can. $ at the time) per year. Moreover, the Centre’s contents have been taken over from the Amt in their present condition. The Initiative agreed to the Amt’s desire to continue to use the women’s Centre as a meeting place for the Round Table for Women’s Politics (Frauen-politische Runde Tisch) in which several women from the Amt participated. Gabriele adds that “that is OK like that” (sei ja so in Ordnung) and it meets with general approval. Elisa clearly voices her agreement. Furthermore, Gabriele makes it known that “the Initiative will hire four more women on government sponsored work programmes (ABM-Kräfte)” for the Women’s Centre; and with more personnel the Initiative plans to open the Centre for performances in the evening. It is decided who is going to be on the committee to choose new ABM employees.

Having made all these announcements Gabriele suggests that the glasses be filled. Then Linda is officially welcomed as a Mitfrau, member of the Initiative. Jutta, the treasurer, hands Linda a bouquet of carnations and comments that Linda from now on has to contribute 1 DM for membership subscription (which is the minimal fee). The applause is followed by several toasts, first on Linda’s behalf and then to the well being of the Centre.

After this festive act Gabriele directs the participants’ attention to the remaining agenda of the Initiative. Since the group formed they had envisioned setting up a local women’s infrastructure and cultural project and had engaged in the set up of a project called Fayencenhof34. In order to do so they have to negotiate with the city government and try to receive other state funds. As Uta reports on the progress of the Fayencenhof-project and explains that they are expected to contribute additional money one woman notes: "They

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34 The Fayencenhof is a common local project that the Initiative hopes to realize in the near future as one of its initiators. The wool-project and the women’s Centre are supposed to be housed in the facilities of the Fayencenhof upon its completion. Fayencenhof is the umbrella organization for several local associations and initiatives in order to guarantee the common purpose (Gemeinnützigkeit) of these projects including projects for the Youth. This common purpose issue is an important criterion for government sponsored work schemes (ABM) (see chapter 2).
[referring to the city authorities] should be happy that this institution is being created”, thereby stating how she perceives their position as a distributor of state funds (non-profit organization) and emphasizing the fact that they perform unpaid social services for the community. At the moment Uta and Margit are involved in the negotiating process in their honorary capacity as Initiative members. The Initiative women discuss the issue, exchange information and reach a consensus that the contract in its present form cannot be signed. In this discussion only the long standing Initiative members participate- a sign that this is strictly their business and responsibility as a non-profit organization. This is due in part to the Initiative’s interest in setting up a local women’s infrastructure. During the meeting this issue requires further discussions especially concerning the development of future projects, the possibility of creating them and ways to apply for government sponsored support. After this excursion into the world of the women’s project and government sponsored work programmes the buffet is opened. The exchange of information proceeds and conversations continue in their individual groups where women talk about project related issues until one of these issues becomes a topic of debate.

The Big Debate: Keeping the Name Frauenreff Sundine?

Suddenly Uta raises her voice and interrupts those engaged in small group conversations. She wants to bring the topic of her group to everyone’s attention. In this group the retention of the name was debated. “Do we want to change the name with the takeover? Or do we want to keep it?” Uta asks if they should discuss this issue at all in the larger group. Margit and Elisa and other women along the middle of the table (namely old Initiative members) opt for a debate on the issue. The wool-project women remain silent. Others agree that the issue should be discussed. Some of the women sitting next to me become immediately involved and use the floor for debate in order to challenge the notion of a name change. They argue that the Women’s Centre is now widely known as Frauenreff Sundine.

Generally, changes in names have come to signify the transformations in the New German Federal States (many names of streets and public places were changed, in particular those which were associated with socialism, e.g. in Stralsund Lenin square was renamed New
Market). Obviously, the question of a name change is tied into the issue of coming to terms with the historical past of the Centre. Here it is interesting to note that the former supporting institution of the Centre, the *Amt*, had already changed the name from *DFD Counseling Centre Sundine* into *Frauentreff Sundine* and had re-written history in their brochure by simply not mentioning the past and emphasizing the term *Frauentreff*.\(^{35}\) The *Initiative*, however, in their statement of purpose had accepted the history from its beginning and integrated it into their concept and evoked it as follows:

The *Sundine* as an information Centre for women already existed in GDR-times. The possibility of using the Centre has always been kept in the women’s minds.

Thus, the *Initiative* originally accepted the name *Sundine*. However, the *Initiative* is a heterogeneous group open to revisions. To bring up the issue of a change in name seems to suggest several possible interpretations. First, the *Initiative* might have been interested in making it publicly known that they have become the supporting institution of the Centre and that the Centre was no longer an "appendage" of the Office for Women and Family (*Amt*). Second, a new name also defines a new beginning and a new direction to take. Third, from this it follows that these *Initiative* members might have been interested in distancing themselves from the supporting institutions of the past. That is, the members of the *Initiative* group, most of whom had been less involved with state-structures in GDR times (and/or were members of the local opposition), wanted to execute a more radical break with the Centre’s image under the auspices of both the *DFD* and the government *Amt*. The following discussion shows that other members and affiliated women (none of them women from the *Amt*) certainly understood the suggestion of a name change as an attempt to break with the Centre’s past *DFD* traditions. At least *Renate*’s reaction seems to indicate that the main issue was the Centre’s affiliation with the GDR and the mass organization for women, the *DFD*.

\(^{35}\) In a brochure which was published by the *Amt*, the history of the *Frauentreff Sundine* begins with October 3, 1990, that is the day of unification, and does not mention the GDR history at all. In fact, it is not only the rewriting of history which marks a caesura but also the Western style self-presentation. Or rather pre-*Wende* history only appears (in a subtext against which the new Centre is defined), namely, in the name "*Sundine*" which is flanked in parentheses. The text of the brochure emphasized and uses the term *Frauentreff* instead of *Sundine*. Headings such as "What is the *Frauentreff*?", "For whom is the *Frauentreff*?", "What is offered at the *Frauentreff*?" exemplify this.
Renate, a former DFD member, feels personally attacked and argues for a retention of the name. Renate had worked at the women’s Centre while the Amt was the supporting institution. She derives her leading role in this debate over the interpretation of the post Wende development in the Women’s Centre from her three years of employment from the summer of 1990 to the autumn of 1993, and the experience of having been a DFD member and visitor of the Centre. She claims that in the past the DFD had not done anything other than the supporting institutions in the present times: Back then “women just dropped in”. And, she adds, how could they (the Initiative members) judge something that they had not experienced.

Elisa from the Theatre objects to this argument. So does Anne, one of the initiators of the Wende in Stralsund. She replies that “not everybody has to have the [same] experience in order to participate in a discussion (mitreden können)”. In so arguing Anne counters this exclusive attitude: an attitude that constituted a general problem between members of the DFD mass organization and the non-state women’s groups in the GDR. This argument reflects the conflict in the GDR past between the then legitimate DFD and the non-state women’s groups (only now the power dynamics have changed). Following the Socialist Unity Party (SED) directives the DFD did not accept those other women’s groups’ concerns or criticism and the fact that they operated outside of the structures of the mass organization (see e.g. Schenk 1993 and other articles in Funk). Thus, the non-state women’s group activities were carried out in opposition to the DFD and it was the SED which defined women’s interests and introduced women’s policies (compare to chapter 4, p. 111). The critique of the DFD mass organization which was voiced by several Initiative members during this meeting can be situated within a wider feminist critique of socialist mass organizations. (In chapter 4, Part I, I will present this critique in more detail.) For example, Jutta and Margit added that the DFD had been an “SED organization from above”. That is to say the SED (Socialist Unity Party) passed on the implementation of policies for women to the DFD. Because of the relationship between the DFD and the SED these women argue that in the past they did not visit the Sundine. They emphasize that they did not want to have anything to do with the DFD in the past. They also would like other women to consider that this DFD history might still deter women from coming today. In response to this argument Renate replies that “there is no big difference”
between the past and the present since everybody in the past used to voluntarily visit performances (*Veranstaltungen*) and events in the Centre and, she adds, "join the Party".

"Laughter." - A comment on what to some participants is an absurd statement.

Despite the *Initiative* members’ different interpretations of the past or perhaps because of their contradictory perspectives, Renate continues to exclaim that a person who wanted to politically engage in the *DFD* could do this at political conferences. Here Renate makes a distinction between the *DFD* cadre and the large membership and between political *DFD* meetings at a regional or federal level and those *DFD* group gatherings in the neighborhood.\(^{36}\)

The question of the name change has turned into a discussion about the political implications of the past events in the *DFD* Centre.\(^{37}\) Here, it is interesting to note that the heated debate is fought out between Renate, who was a member of the *DFD* and became active with the *Initiative* after the *Wende*, and the *Initiative* members from the opposition circles. Those who had became *Initiative* members through their employment in the Centre or were affiliated with the Centre did engage differently in the discussion and did not argue about the *DFD* past but for the current status quo. Regarding the GDR past, however, the difference in opinion exemplifies each individual’s different attitudes towards the political parties and mass organizations in the GDR. Although women of diverse backgrounds are today members of the *Initiative*, their divergent experiences of the past have caused a conflict in the present. Those who were affiliated with the opposition under the umbrella of the church in Stralsund consider a name change to signify a break with the past *DFD* tradition; others who were either not members of the *DFD* (and other parties or organizations) or only passive members are content with the current label for the sake of *Frauentreff Sundine*'s local flavour. Renate, the former active *DFD* member, wants to maintain the memory of the *DFD* past and basically views the *Amt* (and the *Initiative*) as contemporary descendants of the former *DFD* organization. In my interview with Renate she suggested that the Office for Women and

\(^{36}\) This is an interesting distinction I will further explore in my analysis of how *DFD* women describe what happened at their gatherings and in the Women’s Centre (see chapter 7).

\(^{37}\) And, I would like to add the recent past. That is to say, the political orientation of the supporting institution and how the employees of the Centre responded to the demands of it, had also been an issue of the recent present, namely between the women at the *Amt* and the employees of the Centre.
Family (Amt) handed down their guidelines to the Women’s Centre’s employees in a similar vein as the DFD before. Thus, she suggests a continuity in terms of a hierarchical relationship between the two and in terms of a particular practice. As this debate shows, using one’s old spectacles to describe the present is a tricky issue. Renate suggests a continuity despite the actual structural discontinuities of the political system. It is her interpretation of the transformation (including the evaluation of the past) and her notion of continuity that is contested and contradicted by other women. (Renate also seems to construct a continuity in terms of women’s role in society.) Since most women’s lives have been rocked by the radical changes perhaps it is simply disturbing that Renate pretends nothing has changed. This is nicely demonstrated in a conversation that followed, between Margit and Renate. Margit challenges Renate when she asks her if she is not unemployed today. Renate: “No, I still have work”. Margit: “Oh, well, I was kicked out right at the beginning”. This interchange makes especially clear the extent to which the transformation can seem relatively smooth for one woman and yet have devastating consequences for another. After this personal exchange the heated debate stops. Then the discussion turns back to the original question: Should there be a change in the name of the Centre?

The Consensus

At the far end of the table most women (Linda, Marie, Karina) share the opinion that the name should be kept as it is. The two women from the community Centre argue that the name is well known and recognized in the city. Marie nods and agrees. Linda uses a pragmatic argument: that the Centre has been announced and listed all over the Federal Republic under the name of Frauenreff Sundine. At the other end of the table somebody comments that the sign in front of the store would have to be changed and installed at the cost of 4000 DM. Another argument against a change is that the Office had already taken over the facilities of the Women’s Centre and changed the name from DFD-Beratungszentrum Sundine to Frauenreff Sundine. There is agreement from Marie and accompanied murmurs from others surrounding her. One woman notes that after the Wende the term Frauenreff used to be emphasized by the Amt rather than Sundine. This is because the Amt, together with women
who at the time worked at the Centre, developed a new concept for the Women’s Centre based on the notion of *Frauentreffpunkte*, that is literally “meeting places for women”.

Another woman’s comment on the history of the *DFD* turns the debate in a new direction: “The *DFD* had already existed before”, that is to say, prior to the foundation of the GDR in 1947. “It does go back to Rosa Luxemburg or so” Elisa says. Her statement shows that a general knowledge of socialist traditions exists since it was part of the self-definition of mass organizations in the GDR. Whether this knowledge of the *DFD*’s history is imprecise or whether most women do not want to discuss the topic further remains open. In any event, it is not pursued. Renate the former *DFD* member, for example, is silent. What this shows, though, is that the socialist history in Eastern Germany is commonly known and that these women’s criticism is not directed at socialist ideals per se but against the ‘real existing socialism’ à la GDR and the use of the mass organizations as political vehicles.

With this recurring notion of history prior to the GDR the debate has already passed its climax. A consensus is reached (almost quietly) to retain the name *Frauentreff Sundine*. Yet there is a sense in which the dialogue continues. Different statements continue half publicly confirming or commenting on the debate. For example, Linda, who used to work in an agricultural cooperative near Stralsund, remarks that the *DFD* in the countryside had a good reputation. One woman from the community Centres agrees (see as well Hampele 1993b). One woman raises the question of the whereabouts of the *DFD*: “What does the women’s organization call itself today?” The women in this group are uncertain, perhaps a sign of the *DFD*’s decreased role after it had changed from a mass organization into a (charitable) western association. Anne had listened to the conversation and remarks “*DF e.V.* or something similar” which in fact is the proper name of this transformed association.

Before I address the implications of this consensus I will describe the rest of the meeting and inaugural celebration of the *Initiative*. After the issue of the name change is settled, another issue is discussed among the large group, that is the *Initiative’s* public self representation and distinct status as a non-profit organization. In this discussion some women demand that the distinct character of the Women for Women Initiative should be emphasized
in public. Thereby, their history of involvement in the democraticization process since the early 1990 is being evoked. One woman points out that it is important to describe their association as "independent" (unabhängig). Others agree that being an independent organization is an essential feature of who they are. Thus, the active members confirm the status of their group or association. Other women neither object nor contribute to the confirmation procedure. Unspoken is the fact that this is also what distinguishes the Initiative even as a non-profit organization from the DFD and the Amt. With this, the meeting comes to an end.

As people get up to leave, however, some women remark that they are quite content with the possibility of using the facilities of the Women's Centre as a space for women. (The Initiative has facilities in an old house nearby which will soon be renovated.) But as the conversations between some Initiative members after the meeting indicate the debate brought up issues from the past that are not easily resolved. As the group disperses several women comment on the red tablecloths, some of them jokingly, others more seriously. For example, Elisa finds it disturbing because it reminds her of "old times". "Linda bought them", Marie defends her and emphasizes that they are brand new. "Anyway, there should be Round Tables", Elisa says in reference to the Round Table discussions which were set up by the opposition in the GDR with the Wende. Gabriele mediates and points out the shape of this long room is not too well suited for the actual practice of such a symbolic act. Elisa leaves together with other Initiative women, others socialize in the front room. A small group gathers in the kitchen for a cigarette while others begin cleaning the front room moving back and forth between the two. Linda has already left. She had arranged for Jutta to accompany me on the way home (because of a dark path across the White Bridges) to the Women's Shelter, where I resided for the first period of my stay. I made arrangements with Gabriele, Anne and Jutta to introduce myself and my project at the next Initiative meeting in two weeks. Anne explained that they usually introduce each other but it always takes up so much time. Jutta suggests that only the new participants should introduce themselves. As Jutta departs I leave with her.

How can we interpret the consensus that was reached at this meeting? Was a radical new beginning at the Centre prevented? Why were the arguments to preserve a sense of
locality so successfully used? Was it a nostalgia for the past? Did pragmatism triumph over idealism, localism over radicalism? Is it just another sign of the Initiative’s decreasing political influence? In the immediate post Wende days the Initiative had an impact on local politics which it had lost to the Amt in the process of restructuring once the Amt also became the administrator for the Women’s Centre and another women’s project, the Shelter. Many (former) employees of the Centre (Initiative and non-Initiative members) and DFD-women who frequented the facilities came to believe and voiced the opinion that the Initiative would be the more appropriate supporting institution for the Centre. In fact the Amt did not intend to remain the supporting institution and most women supported the transfer to the Women for Women Initiative. Unlike the Amt, the Initiative in their statement of interest had acknowledged the DFD past and not eradicated it as the brochure on the Centre published by the Amt shows.

The Initiative members also had aspired to a transfer of the Centre earlier but by the time they finally came to be the non-profit organization of the Centre the new political realities of the united Germany had solidified. As I described in chapter 2, this meant for the women’s movement that their activists lost their political impact and adjusted their strategies by setting up a women’s infrastructure. Struggling over funds and battling with the administration in order to simultaneously run projects and employ women had led to a depoliticization of the women’s project movement. To what degree had the Women’s Centre in Stralsund become depoliticized in 1994 despite its transfer to the politically engaged Initiative grass roots group? Why did this controversy erupt? Why did issues of the past surface in this particular manner? We can take a first step towards providing some answers to these questions by reconstructing a history of the Women’s Centre up to the occurrence of the transfer in 1994.

Conclusion

We have already seen the importance of getting together for those women actively engaged in shaping the process of transformation in the post-unification era on a public occasion such as International Women’s Day. In the context of a local institution for women we also see different women gathering to celebrate a change in the supporting institution.
Despite diverse experiences and opinions among these women, they were coming together in the facilities of the Centre to celebrate, congregate and shape the future of this institution. The diversity of those women meeting and assembling at the Women's Centre was one of the project's distinctive features. Normally, the dialogues and conversations initiated at meetings in the Centre would not lead to a dispute. The transfer from one supporting institution to another served as a catalyst that allowed the underlying tensions between a heterogeneous group of women momentarily to surface. The dispute over the name change reinforces the sense that the individual actors are dealing with the present issues of running an institution in support of women based on their experiences with a very different kind of past, that is, their experiences with the political system of the GDR of which the DFD was a part.

The discussion concerning the Women's Centre's past DFD affiliation and the DFD's role in the political system of the GDR not only demonstrates that there was no homogeneous evaluation of the past among Initiative members, but also that individual members' past experiences with the political system of the GDR continued to have implications for their political actions and practice at the present time.

The group discussion at this meeting brought to the forefront a tension that existed between members of the old DFD women's organization and the new women's movement. Moreover, this tension exemplifies the different ways in which women experienced the transformation. It was at this event that I first learned about the history of the Centre. In the days after this event, as I talked to several women in the Centre about it, the idea of investigating the history of this Centre by carrying out oral history interviews took shape. A cooperative venture developed from this encounter which enabled me to explore the dynamics below the surface. Thus, my description of the dispute at the Centre is a prelude and the next chapters will fill in and analyze the historical context for the discussion of the name change and continue the analysis of how the Centre evolved as a project of the women's movement.
Chapter 4 INSTITUTIONAL TRANSITIONS: THE WOMEN’S CENTRE SUNDINE

Introduction

As the previous chapter showed the experience of transition is intrinsically and intricately linked to women’s experiences of the past. We, therefore, will enter this past through the doors of the Women’s Centre Sundine as it was established in the GDR and transformed with unification. In other words, in 1994, this past encompassed the GDR history as well as the history of recent transformation set into motion with the Wende.

In order to get a sense of the institutions, expectations and practices that formed the basis for East German women’s experience as they entered the period of transition, we need to have a clear idea of the history of the women’s organization in the postwar GDR. Since this is almost entirely a silenced space in social history, at least in the local context of Stralsund, in doing this we are bringing to light otherwise darkened recesses of women’s history in the GDR. The first section of this chapter, therefore, provides the GDR history of the Centre and its supporting institution, the Democratic German Women’s Federation (Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands, henceforth DFD). It gives us an idea of the intricate links between the Centre and GDR state policies and what “work” for the mass organization entailed.

The second section depicts the experiences of women at the Centre as they entered the period of transition through the dialogues and conversations of women from different backgrounds. The Women’s Centre is a microcosm of the transformation from the Wende to German unification. What we are seeing is how at a particular moment in history the social movement created an opening in society for open reflection and discussion, enabling some people to actively engage in introducing changes (overturning existing structures) and negotiating the restructuring process. Capitalizing on this moment to initiate radical changes, once it passed, women were still trying to shape and set up new structures. This was now done, however, with the prospect of establishing Western structures in the East. As a result of these changes, new social groups developed and new concepts arose around the Centre.
What I know about the Women’s Centre and its history comes from people, to a lesser degree from newspaper articles and archival material. People shared their experiences, knowledge and opinions with me. When women talk about the GDR history of the Centre they attempt to capture a vanished but clearly defined past. As they talk about the recent history of radical and rapid transformations they begin to produce unpolished stories of those as yet undigested experiences. These stories need to be read against the background of their past experiences. Let us begin with the life and the times of “real existing socialism”.

Part I
The DFD Counseling Centre Sundine 1973-1990

The Centre was set up in 1973 in accordance with the new social policies of the 1970s (under Erich Honecker) and was designed to fulfill a “societal task”, receiving its directives from the Democratic German Women’s Federation (DFD). The Stralsund Chronicle (Ewe 1984) contains an account encompassing the city’s historical and economic development in socialist times. Although the author (Ewe 1984:453) points out the positive development of the economy in the 1970s which allowed for the realization of social political programmes, he does not mention the role of the DFD as one of several mass organizations in implementing these policies. The local Women’s Centre simply does not appear in his and others’ chronicles of Stralsund. It is only through the reconstruction of personal narratives and archival material that we can see how the DFD Counseling Centre was run until the events of “autumn 1989” (Wende). What we are doing here is recovering a silent moment in local history. The narratives of active DFD members stand in stark contrast to the historical document; they illustrate that the Centre must have had a societal and social significance for hundreds of DFD women in Stralsund and the surrounding area.

1 Of whom the following had volunteered oral history interviews: Elisabeth, Hilde, Erna, Birgit and others for a reconstruction of the Centre’s DFD history; for the period of transition (between Wende, unification and thereafter) Birgit, Klara, Christine and Renate.

2 As Merkl (1993:77) notes: “It is not easy to translate the German ‘der reale (or real existierende) Sozialismus’ into meaningful English”. He suggests “realistic socialism”. I prefer the literal translation of “real existing socialism” because it best connotes daily life under the socialist state.
There exists, however, a striking parallel between the oral sources and accounts published in local newspapers: because the narratives and the local newspaper articles often provide overlapping information on the same events. This parallel is less surprising if we take into account that the interviewees might have used the newspapers to refresh their memories prior to being interviewed. But this in itself suggests that the reiterating of official events and occurrences could indicate how important and meaningful they were in people’s personal lives. The DFD members’ narratives, however, add more detail and provide different stories. This allows for a construction of organizational features such as the relationship of the DFD Centre to other local institutions, and the internal organizational structure between different levels of the DFD. In addition, they provide an inside view of daily life at the Centre. This creates a picture of the distinct features and routines of the DFD Centre in times of “real existing socialism”. One of these was the DFD’s role in achieving the state-promoted equality. To understand its distinct form of organization it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the DFD’s history and its function as a mass organization for women followed by a synopsis of daily activities and special events at the Centre.

**History of the DFD and its (Self-) Definition as a GDR Mass Organization**

The history of the DFD dates back to the immediate post WWII era, prior to the foundation of both German states. The DFD was founded in 1947 out of the antifascist women’s committees in an attempt to unite the different democratic women’s forces in a mass organization (for further details see Ehlenbeck et al. 1989:65ff). The foundation of the united DFD organization was described (particularly by those sources published in the GDR) as unique in the history of the German women’s movement (ibid.). According to these

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3 This contrasts with many oral historians’ experience that peoples’ memories and archival information often do not match.

4 According to Fentress and Wickham (1992) people always remember those experiences which convey important clusters and issues of meaning. In this case, however, one also needs to take into account the fact that their stories were told to somebody who was uninformed about these structures of the DFD.

5 The DFD was prohibited in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1957. DFD women had protested against the remilitarisation policies of the Adenauer-government in the Federal Republic of Germany (for further details see Nödinger 1983). In the German Democratic Republic, the DFD continued to exist as the “official and only legal women’s organization” (Julia Teschner 1994:53).

6 However, it was a common strategy and the Socialist Unity Party, the SED, itself underwent a restructuring into a central hierarchical and disciplined “Marxist-Leninist party of a new type” in 1948 (Michaela Richter 1994:97) - in order to create a united antifascist and democratic front against the political enemy, that is, the imperialist reactionary forces in (what was then) the “western zones” (Ehlenbeck et al. 1989).
publications, the *DFD* was following in the footsteps of the progressive liberal and socialist women's movement from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century and in so doing had taken up their claims for peace, democracy and equality (Nödinger 1983:187). But in contrast to its predecessors the founding members believed that they had overcome the mistakes and weakness of the women’s movement which, before fascism was divided (see e.g. Nödinger 1983:20).

The *DFD* united women in a democratic mass organization and, according to the *DFD*’s self-definition, claimed that it represented “the unitary will to act on behalf of women and girls independent of their world view and religious profession” (Statute of the DFD 1975:4). Thus, according to the *DFD* statute of 1975, the *DFD* embodied “the best traditions of the progressive German Women’s Movement” which was active around the turn of the century. Moreover, the *DFD* declared as their models heroic female activists such as Clara Zetkin7 and Rosa Luxemburg. In the GDR a Clara-Zetkin medal was awarded to women for their contribution to socialist society on International Women’s Day. Both the organization’s socialist tradition as well as its unitary and hierarchical structure were typical within the political system of the GDR.8 In this respect, the *DFD* is no exception. In 1948-49, the Socialist Unity Party (*SED*) became the state party of the newly founded German Democratic Republic and the *DFD* like other mass organizations first worked closely and later aligned itself with the *SED* in furthering wider revolutionary socialist programmes. Similar to the bloc parties (see Michaela Richter 1994:96) the mass organizations’ purpose was to support *SED* policies.9 At the sixth federal congress in 1957, the *DFD* acknowledged the leading role of the *SED* in its statute (Hampele 1993b:298). By 1975 this was phrased as follows:

The *DFD* acknowledges the leading role of the working class and its revolutionary party, which with its [policies] fulfills women’s claim for peace, freedom, equality and human dignity. Its decisions (*Beschlüsse*) guide the activities of the organization

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7 As Einhorn (1993:24) notes Clara Zetkin (born 1857) “was one of the first socialist thinkers to assert that labour force participation was liberating in more than the merely material sense of economic independence from men”.
8 The *FDGB* Union, another mass organization in the GDR, also made historical claims on the socialist tradition (see Rainer Weinert 1995:247). To organize into mass organizations with a unitary character (or form of organization) was one of the typical features of institutions in the GDR (see Rainer Weinert 1995).
9 The *SED* was seen as the organ of the working class in power. As Lewis (1995:53) notes: “All other parties and mass organizations were obliged to acknowledge the SED's leadership role and were organized in the Parliament as members of a block puppet institution called the National Front of the GDR (otherwise known as the 'Block').
because they comply with the needs of the people of the GDR and therefore of all
women and mothers (Statute of the 10th Federal Congress of the DFD in February
1975:3/4). (my translation)

The above shows that the SED, through its policy, had become the guarantor of the
DFD’s claim and its main aim to maintain and protect peace, elsewhere, in reference to the
early activities and programmes of the DFD, described as the “highest goal of women” (das
höchste Anliegen) (Statute of the DFD 1975:4). This also meant that the DFD, like other
socialist mass organizations, was not an independent negotiating agent of its female interest
groups, nor an independent mediator between political parties and the state (see e.g. De Soto
1993:295). 10 De Soto’s (ibid.) view of “social organizations” as essentially “part of the official
party”, however, is too simplistic in the case of the DFD as it neglects the fact that the DFD’s
membership consisted of many non-party members (Hampele 1993b) who would not see
themselves as Party affiliates (Einhorn 1989).

Generally, it was through mass organizations that “those parts of the population that the
SED could not or did not want to recruit” were supposed to be socialized, educated and
controlled (Michaela Richter 1994:97). “So-called mass organizations targeted young people
(FDJ), women (DFD), trade unionists (FDGB) artists (KB) and others..” (Derek Lewis
1995:53). 11 That is, they functioned as “vehicles of transmission” and attempted to win over
specific segments of the population to the Marxist-Leninist cause (see e.g. Derek Lewis
1995:53). At the same time these mass organizations also functioned “as sources of
information about grievances of certain social interests” (ibid.). Whereas in the early days the
DFD had been quite active, closer alignment with the SED left less room to maneuver and
finally led to stagnation as the active membership aged. The GDR state’s decision to declare
the women’s question solved contributed to this process and this is what we turn to now.

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10 As De Soto (1993:295) notes, “The DFD carried out directives for women thought necessary for the
reproduction of the system”.
11 Together with the bloc parties and mass organizations the DFD was a member of the National Front (Statute of
the DFD 1975:4). The task of the different organizations was to orient and fix workers (Werktätige) on the SED
(ibid.).
The GDR State and its “Achievement of Equality”

In the early years (1940s and 1950s) of the DFD, the fight for peace and the reconstruction of Germany which “was destroyed by fascism” were the first priorities of the DFD. This included German unity\(^{12}\) rather than fighting for the equality of women (Nödinger 1983:23). However, the formation of the DFD as a mass organization was associated with a larger debate over the position of women in society and their equality (Christine Kulke 1960:145). Since the foundation of the GDR, the DFD’s activities had become closely linked to the social policies designed by the state. In the 1950s and 60s debates regarding the position of women in society which were led by the SED and other organs of the state ministry were dominated by those topics surrounding women’s professional education and qualifications. Thus, the problem of women’s equality was identified solely in relation to employment. The SED ideology propagated the idea that the professional qualifications of women would lead to personal self-fulfilment (Entfaltung), liberation, and political integration. In so doing, the socialist and communist ideas of women’s emancipation were transformed (Kulke 1960:145). According to Kulke (1960:146), the SED ideology mixed those two elements which the earlier social democratic women’s movement had kept separate, i.e., an educational programme to politically integrate women and a notion which equated individuals’ professional emancipation with the wider emancipation of society. Those policies which propagated and supported the integration of large numbers of women into the work force in the first decades of “existing socialism” in the GDR were based on the SED’s pragmatic socio-political notion described above. Consequently, by 1971 the women’s question in the classical sense was seen as solved by the Party:

After the VIII SED Party conference in 1971 it was decreed that the legal and economic basis of equality between the sexes had been established. Subsequently policy now built on these achievements to ensure that girls and women enjoyed equality of opportunity in education and in society as well as the compatibility of career and motherhood (Ingrid Sharp and Dagmar Flinsbach 1995:184).

\(^{12}\) In the late 1940s and 1950s a possible German unification was a common part of the political debates. This changed with the closing of the German-German border in 1961.
In other words, according to the state ideology the “equality of women” had already been achieved (through incorporation of women into the work force). As De Soto (1993:295) points out, “The Party declared that equality had been achieved, and women—the workers and mothers—became officially idealized in the reconstruction phase of the socialist economy “. The GDR woman was “a superwoman, one who could successfully handle both family and career with the help of a beneficial state” (de Soto 1993:295/6). This at least is how the relationship between women and the state was portrayed. At a Party conference in 1976 it became clear that the unity of economic and social policies “cemented the compatibility of employment and motherhood” and turned out to be a “patriarchal method of supporting the family” (Nagelschmidt 1992:7). This was the case because the specific division of labour was never questioned. Those laws which claimed to protect mother and child and the dignity of women (as an example of the latter see Statute of the DFD 1975:4) were granted by a paternalistic state.

In the 1970s and 1980s, social policies were introduced which entitled women to “special social privileges at work” such as a reduced work load for women with two children and “one paid day of absence per month to tend to housework” (Winkler 1994:234/5). These social policies were perceived by the Party and government officials as a solution to the problem of combining work and motherhood and “welcomed by many women themselves as improvement” (“von einem großen Teil der Frauen als Erleichterung aufgenommen wurden”) (Elisabeth, local DFD authority). Hampele (1993b) points out that only a few women viewed the new social policies as solidifying the classical female role. As Winkler (1994:235) also notes:

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13 From this it followed that generally the situation between women and men, that is gender relations, were portrayed as unproblematic and idealized (Schenk 1993:163). The fact that equality between the sexes was declared, “stifled further discussions of women’s issues” in term of alternative interpretations of what emancipation meant (Sharp and Flinsbach 1995:188).

14 As Gunnar Winkler notes: “From the very beginning of the GDR’s existence, policies toward women tended to concentrate on provisions that would allow the incorporation of the female sector of society into the workforce while allowing them to have families as well. The freedom of choice, to decide between work and motherhood, never existed in the GDR. Party and government officials confidently asserted that the problem of combining work and motherhood had been solved by the early 1970s” (Gunnar Winkler 1994:234).

15 Für die Generation von Frauen, die in jener Zeit Kinder bekamen, dürfte tatsächlich diese neue soziale Arrangement als gesellschaftlich integrierender und die politische Entmündigung legitimierender Konsens erlebt worden sein. Dagegen blieben—die zudem inopportun gewordenen Stimmen jener, die in der neuen Sozialpolitik eine Festschreibung der klassischen Frauenrolle sahen, sehr leise” (Hampele 1993b:287).
. . . gender inequalities persisted and were more pronounced than inequalities between other social groups despite legal achievements aimed at guaranteeing equality of men and women. Many policy measures reinforced the maintenance of social differences and strengthened traditional role patterns.

The notion of equality underlying these policies, which Ferree (1993) dubbed "Mommy Politics", was based on a traditional role pattern. The DFD in implementing these social policies accepted this notion of equality without question, as Elisabeth's narrative, in which she formulated the role of the DFD Counseling Centre Sundine, shows:

. . . most importantly the Counseling Centre supported the family... and thereby of course had in particular the role of women in mind. We always had three main issues: first, to ease the family conditions, . . . to ease the life of women in the family... Then we had another area which as the programmes show, was the preparation of young people for marriage and family, so that they would master the family problems. Another important idea was seen in supporting families with many children. The programmes were essentially designed to accomplish this (ES:1).

In this period, the DFD's role had changed as well; the DFD was used more for the propagation of these social policies since Erich Honecker, the first secretary of the SED, introduced the new concept of the "unity of economic and social policy". The DFD did not develop its own political initiatives any longer and became the interpreting and implementing organ (Ausführungsorgan) of the social policies (Hampele 1993b:300). After 1972 counseling centres were established (als Begleitmaßnahme), particularly in order to accompany the new abortion law. The history of the Women's Centre begins at a historical breaking point when

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16 For further criticism of gender inequalities in the GDR see particularly e.g. Nickel 1993a, 1992; Dölling 1993, 1991a,b.
17 Similarly she is quoted in an article of the OZ.
18 Since there existed an infrastructure that made it easier for women to combine family and employment, the DFD's original emphasis on the residential and domestic issues was no longer relevant. In 1980 (or even earlier) the majority of women no longer felt that their interests were represented by the DFD because the organization did not develop new tasks and aims. Teschner (1994) labels one of the internal problems of the DFD as stagnation. According to Julia Teschner (1994:53) "the DFD had failed to encourage the involvement of young women in its activities". These young women belonged to a new generation of those who grew up under socialism and many of whom developed a critical eye regarding the notion of "achieved equality" and the effects of the social policies on women. Whereas in the early days of the GDR criticism and activism for the women's cause was expressed through and incorporated into the official organizations for women, the critical potential of the young generation organized in opposition. Those non-state women's groups who formed as part of the opposition in the 1980s challenged those positions and saw the DFD as ausführendes Organ of state policies for women. Furthermore, their critique of the DFD was due to its inability to pose critical questions and to acknowledge people with different ideas (Andersdenkende).
the reins of power were taken over by a new general secretary, Erich Honecker. A different era of GDR ‘real existing socialism’ began and new policies were introduced; the history of the Counseling Centre itself reflects these changes.

From “Bonboniere” to DFD Counseling Centre: Implementing the “Unity of Economic and Social Policy”

In the following section, I will describe the foundation and organization of the DFD Counseling Centre in Stralsund. I will show how the Centre was not only an instrument (or outlet) of the DFD policies, but was also embedded in the wider structure of the mass organizations and how these different organizations worked together locally in order to implement the state plan of “the unity of economic and social policy”.

The origin of local women’s centres across the GDR was first envisioned at the [9th] federal congress of the DFD. Here, a motion passed to establish counseling centres and subsequently, the foundation of such a central institution for the city of Stralsund and its surrounding countryside was planned. When the DFD Counseling Centre opened in November 1973, the local newspaper wrote:

Hereby Stralsund joins the rank of those cities which have realized the motion (Beschluß) of the federal board of the DFD (Demokrat 19.11.1973).

In other words, the local or regional DFD administration fulfilled the will of the federal board. The Stralsund Centre did not, however, conform to the usual slogan of other centres which called themselves Rat für Alle (“advice for everybody”). They opened under a name with a local flavour “DFD Counseling Centre Sundine” (see Demokrat ibid.) (see chapter 3, Part II for further details on the name). According to the general plan, the DFD Centre (in Stralsund) was planned in cooperation with the city government and the local branch of the Trading Organizations (Handelsgenossenschaft oder -organisation henceforth HO) which was “the state-owned food distribution organization in the GDR” (Lewis and McKenzie’s translation, 1995).
Prior to the opening of the facilities in the old city, the Counseling Centre had worked "without a permanent address" (Bleibe) from 1972 to (November) 1973. Elisabeth, the regional executive board leader (Kreisvorsitzende) at the time, recalls that in 1972, during this one year period, her concern had been, first, the representation of the Counseling Centre in the negotiation meetings with the City Administration and the Trading Organization (Rat der Stadt und dem Handel) and, second, the promotion of the Centre’s task to the membership of the DFD. She was responsible for setting up the Centre and for propagating the federal DFD administration’s decision to its members. The latter task was mainly carried out by another “Freundin” (as DFD activist members were addressed) who, according to Elisabeth’s oral account, attempted to attract women through talks on topics such as cosmetics and a healthy diet while at the same time informing women in the DFD groups about the issues (Anliegen) of the Counseling Centre.19

In an interview on June 31, 1994, Elisabeth, now in her sixties, recounts the beginning of the Centre and her own role in the proceedings. She became a DFD member in 1953. In 1954, she first engaged in the neighbourhood groups of the DFD before she was elected in 1969 as the regional executive board leader in charge of implementing the new policies. The connection between the “unity of economic and social policies” in setting up these DFD counseling centres is perhaps most metaphorically expressed in the way Elisabeth and others remember it as "Bonboniere". Previously, the facilities of the Centre in Ossenreyerstrasse (in which the Centre resided until 1995) had served as the confectionery store “Pralinetti” of the former Trading Organization (HO).20 (A relic of the former confectionery store was the finely worked wooden wall with its shelves and drawers that in the summer of 1994 displayed ceramics of local artists among other things such as the library of the Initiative.)

Newspaper articles commemorating the opening of the Centre stress that setting up the Centre was a cooperative venture. Its running costs were financed by the City of Stralsund and

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19 Though Elisabeth talked about the strategy to attract women, she did not talk about what these issues were. Hampele (1993b:300) mentions that counseling centres meant to accompany and inform about the (in 1972) newly passed legal abortion law in the GDR. But there is no mention of this issue in the oral histories I collected nor in the local newspapers of Stralsund.

20 However, the city provided most of the financial means and set up of the Centre while DFD employees (Mitarbeiterinnen) and groups put in their time and effort into building the Centre.
the Trading Organization (HO). The local representatives of the SED Party (second in command), the Trading Organization (HO), and the vice mayor officially congratulated the DFD at the opening celebration (see Demokrat 1973, NNN 1973). The presence of these delegates from the mass organizations, the Party and the City government further demonstrate that they together with the DFD had successfully implemented the propagated state policy. In the future, the Centre was controlled and supervised at the local level by a specific committee called the gesellschaftliche Beirat\textsuperscript{21}. It consisted of members of the honorary regional executive board of the DFD (ehrenamtlicher Kreisvorstand), HO and those professionals who were supposed to represent the diverse population (Breite der Bevölkerung). This committee was supposed to realize the programmes of the Centre (die Programme dann verwirklicht hat) and, thus, guarantee the implementation of the “unity of economic and social policies”. For example, one of the Centre’s tasks was promoting new household technology in order to run a household rationally (Haushaltsgestaltung)\textsuperscript{22}. This was accomplished in cooperation with the Trading Organization (HO) which had to put it into practice.

As Elisabeth indicates, the actual practices and performances in the Centre were intertwined with the rationale that guided its close cooperation with the Trading Organization (HO). She also recalls that it had been a hard struggle to acquire this room for the DFD “so nicely located” in the Centre of the city.\textsuperscript{23} In the following she compares the facilities and its furniture in 1973 with the ones of 1994; thus, a “scarce” past and an abundant present. Elisabeth’s use of “we” shows that she still identifies with the Centre in its current state:

We had far more simple furniture than what we have now. Now it is really nicely furnished. We used to fight for every chair. Back in the kitchen we once got a kitchen machine from the trade (Handel) to promote new household technology and it stayed in the Centre. Well, when we got a coffee-maker it was quite an occasion when we could

\textsuperscript{21}Later the gesellschaftliche Beirat was renamed and turned into a commission which supported “family policies” (CB:16/17). The GDR women’s magazine Für Dich (40/1977) published an article on the pronounced interest on family policies in Stralsund (“In Stralsund wird Familienpolitik an die grosse Glocke gehängt.”)

\textsuperscript{22}This is also emphasized in articles of the local newspapers OZ and NNN on the opening celebration of the Counseling Centre. This is an example of what I noted earlier, namely, that her story of the origin and establishment of the Centre (often closely) corresponds with the information presented in articles of the local newspapers.

\textsuperscript{23}Today with the economic boom (establishment of many small businesses) in the old city, the location of the Sundine is attractive for small businesses. Many employees of the Centre told stories about frequent requests to rent the facilities (in particular in the early 1990s).
use the machine to make coffee and did not have to brew it by hand. In this way we slowly built up the Centre little by little (ES:2).

Besides showing how she continues to associate herself with the Centre, Elisabeth’s story also indicates that in her position as a regional executive board leader of the DFD this rationale had turned into “matters of concerns and tasks”. Elisabeth’s account furthermore captures the spirit of the promotion of home technology. The modernization of household maintenance was supposed to make easier the running of the household (Erleichterung). This notion of modernization was linked to the notion of equality. In order to guarantee equality between the sexes, the GDR state saw its task as enabling women to combine career and family responsibilities through “rational” use of technology in the home. That is, to further women’s participation in the work force, their professional qualifications and to improve housekeeping.

**Designing the Centre’s Programmes**

The design of the Centre’s programmes revolved around the social policies. A former employee, Birgit, speaks of the “unity of economic and social policies” and how it was reflected in the quarterly issued programmes. Birgit, a forty-two year old woman who worked at the Centre from 1987 to 1993, notes:

You could tell by the programme that we closely cooperated (Zusammenarbeit) with the Trading Organization (BA:4).

The advertisement division of the Trading Organization (HO), for example, provided their services for the decoration of the window at the DFD Counseling Centre Sundine. The Trading Organization also promoted new household technologies, commodities and food products. Many former “visitors” (Besucher) [users] remembered particularly those performances which included a so-called Verkostung (“tasting”) of cheese or fish products. These were carried out by a representative of the local milk factory (Milchkombinat or -wirtschaft) or an expert from the fish factory (Fischkombinat).
The DFD Centre was part of a wider network of organizations which made it easy to access certain services and information. Close cooperation with other local state offices was a regular procedure. That is to say, the Centre organized the events but they were then carried out by the particular organizations or institutions. Further examples include classes and talks focused on a healthy diet offered in cooperation with the German Gymnastics and Sport Federation (DTSB). These courses were first advertised as “slim and fit, and healthy diet” classes and later (since 1988) became known as “slimness classes” (Schlankheitskurse).

Through the DFD, the Centre worked closely with other mass organizations such as the HO, DTSB and local societal institutions and offices such as the Registry Office, the Public Health Office or Hospital for Children (Standes-, Gesundheitsamt, Kinderklinik). For example, the Registry Office (Standesamt) was used by the DFD to obtain the addresses of young couples who were getting married. Elisabeth recalls how the DFD mailed invitations to these couples and invited them to join talks which were designed to discuss their ideas about marriage and exchange information with experienced DFD women. Similar events were organized for conscripted young men and their female partners.

In the 1980s, in accordance with the new family policies, more courses came to focus on marriage, partnership, family and children. In 1988 the Centre introduced “baby courses” (Babykurse) which included diet counseling (Ernährungslehre) and other help for young mothers (Wickelkurse). Elisabeth’s comment following, shows the intended educational significance of some of these courses: “Some [women] were about to have a baby and did not know how to change diapers”. Other courses focused on pre-natal care, the so-called “courses for mothers” (Mütterkurse) which included “gymnastics for pregnant women” (Schwangerschaftsgymnastik). These were organized in cooperation with the Public Heath Office (Gesundheitsamt) and often occurred in their facilities (and not necessarily in the Sundine). In order to take some of the load off working “mothers”, the Centre cooperated with schools in Stralsund and installed a series of events for children in which they were taught certain household skills. Birgit mentions these events and an article from 1978 entitled “The first slice of bread buttered in the Sundine” (In der ‘Sundine’ die erste Stulle geschmiert). The programmes between 1973 and 1990, furthermore, included diverse cooking courses.

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24 Birgit, who had been employed under the old as well as the new regime, in particular points out this feature of this old set up. (see next chapter for more details)
(Kochkurse), the production of hand-crafted Christmas and Easter decorations, and textile courses.

The DFD, however, also had to fulfill a political role and the Centre served as a meeting place “to make politics” (Politik zu machen). Elisabeth (11) notes that the DFD used the Sundine for organizing these events. These included the celebration of the 10th and 15th anniversary of the Centre as well as the annual celebration of International Women’s Day. Some of the so-called political events had a rather unusual “face”. For example, the meetings with the German-Soviet Friendship Association (DSF-Freundschaftstreffen) were considered “political events” though they could be described as international gatherings with women from the Soviet Union. Some of these international events were actually advertised as “art of cooking courses” (Kochkunstvorführungen) (until 1985) (see Hampele 1993b for these kind of politics). These were “societal” as well as political events because the framework in which they occurred was viewed as societal work (gesellschaftliche Arbeit).

The DFD Centre: “Our House”

The employees of the Counseling Centre organized and coordinated the events for the groups of women who used the Centre (see structural set-up, fig. 10. p. 294). They were referred to as “visitors” (Besucher). One might argue that this perhaps indicates that the DFD membership had only “visiting” status and therefore, “only extremely limited influence over the representation of their true interests” (see e.g. Teschner 1994:56) The oral accounts contradict this view and rather suggest that many women came to see the DFD Centre as ‘their house’. The visitors were mainly DFD groups and “women’s groups” from the companies (rarely single visitors). The employees of the Centre were well informed of the members’ desires and wishes and incorporated them into the programmes. Erna, an executive member of one neighbourhood group, describes how her DFD group and the employees of the Centre interacted and how the DFD group provided the employees with inspiration for performances:

25 Since the 1980s peace rallies were held on International Women’s Day at the New Market - under a different motto every year such as “against atomic war”, “freedom for [Nelson] Mandela”.

Well we consulted with the women who worked at the Centre and voiced our wishes for what we would like to do (ED:2).

Erna also remembers the positive reaction of her DFD group when the Centre was first formed and opened:

..the Women’s Centre was formed.. and offered programmes, which were multilayered and we immediately went for it (darauf stürzen). Well, I must say that our group viewed it as a big support. We looked at this programm and showed it to the women. They registered for those events that interested them. Back then it was always crowded; we did not always get a seat (Plätze), so one had to register (ED:1).

The Centre was popular with the DFD groups in the neighbouring areas. The DFD membership was organized in by neighbourhood (Wohngebiet) and it was here that one would find the basis of the women’s organization (see fig. 10). The women’s Centre was a central meeting point for DFD groups and “old friends” (Freundinnen) who had been engaged in the DFD for a long time (ES:12). Erna’s statement reinforces this:

We [the DFD local group] really looked at it as our house and accepted it, I would say... The women liked how it was furnished and they felt at home (ED:2).

Birgit, who had worked at the Centre in the late 1980s and early 1990s, describes the popularity and the extent to which the Centre was used by the DFD membership before the Wende:

Women always came in groups, mostly groups; a few single persons came... we had unbelievably (unwahrscheinlich) many DFD groups in Stralsund and they always received the programme and then they called and said, well, this event we would like to see [participate in] (BA:6).

When Birgit speaks of the Centre in the past she emphasizes the number of visitors and the steady flow of visiting DFD groups due to the form of gatherings in the mass organization for women. Here, Birgit contrasts a fact of the past with one of the present. Birgit’s emphasis most likely was stimulated by her experiences as an employee of the Centre after the Wende and unification when the Centre was no longer frequented mainly by DFD neighbourhood groups.
In the past the Centre received financial support from the mass organizations and services from other state-organized institutions. This meant for its users, as several women pointed out, that the DFD Counseling Centre could offer courses free of charge. Nowadays, due to the changing relationship with the state, courses require a fee which has to be paid by individual women who enroll in courses or visit performances.

In GDR times, the DFD Centre was designed for the needs of working mothers and many events took place in the evenings when the Centre was often still open. As Hilde (who followed Elisabeth as regional executive board leader in 1988, a forty-five year old DFD member in 1994) points out, DFD women were employed and had children to take care of. That the Centre used to support women in performing their dual role as mothers and workers is even more explicitly expressed by Elisabeth, who summarizes the aim of the DFD as follows:

We always were busy helping women to manage their career and everything else (alles unter einen Hut bringen). That was the main aim: to combine everything, family, professional employment career, children, qualification, well, all of that (ES:9).

This statement also highlights Elisabeth’s identification with the state’s social policies for women. (For a further analysis of how DFD women describe and perceive the events and activities in the Centre in terms of its “societal” and political significance see chapter 7). Elisabeth’s statement furthermore shows that the particular focus of these programmes by definition excluded other segments of the population. For example, no attention was given to other female non-working groups such as pensioners nor to the large group of single mothers. The DFD’s engagement to improve the living conditions for women by creating a better infrastructure in residential areas such as kindergartens, shopping centres, as had been successfully done in the 1970s (see Teschner 1994), had working mothers in mind. Stories of how DFD activists attempted to influence local policies, however, not only demonstrate their own initiative but also show how they used the above mentioned affiliations with other state-organized institutions to implement the existing policies in their own best interest.

26 "Policy makers did not accord attention to non-working groups such as female retirees", Gunnar Winkler (1994:236) notices because, as he points out, “political measures were almost always limited to the working population” (1994:235).
Stories that I was told about the Centre of the past, however, show no critical reflection on the exclusionary practice directed towards those women who did not accept the DFD’s close relationship with the state; their acceptance of the SED’s claim to leadership; and the principle of democratic centralism which was the mechanism by which the organization for women was controlled. These problems with the DFD are captured in the feminist critique of the mass organization for women (see Teschner 1994, Hampele 1993a, Einhorn 1993 for DFD; Moore 1988, Funk 1993a for state socialist societies in general). Despite a recognition of some of the DFD’s achievements a general critique hinges on the DFD’s inability to transcend and question the above described existing structures and to allow for forms of expression in opposition to the SED policies (see e.g. Hampele 1993a:293.299). With the historical moment of the Wende the official function of the mass organization to pass on and carry out the directives of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) to mobilize women in support of the Party was publicly questioned and subsequently became obsolete. Several months later, as the DFD ceased to be a mass organization, its role changed dramatically and it no longer extended state policies to a female constituency.

The Change from a State Mass Organization to a Western Association: The DFD in Stralsund

As a result of the Wende, the DFD had to initiate radical structural changes (Teschner 1994:56f). In March 1990, at the federal congress, the DFD changed its status and has since been transformed from a mass organization for women into the DF e.V., that is, one of many associations in the united Germany. However, the DF e.V. remains the legal successor (Rechtsnachfolger) of the DFD. Eingetragener Verein (e.V.) denotes a registered association which is recognized by the West German state. As a registered association, the DF e.V. is eligible for government sponsored work programmes and has established employment on the basis of these state monies. That is to say, the DFD (as it is still called and as I shall continue to refer to it) has become one of many other non-profit organizations running women’s projects. Thus, especially in cities, there developed a “kind of a double structure” of initiatives.

\footnote{During the 1980s non-state women’s groups had illegally existed in the opposition (see Kenawi 1995b).}
and self-help advertisement/offers (*Selbsthilfeangebote*) consisting of the "old" and "new" women's movement (Hampele 1993a:301).

In Stralsund and the surrounding countryside the DFD initiated a number of government sponsored projects and employment for their own staff. Leading up to unification, the DFD, like other parties and mass organizations across the GDR, had lost most of its membership and a good part of its financial base. Thus, after initial attempts to keep it, the DFD in Stralsund had to give up their Women's Centre. The DF e.V., however, negotiated with the new government office, the Amt, to continuously use the Women's Centre for their remaining groups. Therefore, in Stralsund groups of the "old" and the "new" women's movement existed literally under one roof.

To conclude, before the Wende, the Centre had drawn a particular clientele which consisted mainly of an aging DFD membership. In GDR times, the Women's Centre had been a locus for DFD activities, supported the implementation of social policies for women and thus was characterized by a structural set-up that collapsed as the hierachical structure of the DFD became ineffective and the DFD as a mass organization dissolved and reformed. In the next part I will describe these dramatic changes that were initiated with the Wende at the Sundine and its institutional transformation in the process leading to unification.

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28 For details on how the DFD lost most of its membership in this process see Hampele (1993a:301).
Part II

The Wende and Unification at the Women’s Centre

“I wish that this time of radical change (Zeit des Umbruchs) would come back so that it could be used better”. (interview with Klara July 1994, Centre employee Dec. 90 to Oct. 91)

Klara’s statement is an intriguing reflection and comment on the developments that followed the time of radical change, i.e., the Wende. It suggests that she has a sense that this time of opening up, searching democratic reform and ‘revolutionary renewal’ could have been used better by the people who were initiating basic democratic changes. Her statement furthermore reveals that it was only this short moment of an opening where collective agency (politics) had a chance to influence effectively processes of democratization and restructuring. While Klara describes the closing of this opening as it affected the social movement in general, her particular experience was with the women’s project and how the women’s movement became institutionalized. (We will hear more of her voice describing what was happening at the Centre.)

What we are hearing then, first, are women’s voices (from personal narratives and newspaper clippings) of how they experienced this historical moment when the old system collapsed, the social movement took its place and the new system had not yet arrived. We see how the mass organization for women collapsed and the DFD retreated from centre stage as new forces and groups were beginning to form.

This women’s grass roots group very effectively influenced the process of initiating social change and developing ideas for restructuring the local administration. Typical of the social movement, their form of collective action was based on the self-help character of their group and very early on aimed at the institutionalization of a body through which women could participate and effect political decision-making. After the elections of March 1990 in the GDR “the dilemma” of what happens to the movements’ goals and forms of collective action upon institutionalization (Cohen and Arato 1995:557) was intensified by one main factor: unification.
Prior to unification this institutionalization and incorporation would take place in a different state than the one the movement came up against. The emergence of the civil movement in the GDR democratized its society at large and some activists thought that this process could be more successfully continued within the parameters of the West German state or rather an expanded FRG.

The women's movement and the Initiative in Stralsund faced further difficulties with the election when they had lost most of their political influence, i.e. to determine the restructuring processes. We see how in Stralsund the women's grass roots group lost its momentum to shape the new institutional structures and the Centre itself came to be supported by a new group of government clerks of the newly established Office for Women and Family. On the day of unification, October 3, 1990, the Women's Centre came officially under the auspices of the newly founded Office for Women and Family (Amt). The Initiative had only a marginal role in setting up the structures of the Centre and was not in a position of power to determine the course of it but merely one of the groups using it. However, their ideas largely influenced the employees in the Centre who were recruited to their group, whereas the Amt women were not so much influenced by grass roots ideas but by attempting to implement the state guaranteed equality (e.g. with the Office for the Equality of Women).

What we see then with unification is not simply that long experienced alternative practices became institutionalized but that women in the Centre tried out and experimented with revised concepts as they attempted to adjust to and cope with the impact of the transformation processes. The Women's Centre around the time of unification was a centre stage for information, exchange and discussion. During this time new concepts came to guide the social practices in the Centre. Through the employees' accounts of individual visitors' problems, the immediate post unification period and the daily problems of transformation that individuals were facing become visible. Furthermore, they show how the employees (in exchange with employees of the supporting institution) through their experience of the changing conditions developed different concepts and revised their programmes of the Centre until new concepts came to guide the social practices in the Centre. Individual women also became involved in the wider social-political changes through their activities in the Centre.
(e.g. initiating institutional transformation locally). Some of the events in the Centre illustrate how issues of national concern, discussed by politicians and members of the women’s movement, were interpreted and incorporated into Centre affairs. Thus, we get a sense of how larger processes played out in the locale.

Brief personal histories (shown by use of boxed texts), introducing the staff by focusing on the employees’ work history and their relation with the Women’s Centre, inform us about the background of these women which illuminates the dialectical relationship between individual action and the changes of society at large. The brief biographical accounts provide us with an idea of what kind of people came to use this particular social environment to initiate changes, to engage in the women’s cause and to further the process of democratization.

What we see then, in the way people try to formulate what is happening (e.g. with the “takeover” of the Centre), in talking among each other and to me, is how individuals are differently inserted into the structure. Through personal narratives I demonstrate how they reflected and articulated their experience with the institutions while they were being transformed. In other words, I use their personal narratives to show how they responded to the transformations in their lives by reformulating their understanding of history and institutional as well as democratic aspects of the changing society by drawing upon their work experience in the Centre.

The next sections deal with a complex set of changes. I begin by describing how the local press presented the transformation of the Centre from a venue of the socialist mass organization for women into an “independent” democratic institution. Then I continue with how women through their personal statements describe their experience of the Wende, i.e., the turning point, as a process of ‘things falling apart’. As part of this process, the DFD lost its authority, reputation and credibility among its members. It is in this power vacuum that new players or individuals enter the public stage. We will be meeting diverse individuals and groups of women as we go through the different stages of transition in the Centre. In the initial phase Birgit’s personal narrative stands out because of the way she dealt with the transition as a result of the fact that she was pro-actively engaged. In other words, she used the
opportunities for new collective action that arose with the Wende. Her personal narratives, thus, simultaneously provide insights into the dissolution of old structures and the emergence of new ones. In order to understand how new social forces came to influence the process of transformation, and the way people began to use the Centre, I describe the emergence of a grass roots group for women who called themselves Women for Women Initiative. These women shaped the process of restructuring the Centre even after another institution, the Amt, officially became the supporting institution.

‘Betwixt-and-Between’: Half DFD and Half an “Independent Institution of our City”

On February 22, 1990, the local newspaper Ostsee Zeitung featured an article on the Centre employees’ desire to separate from the DFD because they wanted to move ahead and give the Centre a new purpose. Here, the Counseling Centre was already described as “no longer belonging to the DFD” but as being an “independent institution (selbständige Einrichtung) of our city”. Furthermore, the employees announced that their desire to maintain a “meeting place (Treffpunkt) for Women and Family” required financial support from the city. They, therefore, made use of the press and publicly asked for financial support in order to guarantee payment of the Centre’s monthly expenses.29 This article gives us a first idea of how the wider social changes, initiated with the Wende, affected the DFD Counseling Centre Sundine. It captures a moment when the old supporting structures such as the DFD and the HO were dissolving and new ones were not yet in place. In other words, the Centre’s supporting network was breaking away and the mass organizations would no longer finance the Centre so that events required a “minimal fee”. This included slide shows or the so-called “Frauen- und Familienkaffee”, a daily drop in café for women and families that was open between 10-2 (ibid.).30

28 Previously, the city and the Trading Organization (HO) secured the running of the Centre. As one woman (Birgit) notes regarding the financial situation of the past (that is, the support through the mass organizations): “We did not make money running the Centre” (kein Geld erwirtschaftet).

30In addition, the employees plan to finance the Centre through their own initiative (in Eigeninitiative)- a sign of the new times. Another sign of change are the new events and performances which have become incorporated into the programme. At the beginning of 1990 part of the old programmes continue to exist including “courses for mothers, baby service, sliminess classes”; the latter now called Molli-Kurse (February 22, 1990, Ostsee Zeitung).
For a view from inside the Centre and to demonstrate further how the dissolution was experienced, I will use Birgit’s account. She describes how in “autumn 1989”, as Ursula Kaden (a New Forum leader) calls the Wende in Stralsund (1994:31ff.), the relationship between the DFD and the Centre had dramatically changed. In particular, Birgit’s personal narrative shows how the relationship between the DFD mass organization and the Women’s Centre eroded during the process of transformation. Furthermore, through her personal narrative we gain insight into how the national political changes surrounding unification played out at the local level in the DFD Counseling Centre Sundine, and the role individual women had in this process.

Birgit was one of two employees at the time. She came to play a pivotal role during the transition period (autumn 1989 to October 1990) in the Centre and was actively involved with the newly emerging grass roots group Women for Women Initiative (Initiative) who aimed at influencing the local administrative and political restructuring process. As a founding member of the Initiative group and an employee of the Centre she had the sole position in initiating the first steps of change (institutional as well as regarding performances). I met Birgit when she visited the Women’s Centre in 1994. She was perceived as the authority on the recent Women’s Centre history during the time of the Wende and unification. When I asked her for an interview she immediately agreed to share her knowledge of this crucial period.

Birgit, 42 years old in 1994, began to work at the Counseling Centre Sundine in 1987 (officially she was hired as a salesperson of the Konsum, which belonged to the HO-Trading Organization). Previously, she was employed as a leading technical controller, TKO-Leiterin (Technische Kontrolle und Organisation), that is, a technical quality and safety controller of the milk factory in Stralsund (Milchwirtschaft Stralsund). Birgit had known the Sundine from introducing samples of new cheese products (Verkostung) in the Centre as a representative of the milk factory. Her reasons for taking up a position at the Centre for considerably less pay were due to her difficult position at the milk factory. As a controller she was responsible for the quality of the products. Keeping a certain standard of quality often interfered with the requirements of “the plan”, that is, fulfilling the quantity that was supposed to be produced. Birgit was pressured and sometimes tricked into letting products pass below the standard—an illegal act for which she was accountable. Because of her inability to do “a good job” under the conditions of a “collapsing GDR economy” and her fragile health, which was a result of stress at work, she decided, (as she pointed out in agreement with her husband) to change her place of employment. Birgit is married and has a daughter and a son who were both born in the early 1980s.

It is interesting to note that Birgit does not describe the dual role of being a mother and a worker as stressful but the signs of a break down of the economy.
1970s. She was also an active member of her DFD neighborhood or residential group. When Birgit switched from membership in the DFD to membership in the grass roots Initiative, she promoted changes in the Centre and became one of the public figures in this process. Perhaps it was Birgit’s previous experience of powerlessness at the milk factory where she had been caught between the requirements set by “the plan” of production and the quality control department which encouraged her to play an active role.

Birgit describes how the political changes (with the Wende) impacted on the atmosphere, the activities and, in particular, the organizational set-up of the Counseling Centre. Due to the structure of the DFD mass organization official guidelines used to be handed down from the federal board via the regional and local board\(^\text{32}\) to the DFD Centre and the DFD residential groups (see fig. 10, p. 294). For example, the employees of the Centre had to design programmes in accordance with the board of the DFD. This hierarchical and uniform decision making structure of the DFD broke down in “autumn 1989”. Birgit recalls that the DFD during the Wende pretended to be dead when it had been the authority in the past:

During the Wende the following happened: The DFD did not move at all. So, we had to fend for ourselves. We wanted answers from the DFD, we wanted to know, we had believed what had been told before and now all of a sudden different things were said about the DFD and we wanted to know if it was true. Where the money [solidarity fees] went. We became aware of things which we previously did not think of at all and these answers we did not get (BA:8).

In other words, in “autumn 1989”, at a time when the membership desired answers, guidance, transparency and accountability the leadership no longer performed its role. In consequence, the whole hierarchical and uniform system seemed to collapse, or rather implode, forcing DFD members to inquire and seek different venues of action. During this time the Women’s Centre, though literally in an acephalous state, continued to be a meeting place for DFD women who were looking for advice and contact at a time of social-political unrest and change. Birgit describes how the Sundine became a central starting point of inquiry:

The starting point was always the Sundine and now they [DFD-members] came and wanted to know that [asked for the DFD’s accountability]. We did not know anything ourselves, we also wanted to know and nobody made a move (Anlaufpunkt war immer die Sundine und die kamen jetzt und wollten das wissen. Wir wußten selbst nichts, wir wollten auch was wissen und keiner rührte sich). (BA:9)

\(^{32}\) See Statute of the DFD (1975) for the structure of the DFD.
Thus, being situated between the membership and the local and regional board leaders, Birgit’s position as an employee of the Centre was between a rock and a hard place. The membership came to the Sundine and demanded answers which she and the other employees could not provide due to the silence of the Bezirksvorstand and Kreisvorstand (regional and local board leaders). The board had stopped providing them with guidance or instructions. For many DFD members these experiences of being in a quasi power vacuum came as a shock and surprise. According to Birgit, this novel phenomenon (that is, the behaviour of the DFD leadership) was openly discussed in the Centre as it constituted a space and venue for women to express their ideas and thoughts on and feelings about what was happening. Birgit summarizes her sentiments as follows:

I had really had it up to here with the DFD (Ich hatte total die Nase voll vom DFD) and I said, it cannot continue like this (BA:9).

In consequence, she gave up her DFD membership at the beginning of January 1990 (BA:9). This was a time when many GDR citizens gave up their membership in the Party and in the diverse mass organizations. As a result of this trend, the DFD neighborhood (residential) groups were dissolving and the Centre lost its main clientele and purpose as a counseling centre. In lieu of this development the employees and local DFD leadership were seeking for new options. (For example, to run the Centre as a project on their own initiative.) While DFD leaders did this from within their organization as it began to undergo massive changes, Birgit, then no longer a DFD member, established new contacts outside the Centre and the DFD sphere. She joined a handful of other women who, like her, were interested in political engagement in women’s interests and, as she phrased it, “thought about women’s problems”. They formed an initiative.33 To understand the way this grass roots group exercised its influence and the role it played in the process c.f local institutional restructuring, I now turn to how the Initiative emerged.

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33 At the time many such groups emerged. For further details on the founding of initiatives at the time (see e.g. Probst 1993).
The Role of the *Initiative* in “Autumn 1989” and prior to Unification

The *Initiative* was a local offspring of the East German women’s movement. Though they did not officially join the umbrella organization of this movement, the Independent Women’s Association (*UFV*) (see chapter 2, p. 59f.), they came to influence local politics in a similar way to the *UFV* at the federal level. They played a role in establishing a local women’s infrastructure and continued to have an immense impact on the Centre as a source of alternative ideas, even as it became supported by the *Amt*.

They began to form in autumn 1989. A group of five women originally met for discussions at the Sports Centre of the German Gymnastics and Sport Federation (*DTSB*). One of the participants was a member of a peace circle (*Friedenskreis*) in Stralsund who had been an initiator of the weekly prayers (*Andacht*) in solidarity with the Monday prayers in Leipzig (*Kaden 1994:35*) [a centre of the ‘revolutionary’ movement] and thus was one of the leading public figures of the political changes (*Wende*) in Stralsund. This woman had come to know a West German woman from the coastal town (and *Hansestadt*) of Kiel in the neighboring federal state of Schleswig-Holstein. When relationships between the two cities were established and Kiel became the partner city of Stralsund, government officials from Kiel came to visit Stralsund in April of 1990 (*Hansestadt Stralsund 1994:76*). Upon invitation by the Ministry for Women and Family in Kiel, Birgit with other members of the informal women’s group visited the Ministry and toured the local women’s shelter and centre in Kiel - such places did not exist in the GDR.

Immediately after this visit the “Women for Women Initiative” (*Initiative*) was founded in Stralsund (BA:11). Both the emergence of the women’s movement in the GDR and the visit to the women’s shelter and centre in Kiel seemed to have influenced the decision to form a local grass roots group and to establish women’s projects in Stralsund. Like other groups of the East German women’s movement the *Initiative* was interested in building up a local women’s infrastructure for information, counseling and communication in order to attract a diverse group of women. But they were also inspired by the infrastructure and governmental set-up

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34 As discussed in chapter 2, at the time the East German women’s movement had formed and was actively involved in reforming the existing structures.
they had seen in Kiel, particularly the Ministry for Women and Family after which they modeled their new government office. Thus, they initiated the first steps for the formation of the Office for Women and Family (Amt) while the UFV demanded the establishment of local Offices for the Equality of Women. As the Initiative became involved in local politics they also desired and tried to maintain the facility of the Women's Centre as part of the local infrastructure which they envisaged.

In the Centre, Birgit was the key figure and the Initiative group supported Birgit in talking with the Mayor (Oberbürgermeister) of Stralsund in order to secure a salary for the Centre’s employees. The DFD, still was the supporting institution, did so as well. In any case, the city agreed to pay Birgit’s salary and the Centre was temporarily assigned to the area of Social Affairs (sozialer Bereich). In other words, the future of the Centre did not lie in the hands of the Initiative or of the DFD but depended on the city for its existence. This arrangement most likely was an important step in maintaining the Centre and slowly detaching it from the DFD, so that it could more easily become incorporated into the transformed governmental institutions and administration after the March 1990 elections.

These Volkskammer elections of March 18, 1990 represented a crucial moment in the post Wende period because the majority voted for those parties in favor of German unification (that is, basically against reforming socialism) and thus, this election came to be viewed and interpreted as a vote for unification. Due to the Independent Women’s Movements’ (UFV) activities prior to this election (see chapter 2, p. 47f) Offices for the Equality of Women were established. The communal laws of the GDR of May 1990 required that an Office for the Equality of Women had to be set up for every town with more than 10,000 inhabitants (see e.g. Hampele 1993a:186). In Stralsund, the Office for the Equality of Women was combined with the one for Women and Family. Here the UFV’s efforts on the national level and the Initiative’s efforts on the local level had literally merged into one institution. Although the idea

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35 In Stralsund as on the federal level the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) received the majority vote. In Stralsund the CDU gained 42.15% followed by the PDS, the successor of the Socialist Unity Party with 24.09%, and the SPD (Social Democrats) with 19.24% and other small parties such as the Green Party and the Independent Women’s Association with 1.96% (Hansestadt Stralsund 1994:75).
36 In this form it had not existed in the Federal Republic of Germany (West). These were a result of the Independent Women’s Associations (UFV) initiative and involvement in the central Round Tables and the “Working Group on Women’s Policy” (see Hampele 1993b:186).
of establishing an Office for Women and Family (Amt) in Stralsund was originally brought up by the Initiative, they were excluded from the process of setting up the administrative structures of this Amt. Moreover, the Initiative's candidates did not succeed in filling the opening positions of this newly formed government office - a sign that the Initiative, like the UFV, began to lose more and more influence as a result of the Volkskammer elections in the GDR.

When in March 1990, following the elections, the Office for the Equality of Women/Office for Women and Family was founded, the position of a senator for the Office for Women and Family (Amt) was filled by a woman who was a member of the Social Democrat Party (SPD). This new senator in her honorary capacity immediately appointed a leader for this combined Amt and initiated the first steps to bring the Women’s Centre from the area for Social Affairs into the Amt’s area of influence and competence (so that the salary of the Centre’s employees was paid from their budget). What we see happening here is that, as new structures were established after the elections, the Initiative women were not in a position of power to influence the set up of an infrastructure for women (other than as a non-profit organization). A ‘new player’, the Amt, consisting of a whole new group of diverse women, came to influence government decisions regarding women and the women’s projects in Stralsund. The senator engaged in a “takeover” of the Centre by the Amt while officially the Women’s Centre was still in DFD hands.

For the Initiative, this did not mean, however, that they were not continuously involved in the Centre. Both of these women’s groups (governmental and grass roots) were post Wende establishments engaged in change and transformation as well as interested in creating a local women’s network and bringing the Centre under their control. Both groups of women were heterogeneous and engaged in the ongoing democratization processes after the elections.

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37 After their visit to the Ministry in Kiel they aimed at establishing a separate government Office for Women and Family (modeled after the one in Kiel) instead of one that e.g. is combined with the Office for Youth (a quite common administrative structure).
38 In Stralsund, the Christian Democrat Party (CDU) had scored the most votes (42.15%) but needed to form a coalition in order to govern. This coalition was formed with the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the government Office for Women and Family was assigned to the SPD.
39 Because this chapter focuses on the women’s Centre I do not describe the struggles that these women faced in forming a new group and having to design women’s policies.
somewhat differently. While the Amt women were employed to guarantee women’s equal rights and to support women and family, the Initiative women remained a grass roots group and most of them participated in their leisure time in establishing self-help groups and worked in political parties. The Amt, however, depended on women like Birgit, an Initiative member, to engage in the Centre, particularly when the DFD was still officially the supporting institution.

Birgit’s account of a personnel decision in the Centre prior to the “takeover” illustrates that the newly formed Amt and Birgit, now with the Initiative, did not want to hire a DFD women and together pulled their weight against the DFD. Instead of the DFD’s preferred hard core candidate, Renate (see biographical history below), whose nomination was supported by Birgit, was hired. As Birgit notes about this event: “the DFD once more tried to get a foot in the door”. The story of this personnel decision signified for Birgit that the influence of the DFD on the Centre’s affairs was reduced in the time leading up to the takeover.

The new employee, Renate, however, was a compromise candidate on whom the Amt and the DFD could agree. Renate had been a long standing member of one of the DFD neighbourhood groups but had resigned from the organization. To become employed at the Centre provided her with an opportunity finally to leave behind a work environment that had been very stressful.

Renate was born in 1947. Between 1970 and 1974, when her two daughters were born, she was a housewife. Because her husband was a sailor she was required to act very independently. After these four years at home she continued to work in her profession. Renate received her training as a technical draughtsman (she had received this qualification after three years of studying at evening classes). She had worked for twenty-six years in her profession as an engineer (Projektierung). Since 1984 she had faced serious difficulties at work with her boss and because of it had considered finding other employment. (This stress had caused health problems. Renate had a gall bladder operation.40) But her colleagues had convinced her to stay on. When in 1990 employment at the Centre became available (which Renate came to know through personal contacts with Birgit), Renate took the opportunity to leave her profession. When Renate became employed in the Women’s Centre in June of 1990 she was no longer a

40 It is interesting to note that in the context of the Centre several women (see e.g. Birgit) acknowledged the impact that the stress at work (in the past) or of being unemployed (in the present) had on their physical well-being. That is to say, they articulated how macro-processes such as the breakdown of the GDR economy or the current transformation process affected their lives. For details on the effects of the transformation process on former GDR people’s well-being see e.g. Birga Maier (1996).
DFD member. In GDR times she had been an active DFD member in her neighbourhood group and had often visited the Sundine to participate in a textile circle which was hosted at the Centre.

Renate and Birgit both had belonged to the ‘younger generation’ of DFD members who gave up their membership during the Wende and became involved with rebuilding the Centre. Through her employment in the Centre Renate also become involved with the grass roots group, which shows that the Initiative at the time was still recruiting new members and affiliates of very different backgrounds, but the major decisions concerning the Centre were in the hands of the Amt. While these two employees began to reorganize their work at the Centre, the Amt and the DFD began their negotiating process.

From DFD to Amt: The “Takeover”

What we see here, is how women remember differently the process in which old structures were being transformed into new ones. The women of the Amt and others who favoured the change of supporting institutions used the term “takeover” (Übernahme), whereas the DFD members would speak of a “handing over” (Übergabe). The term “takeover” requires some clarification. Here, I use the term “takeover” because the power now rested with the group which substituted for the DFD. Moreover, in the context of unification people would eventually speak of the fact that the FRG “colonized” or “took over” the GDR whereas they would not speak of a “handing over”. The DFD members’ use of the term “handing over” is not, strictly speaking, accurate but enables them to preserve their appearances. As this use of different terminology indicates, the stories surrounding the time of the “takeover” were told from slightly different perspectives by Amt, Initiative and DFD women.41 Basically, the Initiative members of the Centre and the Amt’s employees emphasize the building up of new political structures, while the DFD members explain the reasons and process for having to give up their Centre. People remember the transition, then, as members of their respective social groups. They also remember different incidences and historical moments which in retrospect symbolize or signify the outcome of the process of transformation. To give an example.

41For the reconstruction of this time period or rather the transaction period I rely to large extent on oral accounts. (Many people’s memory of these times is imprecise in terms of accurate dates-an indication of how rapidly their every day life was transformed).
Birgit’s story of the aforementioned personnel decision exemplified the change of power for her in the Centre and thereby, the “takeover” that actually was still to come.

So one might say that there exist different versions of the “takeover” which are exemplified by Birgit’s (see above) and Hilde’s different accounts (to follow)\(^\text{42}\). Here I focus on Hilde’s story because it is mainly from her account and the documents she showed to me and those I found at the *Amt* that I could reconstruct some details of the institutional transfer. As Hilde’s account of the “takeover” negotiations illustrates, the *DFD* had originally been interested in keeping the Centre but as a result of the restructuring process had had to give up its leadership role. Hilde, who was the *DFD*’s chief negotiator, tells her story of the “handing over” of the Centre to the *Amt* from the perspective of her position in the *DFD*. Hilde recalls that the *Amt* was immediately interested in a “takeover” (*Übernahme*) of the *DFD* Counseling Centre (HZ:3) but the *DFD* administrators in Rostock refused to give permission for a “handing over” though they could not provide the money to run the Centre either. In this situation Hilde as a regional board leader (*Kreisvorsitzende*) finally “in principle decided independently” (*im Prinzip eigenständig entschieden*) to hand over the facilities of the Women’s Centre because of increasing costs which could not be covered by the *DFD* (now *DFe.V.*).\(^\text{43}\) (To make a final decision on her own signifies that she could have safely ignored the old hierarchical structures which were no longer working.)

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\[\text{Hilde (45 years old) was a regional (Kreis) executive board leader of the DFD at the time of institutional and societal transformation. She had begun this position in 1988 after her employment with the regional board of the Union (Kreisvorstand der Gewerkschaft) since 1971. Hilde had worked in her profession as a lathe operator for ten years before she received an additional education with the Union in the 1970s. She also became a DFD member in 1972. In her position as a regional board leader Hilde had to negotiate the transaction between the Office for Women and Family and the DFD (see chapter 7 for more biographical details).}\]

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\[^\text{42}\] Although Hilde and Birgit both were *DFD* members prior to the *Wende*, they experienced the transition as members of different groups. Hilde remained a *DFD* member and participated in the restructuring of the mass organization while Birgit gave up her membership and joined the *Initiative*.

\[^\text{43}\] In other words, Hilde’s account of how she acted in a situation in which she was caught between the superiors’ wishes and her own judgment of the situation resembles Birgit’s story. This hints at both the fact that the old decision making structures (of the times of mass organizations) had fallen apart and that individual women began to use and act within the parameters of the new public space.
I describe the change of supporting institutions then from Hilde's perspective because it echoes the view several DFD members had expressed. The change of supporting institutions or the "handing over" of the Centre is more vividly remembered by continuing DFD members because for them it symbolizes the end of the era when through the mass organizations the Centre was guided as well as financially secured. Thus, DFD members describe the drying up of public funds for the Centre as a result of the changes of their mass organization and the dissolving of the DFD neighbourhood groups (which canceled the membership fees). Hilde pointed out that the city could not finance the DFD with public money (öffentliche Gelder). In other words, financial support for the DFD (DF e.V.) was scarce.

Although Hilde describes several of her own attempts to set up projects under structurally different conditions in order to secure maintenance costs and finances for the Centre, these projects were not sufficient. As Hilde emphasizes, the DFD had to give up the Centre for financial reasons. From the perspective of these local DFD women then it was a question of finances and access to resources that were no longer provided to the former mass organization since public funds became administered differently, which accounts for those non-profit organizations (or other state mediators) administering funds for community projects.

To finish the story of the "takeover", Hilde signed the two contracts between the DF e.V. and the Amt. Hilde and the representative of the Amt (the senator) signed in both parties' mutual interests. The 'old establishment' (DFD) cooperated with the 'new administration' (the Amt). This shows that there was a general sense and interest in these different women's groups to maintain a Women's Centre in Stralsund beyond the turning point and across the times of change. This is exemplified by the contract between the property owner (the VEB Gebäudewirtschaft) and the legal predecessor of the DFD, the DF e.V., which only terminated with the reservation that the new user of the facilities on Ossenreyerstrasse would be the Amt (see termination of contract, signed 17.9.1990 by Hilde). While one contract guaranteed that the Amt could rent the facilities, an additional contract between the local board of the DFD and the city government of Stralsund (Vereinbarung zwischen dem Demokratischen Frauenbund, Kreisvorstand Stralsund und der Stadtverwaltung der
Hansestadt Stralsund) defined the role of the Women’s Centre (in this document already called Frauentreff Sundine) and determined who had rights to use it⁴⁴.

Here, the Women’s Centre, as part of the Amt, was conceptualized as a meeting place for the diverse women’s associations in the city. This included the DFD which had negotiated continual use of the facilities of the Centre free of charge (for its remaining groups). Moreover, the contract emphasized that the DF e.V. legally remained an equal member in the “work group Sundine” (Arbeitsgruppe Sundine) where the interests of the DF e.V. could be expressed. In fact, the DFe.V. participated in the actual work meetings (Arbeitsbesprechungen) in which members of the Amt and employees of the Centre discussed the Centre’s affairs. For example Erna, who continued to meet with some of her circles in the Sundine, joined these meetings (see records of these meetings). Although the new DF e.V. still had user rights and participated in Centre affairs, the new supporting Office for Women and Family (Amt) in the future intended to detach the new Centre Frauentreff Sundine from its DFD history. The institutional transfer shows that it was not the Initiative but the DFD and the Amt, as representative of the new administration, who legalized the institutional transition. In terms of the larger picture, this time of radical change ended or was now directed towards unification. It was then that the women’s projects took on the role of social service institutions in supporting individuals in the process of transformation (Bülow 1995). That is, further transitions were necessary in order to adjust to the demands of unification and to integrate people into a transforming society.

On the Road to Unification: Modeling the Centre into a Social Service Agency

To instill stability and to offer possibilities for social integration direction was given on how to set up new structures modeled after West German social service agencies (Bülow 1995:199f). As part of this institutional transfer from the West to the East, Eastern institutions were turned into Western ones. While the facilities of the Centre existed they had not yet transformed into a new institution. There also was a need for individuals willing to explore on their own initiative ways of establishing new structures. They had to find new ways to talk about the past and to create new identities. The Women’s Centre was a space for democratic

⁴⁴This contract was signed on 9.11.1990 between the local representative of the DF e.V. and the senator of the Office for Women and Family.
encounters and challenges to people’s ability to overcome the past and to raise questions about creating new identities. That these individuals existed is illustrated in Klara’s story of how she was recruited by the Amt to become employed in the Centre.

Klara is thirty-four years old and had been married for ten years. She has two daughters. Her eldest daughter was born 1986 when she moved to Stralsund from Dresden (in the South of the GDR). She stayed at home and was a member of the church community. Her daughter was not sent to the state nursery but kindergarten at the church (Spielkreis evangelische Kirche). Klara received training as a librarian but could not find employment in her profession in Stralsund. Through personal contacts she was employed in March 1990 at an institution called Geschützte Werkstatt where she worked with disabled people. She was dismissed from this employment (Kündigung) in favour of a young man in November 1990. Because of this discriminatory experience at her work place Klara turned to the Office for Equality/Office for Women and Family. They offered her an ABM-position at the Women’s Centre. Klara was the first woman who became employed in the Centre after unification when government sponsored work programme schemes became available. Klara was also the first employee without a DFD background. She had worked at the Centre on a work programme (ABM) basis from December 1990 to October 1991. During this time she became involved with the Initiative and continued to join their meetings although she never officially registered as a member.

Klara’s story about the conversation between her and the women from the Amt in autumn 1990 (around the time of unification) highlights some of the ideas concerning the Centre which the women at the Amt had in mind for a new beginning, i.e., a centre modeled after Western community projects. Klara recalls how she was asked by women from the Amt:

Would you like to help set up a Communication Centre for women in Stralsund (haben sie nicht Lust in Stralsund ein Frauenkommunikationszentrum mitaufzubauen) ?...
(KN:3).

Klara acts out her response and conversation with the women of the Amt about their idea of changing the Counseling Centre into a Communication Centre for women:

First of all a women’s Communication Centre was something which did not exist in Stralsund and therefore was necessary...Well, let’s start it (naja, gut fangen wir an)....(ibid.).

Klara constructs her response to reveal enthusiasm about the idea of creating a public place for women in the city. Her story captures her belief in the need for such a place and the enthusiasm involved in the idea of setting it up. It also shows, firstly, that the Amt needed to
recruit women capable of building up and reopening a new Women’s Centre, one that they envisioned as a “Communication Centre”. Secondly, that at the time it was still possible to find women willing to enthusiastically engage themselves in the necessary restructuring process. And thirdly, as we will see next, that there was some confusion over how to go about this and how to interpret certain practices.

As Klara continues to present the course of the conversation she also draws out the difficulties that were involved in overcoming the DFD past and setting up a new Women’s Centre in the old facilities. Although the Women’s Centre was no longer a DFD Centre it was remembered as such and therefore many Stralsundians continued to associate it with its DFD past and the GDR (see also section on dispute, chapter 3). Klara comments on her discovery of having to work in the facilities of the DFD Centre in retrospect:

I did not have any idea in what kind of facilities (Raumen).
[Klara imitates the Amt women’s response:]
Well, the Frauentreff.
[Klara asks:] What kind of Frauentreff?
[The Amt:] Well, the Sundine.
[Klara] I say: there! That won’t work out (das kann doch nicht gut gehen).
[Amt:] Well, why not?
[Klara:] Well, that is a DFD-house and what do you want to do there and so on.
[Amt:] That is no longer a DFD-house, it belongs to the Amt for Women and Family and it is financed through the city government and these old prejudices DFD. Frauentreff, that has to go.
[Klara:] Aha, I thought, well, we can try it (KN:3).

Klara’s response to the Sundine confirms one argument that had been used in the dispute over the name of the Centre: the name Sundine, at least in 1990, was largely associated with the DFD. Because Klara told this story in 1994 she also was commenting on her actual experience of working at the Centre. These experiences were shaped by her attempting to introduce changes and partially by overcoming the DFD history of this Women’s Centre but also by modeling the Centre after Western institutions. That is to say to adjust the set up to the situation in the East where the Centre played a role in helping people cope with the transformations.
At the time of the conversation, Klara was uncertain herself about what her work would entail. She asked “them”\textsuperscript{45}, the women of the *Amt*: “what is a *Frauentreff*”? She describes how “they” had answered “you present yourself self-confidently so just go ahead and if it does not work we’ll tell you”. It shows that the *Amt* women (who themselves went through a phase of transition attempting to find a new orientation) attempted to find employees for the Women’s Centre who were capable of initiating change independently and “self-confidently”. The women of the *Amt* were immediately interested in winning Klara as an employee for the Centre, probably because of her initiative to contact them or possibly because they knew of Klara’s experience with church groups. Thus, she was perceived to be an appropriate candidate for introducing changes and alternatives at the Centre. They, however, had already begun to develop ideas concerning the direction to take for the *Frauentreff* and how to organize it. According to Klara they saw their role as supervising this process.

The story of their subsequent conversation, as further described by Klara, illustrates that often social practices at the time appeared to be carryovers from the past. Klara recalls the following guidelines and instructions which she was given and her spontaneous response:

> You have to organize the events, you don’t have to do it yourself... [the Centre] has to attract as many (diverse) women as possible, in particular unemployed women and it should be a political *Treffpunkt* [meeting place] for women. [Klara protested] A political *Treffpunkt* that sounds again very much like GDR. (KN:4).

What is also encapsulated in the account of this initial conversation and contact with women from the *Amt* is Klara’s later experience of the discrepancy of opinions between employees at the Centre and the *Amt* that developed over the running of the Centre. It shows furthermore that Klara had had developed a critical stance towards the leadership role of the *Amt* (which she interprets now as a carryover) and that for her the ideas of building up a new Centre were based on grassroots ideas and activities about self-organization and self-actualization instead of “guidelines from the top”.

\textsuperscript{45} Klara, most of the time, conceals the actual speaker’s identity and refers to “them”. Klara remembers how she was interviewed by three women among them the spokesperson (leader) of the *Amt*, who also was the Equality Officer, her deputy and another employee at the *Amt*. 
It seems that Klara believed that democratic structures could most effectively be continued in West German structures. Klara’s description of a conversation with women at the Amt demonstrates different views of this process of transformation, views which depended on peoples’ experiences and interpretations of the past. What this also shows is that Klara believed the Centre would be a place where women of different backgrounds and affiliated with different groups challenged one anothers’s views. It demonstrates the extent to which the Centre was used for democratic encounters which challenged their ability to overcome the past and to pose questions regarding their identities.

The “takeover” of the Centre had guaranteed that places for women would continue to exist after the Wende and when people entered FRG society. German unification marked the end of the GDR and the incorporation of projects into West German institutions. How the local press commented on this transition is a reminder that practices do not change as radically as one might think given the radical discontinuity. It is the report on this historical moment by the local press that we turn to now.

**A New Beginning with Old Slogans: “Good Advice for Women and Family”**

Since unification, notions of the past were continuously used by the local press to define the Centre’s role, purpose and function in the city. Thus, the newspaper articles I use in this section are an important piece in the puzzle for putting together a clearer picture of how people interacted and coped with the processes of transformation and institutionalization. What we know from women’s personal histories allows us to speculate here that those women employed in the Centre had not yet gained enough experience with alternative practices because they had only begun to be influenced by ideas of the women’s movement with the Wende. What I argue then is that old notions were revised and experimented with before new ones could be developed and established.

In an article published on the opening of the Women’s Centre Frauentreff Sundine, on October 3, 1990, the day of unification, the Amt was officially announced as the new
supporting institution. Like the Counseling Centre of the past, which had presented the DFD, the *Frauentreff Sundine* was now perceived in public as an “appendage” (*Aushängeschild*) of the *Amt*, i.e. the Office for Women and Family (and not the Office for the Equality of Women) (see fig. 11, p. 295). Family had positive connotations vis à vis the GDR state. In this sense the family theme had been assigned to the *Amt* since it was argued by women of the *Amt* that it was even more important to think about these issues since families had to adjust to the new pressures in the employment market (which created tension between family and career); and changes within the family had begun to occur in relation to the wider economic, social and political changes (see e.g. Meyer and Schulze 1995). So what we see happening with unification is a link between women, the Centre and family principles.

The headline for one of the main articles on the opening of the *Frauentreff Sundine* was “Good Advice for Women and Family”. The local newspaper Ostsee Zeitung (October 3, 1990, p. 11) featured a re-make of the *DFD* slogan of 1973 “Good Advice For Everybody” (*Guter Rat für Alle*). In terms of its style and composition this article was designed to remind readers of the one that was written on the opening of the *DFD* Counseling Centre in 1973. This was the slogan under which the *DFD* women’s centres were set up in the early 1970s (see previous section in this chapter on the history of the *DFD* and the Centre, p. 115). “Good Advice for Everybody” encapsulated the idea that the Centre was not only specifically intended to serve women but society at large. In 1990, this slogan was changed to “Good Advice for Women and Family”. Thus, a new beginning was constructed in an old fashion. This time, however,

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46 However, the actual practice in the *Frauentreff* preceded the legal transaction procedure. A local newspaper had already made public the newly envisioned function and use of the Centre prior to the takeover. The Stadtanzeiger announced on September 14, 1990, the following information: “*Sundine is a Communication Centre. We are looking for ideas and suggestions/mothers’ course, English conversation and handicrafts. Also a baby store to exchange clothes and toys is planned*” (ibid. p.6). This article also advertised a list of suggestions for events that could take place at the Centre and asked readers to send further suggestions of ideas to the *Amt* or the *Sundine*.

47 A strong family orientation in the GDR has been described by Nickel (1993b:146). Nickel (1993b:146) also argued that the family in the GDR “was the (only) counterstructure” opposing “the long arm of the guardian state” and in this sense the “family became a symbol of a political culture without a public face”. It is interesting to note how the symbol of the family as “a symbol of a political culture without a public face” (Nickel 1993:146) now has a public face and the *Sundine* was one space where it could be pictured.

48 The family was depicted as an entity whose well-being was threatened by the new challenges posed by the transformation (Familienreport der Hansestadt Stralsund, 1994).

49 It is not surprising to discover that both articles (1973 and 1990) were written by the same journalist. However, I also found a similar tone and style in those articles that had announced the events for the International Women’s Day in Stralsund (see chapter 3, p. 84).
“Good Advice” was confined to “women and family” and reduced women to the family principle.

The article which appeared on October 3, 1990 emphasized that the Centre continued to support “women and families”. This notion of women and family relates to the social policies for women in the GDR\textsuperscript{50} which used to link and solidify women’s responsibilities for their families as the main caretakers. Many women had identified with or taken for granted these social policies which linked women to family. The term women became frequently linked with family in the GDR (Susan Bassnett 1986:65ff.) and for many former GDR women this link remains taken for granted and is being upheld similarly to the equally important notion that employment and social security constitute a basic feature of one’s life. The particular context of social policies in which former GDR women and men developed their notion about gender roles and concepts of combining employment is described in detail by Trappe (1995). It is this notion that continued to exist in a revamped version (as was demonstrated by the articles) and thus reinforces the impression that here a new beginning occurred in an old fashion.

I would like to end this section by giving further examples of this phenomenon. While the first example confirms my earlier point that an old idea to provide services for “Everybody” had been revised and experimented with, the second example presents evidence that, in fact, this concept was abandoned shortly after the initial transition period. I describe the visual impression I received from gazing at two large atmospheric photos of the Centre’s exterior and interior featured in an article of October 8, 1990 (Stralsund Extra). This was noticeably different from the impression I received while spending many hours in the same space in 1994. One photo depicted the new facade of the Women’s Centre with the sign (depicting in blue and white \textit{Frauentreff Sundine}) and the other the newly furnished interior (including some new equipment) with different groups of guests sitting around individual tables. One table was taken by a family of three, mother, father and child, the second by two elderly females (the average age of \textit{DFD} members) and a third by a couple (male and female). These photos indeed illustrate that the Centre at the time was open to “Everybody”. That here

\textsuperscript{50} For the development of policies for women in the GDR towards an emphasis on family policies see e.g. Trappe (1995).
a new beginning had occurred in an old fashioned way is further exemplified by the byline to these photos:

..here one also can in the future ask questions concerning personal and societal issues of life or inform oneself about new handicraft techniques and fashion or just drop in for a cup of coffee (Stralsund Extra October 8, 1990).

In 1990, in fact, the press reflected the different concepts that women had put into practice as they were making the transition. For example, to not exclusively reserve the Centre for women in a way was reformulating and attempting to establish a practice based on the notion of providing a space for “Everybody”. That is, as the employees separated from the DFD, they had applied a notion from the past with which they now freely experimented. Not only would this mean providing child care services, information and a mother and child group but also, as one article emphasized, allowing men to enter the women’s space. The article of October 8 (Ostsee Zeitung 1990) explicitly pointed out that the Centre was not reserved for women only and that it invited men, the so-called ‘stronger sex’ (das “starke” Geschlecht) to visit certain information and counseling (Beratung) events. These were characteristics of the immediate transition period when it was not clear yet in what way women’s role in society was being altered. The employees’ descriptions confirm that workshops around the time of unification were frequented by both women and men (see p. 148f.).

As people came to feel the effects of the restructuring, activities and practices in the Centre changed, and were soon followed by basic conceptual changes. Out of the employees’ experience with visitors between 1990 and 1993 the concept of the Sundine as a space for “Everybody” was revised. In 1993, in an article of the local newspaper, Stralsund Extra (Dec. 16, 1993), the Centre’s employee, Birgit, was quoted: “We prefer not to let men in [the Centre]” (Männer lassen wir lieber gar nicht erst rein). However, the commentary assured the reader that these were not the words of a feminist but based on the experience of “how much

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31In women’s centres of the new federal states it is common to allow the participation of men at certain events. For men to enter a Women’s Centre is not per se ruled out (see e.g. Hömberg 1992:57). This practice stands in stark contrast to women’s centres in the old federal states where women’s centres are conceptualized as places for women only.
women need to be among themselves” (wie sehr Frauen das Untersichsein brauchen). The article emphasized that it was important for women to have a place of their own where they could openly talk about their problems and exchange experiences.

What we learn from the newspaper piece of 1993, then, fits neatly into certain female participants’ views of what happened once men were allowed to participate in courses other than information workshops around unification. As several women had pointed out in personal conversations “women do not talk as freely in the company of men”. Subsequently, those women who worked at the Centre in 1991-1993 reached a consensus regarding this issue of male visitors and developed the notion of “a meeting place for women” (Frauentreffpunkt). That is to say, giving up the concept of the Centre as a space for “Everybody” led them to develop their own concept— one which was closely linked to the experience that the employees had at the Centre during the post unification period, as is exemplified by Christine’s statement:

.. I don’t think it’s too good if women isolate themselves, but for the daily encounter in the Sundine, it should be reserved for women (den Frauen vorbehalten sein), but certain performances should be with both. (CP:7)

Christine’s statement is twofold, namely, it comments on the idea that women should have their own networks and infrastructure of “women’s spaces” separated from men which she sees as isolating. At the same time out of her particular experiences at the Centre she reaches a different conclusion— one that suggests, although it is in principle a women’s centre “reserved for women”, it should not categorically exclude men.

What this shows then is that women in these projects in Eastern Germany did not follow the common practices in Western Germany which generally exclude men from women’s spaces but developed their own slightly different practices. However, their experiences of how women’s role began to be transformed in the united Germany brought

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52 The example of a women’s husband’s disturbing influence at a women’s breakfast is cited to make a case in point. A story I heard a couple of times from different women when justifying a women’s space.
53 Several authors from the West (e.g. Funk 1993b, Hömberg 1992) mention that the attitude towards men generally differs and finds its expression in having men visiting women’s centres. The different attitude is based on the notion that the categories women and men are equally defined. For example, the socialist marriage was a public statement of a union between two partners equally defined (Gysi 1992:68, see also Bassnett 1989).
them closer to those positions espoused by the women's movement in the West (and a more exclusionary practice than originally intended). As the example of the Women's Centre shows, their experiences were gained in the work environment of this institution for women.

What the “daily encounter in the Sundine” was like then and how closely it was related to the experience of restructuring and transitions, we learn in the next section before we return to see how the employees applied their newly developed concept to the Centre.

**Daily Problems of Transformation: A New System of Social Security and the Experience of Unemployment**

The transformation processes of unification required that women and men adjust to the institutional transitions. This meant moving from being pro-active to being re-active in order to cope with processes they could no longer influence to the extent that had been possible with the Wende. That is to say people could only be creative and develop new ideas within a given framework, namely, in the way the institutions of the West were transferred to the territory of the former GDR. Here, I describe the Centre’s role in this transition period.

During the transition period of 1990 both (former) GDR women and men were confronted with the Western administrative system and the Western system of social security which with unification became transferred to the New Federal States. To a large extent the individual’s encounter with and orientation to a different system of social security caused problems (see Gunnar Winkler 1994:236f). The post-Wende programmes in the Centre included those courses that were designed and intended to familiarize former GDR women and men with the Western administrative and social security system.

At the height of the radical institutional changes surrounding unification certain programmes were attended by women and men. In the narratives of the employees that describe the end of 1990, they emphasize that the programmes at the Centre functioned as an information drop-in classes and were designed to soften the effects of the Western institutional transfer by helping women (and men) cope with administrative changes. Workshops hosted by
the medical insurance companies AOK, DAK provided information for their potential new customers. Klara explains the need for these courses in a typical fashion by contrasting the monolithic social security system of the GDR with the pluralistic one of the West:

At the time it was a difficult problem to decide on a medical insurance company and then manage everything on your own. That did not exist in the GDR. There was one medical insurance company (KN:7).

There existed a series of other events that served as information and discussion forums. For example, information regarding the change of the new school system was introduced and discussed with teachers, mothers and fathers; information was also offered concerning legal, tax and consumer issues (Rechts- Steuer- und Verbraucherfragen); and the West German civil law (bürgerliches Gesetzbuch). Most of these events at the Women’s Centre attracted both a female and male audience. Birgit’s narrative captures the atmosphere of these events in the Centre while explaining the appearance of a mixed male and female audience as follows:

Well, there were these kinds of events which were important for the whole family, mainly informative events including topics such as subsidized housing (Wohngeld), child care money (Kindergeld). .. Then sometimes we sat on the stove and anywhere one could find a place because we did not have enough room. Then later we organized the events in such a way that we did not announce it as one event starting at 4 p.m. but we said that between 4-6 p.m. anybody could come... and once ten or fifteen people had gathered then she said something about subsidized housing and everybody could ask their questions. Then this group left and the next one came, it was a shift system. Well, sometimes there were fifty to sixty women inside and some men as well (BA:17).

This quote speaks to the need for information and public places to gather for such orientation sessions. Based on the notion of a Centre for “Everybody”, to a large extent events were geared towards providing women and men, (respectively, the family) with information on the Western administrative system. Big events such as the one described by Birgit, however, were the exception and not the rule. Most programmes and events such as a circle (Gesprächsrunde) for unemployed women, or individual counseling sessions (free of charge) about insurance, finances, courses for mothers or saving plans as well as the regular English courses only attracted small numbers of women.
Due to the Amt’s idea of providing and encouraging the formation of self-help groups, other activities at the Centre included the meeting of the interest group for single parents (Interessengemeinschaft Alleinerziehende) which was organized by an Initiative woman. They organized a discussion circle for single parents and used the Centre as a meeting place. In general self-help groups were signs of the new forms of social gatherings and in this sense signs of the new times but this group constituted a short-lived phenomenon in the Centre. The Frauentreff Sundine, thus, provided a forum in which new social practices were given space to develop as women were searching for reorientation and social integration.

At the time the Centre functioned as a drop-in for many female visitors who appeared to be in a state of shock, apathy or retreat as a result of the rapid and radical transition from a socialist economic system (and society) to a social market economy. Many individual women visitors came to seek help for problems which all seemed to be related to the experience of unemployment and the social and personal stress of losing their jobs. In the GDR both women and men were integrated into society through their employment (see the section on work-place society, chapter 2). With unemployment women could no longer rely on the institutions of work (employment) to develop a sense of being integrated. Some women turned to the one institution in Stralsund that appeared to have weathered the storms of change (and which used to have an integrative function in the past), namely, the former DFD Women’s Centre, now the Frauentreff Sundine. The transformed Women’s Centre became a place where some of the social and personal effects of unemployment were articulated by those individuals who felt that they were not initiating change and building up new structures.

As discussed in chapter 2, Part I, mass unemployment is a feature of many regions in the new federal states and the chances of finding regular employment in a region such as Mecklenburg-Pomerania are particularly slim for women, who have been effected differently by the transformation process. Winkler summarizes this as follows:

Since unification, many of the social benefits that women in eastern Germany considered essential for their own development have been eliminated or drastically curtailed. These include an extensive network of day care facilities, paid leaves of absence when children are sick, special protection regarding termination of employment, and a social security system based on one’s own work and not that of the
husband. While most East German women realize that these provisions did not guarantee social equality under the previous regime, they are now experiencing increasing social inequality due to the deterioration of conditions that once supported female work and economic independence (Gunnar Winkler 1994:236).

The following accounts of three Centre employees, Birgit, Klara and Renate, who worked in the Centre in late 1990 and 1991, capture the dimension of the social and personal effects of the transformation on individual women and how they attempted to reorient themselves (by visiting the Women's Centre). The employees depict how individual women were affected by losing state benefits and employment, that is to say, either through their own unemployment or/and that a family member. In particular, two employees describe the struggle of those women who visited the Centre. In so doing their narratives transmit the dramatic experiences of these times of transition for East Germans and in particular, East German women.

Though the employees were experiencing the same demands of transformation on their everyday life they were affected differently than the visitors. They had a chance to reorient themselves through their work at the Centre. Through their employment in the Centre they were in a different (privileged) position, one which allowed them to actively engage instead of 'passively' experiencing the changes as Birgit describes it:

There was a time at the Centre where I personally felt that our women were completely absorbed with their daily problems so that they did not want anything. (BA:30)

Klara describes how they provided individual advice and counseling. She says that the three employees at the time quickly realized and agreed that these women “simply needed their own place” (das sie einfach einen Ort brauchen) - ‘a room of one’s own’. The employees emphasize two main differences between themselves and the visitors. As Birgit and Klara point out, they saw themselves as having an advantage over other women not because of their employment but because of their (what they called) “intact families” or a reliable partner and a relationship with their husbands based on equality. That is to say, they made a statement about the possibility of developing equal partnerships under the conditions of the GDR and they
perceived this basis for equality as changing, thereby redefining the needs of those women who came to the Centre. Klara interprets and analyses their needs as follows:

Women simply needed to relax from their family... the first weeks we basically opened the door and offered coffee for women... well, we threw light on the situation they were in but they soon realized that they could only expect this kind of help, that we would talk things over. We could not pass on some finances but we could say, with this problem you should go here or there, to the social office (Sozialamt) (KN:16).

The prospect of not finding employment brought many of these visitors to the Centre. In the GDR, women were used to being economically independent, they were educated and qualified and through this were self-confident (Schwarz and Zenner 1992:25). Women's participation in the labour force was a cornerstone of the officially achieved equality. Now this cornerstone had been taken out and the building collapsed leaving behind a memory of its architecture. No matter if women had been critical of this official version of equality or not, they now remember and emphasize that employment had provided the basis on which most women's self-development outside of the house and family was built. Because of their experience of having been employed during all their working lives, the experience of unemployment and staying at home affected some women's self-confidence. Klara describes the intricate ways in which this worked:

Yes and then this problem for women, yes, now I am at home; now I am not useful any longer (jetzt bin ich zu nichts mehr nutze). So I may not get anything for myself, now, it is the husband's (man's) money.. I am a nobody. When we said, well, why do you feel this way, now you have time .... well, the self-confidence equaled zero because of the taken away employment or the dismissal of employment. And this can be said for all the women who came to the Centre being unemployed. All of them were finished (erledigt).

Birgit's narratives confirm Klara's observation that unemployment was a serious blow to most women's self confidence54. Birgit relates the increasing number of women seeking support at the Centre to crucial administrative termination dates, such as the time when many women's unemployment insurance was cancelled at the end of 1992/93 and, as a consequence,

54 An observation that can also be found in the literature, in general, on unemployment among East German women and men. However, here it is shown what these women attempted to do about it, e.g., by simply talking to the employees.
they became dependent on their husbands’ income if they were still employed (BA: 33).

Within the first two years of unification, Birgit argues, the repercussion of women’s or their family members’ unemployment brought about a change in the kind of domestic difficulties and problems women were facing. According to her a whole set of problems caused by the stress of new experiences reached its height in 1992/93. In particular, Birgit describes some of the domestic problems women were facing at the time, such as physical violence and abuse directed towards children (previously all taboo topics in the GDR)55. In addition, some visitors were overwhelmed and suicidal. Birgit notes:

Ah, we had women in here who were in complete despair... I can only talk about myself what I experienced in this time... it began with a suspicion of child abuse and sexual abuse of children and ended with thoughts of committing suicide and all of that, I had to deal with all of that at the Frauenentreff. And sometimes these women told me that it had already helped them that they were able to tell somebody. Of course I also always tried to tell them that they should visit counseling services, phone numbers, opening hours (BA:32).

In other words, the Women’s Centre literally fulfilled its new function as a drop-in Centre for women in emergency situations (Anlaufpunkt für Frauen in Notsituationen).56 The visitors’ daily problems of transformation were reflected in the employees’ narratives about their working experience at the Centre. But at the same time the Centre’s programmes changed, reflecting not only the individuals’ experiences but also the larger processes of transformation.

Signs of a New Era: The Programmes of the Centre post 1990 (-1993)

Once new programmes (covering a wide range of topics and performances) were established the Centre regained some stability. After 1990, actual courses at the Centre fell into two types: Those courses which were revised versions of earlier ones and those courses which

55 I heard similar stories from women in the women’s shelter in Stralsund.
56 The women’s Centre brochure of 1993 advertises that it offers the service of “consulting, looking after (counseling) and information for women in particular circumstances of life and emergency situation” (Beratung, Betreuung sowie Weitervermittlung in besonderen Lebensumständen and Notsituationen). The Amt was also the supporting institution of the women’s shelter in Stralsund and used the Sundine in order to promote and integrate the shelter into a newly set up women’s network. For example, an informative talk concerning the women’s shelter (Informationsgespräch zur Frauennotunterkunft) was scheduled for the 11.9.91 in the Sundine (letter Amt).
were newly introduced by the Amt and/or the employees. (We see one example of the former and several of the latter). Some courses had been part of the Centre’s repertoire since the 1970s and 1980s such as the “baby service” and textile courses (Näh- und Klöppelkurse) which continued on a regular basis. Although some of the courses continued (with old themes) they were remodeled. For example, the previous “baby-courses” once developed in the 1980s to assist young mothers were now turned into a mother and child group. Although the contact circle for mother and child (Kontaktrunde für Mutter und Kind) was in a way a continuation of the baby courses Christine, who supervised the group, introduced different dynamics.

Christine (married, in her early forties) had worked for nine years at the department for national education with a specialization in the area of talent promotion (Abteilung Volksbildung in der Talenten- und Begabtenförderung) for children between kindergarten age and grade twelve in Stralsund. She studied and taught at the University of Greifswald in the department of education (Sektion Erziehungswissenschaften). After her studies she first taught at a country school (Landschule) art and German before she came to work at the house for pioneers (Pionierhaus) and to lead what she referred to as the Kulturkunststrecke. In this position she founded ceramic centres and was involved in diverse cultural activities besides the support of young talents. When Christine became unemployed in 1991 she recalls: “then I did not want to stay at home and wanted to use the time to do something on the side.. then I thought I go to the Sundine and ask if they were going to offer courses, circles to talk (Gesprächsrunde) .. then they said that they like the idea but they have to consult the Office for Women and Family for approval”. Christine contacted the Centre and the Amt on her own initiative and was offered an ABM employment. The Amt created a 5 hour ABM for her. From November 91-August 92 Christine was an employee on ABM in the Centre before she found another employment at a local re-training institution.

Christine recalls that topics in the contact circle for mother and child were chosen based on what it was that “mothers wanted” (Wunschthemen der Mütter). Christine explains how she perceived her role and the set up of this group (see interview and OZ 15.10.91):

they came on Wednesdays with the little ones.. we set up a crawling corner (Krabbelecke) ... we exchanged clothes ... we talked about how to design a child’s room.. brought in something creative... from week to week we did this... talked about fashion, styles, exchanged books.. one lead to the other.. one does not have to buy everything and fill the room, what do children want to have there..” (CP:11).

Other courses were newly introduced and inspired by the idea of providing a space for women where they could communicate. As Klara states:
We started the women's breakfast. We tried to incorporate more language classes. The idea with the language classes was not to commence learning a new language but to talk with one another in a different language (KN:6/7).

Moreover, the English language classes symbolized the dawn of a new historical era since Russian used to be the first foreign language learned in school in the GDR (an equivalent to the English classes in the Federal Republic of Germany). Also, the women’s breakfast, which was introduced in 1990 and became a weekly event, was always accompanied by different kinds of activities such as cosmetic courses, the introduction of women’s magazines (this was done in cooperation with the city library) or the presentation of invited guests who talked about their professions (e.g. a bookseller). Again some of these activities which accompanied the women’s breakfast, e.g. the cosmetic course, were designed to familiarize visitors with “how to be a woman” in the West. Certainly new “Western standards of style, dress, and cosmetics have been imposed on post-Communist women” (Funk 1993b:323) but those women who participated in those cosmetic courses in the Centre in 1994 treated these exceptions in a joking and playful manner.

Thus, the Centre was the actual space in which programmes provided a framework for discussing particular themes and an opportunity for exchanging ideas in newly formed groups. As women broke away from the old structures, courses constituted forums in which women could get together to try out new things and figure out new ways, for example, how to be a women and/or a mother in the West, and how to position themselves with regards to larger concerns such as the national question on the abortion law (see below).

Many of the courses at the Centre such as the health food cooking courses were initiated by the employees. Some of them were initially contested by the Amt. The Amt was opposed to practices such as textile courses or cooking courses in the Centre, calling them outdated and associating them with the DFD because they had been part of the repertoire in GDR times. The employees in defending their activities explained that the notions behind it were relevant and appropriate for the Centre. Renate, particularly, had argued that in her handicraft course they addressed current political issues. In the case of the cooking courses the
employees argued that these were not comparable to the ones in DFD times because they promoted health foods instead of new products.

Other courses were new indeed. For example, Klara regularly offered a literature café in which she introduced different books. However, activities and events that were related to certain political issues on the regional and national level were suggested and initiated by the Amt. Since the Amt was the supporting institution petitions were laid out to sign in the Sundine on public issues such as the abortion law i.e. article 218, the cutting of trees along country roads (Alleenbäume), the abolition of an East German children TV show (Sandmännchen). As the former employees pointed out, these petitions brought visitors to the Centre. Furthermore, the programme in the Centre was extended to include events such as a discussion about the pros and cons of the article 218 which had attracted thirty women. (Though most of them were members of public institutions, as Klara remarks.)

The controversy at the Women’s Centre surrounding paragraph 218 of the Penal Code responded to the ongoing public debates at the national (federal) level. At the time (summer 1991) “six disparate draft laws were submitted to the Bundestag (German Parliament)” (Einhorn 1993:97) ranging from anti-abortion positions to those who “proposed to eliminate paragraph 218 from the Penal Code and to give every woman the legal right to decide on an abortion” (Einhorn 1993:97). The fact that the Amt had to justify the discussion on abortion in the Centre in front of the city assembly (Bürgerschaft) shows not only that the Women’s Centre at the time was perceived as an appendage (Aushängeschild) of the Amt but also that, as Funk (1993c:198) suggested, “the legal debate over abortion is part of redefining the social role of women in the united Germany, reintroducing religious views in the former socialist system, preserving those views in the West, and retaining state control over women’s

\[57\]In the area of reproductive rights women in east Germany have lost access to free and legal abortion on demand up to twelve weeks after conception. (see also Einhorn 1993:92) Instead they are subject to the provision of paragraph 218 as revised by the Federal Constitutional Court on 29 May 1993. Despite hopes that the GDR model would be adopted in the united Germany, the ruling means that abortion continues to be a criminal act, although women who have abortions and doctors who perform them are immune from prosecution” (Ingrid Sharp and Dagmar Flinsbach 1995:190/191). For further information on abortion laws in both Germanies and the debate on 218 in the united Germany around the transformation of abortion laws see Funk’s article “Abortion and German Unification” (1993c).

\[58\]For details on the issue such as women’s members of the Bundestag declaration, their draft and on how the new abortion law was pronounced unconstitutional see e.g. Einhorn (1993:98/99).
reproductive capacities”. Klara’s story about one incident in the Centre supports Funk’s assessment and shows how the processes played out in a locale such as the Women’s Centre since the climate around the issue of abortion had changed and had become a contested issue with unification. It also shows how the employees mastered the changed situation. Klara recalls:

I was pregnant with Anke... and I soon had a very big belly and with this big belly I discussed the paragraph 218 [of the Penal Code] issue and got to hear massive criticism. Well, I remember that once a man came in and talked our ears off (hat uns vollgeblökt), who we think we are. Well, we had the whole window full with slogans against the 218, and he came in and had a fit (hat getobt) and yelled at Renate and Birgit, who do they think they are (was sie sich einbilden) and then I came [in] with my big belly and he said, how can this be, how can you work here [she imitates him]. Then I said, I can tell you, because I live in an intact marriage and an intact family and then I believe a child is part of it and well protected (aufgehoben), but there are many women who do not live under these circumstances and for those I believe an abortion is legitimate. That cannot be, you should not be allowed to carry a child with this opinion he yelled at me. At one point, I said to him, you know, this is a Frauenbreff [women’s Centre] and we did not ask you to come in and because of this I am going to kick you out of here right now (und damit schmeiß ich sie jetzt hier raus). (KN:13/14).

Klara’s story once more emphasizes how the employees through their experiences began to resort to more exclusionary practices and to claim the Centre as a women’s space. During my stay in 1994, I heard other stories about encounters with male visitors, who came to the regular breakfast at the Centre with their partners. The moral of these stories was that women needed this space of their own as a result of the changing context in which women’s roles had begun to be transformed. It is this consensus which at the time strengthened the employees’ sense of forming a group and was turned into a slogan “a woman’s dream in a man’s world”. Whereas in the GDR women through their employment had had a guaranteed as well as an accepted place in the “men’s world”, now this had began to change and their double orientation towards employment and family was called into question.

We saw how the ongoing larger processes of transformation influenced the programme of the Centre, how national themes were discussed in this specific locale and how women

59Furthermore, “Women’s right to abortion as part of the general women’s position in state socialism, one predicated on a nonreligious basis, has become a symbol of state socialism and the confrontation of East and West” (Funk 1993c:198).
working and visiting the Centre experienced these larger transformations. Furthermore, what they concluded from these experiences led them to develop a concept of their own. Being aware of the changes for women they expressed this in a new conceptualization of the Centre, one which gave up and broke with the idea of a Centre for “Everybody”. Instead the employees, who formed a new group, used some ideas from the West German women’s movement to build and create a women’s space. This new concept introduced the idea of a male dominated or patriarchal world in which women carve out niches and it is to this that we now turn.

Ein Frauen(t)raum im Männerraum: A Woman’s Dream in a Man’s World

The experience of the transition led the employees to experiment and revise old concepts, and ultimately introduce new one’s. “A Woman’s (Dream ) Space in a Man’s World” signifies that a new conceptualization was based on the alternative notion of creating niches opposed to the mainstream. It also demonstrates the awareness of women living in a patriarchal united German society. The following section shows how the adopted and adapted the ideas of the women’s movement.

“Ein Frauen(t)raum im Männerraum” is a playful slogan which imagines a “woman’s dream” for a “women’s space” come true. It is taken from a 1993 brochure, produced by the employees of the Centre and the Amt, that came out of their cooperative venture. This new concept for the Women’s Centre was developed by the four employees in cooperation with the Amt. It came to serve as the basis for the self-presentation of the Centre and advertised their conceptualization. The content of the brochure informs us about the Frauentreff and its intentions and purpose. But it is not only interesting for its content but also its aesthetics: Firstly, the design displayed symbols of the Western and West German women’s movement indicating an acceptance of the feminist notion of patriarchy and a women’s space. that is, “a woman’s dream in a man’s world” (ein Frauen(t)raum im Männerraum). The playful expression of their concerns with such a slogan as well as the use of aesthetics reminds one of those that are associated with the general alternative movement of West Germany.\(^6\) Secondly, 

\(^6\) The aesthetics of the countercultural, so-called alternative, movement of the 1970s and 80s in the West broke with the conventions of the hegemonic West German culture (von Dierke 1997).
at the same time it silences the *DFD* history. In fact, any reference to this history is missing from the brochure. The way in which the history of the Centre was ignored and not mentioned is interesting given the fact that *DFD* groups continued to use the Centre. Thirdly, by this time the *Amt*’s idea to establish a Communication Centre had been dropped. Underneath, the alternative surface concepts of the past remained. For example, the Women’s Centre was still conceptualized as a place to seek counseling (*Beratungsstelle*). The notion of a women’s meeting point (*Frauentreff*) came to serve as the main concept for the new Women’s Centre. The new emphasis at the time on the label *Frauentreff* and not *Sundine* was an attempt to shift the weight from the past to the present. In other words, in 1993 the Centre had regained a certain stability and it had a concept that was more strongly shaped by the ideas of the women’s movement than before the Centre became institutionalized in Western structures.

Another example of how ideas of the movement were incorporated and made their own was the way the employees worked together. Two of the four employees of the were hired on temporary government sponsored work programmes. All four had formed new groups in the defined set up through which they became employed. They became affiliated with the *Initiative* grass roots groups as the worked in the Centre. They attempted to organize their work at the Centre by following those ideas of self-determination etc. which the women’s movement espoused. They worked together as a “quasi” self-organized work team but this was hierachical, unlike true grass roots group, because of the *Amt* which was overseeing their activities.

At times some employees felt that these new forms of organizing were counteracted by the way the women of the *Amt* related to them. For example, women from the *Amt* would bring up particular issues with only one person instead of the group. Differences between the employees were also reinforced by their different salaries and the fact that some women were permanently employed while others worked on government sponsored work programmes. Individuals’ experiences of the past and the present differed as well.

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61 Meanwhile two more new employees had been hired. While the Centre had already two permanent positions like other women’s projects it came to employ more personnel on government funds.
Despite the four women’s very different backgrounds, their experiences of the transition, their common work experience at the Centre, i.e. the challenge of having to rebuild the Centre, brought them together as a new social group. The four employees of the Centre developed among themselves a routine of managing the everyday tasks and began to create new programmes. As Christine notes regarding the set up of the work schedule and the impact of the different personalities for the work at the Centre:

Two of us were always in the Centre because of the division into morning and afternoon shifts. Each of us had his strength [chocolate side (Schokoladenseite)] and he brought it to the Centre (die hat er da zum Tragen gebracht) according to his skills and education (CP:5).

Her comment shows that she defines her activities mostly in terms of work and its organization. Christine’s reference to themselves as “he” indicates that she perceived the female employees in their status as workers (typical of the GDR, see previous notes on this kind of utterance), particularly as educated workers with special skills which complemented each other in the Centre. The way these diverse women managed to work together as a group to set up a new Centre created social cohesion. The degree to which ideas of the women’s movement were owned, however, differed, as Christine’s use of language shows.

Work at the Centre for these women provided an opportunity to use their skills to master a difficult personal as well as societal transition. Both newly hired women had extensive experiences teaching creative courses in arts, textiles etc., were sociable and well connected and put their creative skills as well as their contacts to good use in the Centre. Christine describes her engagement as follows:

I was determined to bring in art (ich hatte mir auf die Fahnen geschrieben Kunst reinzubringen), the big window could be used for it and I knew through my work [how to do it]

Christine organized art exhibitions for the window as well as meetings with artists. She described knowing many people in Stralsund through her previous employment and states:
I could apply everything I'd learned to the Sundine. Really I always followed a similar system.

In particular, Karina’s and Christine’s stories suggest that they came to apply their old work experiences in a remodeled fashion in the different context of the Women’s Centre. The Amt had chosen to hire women such as Christine and Karina who could bring creative skills to the Centre. In autumn 1991, in addition to the two employees who were permanently employed, Karina (whom we have already met at the Initiative’s Inaugural Meeting) was newly hired on an ABM basis.

Karina was originally trained as a designer. An accident made it difficult to practice in her profession. After two years as a housewife she began to seek further education in diverse handicraft and art circles and came to lead textile circles (Textilzirkel) and folklore art collectives (Volkskunstkollektive) herself. These were financed by the companies until the monetary union in the summer of 1990 when Karina became unemployed. (For more biographical details see next chapter, p.183) However, through this free-lance activity over a period of fifteen years she had made administrative and other contacts which remained useful. Also, her teaching skills were an asset for the Centre and viewed by her as such. Karina had applied and competed for this government sponsored employment with other younger women. She speculated that she might have gotten the ABM because she and the senator discovered that their daughters went to the same summer camp. Karina was employed on the government sponsored work programme from October 1991 to October 1993. After five months of unemployment she was rehired at the Centre in April of 1994.

Karina also describes how she developed certain personal interests and skills, techniques she had acquired on her own, into new courses at the Centre. That is to say, despite radical, e.g. institutional discontinuity, the employees describe certain aspects of continuity in the way they used their skills, organized their work, acted, and related to other (political) institutions, in short, how they made the transition to being employed. It was, however, not just employment but engagement in women’s issues beyond the Centre.

Work at the Centre provided an opportunity for additional activism and one can tell from reading the programmes that employees used what was available to them in terms of organizing activities and making contacts. This was an active phase in the Women’s Centre as the group of employees engaged with other institutions and organizations in the city and
beyond those boundaries with women's projects in Mecklenburg-Pomerania, using the information and resources accessible at the *Amt*.

A further look at the brochure, designed by Karina also shows the scope of advertised events, programmes and activities. The programmes were a mishmash of events and activities to attract diverse women and include such diverse courses as “arts and handicraft techniques”, a so-called “women in action” programme with discussions on article 218 of the Penal Code and many other political questions (*Aktionstag gegen Gewalt, Entwurf der Landesverfassung, Veränderung des Grundgesetzes*), and ad hoc circles (*Gesprächsrunden*). There existed a diverse list of courses and information events some of which informed people about other social services in the city such as “advice on how to apply for child support, housing support (*Wohngeld*), welfare...” or institutions such as “consumer advice (*Verbraucherschutz*)” and for the medically interested talks on AIDS, osteoporosis, menopause; healthy diet, cosmetics were offered; in addition courses on self-defense were also advertised at the time. The idea behind offering this wide spectrum of courses was to attract women who were unfamiliar with institutions for women (*Fraueneinrichtungen*). The Centre attempted to attract visitors of diverse backgrounds such as “women of any age, in different situations of their lives, unemployed, single parents, single or widowed (*Alleinstehende*), housewives, professionals, seniors” (brochure 1993).

In other words, the Centre was one of the new places which had became available for socially integrating women. We have seen how the employees themselves used the opportunities at their work place for meeting the challenges of unification. The programme of the Centre, however, did not draw as many visitors as expected; most unemployed women did not think to look for help from non-governmental institutions. Women at the *Amt* and the Centre seemed to have discussed this issue of attracting women to use the facilities of the Women’s Centre many times. Some of these discussions were remembered by participants as thematizing how one would define and pursue collective politics for women. Women both at the *Amt* and the Centre had developed different perspectives on what activism for women and women’s politics entailed. Consequently, this was expressed in their different opinions on how to set up certain aspects of the programmes, i.e. some courses and actual discussions. The *Amt*,
in its function as the Office for the Equality of Women, represented an institutionalized strategy in support of the equality of women. Women from the Amt voiced their desire to see more political discussions and events at the Centre where issues of equality could be discussed. The front-line employees argued that though they did not oppose the idea of political discussions, one had to attract women differently (Renate, Birgit) or as Klara phrases it:

we agreed that not only political or societal discussions.. were what women needed but also a room of one’s own (KN:5).

From the perspective of the employees, the Amt women’s expectations did not meet the needs of those women who consulted the Centre. Klara describes their actual difficulties in motivating women to engage and even to participate in the programmes. Klara states:

We can only attract (ansprechen und auf die Frauen zugehen) those women who really come. And those women want to sit down and talk....and this talk about intellectual (hochgeistige) women who build up a feminist movement that is quite nice but you can only work with those who come. I cannot drag them out of their apartments... And then we started a programme ..where once in a while somebody new came but those women who came regularly, we knew private things about them... those we worked with (sind wir eingegangen). (KN:6/7).

Klara also came to realize that she perceived a difference between organizing an “intellectual feminist movement” and the kind of work they could achieve in the women’s project or rather the kind of things they could do for women in the context of the Women’s Centre. In other words, she seems to describe a split between the possibilities for collective politics and the need to provide social services for women undergoing transitions. Klara voiced that the Centre simply should provide what the female clientele desired and not impose political aims. Thus, her description raises the question of how the issue of socially integrating women through places such as the new Centre is related to the question of how collective politics could be pursued in the projects after the women’s movement became institutionalized. That is, how the aims of the movement could be reconciled with providing social services for women who needed to talk about those problems which were caused by the transition.

Another story shows that Klara became critical of the institutionalized politics for women and the kind of discussion forums it would bring to the Centre. She exemplified this
with her story about a meeting of discussing paragraph 218 of the Penal Code. Women from the Amt as well as women who worked at the Centre remembered different aspects of this notable discussion in the Centre. Most of their stories pictured those discussants who opposed their own views in support of the article’s elimination. Klara, however, had contextualized and interpreted the actual discussion not in light of the differences in opinion among the diverse representatives of different institutions or groups regarding the “paragraph 218” campaign; rather she had thought about the motivation of these thirty visitors who had been attracted:

But if you look at who these women were, then you found out that there were ten employees of the Amt, three from Pro Familia, three from the Catholic community who had to argue against it, and, well, perhaps there was a maximum of five real visitors. Then we said this is throwing sand into people’s eyes if you say we have an evening event with thirty women and all of them just do their job.... (KN:12).

Klara here problematizes the institutionalization of women’s politics or collective politics, as she calls it, when “women just do their job”. It appears that some of the movement’s features such as the ability to disturb, resist, innovate and question existing political and social institutions were again delegated to those professional women used to leading such discussions (e.g. the Amt which did it within the administration). In Klara’s opinion it negated the Centre’s purpose of providing a space for self-organized gatherings on a grass roots level and for motivating visitors to engage and join in. However, the employees could challenge the supervising Amt only to a limited extent. As Klara’s depiction shows, the grass roots component receded into the background of some gatherings and discussions in the Centre as the women participated in the national debate on abortion.

This raises questions about the limits and possibilities of collective politics as they played out in the Centre after the movement became institutionalized. Some women who were aware of how difficult it was to run projects and pursue collective politics wondered if a change in supporting institution would allow for different dynamics at the Centre once the Initiative applied to take it over. For a variety of reasons the possibilities and limits for collective politics became once again reconfigured as the conjunctures and therefore the functions for this to happen transformed again. Before I turn to why and how the relation between supporting institution and Centre changed and where the Centre was heading I let draw the following conclusions.
Conclusion

I have described the Centre in an era which saw the collapse of the socialist mass organization for women, the rise of the women's movement and the institutionalization of new structures as women's politics and projects became established. The Women's Centre during this time of transition was a locus where some of the processes of transformation in Eastern Germany became visible. In other words, the Centre was a microcosm of the larger socio-political and economic transformations. We have recognized individuals' involvement in the larger political processes during the Wende and learned about the relationship between new group formations, individual engagement and their impact on the institutional restructuring around the time of unification. The experience of women's changing position within the context of larger processes of economic and socio-political restructuring was exemplified in the adjustment and set up of new programmes (e.g. cosmetic and language courses) and the development of concepts for the Centre. In this process of constant adjustment notions from the past and the present were transformed in an attempt to develop the Centre's own profile.

In the process of developing their own conceptualization we saw women, as individuals and members of groups, establishing new modes of action, organizational structures and relationships with political institutions. We also saw some continuity in their modes of action, programmes etc.. This can be said for both women who worked at the Centre and the Amt. We saw that women in the Centre used a language from the socialist past and experimented with old concepts as they began to model the Centre after a Western institution, before they revised their concepts and found another language to articulate their new experiences and the reality of being a woman in the unified Germany. Their ideas of projects in the West informed and shaped the way they reformulated and revised the conceptualization of the Women's Centre. Some notions of the West German women's movement were made their own as the project became institutionalized. But they ended up creating something different from Western Germany because socialist ideas about how equality had been achieved through employment became translated into East German women's activism in the sense that one aim of the project was to create employment.
At the same time the organization of work at the Centre became an issue of change. Putting into practice alternative notions of how work could be organized in the Centre, however, was limited due to the regulations imposed by government sponsored work programmes and the relationship between the Centre and the Amt. Thus, the Women’s Centre’s link with its supporting institution, the Amt, at times enforced and at other times prevented the development of emancipatory processes in the Centre. Nevertheless, the trajectory of the East German women’s movement had left its marks on the Centre and transformed the interaction between those women involved in it. The practices and expectations of these women were changing as the institutionalization progressed. The history of the Centre and its supporting institution shows that women’s offices and the projects of the women’s movement became established, or rather institutionalized and incorporated into the West German institutions.

We saw at the Centre that in terms of its Westernization, i.e., its use of government sponsored work programmes, political activities tied to a vision of societal change receded into the background while more narrowly educational, cultural, business and social service activities gained the upper hand. In other words, in Eastern Germany a shift had occurred from engagement in social-political change towards social services and small scale changes in the projects themselves where women tried to carve out their niches in a “men’s world”.62

The immediate transition period of ‘revolutionary renewal’, this short opening for directly influencing the restructuring process, had ended with unification, and issues of social change were now addressed within the context of institutional transfer from the West to the East. As with all social movements, determining the exact end of the movement is a challenge because of its dynamic nature. The limits of the grassroots forms of collective action and politics, however, indicate its destiny. The direction an agency takes is a function of the opportunities provided by present conjunctures. The next chapter looks at what this implied for women affiliated with the Centre in 1994.

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62 In fact, it is this shift from engagement in social-political change towards social services which Kenawi (1995a) marked as the shift from a women’s movement to a women’s project movement (Frauen-Projekte-Bewegung). Kenawi (1995a:110) interprets the women’s project movement on the one hand as moving towards autonomy from male patterns and on the other hand as moving into the isolation of women’s projects.
Chapter 5  THE LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF COLLECTIVE POLITICS: THE WOMEN'S CENTRE 1993-94

By 1993, a process of routinization had settled in as the Centre was institutionalized under Western social service agencies. A women’s movement that had once actively opposed the GDR state had lost its political significance and its projects were gradually depoliticized.

This aforementioned development is not unusual for social movements undergoing institutionalization (e.g. Mooers and Seers 1992). West German studies (von Dierke 1997; Roth 1994b) provide a framework for this analysis (due to a lack of material on East Germany), although the process played out differently in the East. This was in part due to the rapid and radical transformations and the development of a movement of women’s projects offering opportunities for social integration (Bütow 1995). What is left of collective politics now that projects have been depoliticized and what is happening to the Women’s Centre in the present in terms of the limits and possibilities of collective politics? How did women perceive the relationship between their ABM employment and the women’s project movement?

In the previous chapter, I explained that the Centre with its affiliate, the Amt, had regained a certain stability with an established routine. Between 1993-1994 there was another institutional transfer and transition accompanied by a radical staff turnover in which the balance needs to be established once again. If we compare the takeover of the Centre by the Amt in 1990 with the transfer of 1994 to the Initiative, however, we will see a major difference: In 1990, changes in the mode of organization had represented wider institutional and societal changes initiated with the Wende. Individual women took responsibility for creating new meanings and new interpretations (e.g., a conceptualization for the Centre) into their own hands, while they collectively contested the newly created gender inequalities in the unified Germany (see chapter 4). The current institutional change from Amt to Initiative represents another shift towards both an even greater dependency on government sponsored work programmes (ABMs) and more of a social service institution than a platform for the women’s movement.
This phase of the Women’s Centre was also characterized by a momentary withdrawal of many former employees and women in diverse institutions normally supervising the Centre. Women from the Amt and the Initiative, who at other times had been strongly involved in daily affairs, initially did not interfere with how the Centre was organized by the employees. Furthermore, as typical for many projects (see p. 57), the rotation of personnel interrupted and destabilized the smooth functioning of the Centre. Compared to projects in other regions, however, government cut backs did not yet effect the Women’s Centre in 1994. In Stralsund, the government attack on ABM programs was delayed.

Part I describes the structural and personnel changes and how they related to the processes of institutionalization and transformations, including an impression of the daily routines, interactions and challenges at the Centre. This is followed by brief biographies of the new personnel to demonstrate how they dealt with discontinuity and transitions in their lives. These are women with very different interpretations of the past and different experiences of the transformation process. Thus, they experienced ABM employment in the Centre differently from previous employees, and their ideas about the Centre’s role in providing possibilities for social change, collective action, and social integration of women also differed. Part II deals with how the Centre’s supporting institution, the Initiative, responded to and interpreted the kind of difficulties that surface in the Centre as a result of daily problems posed by the different interpretations of work at the Centre.

**Part I**

**Post-Unification Institutional and Personnel Changes: The Transfer to the Initiative**

Specific to the Centre are its three phases (see fig. 12, p. 296), i.e. its DFD history and its intermediary existence as a project supported by the Amt, and followed by the non-profit organization, the Initiative. These further institutional transitions for the Centre took place in 1993-94. To understand how in the course of these developments women’s expectations, conceptualizations, and practices in the Centre changed, we need to know about the structural,
institutional and personnel changes. This time the changes were initiated by the city government, not by the people themselves. In the wake of federal, regional and local elections, the municipality attempted to reduce the budget by officially ordering the Amt to transfer the women’s projects (the Centre and the Shelter) to non-profit organizations. The women of the Amt speculated that the outcome of the election might generally change local policies and subsequently effect the existence of the Amt für Frauen und Familie.

In the summer of 1993, the Amt began to negotiate with the Women for Women Initiative (Initiative) which as a state recognized association (Eingetragener Verein) was eligible to take over the Centre. Many women, including DFD women, were in favour of the Initiative becoming the supporting institution because they thought the Centre would be more appropriately run by a grass roots group closely involved with the women’s movement without a party affiliation. The Initiative members agreed to become the supporting institution of the Centre since they had regularly contributed to its programmes and many of the Centre’s employees had been affiliated with (or joined) their grass roots group. The Initiative recycled their earlier plan to run the Centre and suggested in their application incorporating the Women’s Centre into their larger umbrella women’s project (Fayencenhof) which was supposed to house their projects in the future.

While the Initiative worked on a framework for the Centre and a financial plan, the Amt carried out the negotiations with the city government and vouched for the Initiative. Both parties cooperated because they had a common interest in maintaining the Centre. The actual transfer, however, was delayed twice. Finally, in March of 1994 the city assembly

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1 Im Rahmen der Stellenkürzungen im Haushaltsjahr 1993 erhielt das Amt den Auftrag Sundine und Frauenhaus zum 1.11.93 in freie Trägerschaft zu überführen (innerdienstliches Schreiben des Amtes).
2 In unified Germany, the year of 1994 was the so-called super election year (Superwahljahr) when federal, regional and local elections occurred concomitantly in many federal states. In Stralsund women of the Amt were wary of the local elections because they did not know what they would imply for the Amt. When I talked to them at the beginning of 1994, they had heard rumours that the Amt für Frauen und Familie might be dissolved following victory of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU). Some people speculated that the reasons might be that the Amt was viewed as affiliated with the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The senator for the Amt was a party member of the SPD but most women employed at the Amt had no party affiliation at all. The Amt was threatened, i.e. in this case the Office for Women and Family, with dissolution because it was not a requirement of the state like its counterpart the Office for the Equality of Women. In fact, in 1995-96 the Amt dissolved leaving only the obligatory Office for the Equality of Women behind.
3 This included the wool-project for the long-term unemployed. To incorporate the Centre into this project was really a long term plan and promoted as such in the Initiative’s framework.
(Bürgerschaft) passed a resolution supporting the handing over of the Frauentreff Sundine by the first of April 1994. Due to the delayed and confusing process, the Amt and the Initiative could not guarantee a smooth transfer.

In the autumn of 1993, the government sponsored positions for Karina and Christine terminated and were not renewed by the Amt. ABM could have been extended for a second year, but the Amt ceased to be the employer. Renate terminated her contract and the position was not renewed by the Amt. From October 1993 to December 1993, only Birgit, long-time employee and Initiative member, remained in order to prepare the transfer. The Amt had attempted to recruit either her or one of the other employees for the permanent position of leader, but all of the previous employees were not interested and willing to take on this role. For example, Birgit resigned officially for "health reasons", but she also mentioned that she had been "burnt out" from her engagement during the transition years. Karina had turned down the position of leader because she felt it would be too challenging and too time consuming. As a result, they were forced to hire a newcomer. This made it more difficult for staff and the supporting institutions to convey the recent history of transition and to pass on effective procedures. Moreover, the hiring of a leader represented another shift, or structural change, in terms of its internal organization. The Centre had not had a leader since it separated from the DFD. Employing one woman in a leading position again, however, was an attempt to guarantee some continuity for the Centre and to counterbalance the rotation of personnel since other employees would be employed temporarily on government sponsored work programmes (ABMs). The leader's permanent salary would be paid by the city. We see here that the financial conditions created a situation in which having a leader made sense for very practical reasons. That is, not in order to guarantee the passing of directives to a female constituency, as in DFD times, but to deal with administrative issues, to have somebody with practical knowledge of the Centre's management, and to guarantee a continuous existence of the Centre.

This process exemplifies, however, how leadership was again transformed. A short period in which the group of employees operating on basic democratic principles only with the Amt in the leading position was followed by one in which one women was again hired in a
leading position. One could almost see it as ironic that a grass roots group following a non-hierarchical principle in their organization took over the project at this point in time. Yet, for the Initiative the meaning of leadership was transformed as well and they saw this person’s role in familiarizing the new employees with notions of the projects. Under the Initiative, the Centre first began with one leader. In addition, as funds were released by the employment centre, the Initiative was able to hire four new employees who would stay for up to one to two years. As a result, individuals with different kinds of employment and transition experiences than those previously at the Centre were hired. The hiring procedure and the circumstances under which the Initiative gained ABM candidates differed as well. These candidates were sent through the employment centre and simply found employment again.

Following the suggestion of an Initiative woman, Linda (see biographical details p. 181) was officially hired by the Amt as the leader in January of 1994. From January until April 1994 Linda was the only employee at the Centre. Her role in the Centre is crucial for understanding some of the dynamics that played out over time. Once the old staff left, she played the mediating role between the Centre and the Amt. Her contacts with women from the Amt, her knowledge of the negotiation process between the Amt and the Initiative, the experiences she had as a volunteer at the Women’s Shelter and at the Centre in 1993, were important assets. After the transfer of the Centre, she would also become the contact person between the Initiative and the women employed in the Centre. As the leader of the Centre and an Initiative member, she was on the hiring committee for the new employees after the Initiative became the supporting institution in March 1994. The Initiative hiring committee faced similar problems to the Amt when they searched for new staff. At the time, there were no Initiative members or affiliates who were qualified or interested in becoming temporarily employed on a government sponsored work programme (ABM) in the Centre. The hiring committee had to choose from a pool of applicants who lacked an interest in and experience with the women’s projects and the movement. As one Initiative woman, Gabriele, said in retrospect:

[Among the applicants] there were no women who were interested in women’s issues or had had experiences with these issues.4

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4 Gabriele, furthermore, interpreted the fact that only a small number of women was interested in women’s issues (women’s cause) as a “general problem” in Stralsund (fieldnotes 9.7.1994). In order to understand her comment one has to take into account the fact that many activists of the women’s movement retreated from political
Finally, in April of 1994, ABM funds were released; in order to avoid further administrative procedures and delay, they decided to hire three women who had been sent by the employment centre. These women did not know one another before but were brought together through ABM and their employment at the Centre.

**A New Phase at the Centre: The Change of Direction**

I was involved with the Centre at this time and therefore my presence is included in the following ethnographic description. In a way, the course of my research became bound to the institutional changes of the Women’s Centre and was transformed together with the change in supporting institutions from *Amt* to *Initiative*. While my initial contacts were with the *Amt*, with the inauguration celebration of the Centre’s transfer I began to have closer contact with the *Initiative* members.

Some people expected the Centre under the *Initiative* to provide better services for women in Stralsund because of their grass roots past. While the *Amt* was the supporting institution, most employees were members of the *Initiative*. It is ironic that when the *Initiative* became the supporting institution, most employees were not members, were not accustomed to the ideas of the *Initiative*, e.g., how to organize work in the Centre according to alternative principles. Generally, the *Initiative* wished to provide a space for women to gather and to self-organize (see later section on “opportunities of change”, p.188). As we will see, the employees developed different routines or led the Centre in a different direction. The way they understood this work gave them a sense of stability despite structural instability (institutional transfer, new employment etc.). What happened at the Centre shows how different experiences of the GDR past and the *Wende* translate into different understandings of the Centre’s role and consequently women’s actions.

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engagement after they became disillusioned with the developments following unification. This was a general phenomenon of transformation not only in Eastern Germany but also in other post socialist societies. For example Jirina Siklova (1993:81) states: “Women with political interests and aspirations are not very active at the moment; change has been too hectic”.
When I began to visit the Women’s Centre regularly in March 1994, there was only one employee, the leader, Linda. While waiting for more staff to be hired I familiarized myself with the Centre’s existing routines and assisted the leader with her daily tasks such as preparing the “women’s breakfast”, setting up the room for other groups of visitors or customers and helping with other chores such as writing applications. This situation worked to my benefit because the leader appreciated somebody giving her a hand, exchanging information and advice. As the Centre entered a new phase of its life, Linda, in fact, jokingly introduced me to the new employees as “belonging to” the Centre. Once I was accepted I was comfortably incorporated into the daily routines of the Centre (which included being invited to eat lunch with them).

I dropped in daily for a coffee and joined many of the performances and open events such as the women’s breakfast. They were always happy to see somebody, me, enter the Centre, because there were sometimes only a few participants (visitors) or zero interest in advertised gatherings. (We sometimes chatted about the reasons why certain performances would not fly.) I soon began to contribute to the programme mainly by teaching one English class and giving several talks. For me, participating and working in a women’s project was a new experience and one that allowed me to get to know the routines and daily problems of women including the visitors to the Centre.

The contact with the employees of the Centre and the Initiative members developed in rather separate spheres. While I joined the employees’ activities during their working hours in the Centre, I would meet the Initiative members at one of their meetings outside or inside the Centre. On such occasions I introduced myself and my project, talked about the women’s movement and twice gave publicly advertised talks at the Centre (one on Ethnology and the other on East German women’s research). I also went out with the Initiative when they attended concerts or theatre performances such as Virginia Woolfe’s “A Room of One’s Own”. (I had offered to present an introduction to Virginia Woolfe’s work prior to a performance of “A Room of One’s Own” in a local theatre which was advertised in the Centre’s programmes.) Linda and two employees, Martha and Karina, occasionally came to these events but otherwise the Initiative and the employees moved in rather separate spheres. The active
*Initiative* women were employed full-time and therefore took care of the requirements for the women's projects in their spare time. They rarely visited the Centre during the day and expected it to run on its own. Given how I was entrenched in some of the dynamics, I will next focus on the employees and the kind of routines I saw developing in the Centre.

When I recall my first contact with the new employees one encounter in particular comes to mind. As I read through my field notes I was surprised how self-confidently these women began to act and organize in an environment that in principle was new to them. While I realized at the time that some of their practices and actions indicated there were issues they took for granted, I was uncertain of which these were. Some of them were related to their previous common experience of having full-time employment but this was not sufficient to explain the kind of interaction, internal organization of work and programmes which developed. Particularly, how could one explain that most of the employees worked in an *Initiative* project without ever inquiring further about the *Initiative* or the larger women's (project) movement's purpose and aims? Although they worked at the Centre, it was as if the employees were untouched by the *Initiative*’s agenda and as if the *Initiative* was a very distant employer that existed in a different sphere. While the employees perceived the projects as fulfilling a certain role, namely, to provide employment for individual women and social service for the wider community (and took this “in its kernel [as] taken for granted”) 5, I expected or took for granted that they would cater to the community and be strongly affiliated with the women’s movement. A closer look at the daily routines and interactions proved otherwise.

What follows then, is a description of how certain interactions unfolded which provide a sense of how the employees perceived what work at the Centre headed by the *Initiative*

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5 Certainly there were issues I took for granted when contacting a women’s centre which were derived from my experiences with women’s projects in East and West Berlin. Though the main difference was perhaps as Funk (1993b:320) notes in the different “lifeworlds” of Eastern and Western women - “that stock taken for granted of unreflected beliefs and world views” (Funk in reference to Habermas 1993b:320). Attempting to understand the complexity of issues that were taken for granted occupied my post field work analysis. To speak with Schütz: “If an actual experience in a similar lifeworldly situation can without contradiction be classified into a type formed out of previous experiences (and thus it fits into a relevant reference schema) then it, for its part, confirms the validity of the stock of experience. What is merely given as questionable in the novelty of each current experience is, in the routine flow of experience in the natural attitude, routinely made into something taken for granted...... For the most part, the current experience appears to me as something that is in its kernel taken for granted, although it is naturally in principle “new”” (Schütz 1973:10).
would mean; and how they attempted to organize themselves and reorganize the Centre into what they perceived its purpose to be. This time the actual location of the Centre did not change but the *Initiative* asked the employees to advertise and make known to the public the institutional changes. During the spring and summer of 1994 the large window of the Centre was used to advertise the wool-project and the *Initiative*. The following encounter describes the employees' understanding of the transfer to the *Initiative*.

As I continued my daily visits to the Centre, I met Beate and Marianne who familiarized themselves with the facilities by cleaning up and assessing what was left in drawers and boxes from previous years. Here, they had found materials that had been collected in the past for textile and handicraft courses of the *DFD*. They also discovered piles of dated handicraft magazines and the one and only GDR women's magazine *Für Dich* (For You). They threw out those relics of the *DFD* time and were amused that I displayed great interest in the *Für Dich* magazines and took some of them home to stock up my literature on the GDR. They also commented jokingly on the beauty of the blue crystal knickknack gifts as they put them away. Through their jokes I learned that these were typical gifts from the USSR acquired through contacts with Soviet women who visited the Centre (validated by interviews with former GDR women later). I pictured them decorating the shelves since the 1970s when the Centre participated in those exchanges which the *DFD* organized in cooperation with the German-Soviet-Friendship Federation (*Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft*). In short, the past of the Centre was still encompassing even after the *Initiative* took over.

As most of the *DFD* paraphernalia was moved out, the feminist library of the Women for Women Initiative moved in. The *Initiative* had decided to set up their library at the Women's Centre in order to make it accessible to an interested public or women's readership. They voiced their wish (to Linda) that the books be catalogued and the employees, in particular Beate and Marianne, immediately carried out this task. Again as with the takeover of the Centre by the *Amt*, certain designs and interior set up of the Centre were

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6 Beate would also in the future provide me with literature (including children's literature) that was popular in the GDR and we had many conversations about this and contemporary literature. She also pointed out that literature was valued differently in the GDR and reading was quite a popular leisure time activity.

7 The stock of books included Western feminist (mainly European) literature, recent publications in the area of East German women's research and a feminist West German magazine (*Emma*).
changed. As the employees cleaned up and remodeled the Centre it seems that they intended to adjust it to the “institution or group” now in charge: the Initiative.\(^8\) They resumed organizing the existing courses at the Centre. On the surface the daily routines appeared to continue as the new employees focused on providing information (about the Centre’s services) and on directing those seeking support to other institutions. The needs of the female clientele, however, had changed since the frenzy of unification and the Centre was no longer an emergency drop in even though occasionally women would seek information about the Shelter. Commonly, the employees would answer the phone (Telefondienst), offer tea and coffee to visiting guests (individuals and groups), chat and entertain them.

Some of the individual visitors (Besucher) regularly dropped in for a coffee while others were just tourists passing by. Most of the women, however, came for courses and events. The employees were responsible for ensuring that the classes ran smoothly. They collected fees for these diverse courses, set up the room for classes and groups of visiting women and prepared food and beverages for them, and cleaned dishes afterwards. Some of the female clientele came in groups such as those women in a retraining programme at the Bildungszentrum NordOst. One purpose of their visit was to familiarize women with the Centre and to encourage them to eventually use these facilities on their own. Here, a pattern of the past (i.e. group visits) was used by the organizer of the retraining programme to engage these women in social activities and to introduce them to contemporary purposes of the Centre. (A woman whom I met at the shelter and who was also a member of one of these groups mentioned that she perceived the Centre to be a possible place to socialize even on her own after those visits.)

Course participants who came to register individually were interested in learning new skills. These included the weekly language courses, silk painting courses, textile courses etc. Other women came to the Centre to meet women in similar situations or with similar interests.

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\(^8\) Thus, the change of facades and the clean up symbolized the changing institution. As with name changes (see chapter 4), changes in the physical environment such as the replacement of books, working equipment etc. in public places (libraries) and work places as well as in people’s homes (such as furniture, bathrooms, cars) signified the transition of the socio-economic and political system; a process which was accompanied by the selection of useful and not useful items from the past for the future. It would appear that ideological change is linked to changes in the physical environment and vice versa.
For example, members of the mother and child group gathered weekly with their young children. Some of them were from the West whose partners were employed in Stralsund. During their meetings they exchanged information about services, political and cultural events, children’s issues and were generally supportive of one another. Another group met for Political Round Table discussions to prepare for their involvement in committees of the city government. Some of these women formed groups whose members kept in contact and continued to use the Centre as a meeting place for their activities; other groups fell apart after the classes ended or individuals continued to meet in private.

The varied use of the Centre by different groups seemed to confirm its self-description. In addition to established courses, employees organized one-time events such as a political discussion with members of different parties previous to the local, regional and federal elections (Martha), the “birthday of the month” for a group of elderly women and men (Marianne), an exhibition of products from the crafts shop of the factory for disabled people (Behindertenwerkstatt) (Beate), etc. Karina was the only one who taught courses (silk painting etc.). Though these activities might have been of some value in making contact with other social service agencies and advertising the Centre, they did not promote the formation of new groups nor were they particularly organized in the interest of women.

A series of ‘product promotions’ events was particularly striking. These ‘product promotions’ ranged from cosmetics promotions such as Avon and Julian Gill to food product promotions such as Dr. Oetker. In the past, ‘product promotions’ used to introduce new consumer products and technology but now the promotion of these products became a commercial event. For this reason some women opposed hosting them while others saw them having a social function as a means to attract women and allow them to experience gatherings as in the old GDR times.

During the previous three years, programmes and activities at the Centre had been contested issues among women working at the Amt and the Centre, I was told. However,

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9 As I studied the history of the Centre I realized such events were remodeled after product tastings (Verkostungen) of the past which intended to introduce new consumer goods. Whereas in the past they were carried out by representatives of the local producing factories, in the present they were carried out by sales representatives of the companies.
during my stay at the Centre I did not observe such disagreement. What began to surface instead was a critique of the way activities were carried out and routines were set up. The employees did not voice this criticism; some of this criticism was directed at how they interacted with women who used and visited the Centre.

Linda saw additional problems. In her view the Centre had lost its direction and needed a new profile. For her this was confirmed by a visit in early June of all the employees and myself to a project for the unemployed, a so-called centre for the unemployed (Arbeitslosenzentrum). It showed (to those involved) that the Centre offered overlapping assistance with other ABM-projects in the city. Linda's view of a lost and missing direction was perhaps influenced by women from the Amt who thought that the leader needed more support and guidance from the Initiative. Thus, this perspective confirms that another transition period was taking place within the Centre.

Although most of these critical comments did not point towards particular solutions but mostly aired discontent, one women, Christine, voiced specific ideas about how the "service" for users of the Centre needed to be improved. Christine had a continuous relationship with the Centre (after her employment in 1991-92) through another position. She headed some of the re-training programmes (also ABMs) for women at the Bildungswerkstatt Nord Ost and occasionally visited the Centre with these groups or organized their visit to certain performances at the Centre. I first met her through the professional relationship she maintained with the Centre. As Christine commented on her impression of how the Centre changed, she began to describe how several groups of women had experienced the Centre lately. In fact, she voiced her critique by "speaking for them". She rephrased the complaints that "her women" had articulated and interpreted their stories of visiting the Centre as follows:

My women [i.e. the women Christine trained] had a negative experience.. you have to be tolerant... in the last little while they had that kind of experience that they said, we won't go there anymore, it is not nice any longer, not cosy (gemütlich)...
Christine mentions in particular one ‘food product promotion’ event hosted by the bakery guild (Bäckerinnung) attempting to further local trade. As in the past, these performances were announced as Verkostungen (product tasting). Christine directs her critique towards the way it was performed:

there was this story with the Bäckerinnung [bakery guild] who had offered a Verkostung [bread tasting] ... what use is it for the Frauentreff when men give a bread tasting there... it was promoted differently ... and the women came at eight o’clock and were sent away, they were not allowed to take a seat and then they stood there lost in space and time... there were two groups from the Übungswerkstatt who did not like it there lately.

Christine does not object to these kind of events in a women’s Centre but problematizes the fact that men hosted a “bread tasting” in the Women’s Centre. She criticizes the performances for not being designed and set up in the interests of women. In her following statement it becomes even more apparent that she criticizes the “service” that had made women feel uncomfortable:

... in such a place you must find warmth and friendliness .. you cannot scare people away... the table must always be set. Women need to sense that they are welcome (das sie gewollt sind) ... you need to be tolerant.

She suggests one should see the Centre as a place where the notion of tolerance, as espoused in liberal society, may unfold. Her words resemble the Initiative’s ideas which will become clearer in a moment when we look at their Statement of Purpose. There it is outlined how the women’s Centre should provide a space for “openness, difference, friendship” and a “meeting place for diverse women”. Christine’s criticism addressed several issues: the notion of tolerance (of a liberal society), the priority of women’s issues, the importance of a space for women and the idea of “the table must always be set” for sharing and serving the female “clientele” or customers of the Centre.

As a former employee of the Centre, Christine was involved in building the Centre in a newly rising public space. She embraced a value of liberal society, tolerance, but related it to the idea of providing good service in the Centre. Indeed her vision of work at the Centre has
come to be defined as one of “service”. It is no longer the idea of promoting democratic and social changes but the idea of service for those women hit hardest by the transformation process that appears to be important for maintaining a women’s network. Christine thus views the Centre to be first and foremost one of the social service institutions for women in the city—a stepping stone for their social integration. Most likely many visitors to the Centre would agree with her views. A period of opening up when the Centre had been a place where change was first discussed was followed by a period in which women set up new western structures expanding democracy as echoes still through Christine’s words. At the time the Centre moved into providing more social services.

What we see happening at this particular moment is how different perceptions of the Centre, namely, as a place for engagement with the women’s cause (Initiative and some groups), a place of employment (employees) and a service for helping women to socially integrate (visitors), become transposed onto the Centre. The difficulties that result from women having these different expectations speak to a number of issues. Generally, there are difficulties of establishing and transferring a Western social infrastructure to Eastern Germany and offering social possibilities of social integration (Bütow 1995). The Centre has a function in providing opportunities for women to adjust to institutional changes and to address personal changes but this is limited due to the instability created not only by the institutional and personal changes but also by the diverging ideas very different women bring to the Centre but do not openly discuss. In fulfilling this role of a social service institution, however, most users’ interest is not in pursuing collective politics but in some sort of gathering, maintaining or building social contacts and learning new skills. This is not quite what the Initiative envisioned for the Centre. The Initiative’s idea that these employees should organize the Centre as an independent project developed rather differently in practice. The two groups of women involved in running the Centre related to the women’s projects differently, namely through their employment and through their membership in the Initiative. Why the employees and the Initiative saw the running of the Centre differently can also be found in their respective backgrounds. It is the personal work histories of the employees that I turn to, followed by the Initiative perspective.
Through brief personal work histories the experiences with employment and a changing institutional setting give us an idea how these women’s sense of themselves and their place in society shifted. They all narrated in great detail the story of their professional education, changes in career or special events at their work place in the GDR. They also talked about their experience of unemployment and the change of their professional careers after the Wende and unification. The biographies include Linda (thirty-three, former agricultural cooperative member), Karina (forty-eight, former leader of textile circles and collectives), Marianne (forty-nine, former secretary/administrator), Beate (thirty-two, former social worker) and Martha (fifty-five, former cadre educator). Each woman dealt with the discontinuities in her life differently depending on her past professional position in GDR society and in unified Germany, e.g., her experience of social and political institutions as well as social networks undergoing transformation. As they told me the story of their lives, they talked about how they experienced the Wende and the post unification era and how these historical events affected their professional as well as their personal lives. The interviews were collected several months after they became employed at the Centre. As a result their stories have become modified to a certain extent by their interaction in the Women’s Centre.

Linda

The position of the leader at the women’s Centre is Linda’s first permanent employment after the Wende. Linda, a single mother of two daughters in her early thirties (separated), was originally trained as an agricultural technician, Zootechniker, which required a study in the area of agriculture and animal production (Tierproduktion). She had worked at an agricultural co-operative (LPG) near Stralsund where she had also trained international volunteers (e.g. from socialist countries in Africa). In the autumn of 1989 Linda had left the agricultural co-operative because she was fed up with the situation at work. She recalls that “the collective was nice but the boss was disgusting” and “one was not allowed to have one’s own opinion”. Her active involvement in changing things at work had failed. The collapse of the economic and political system of the GDR she experienced almost vicariously as a physical breakdown forcing her to escape from her employment in order to recuperate and regenerate by taking up a job for which she was overqualified. In May 1990, she began to work as a seasonal employee at the Konsum, a state run food chain store in the village where she lived. Here she experienced the end of the HO company and the

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10 In the summer of 1994, I recorded extensive life histories with this group of women based on the close relationship that developed during our almost daily encounters. The interviews were carried out in the Centre sometimes in the company of the other co-worker. They were conducted during the employees’ working hours.
mass termination of contracts for the employees. However, as a seasonal employee she was not eligible for compensation payments (\textit{Abfindung}) from the \textit{Konsum} nor from any previous employment. After seven months of unemployment Linda participated in a re-training programme in Demin, a small town in the area, before she began as a volunteer in the Women's Shelter and the Women's Centre in Stralsund where she eventually was offered the position of a leader. At the inaugural celebration (see chapter 3) she became a member of the \textit{Initiative}. During the interview recorded in the summer of 1994 Linda recalls that in the past, during her years at school, she had always been asked to take on leading positions (which she did not refuse), e.g. as a leader of a brigade or for the Pioneer Youth Organization (\textit{Pionierratsvorsitzende}) of her class. Linda does not regret her change of professions and evaluates it in the following manner: “I prefer my current work”.

In the short period of time that Linda came to know the Centre while she worked as a volunteer, Birgit instructed her and passed on knowledge of how to run the Centre. This was not enough training, as Linda points out in hindsight. Under the existing conditions of yet another transition, a time of instability and dissolution, it was impossible to acquire or catch up with those experiences others had with this women's network in the post-\textit{Wende} history. Linda had been interested in collective action at the time of the \textit{Wende} but did not find others interested or motivated in challenging the old structures. She used the opening up to change her employment, only to discover later that this would be financially to her disadvantage as these structures dissolved. The new structures she got to know through re-training and employment schemes. She is interested in learning about the new women's infrastructure she encounters.

\textbf{Karina}

Karina was first employed on the government sponsored work programme from October 1991 to October 1993. Part of her post unification experiences had been with the Centre and the \textit{Initiative} in setting up the Centre and developing a new concept for it. She had extended the \textit{ABM} for the maximum two years, after which she was unemployed again. Then after five months of unemployment she was rehired at the Centre in April of 1994. Karina was originally trained as a designer. An accident made it difficult to practice in her profession. After two years as a housewife she began to seek further education in diverse handicraft and art circles and came to lead textile circles (\textit{Textilzirkel}) and folklore art collectives (\textit{Volkskunstkollektive}) herself. These were financed by the companies until the monetary union in the summer of 1990 terminated them. (For more biographical details see next chapter 7, p. 268) Through free-lance activity over a period of fifteen years she had made administrative and other contacts which remained useful. Her teaching skills were an asset for the Centre and viewed by her as such. Karina had applied and competed for this government
sponsored employment with other younger women. She speculated that she might have gotten the first ABM in October of 1991 because she and the senator discovered that their daughters went to the same summer camp. During her employment at the Centre in 1991-1993 she explored the new opportunities in terms of the kind of creative courses one could offer as well as the new social and political groups that had formed during that time and became affiliated with the Initiative.

For Karina the institutional transformations changed the way she was being remunerated for her work, though she continues to use the same skills. It is through work that Karina has made a choice to become affiliated with the grass roots group for women. Karina brought to the Centre a knowledge of the different individual women and women’s groups involved with the Centre and the history of its transformation. In addition she had the experience of being part of a work group at the Centre in the past. She was viewed as the ideal candidate by the Initiative women to become employed on ABM.

Marianne

Marianne was forty-nine years old when she became employed at the Centre in April 1994. At the age of nineteen she married a sailor and had two children. She stayed home because she did not want to send her children to daycare. After a few years she resumed work as a secretary in the personnel office at an energy plant. “That was an upward movement, because I earned 800 marks, for a woman”. She had become a party member in 1965 and was allowed therefore to assume this position which gave her access to other employees’ personal files (Kaderakte). This more prestigious and better paid job, however, had a price. Marianne characterizes her work at the personnel office as follows: “Work also was fun, but you were under a lot of pressure”. Marianne recalls her first contacts with members of the “Security Service” (Stasi) who occasionally came in to check on workers’ personal files. When she worked as a Vice Director for the registry office (Standesamt) she was expected to pass on information about colleagues to the secret service (Stasi). “That was too much for me” and as a consequence Marianne looked for different employment in the company. The Wende came as a shock to Marianne. She experienced physical ailments when making the decision to give up her Party membership. Marianne (in 1994) recalled her surprise about the rapid and radical transformation: “That there would be a united fatherland that quick, I did not expect”. Four years after unification, Marianne assesses the changes: “My boy is thirty, he does not find work....this we did not experience before....sure I did not have a car before but the car is the only achievement (Erungenschaft) that the Wende has brought for me”. And while Marianne continues to talk about rising prices she adds: "And I also got my cat after the Wende...otherwise it did not bring me another blessing (Segnung)". Marianne concludes that she benefited materially from the Wende. The changes have brought her material goods but they do not outweigh the social security she, her family and society in general have lost since the demise of socialism and the introduction of the market economy. “I lost my work
and I told myself that it is only money that counts because of the circumstances—rent increased eight times." Around unification Marianne was briefly unemployed, employed by a corrupt western businessman and worked three years for the Ministry of Social Services assisting people in applying for welfare, rent money and other social assistance. After another brief time of unemployment she was able to again secure a position in a government sponsored work programme this time at the Women’s Centre. When asked what kind of courses she would attend at the Women’s Centre Marianne replied that she was interested in “small and big politics” but she could not participate because "it always reminds me of the times I had to". She reflected on the personal reasons why she would hesitate to become further involved in the women’s projects: "I decided (fest vorgenommen) not to be bound by anything anymore, to be caught again (einfangen lassen)....the feeling is still there that something has you in its grip (dass dich was festhält)". Marianne did not want to get politically involved although she voiced awareness about existing inequalities in the employment market. She also expressed a strong awareness of gender differences and described the strategies which had guided her life in the GDR as a worker and mother who made ends meet in an economy of scarce resources. She concludes that further political engagement (e.g. involvement in the project) was perhaps a (societal) interest but not desirable for her. 

Beate

Beate was in her early thirties (born 1962). After school she did an apprenticeship at an agricultural cooperative ZGE Produktion Bandelin. This apprenticeship was required to pursue her wish to become an educator or social worker (Erzieher). Afterwards was accepted into one of the two schools in the GDR that offered this particular kind of pedagogical social work (Institut für Heimerzieher- Ausbilder in Hohenprießnitz). As part of her studies she also received some basic military training (ZV-Ausbildung) which Beate said was a “nightmare”. During school she got married to her husband who was about to become a military pilot for the National Peoples Army (Nationale Volksarmee- NVA). They have two sons around the age of ten. With the Wende the enclosed and slightly privileged world of NVA members and their families fell apart. Beate described how she and her nuclear family did not cross the German-German border for a long time after its opening because “they did not want to go to the enemy”. In 1990 Beate was given her notice at the home for disabled people. “Today I would fight against the dismissal, back then I was headless”, Beate recalls. Her GDR degree was devalued and thus she had to study for an equivalent degree at a college in Neubrandenburg (Mecklenburg-Pomerania). She applied for a job at a factory for disabled people (Behindertenwerkstatt). It was here that Beate saw her calling. But the decision to hire her and to set up a contract with the Behindertenwerkstatt was only made after she had already accepted her ABM employment at the Women’s Centre. During the interview with Beate, she would not explicitly comment on her work in the project but talked about it as part of her stories around growing up with her siblings and her mother. She depicted her mother’s

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11 As Einhorn (1993:171) notes with respect to political activism: "The retreat into the private sphere is justified by many as a reaction to over-politization of daily life in the past, intensified by insecurity and material pressures in the present".
professional career and their family life (after the divorce of her mother from her father) as a case in point of woman’s economic independence and the possibility to raise children as a single mother in the GDR. This viewpoint suggests once again how women’s issues and emancipation were based on their economic independence. She upheld a notion of equality, as it had been propagated in the GDR when she revealed her sentiments about women’s position in the new Germany: “Women aren’t worth any less today” (Frauen sind doch heute nicht weniger wert).

Beate never joined the Party and in her adult life was not an active member of any mass organization. She was very much entrenched in a daily life structured by state-directed parameters albeit filtered through her husband. Although Beate’s biography is very different from Martha’s both their lives in the GDR had been shaped through their husband’s employment in the military and a certain privileged status within GDR society that came with a family member’s position in the service of the state.

Martha

Martha was fifty-five years old and came from a family of agriculturists. She received a university degree in agriculture and afterwards worked as an assistant at an agricultural co-operative, LPG Velgast, near Stralsund. She had two children and her husband was an officer in the people’s army (NVA). In 1975 she became employed for the Kreisleitung for the women’s commission of the FDGB first in Velgast and later in Wolgast. Between 1985 and 1987 she changed her place of employment again and worked for the Party cadre Kaderaus-und Weiterbildung. Martha had described the Wende as a shock, an event for which she was totally unprepared. After the Wende she was involved in the dissolution of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) structures and at first continued to be employed. Because of restructuring in the agricultural sector Martha lost her employment. In between she was on short term work (Kurzarbeiter Null). With the support of the OTV-union she went through several court processes, at first in an attempt to continue work and then to receive a proper termination of contract. She ended up receiving compensation payments but did not get a “workplace”: “I’d rather had had a work place”. From the summer of 1993 on she was unemployed until she was employed at the government sponsored work programme in the Women’s Centre in April of 1994. She had been a DFD member in the past and has kept her membership with the transformed DFK. Martha talked about her first meeting with Initiative members and her desire and ability to work in the Centre based on her notion of “women’s work” (for more details see chapter 7). Out of her employment experience with women’s organizations in the GDR Martha stated: “I knew what women’s work was”.

The work histories once again confirm the immense importance placed on the value of employment in their lives. What emerges also from these work histories is how they
experienced the *Wende*. For example, as we see from Linda’s biography, she had experienced the transition time first, despite her voluntary change of profession, as something out of her control; second, as unemployment and retraining; and after this odyssey, third, as finding a reorientation as volunteer at the *Amt*. Thus, she had come in contact with the women’s infrastructure through her retraining programmes and search for employment. As we can see further from Linda’s biography, she had different experiences of the transition period than the previous employees who had first actively participated in the local democratization processes and then the restructuring processes, i.e. the institutional transfer from the West to the East and how it was implemented.

The experience of unification for these women is interpreted through the possibility of having or not having work. Unlike these new employees, those employees whom we met in the previous chapter and other *Initiative* women were actively involved with the movement and felt that they came to direct their own lives with this opening. They collectively experienced the “opportunity of change” to engage for the women’s cause. For the new employees, the *Wende* did not present such an opportunity for their individual career nor did they experience a moment of heightened collective praxis. Rather, for them it had created a “necessity of change”. As we saw from their narratives, they interpreted their lives through their career, family networks, raising children, and their husbands’ professions. These issues continue to be their concern after the changes. The *Wende* was constructed as a pivotal historical point in their biographies. With the *Wende* this network of social relations and social engagement fell apart. In the case of the family, relations were transformed. The way they formulate their views of the past and their roles in the present are directly connected to how they experienced the short period of the opening. In fact, some of these women experienced the *Wende* as a “shock” and as processes that were dismantling their lives “blow by blow” (Schimkat 1995). The *Wende* meant the experience of a change or abrupt end of all their professional careers, the breakdown of networks (Beate), giving up Party membership (Marianne), or dissolving the Party organization (Martha). It had set into motion a process which they experienced as being beyond their control. They did not join initiatives or became involved in other new forms of collective politics during the *Wende* (except for Marianne who mentions that she once joined an initiative to form a chain of light—a form of political protest).
Unification was experienced as a restructuring that created professional and social insecurity. A sense of frustration and confusion was experienced over the loss of employment and an increasing awareness of their role in the unified Germany. After unification, however, they were to different degrees involved in the restructuring process and the establishment of new social services through their post *Wende* employments.

The next section presents some of the different interactions that developed in this post-unification phase as a result of the above mentioned diverse experiences with the previous opening of the *Wende* and the subsequent social changes. The moment of the brief opening of 'revolutionary' renewal and its closure had touched their lives differently.

Unlike the new employees, the previous employees and the *Initiative* members discussed their experiences of the changes in women’s groups. For example, they used some of the ideas that were formulated in these discussions to figure out ways of institutionalizing projects for women in the unified Germany. Not having experienced these new forms of discussions, the employees came to interpret the institutionalized self-expression of the *Initiative* group in the project somewhat differently than the *Initiative* would have desired for their project. As we will see more clearly in the next section, the *Initiative* had a different vision of the Centre.

**Part II**

**The Decline of the "Opportunities for Change"**

In this section we look again at a group of women who would characterize the *Wende* as a period in which they experienced heightened collective practice through effectively influencing the local restructuring process. After unification they set up an infrastructure for women, thus actively participating in the institutional transfer from West to East. The idea of the “opportunities for change” was closely linked to the *Initiative* members’ experiences during the transformation process. We can see how the *Initiative*, as a non-profit organization, perceived and coped with some of the problems brought about by the constraints of running women’s projects. Despite a high degree of institutionalization and funds the *Initiative* maintains alternative approaches to the running of projects such as the Centre.¹² Their

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¹² Roth (1994b) describes this for the alternative movement in Western Germany.
concrete political demands, however, have been transformed to alternative concepts of self-assertion and actualization which they wished to realize in the Centre.

The Initiative envisioned creating a space for "opportunities of change" (Statement of Purpose) in the Centre where these alternatives could be put into practice. However, these ideas at times seemed to be contradicted by some actual practices in the Centre, as difficulties (see Part I) began to surface. Some users were discontented, other women felt that the Centre had lost a clear direction. Here we see a crisis situation that forced the Initiative to intervene and confront the existing contradictions and difficulties. To understand in what way the Initiative's ideas about the Centre differed from the employees' we will investigate more clearly their Statement of Purpose from which the above slogan is derived. It is an example of how their ideas related to social change became institutionalized (written into this document) when the Initiative applied to take over the Centre.

The Initiative's Vision of the "Opportunities for Change"

It is here that those ideas inspired by the movement's aim to initiate social change became transposed by the Initiative into a project which at the same time served as a social service agency for integrating people into the society of unified Germany. The slogan "opportunities for change" is taken from the Initiative's Statement of Purpose and exemplifies the group's transformative impetus. If we recall the Initiative's inaugural meeting at the Centre, they had emphasized their status as one of being independent or autonomous in order to distinguish themselves from the previous supporting institutions (DFD,Amt). These ideas became transposed onto the Women's Centre. The Initiative viewed the Women's Centre as self-sufficient and independent (as Jutta, as a representative of the Initiative, pointed out in a meeting, Beiratssitzung 23.6.1994). This was, however, not expressed in writing because the Initiative officially applied in their role as a non-profit organization.
also in their desire to continuously strive towards egalitarian and self-determined interaction. Articulating these ideas in an official document is in itself an emancipatory action.

The Statement of Purpose indicates how the Initiative views the Centre as a space to provide a place for women’s gatherings and for collectively exploring opportunities to initiate change. This Statement ascribes to the Centre the status of a ‘true’ Initiative project or enterprise linked with the ideas of those so-called (civil) initiatives which surfaced with the Wende. The necessity to create democratic spaces and to involve people in a democratization process has remained a project of the Initiative even after the brief opening closed.

When the East German women’s movement had emerged, its aims were formulated in opposition to its members’ past experiences with the political system of the GDR. For example, the only legitimate form of political activity was getting together in mass organizations such as the DFD and public spaces were filled by the diverse state-controlled organizations (Schenk 1993). With the Wende, the women’s movement came to criticize and challenge the official institutions of the GDR. They then had to adjust to a different bureaucratic system, that of the FRG. A vivid imagination and analysis of what it would mean for women to be incorporated into an enlarged FRG led them initially to challenge the way political decisions were made. But their networks of solidarity broke down in the radical and rapid process of restructuring (see comments of women activists in chapter 2, Part II) in which some of them continuously engaged in the building of new administrative structures. Political demands represented only one aspect of their claims for social changes that aimed at a profound transformation of society. What remained then were alternative aspirations such as grass roots groups like the Initiative who set up women’s projects.

When the Initiative took over the Centre, there were already ways in place to run the Centre as a social service institution in offering opportunities to socially integrate women. The Initiative used in their Statement of Purpose (late 1993) some of ideas from the Ami’s Women’s Centre brochure (1993) which had already proven to be publicly acceptable and workable characterizations of the Centre, such as providing a “women’s space” where one could search for “opportunities for change”.

Meeting places for women (Frauentreffpunkte) are central spaces for which women's life problems have a place (Raum finden können) and therefore, one could search for opportunities of change (Brochure 1993 and Statement of Purpose 1993).

The Centre was one of the newly negotiated public spaces, a “meeting place for women” (Frauentreffpunkte), where women could search for collective responses to their daily concerns and interests. With the Wende, the women's movement actively pursued a redefinition of women’s interests as part of wider democratic changes. Thus, concretely, these “opportunities for change” related to the idea of filling public spaces and forming new groups and redefining women’s concerns. Subsequently, the Initiative depicts the Women’s Centre as a place where these ideas of a public opening for discussion and redefinition could be put into practice:

women find openness, commonality (Gemeinsamkeit) difference and diversity, friendship and solidarity (Initiative’s Statement of Purpose).

The Initiative also evokes concepts of self-actualization and views the Centre as a venue for the staff’s and visiting women’s personal or self-development and novel experiences:

They [visiting and working women] will find new challenges as well as new boundaries (Initiative’s Statement of Purpose).

What meaning could be assigned to this statement in 1993-94? Should “opportunities of change” now be understood on a personal development level? The Initiative views the function of the Centre as twofold. On the one hand, the Women’s Centre was supposed to provide the facilities for motivating other women to gain similar novel experiences and to seek further “opportunities for change”, and on the other hand, the Centre (several years after unification) was supposed to provide a space which allowed for coping with the harshness of the different social conditions following the breakdown of the old social networks and system of social security. Hence, their statement “women experience relaxation and can overcome their isolation” (Initiative’s Statement of Purpose). The latter indicated that this time it was not to overcome the political isolation of GDR society, but the social isolation due to unemployment in the FRG. That is, the purpose was to encourage unemployed women
seeking social contact outside of the home. Thus, one could interpret the *Initiative* Statement of Purpose as their attempt to combine the public service mission (*Gemeinnützigkeit*) of the *ABM* with their objective to provide a public space for alternative practices and for new groups to form.

It has been argued in a different context (e.g. for the West German alternative movement by von Dierke 1997:152) that accepting government funds for alternative projects is one way of expanding control over these projects; and that these projects perform services for the community perhaps more successfully than the public service agencies ever could. Unlike public service agencies, however, the *Initiative* was also interested in applying an alternative concept of labour and challenging the official institutions. Alternative in a double sense: one that could be seen as an opposition to the organization of labour in the "real socialist" times of the past as well as to the capitalist modes of the organization of labour.\(^\text{14}\) The *Initiative* was not making a profit in providing a service. These non-conformist ideas about labour are found in many projects of the alternative and women's movement in the East and the West (Bütow 1995:199; von Dierke 1997).

Yet to receive funds for the projects they had to fulfill the requirements of social service agencies. Accepting this framework did not mean giving up on attempting to create an environment for "consciousness raising" (Anne, *Initiative* member). Since financial support from the government was granted for serving the needs of the community and not for "consciousness raising", one might view one function of these funds as a way of controlling exactly this transformative projection.

That this kind of control through *ABM* funds is effective is shown by how women who used and were employed in the Centre began to perceive its function. Users expected the Centre to provide services for the unemployed. The employees expected work in the Centre to be some kind of social work. Although the *Initiative* recognized and supported these needs as well, their aims went beyond it. Here the employees'/users' ideas and the *Initiative*'s did

\(^{14}\) "Work does not mean alienated production or performances of services merely to turn a profit", as von Dierke (1997:137) formulated the values of alternative projects in the West.
not converge. This comes across clearly in how the Initiative describes employment in the Centre:

Women who self-organize here [at the Centre], decide about the style of work (Arbeitsweise) and the topics of discussion (Auseinandersetzung). Women attempt to base their work on a different idea of politics and a different idea of work. They experiment with new forms of educational work (Bildungsarbeit) with women. (Statement of Purpose of 1993 and Brochure 1993).

We have seen how the Initiative agreed to play a role in this enterprise as organizers of funds and at the same time play the role of initiators of social change. The Initiative defines work at the Centre as a mode of self-actualization to seek egalitarian and self-determined forms of organization and expected the employees to organize the project accordingly. But this led to a crisis which is illustrated by the leader’s (Linda’s) illness/distress- an incident I will describe in the following section.

The Advent of a Crisis

In 1994, the notion of “opportunities for change”, together with those concepts which directed the Frauenfreff between 1991-93 such as the concept of the Centre as a “women’s space” or an “alternative work environment”, lost priority for the new employees of the Centre. The daily practices of this Women’s Centre thus clearly confirmed the development of the depoliticization of the women’s projects at large into an emphasis on social work lacking a vision of change. For example, there was hardly any challenge to the existing inequalities in terms of how the programmes were designed. The “women in action” programme (see chapter 4, p. 161) in which issues of gender, power and existing inequalities would be addressed no longer existed. Through their employment in the Centre, the employees did not necessarily engage in the process of creating new meanings, questioning the equality that had existed in the GDR or the one that was being re-established.

From my perspective at the time, this development had a threatening component. I thought that I might be witnessing the final stage of the Centre’s existence and the advent of the crisis confirmed this impression. As its ongoing existence has proven and my later
analysis shows, it was not as endangered as I thought, but more than anything else it was a sign of a change in direction (see previous section) and an underlying tension between women with different ideas, values and purposes associated with the Centre. This was reflected in the existing internal problems of how work should be organized and responsibilities shared between the employees themselves and their leader. These internal difficulties had not remained unnoticed by visitors and other women but so far neither the Initiative nor anyone else had acted on it. It was only when the leader became ill that the Initiative became aware to what degree their concept of self-organization for the Centre differed from its reality. That is to say, the dynamics among women working in the Centre did not play out in a way that the Initiative had envisioned. While the Initiative’s Statement suggested one direction, the employees had taken another.

The advent of a crisis arose when the leader temporarily became ill and did not contact the Centre for several days. As the leader disappeared, the Centre was left symbolically speaking in an acephalous state thus forcing the Initiative to intervene in order to solve a developing crisis and to guarantee the running of the Centre. The occurrence of a crisis, however, was really more of an individual breakdown as a result of difficulties among those women working at the Centre. This stress was caused by their internal organization, forms of communication and a division of labour between the leader and employees. They did not run the Centre in the manner that the Statement suggested.

At the beginning of July, during my daily visits to the Centre, the employees informed me that Linda was on sick leave. After a few days they began to wonder why she did not phone the Centre as she usually would. During this time women from the Amt had called the Centre and demanded the Centre’s budget prior to the official deadline because they were going on vacation (the Centre still received a certain amount of funding from the city). The employees waited for Linda to call and tried to reach her. She could not be reached by phone because her household like many others in Eastern Germany did not have a phone yet. She could also not easily be visited because she resided in a village outside of Stralsund. The deadline for the budget was approaching and the employees discovered that Linda had taken the forms home. They did not have the information to fill in the forms, prepare the budget and
meet the deadline. Not meeting the deadline for this budget could have caused potential problems for running the Centre in the future. In this situation they contacted Gabriele, the spokesperson of the Initiative. The employees called on the existing structure between the Centre and the Initiative in order to solve the problem at hand. So far the Initiative had stayed in the background. As the weekend approached and Linda had not called in, Gabriele and I decided to drive to Linda’s residence in the countryside.

When Linda opened the door she displayed relief: “I am glad you came by”. Linda began to tell Gabriele and me her story. It soon became clear that she was not only sick but also felt exhausted from her work at the Centre to the extent of verging on a physical breakdown. Linda had talked about some of these work related issues before with me but she had never voiced them in front of a woman from the Initiative. Here, Linda talked about the fact that she as a leader was constantly asked to make small daily decisions which made her feel quite overwhelmed and consequently she did not feel that she “could leave the employees alone in the Centre”. The employees’ refusal to work independently was perceived by Linda as adding pressure because she felt responsible for all decisions.

I supported her interpretation of the situation by telling a story of one event I observed in the Centre. In this situation employees were hesitant to make a decision concerning the posting of a notice. A woman came into the Centre (when Linda was out) and asked the two employees if she could put up a notice. They replied: “we have to ask the boss”. I had wondered then about this reaction and noticed later that Linda asked them to make this decision themselves. Linda’s complaints confirmed that she expected the employees to make decisions. Calling Linda “the boss” indicated that they perceived her as being responsible, expected her to make decisions and to pass on instructions. This created a vicious circle: they expected her to give instructions and she expected them to make decisions on their own. The Centre’s set-up with one woman permanently employed, and in a leading position, had backfired. It prevented ‘self-organization’ by those employed at the Centre. The leader, Linda, was daily confronted with the repercussions of this set-up. Subsequently, Linda felt overloaded with this responsibility in combination with the pressure to continue and improve the running of the Women’s Centre. As she perceived it, an organizational structure had not
been implemented which would allow the employees to work independently and allow her to focus on administrative issues. As will become clear in the discussion to follow, Linda’s distress hinted at a variety of problems.

As a short-term relief for Linda, Gabriele offered to do the administrative work for the budget plan. As the executive leader of the non-profit organization, Gabriele also suggested that this issue be dealt with at the Initiative’s next board meeting which was scheduled for the following week. She suggested that further strategies should be discussed and some of the more general problems with running the Centre be addressed. Indeed it occurred a week later after Linda returned back to work.

The Executive Committee Meeting (Vorstandssitzung) of the Initiative: “You have to motivate so that others join in”

We can read this meeting as the first attempt by the Initiative to evaluate their new project, the Women’s Centre. These women’s reflections are based on their experiences with the movement and the processes of institutionalization. In this section we learn about some Initiative members’ perspective on their role as a non-profit organization and the way they viewed the process of institutionalization, both of their own grass roots group and of other projects. Their interpretation of the situation in contrast to the employees’ provides us with insights into the decline of some ideas associated with the women’s movement and how they evaluate the prospect of politically engaging and in pursuing collective politics in the present. It shows us the direction the Initiative women’s agency takes and their experiences and interpretations of the process of transformation and democratization.

In July, some Initiative members gathered for a meeting of the executive committee (Vorstandssitzung) at the Women’s Centre. This meeting unfolded four months after the Inaugural Celebration which the Initiative had hosted at the Centre as they took it over (see chapter 3, Part II), and three months after the new employees were hired on government sponsored work programmes (ABMs). We have already met the three participants (members) of the executive committee at the Inaugural Celebration of the Initiative. They are Gabriele,
the chairwomen [president], Jutta, the treasurer, and Anne, the vice president. Both Linda and I attended to elaborate on the difficulties that proceeded. In this discussion members reveal their view of the Centre, its function, its constituents, and its goals. They also discuss their understanding of women's issues and politics. As they explore strategies and solutions, these women articulate their diverse but overlapping ideas. It gives us a sense of how these women perceive the limits and possibilities of collective action and politics.

The beginning discussion among the Initiative members elaborates and reflects on their own groups' institutionalization process within the structures of West German state agencies. It is in a nutshell the history of women's groups that are affiliated with the East German women's movement. These groups originally opposed the GDR state but became institutionalized in unified Germany, e.g., the Initiative associations (non-profit organizations) applied for government funds in order to set up women's projects. What this means for the group members in terms of how the Initiative has changed since it originated (together with many other initiatives in a second wave of protest in early 1990) is addressed in a brief discussion at the beginning of the meeting. Here, the three members of the Initiative reflect on the structure of their group and how responsibilities, work and membership had been transformed since they changed their status from a self-help group for women to a state recognized association.

This issue arose because the executive committee had lost members willing to politically engage and conduct their work with the non-profit organization under unification. At the time, they were searching for more active women to engage in two particular projects: a government committee on women and family (Ausschuss) and in their own executive committee (Vorstand). Anne announces that she will not be able to continue as a vice president of their association due to her other political responsibilities as president of the city assembly.15 During the Wende Anne had been engaged in the New Forum (Neues Forum) and now was an active candidate of the Green Party. I listen to their conversation about matters regarding the organization of the executive committee and who of the Initiative members and affiliates could be recruited to perform these tasks. Gabriele comments "we are falling short

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15 This loss of active members for the grass roots has also been noted, e.g. for the group of Neues Forum in Rostock, where active members became engaged in the new administration and parties (Probst 1993).
of engaged people”. It is then that I ask the group “how was it in the past?”, “how was the Initiative organized in the past?”

Anne answers:

“In the beginning we did everything together.”

Jutta:

“But active, who was active?”

Anne:

“In the beginning we were six or seven women, you were not there yet.”

Jutta:

“In the very beginning.”

Anne:

“We did everything together and then with the formation of this odd association when you had to go into these funny structures, we had to set up the executive committee; and then things drifted apart a bit ... now everybody is doing something else and everybody is going off in a different direction (dann schimmen alle woanders hin).”

Anne reviews, specifically, how she experienced this institutionalization within the Western structure and how it has affected their group and their ability to pursue collective forms of action. As they used the existing structures and resources for setting up a new infrastructure for women, which simultaneously employed women on government sponsored work programmes, new challenges and hurdles arose. They were now in a (double) bind: In order to get funds they had to accept the standards of public service agencies. But these were out of their control depending on the release of regional and federal ABM funds and its distribution by the local administration such as the employment centres (for ABM). The mobilization of resources, however, could only be manipulated through applications. Political claims to secure resources for an expanding network of social service agencies for women were only voiced by women in the institutions for women (see chapter 2, Part II, p. 55f).

Gabriele’s statement allows for some insights into how these structural set-ups created the Initiative’s dependency on the employment centre and determined their role as employer. It also shows how as a result of this structure certain expectations were created regarding the kind of responsibilities the Initiative would have towards their ABM-projects. In this example, the wool-project, Gabriele states:
"We need somebody in the executive committee who can take care of financial problems and support Mrs. M. (Geschäftsführerin) [the managing director or secretary of the project] and push her. ... She does not do it because she thinks the Initiative is responsible. We had applied for her salary raise at the employment centre because she also carries out administrative work (keeps the books) and takes on leading tasks. The employment centre turned it down issuing a warning that we should be very careful and look up our ABM guidance (Aufgaben), otherwise they would cancel the whole programme; such things are not supported any longer. We are already glad when we passed it through so that she can do payroll and these things."

Jutta:

"And when next year her ABM ends, we could hire Martina again" (a former active member, currently not in the city).

Gabriele:

"Yes, for example."

This exchange shows several problems related to the use of ABM resources for their projects. The decrease of funding for the projects required ongoing adjustment to the administrative procedures and the standards of public service agencies and the dependency on an administration that is distributing these funds and leaves no control over these resources (e.g. increase or decrease of funds). Fulfilling the guidelines for ABM allows employment only for one to two years. Thus, the Initiative also has to solve those difficulties created by the temporary nature of the ABM which required a constant rotation of personnel. The expectations of the managing director of their wool-project show that they ideally needed somebody who would not only know the rules of the game but also be interested in the aspirations and the work of the non-profit organization. One way of working around it was by strategizing who of their own members and affiliates would be available to work temporarily in their projects. For instance, they oscillated between employing their members and non-members on ABM to cover certain tasks. Having an Initiative member employed in a project was important to guarantee communication between the project and the Initiative. Furthermore, it was essential for developing and maintaining an exchange between projects of the women’s network and to keep alive an interest in collective forms of activities beyond the actual project they were employed in.
The Initiative women were aware of how dependent the running of the project was on these funds administered through the employment centre. The Initiative used these resources in order to run the projects but there existed a limit to how far they would conform as a group. When the Initiative had set up projects that had played a role in the transformation process and institutional transfer as a service institution that offered employees possibilities for social integration (see chapter 6, Part II), their activism to challenge existing institutions was channeled to a large extent into setting up these projects. Although they were partly subsumed by this task they had maintained the values of a self-help group. As the following example illustrates, despite their responsibilities as employers, the Initiative tends to incorporate these women into their network. The way the Initiative members attempt to tackle Linda’s difficulties at her work place confirms this. Gabriele’s suggestion goes far beyond the Initiative’s new responsibilities as employer of the Centre and incorporates Linda into the self-help network. Gabriele presents her idea as follows:

“I wanted to suggest that we send Linda on an ‘educational journey’ (Bildungsreise) during her two weeks of vacation (laughs). What do you think about it?”

Gabriele had already investigated prices and opportunities for putting up Linda’s children in the meantime. Because Linda explains that she had made plans for her upcoming vacation these suggestions never materialized.\(^\text{16}\) Gabriele, however, emphasizes that there should be an incentive to solve not only work related but also personal problems with their association:

“If one really has problems and needs a change badly, then one should try to solve them through the association. Money should not be an issue (am Geld darf es nicht scheitern).”

The self-help principle should be generally applied to Initiative members. It was encapsulated in this suggestion. It also confirms that Initiative’s notions of self-help and self-

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\(^{16}\) Also, the Initiative offered the leader the chance to go on a work trip. In August the leader and I undertook an excursion to Berlin where we visited numerous other women’s centres and gathered information about their programmes and structure.
organization continue to exist after the times of ‘revolutionary’ renewal and the unsettling experiences of modeling Eastern institutions after Western ones.

As we saw earlier with their Statement of Purpose, the Initiative had transposed these ideas onto the Centre and perceived it as a place where other women could repeatedly encounter similar experiences and through these networks become socially (and politically) involved. Most of the actual practices at the Centre, however, contradicted these notions of self-help and collective action. It was not an independent project with a non-hierarchical decision making structure. Those aforementioned ideas did not guide the employees’ practices. One might say that the notion to provide “opportunities of change” was not significant for those women working at the Centre; and consequently those features of the project outlined by the Initiative, such as self-help, alternative concepts of labour, and self-organization were either not realized or understood differently.

Gabriele informs the gathered Initiative members about the discrepancy between their vision and the actual practices at the Centre as she uses Linda’s experiences to make her point. Gabriele states:

“Yes, and then Linda’s problem was or was caused a bit by the fact that things do not run properly, do not run as they should in the Sundine. I would like to think about how one could improve the situation.”

Gabriele asks me to present a short assessment of what I had observed so that the group could use it as a basis for discussion. I describe my impression that a directional purpose was lost and that the employees only had a vague idea of the nature of this women’s or Initiative project and lacked the expertise to present it to visiting women as well as other institutions. I pinpoint the issue:

“What [idea] do the employees want to convey and mediate? I have been here for a while but I don’t know it. .. If one wants to motivate women to self-organize how can it be achieved?”
I had taken up the Initiative’s own idea and mirrored it. How could those ideas be put into practice? From my perspective, a conceptualization was lacking and thus I suggested developing one for the Centre. Why did they not try to translate into action the kind of concept that the Initiative promoted in the existing framework and Statement of Purpose? I asked: Could they not use the existing concepts as a blueprint to develop ideas for the presentation of the Centre? All my questions seem to suggest that I associate the Centre with the Initiative— an assumption that the Initiative did not necessarily share. I did not comprehend then (what I noted a few pages earlier) how distinct the values and ideas of the Initiative group were from what was developing among the employees at the time. In other words, there was a split between the Initiative and their project. The Initiative responses to my remarks account for this distinction and add another dimension. Gabriele notes:

“The Initiative group once had done a good job in presenting itself.”

Jutta points out:

“Then we did not have the Sundine.”

Anne responds:

“And the Sundine was simply taken over, it was not our own project and now it is neither fish nor fowl.”

This conversation demonstrates that the Initiative members to some degree do not perceive the Centre to be their project; or rather that the Initiative members distinguish between their goals as a group and those for the Sundine. They agree that because of the Centre’s separate and specific history which made it difficult to turn the Centre into one of their projects, it would not reflect their ideas, values and goals: “it was taken over”. As this statement also indicates, by distancing themselves from a project that was taken over, they perceive the present to be tainted by a distinct past that makes it difficult to turn the Centre into an independent project. In the discussion, ideas are shaped and lead to a new interpretation of what happened to the Sundine with the takeover.

It becomes clear that there are two principal difficulties. First, these are related to the idea of self-organizing one’s work. Second, they are related to the issue of motivating employees towards the engagement of women. For me as observer and participant, the latter was one of the most striking features of this Women’s Centre, namely, that some women were
neither members of the women’s movement nor planned to further engage in women’s interests or projects. I, like some Initiative members, saw the problem at that time as one that had been created by personnel decisions. Gabriele recaptures the difficulty of finding informed women for the ABM:

“We originally looked for women who had experience with and thought about the women’s movement and politics and did not find any.”

We already know why the Initiative hired those women who were sent by the employment Centre (see Part I). The new employees had not been exposed to these ideas of self-organization and were not introduced to them through their work-place. In effect, my impression, being a daily visitor, was that they simply had different ideas and expectations. Thus, they organized work according to their own notions which allowed them to create a certain stability in an unstable time at the Centre. This general instability in face of the institutional and personnel changes would have required that the Initiative conveyed their ideas to the employees more clearly. I point out that these employees could not be expected to self-organize in the spirit of the Initiative because “they did not write their ABM application themselves” and therefore, one could not expect them to act all of a sudden on women’s issues or run the Centre as an independent project. Those ideas of the Initiative had not trickled down and left the organization of their work unaffected. Listening to my criticism Jutta recalls:

“When they [employees] introduced themselves at the job interview Anne argued in a similar vein and questioned them [at the job interviews]. One [woman] immediately said that she did not know what was going on.”

From the job interview, the Initiative members had been aware that the employees’ experiences and interpretations of the past were different from their own. Many of them were unfamiliar with women’s issues. They had noticed the differences between their own approaches and those of the employees but the Initiative also thought that they had given the employees some indications of what their project was, and what they expected from them. They thought that the job interview had served this purpose and assumed that, like previous

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17 A common procedure in many women’s and alternative projects not only in West Germany.
staff, these women would be encouraged to develop similar dynamics or organization of work. Now, they realize that this did not happen and the employees carried out their tasks differently, unlike the women who were previously employed in the Centre and who combined work and an interest in women’s issues. Through the latter they all developed an affiliation (or became members) with the *Initiative*.

The *Initiative* assesses the situation and Gabriele suggests that the temporary employment could be seen as a time of learning. She is not speaking about training women in the strict sense of the term i.e. to make them more suitable for integration into the employment market but rather redefines the goal of the *ABMs* to train, enhance social and communication skills, self-motivation and self-initiative. This statement interestingly relates back to their original ideas voiced in the Statement, that is, providing a place for familiarizing women with different ideas of organizing, communicating etc.. This is exemplified by Anne’s claims to teach the employees these (social) skills of how to be members of a women’s project.

Anne:

“*I think that Linda must notice this* [if they don’t know how to go about e.g. self-organization] *after a while and then has to talk with the women and ask them how they can envision things.*”

Anne’s idea for Linda’s role in this process underestimates how difficult a task it was for Linda, who was not experienced with conversations aimed at raising consciousness as Anne was. Clearly, Anne sees the leader’s role as in engaging the employees about these issues.

Linda’s concern has been with how they organized their work at the Centre and how she could get the employees to explore contacts with other institutions and women’s networks. But she has a similar concern with the users and visitors. Linda does not know how to motivate women to develop an interest beyond merely providing a wide range of courses. Linda argues that the current customers and visitors of the Centre are less interested in engaging in collective activities other than socializing and getting together for the courses. She wonders out loud how one could overcome the is lack of interest:
"I could not figure out how I could interest them in the other side."

"This other side"\textsuperscript{18} includes wider societal or political changes that were set into motion with the \textit{Wende} and unification. Gabriele responds that she is confused about the role and goal which the Centre is supposed to play at this point in time.

We will see from the discussion that Gabriele’s remark can be interpreted to raise questions about how women’s politics could be defined and applied to the Centre. Gabriele asks if the purpose of the Centre differs from that of the \textit{Initiative}. She says that she does not know if only the Centre, the \textit{Initiative} or both need to formulate “a political aim”. In other words, what are women’s politics like when the interest of women in exploring the “opportunities of change” has declined? Anne answers and defines politics at the Women’s Centre:

“That is one and the same thing, if you say that you would like to think about women’s politics (\textit{Frauenpolitik}) here. .. that is a big aim for me.”

In other words, Anne acknowledges the tremendous task but at the same time views the aspiration to maintain a “communication and information Centre”\textsuperscript{19} as part of their collective aim. She notes:

“It is important that women can collect information but also that you can communicate in a broader sense (\textit{Gespräche geführt werden}).”

She views the Centre as a socio-political space where women continuously aim to challenge gender inequalities and to create “opportunities for change” in an atmosphere that promotes open discussions.

\textsuperscript{18} Linda’s expression seems to indicate that she associates these processes with the notion of being integrated into West German society - a society which had during most of her life time developed in the other Germany, i.e., the country on “the other side” as people would call it.

\textsuperscript{19} A notion that was first developed by local women in the time leading to unification (and was also used by the \textit{Amt}). It is related to the idea of establishing women’s spaces such as cafes, centres, shelters etc. and to develop collective politics from there. In Eastern Germany (former GDR) it was first introduced by the East German Women’s Movement (\textit{e.g. UFV}) in the context of pushing for a “real democratization of society”. In other words, in setting up these women’s spaces, women aimed at determining and forming their own emancipation and equality in opposition to the patriarchal structures in the GDR (see \textit{e.g. De Soto 1993:299}).
Gabriele questions Anne’s broad definition of “women’s politics”. She argues that it is too unspecified for her because she needs a direction of what should be accomplished in the interest of women:

“Nobody knows what it is... it is far too vague for me. Then you can claim that you want to speak out for humanity and nobody knows what that is about.”

Anne critically replies to Gabriele’s desire to define a particular political goal:

“And then there is the problem, I am hearing now, that you want to think for somebody. It is already the shits... you have to motivate so that others join in (mitmachen).”

Anne’s experience with politics for women in the GDR defines her response. She believes in the participation of ‘liberated’, self-determined citizens. She does not want to give orders but to “motivate” other women to participate in collective politics out of their own conviction. She believes that it is through discussing and socializing that women eventually can be motivated to engage in the women’s cause.

Gabriele, however, continues to argue that such a broad definition of women’s politics in a pluralistic democracy opens the Centre’s door to providing a platform where any kind of political stance could be expressed:

“Then you could say, we want to encourage women to be more feminine, to work less, to promote part-time and that they take better care of their children at home. you could call that women’s politics.”

Gabriele’s answer reflects uncertainty about common aims in which women might want to engage in united Germany. From her point of view the Centre should have a certain political profile and women’s politics should continuously fight for the equality of women.

For Anne, plurality of opinions (freedom of expression) and women’s becoming politically engaged on their own initiative has priority. It is in this vein that she imagines the Women’s Centre as a socio-political space and argues:
"I do not want to engage here at the Sundine for women doing this or that or another, that the women have to do themselves. That is women's politics in the Sundine for me."

The dialogue between Gabriele and Anne demonstrates their heterogeneous views of the Initiative members and the ways in which the women’s projects are linked to their own political views and collective politics. Whereas Gabriele wants certain demands to be in the foreground, Anne wants individuals to become involved and politically conscious so that they can represent their own interests. In any case, they both perceive the kind of discussion they are having to be part of the democratization process.

In a way the fact that the employees would not have these kind of discussions at the Centre was part of the problem. The organization of work among the employees and the leader could not be discussed in those terms. What prevented women from self-organizing (or using new public spaces to discuss their experiences and identities in a new society) were their experiences and interpretations of working together in a collective (see chapter 6, Part I, where I discuss these issues). The communication between the Initiative and the employees itself lacks this dialogue. As a result Initiative women are faced with developing strategies to motivate women to use the Centre as their space. As they are discussing the issues, they were reformulating some of their ideas about, purposes of and concepts for the Centre. Gabriele summarizes:

"I imagine that the way we are formulating it now, we want an information and communication Centre for women and include for now some internal workshops or some training [for the employees] one would be further ahead but another problem is the division of tasks [labour]."

Gabriele and Anne initially suggest two different approaches to deal with the division of labour and attempt to initiate changes at the Centre. To solve issues of self-organization at the Centre, Gabriele suggests pragmatically developing “a structural plan”. This entails dividing labour, tasks and encouraging the employees to take on responsibility in a certain area. The plan was supposed to be designed to respond to Linda’s problems of delegating, motivating women to self-organize their work.
Anne suggests that the employees need to know the Initiative’s work. She reflects on the conditions under which they hired the employees. Anne states:

“It is also difficult because the women have to know first what they should do in the Centre and why they are here. Back then at the job interview I had asked them if they had these kind of ambitions and there was nothing coming from them; and that means that we have to drag them ourselves to come to the Initiative. They should come with us and listen to some of the talks.”

Anne believes that the employees should be introduced to new ideas through the Initiative and participate in their events. But Gabriele does not see this as a solution at this stage and objects:

“It takes a while if you wait for it to happen but with a structural plan.”

Linda confirms:

“Then you get them to commit to certain prescribed areas of work you mean.”

Gabriele:

“Yes, so they also feel responsible for a certain defined area in which they can busy themselves independently and it is not left for you.”

I inquire about the process of developing such a plan and the decision making structure:

“Do you want Linda to decide everything as she is already viewed as the boss?”

Linda echoes this point and pictures the extent to which the employees withdraw from making decisions:

“None of them says yes or no if I am not there.”

Anne:

“But you’ll solve this with a structural plan in that you try to find out about the area each woman would like to take on and then she is responsible for it and you should have weekly meetings in which you can develop ideas about what could be done. Then it will run better for all of you.”

As they discuss the different employees’ abilities to work independently and the procedure for developing a plan, they conclude that they, as the supporting institution, need to be involved. Nevertheless, Anne argues for an immediate pedagogical intervention and for
encouraging the employees to take on a more independent role. Anne gives Linda pedagogical advice on how to put this idea into practice:

“I believe you should next, since you are going on vacation, you should talk to them, ask them which area they would like to take over while you will be away. Then it is not so obvious, you won’t be here for fourteen days in this time they have to think about something and prepare and you ask them and do not tell them you do this or that. It is simply an exercise. When you’ll get back then you ask them how it went and .... then the executive committee can continue... and then give it to the women and ask for revisions and if it can work like this”.

The group supports Linda in her task and encourages her to get involved and to initiate changes.

The meeting officially ends but they continue to exchange information about the Centre and current events. The following conversation shows their different opinions about how the Centre is being used. Jutta asks about the occurrence of a flea market:

“I read in the newspaper about the flea market. In principle, I like the idea. I wanted to ask if it was already on.”

Linda explains how they had planned it and that several women had already responded and booked a table.

Anne asks: “Will they do it outside”?

Linda: “On Friday we already have Mrs. E (Erna, see biographic details in chapter 4 and 7) outside. We will put a desk beside Mrs. E”.

Erna was a DFD member who continued to be in touch with the Sundine and in the summertime sold those items which were produced by women in one of the remaining DFD groups.

Anne: “What is she doing there”?

Linda: “She sells her handicraft and we get some of the profit”.

Gabriele: “I don’t like it too much with the handicrafts..”.

Anne objects: “But it belongs to a woman as well as being feminine”.

Jutta: “Yes”.
Anne: "If you want one thing you have to like the other, it is as if men turn wood on a lathe (drechseln), it would be nice if a woman does it".

Gabriele: "Yes, if besides a woman sells avant garde books she herself has written that I would find even better".

Anne: "Sure".

Jutta laughs: "But we don’t have someone like this".

Gabriele: "But this way we are already labeled".

Jutta: "We are branded, you mean"?

Anne joked about switching gender roles: "Perhaps Hans should spin wool beside it .....really there should be an information table right beside it to inform about the Sundine".

Linda: "That is a good idea".

Jutta: "We did it already on March 8. Margit did a really good job. We had a few handouts".

This conversation shows how the Initiative themselves have different ideas about the Centre; however, they always attempt to reach a consensus to maintain it as a space for "everybody". It further enhances what we already know, namely, that the Centre is being used by heterogeneous groups of women who to various degrees become involved with the Centre. It shows the major differences in values, aesthetics and practices between those groups of the DFD and the representatives of the new East German women’s movement. In peaceful "co-existence", to borrow a socialist phrase, they use the Centre for their diverse practices. Some of them tend to be more inclusive in the way they see the Women’s Centre’s purpose developing. The heterogeneous groups who use the Centre are not really linked on a daily basis or aim towards collective politics. At least, this can be said for their daily practices in the Centre. On special occasions, however, such as International Women’s Day, as demonstrated in chapter 3, they might organize collective events.

The Initiative members are interested in pursuing some kind of collective politics and they believe that to develop this they need social gatherings where women can exchange their ideas about daily concerns. In terms of instilling political action in the employees Anne concludes: "You have to talk with women [to attract them], to raise consciousness." When Linda replies that there was a lack of interest on behalf of the employees, Anne opposes this
idea, responding with: “perhaps you do not talk enough with the women about these things we are discussing now”. For Anne “consciousness raising” is the prerequisite for any kind of political action.

In this way the Initiative group continuously attempts to act as promoter of small social change. The Initiative would like to motivate women to socialize and to discover and develop their own interests and skills. This is further demonstrated in Gabriele’s suggestions to promote hobbies around which interested women might organize. Gabriele suggests for the Centre:

“..one has to attract different woman... women present their favorite melodies (Lieblingsmusik).”

Anne follows up on this line of thought:

“Or just offer lists where woman can sign up what hobbies they have so that they can call up one another and have the opportunity of meeting one another.”

To socialize is an important requisite of collective experiences which in turn can be mobilized for political activities. As Gabriele’s and Anne’s suggestions indicate, it is important for people, in relation to the Centre for women, to organize their leisure time in a way that would allow them to socialize outside of their homes and to communicate and meet with women of similar interests, counteracting a tendency among unemployed women to become socially isolated. In this way they saw the Centre providing social services.

In furthering the employees’ ability to provide these services in the public interest they designed a particular vision of work at the Women’s Centre. With the structural plan they intended to introduce the employees to an independent style of working. As a women’s group engaged in change, they adjusted their strategies to attempt small changes among the Centre employees from which the users of the Centre would benefit. To maintain the Centre as a place in which open and democratic discussions can take place was for them an important requisite for collective politics. Ultimately the work place in the Centre or any other project even if “it is only ABM” can be such a place.
In this chapter, we have met women with different experiences of the transformation processes. This is crucial if we are to understand that, based on their different interpretation of the *Wende*, miscommunication and differences developed between the group of employees, users of the Centre and the *Initiative* for the women’s cause. By 1994, however, interest in the women’s movement among most employees To understand the employees we need to take into account that they were currently undergoing another experience of social integration through employment on the *ABM*. At the same time they understood the purpose of their employment as providing some kind of social services. They were criticized, however, for not improving the services of the Centre so that it would offer disadvantaged women opportunities to socially integrate. The employees’ work in the Centre did not necessarily lead them to combine employment with women’s issues. Moreover, as we discovered by exploring the *Initiative*’s alternative ideas for the Centre, the employees’ practices of labour organization diverged from theirs. As a result the *Initiative*’s expectations and ideas were not fully realized in the practices of the Centre.

The *Initiative* envisioned possibilities for collective action in the Women’s Centre - not only concrete political demands and action but also alternative concepts of self-assertion and actualization. This correlated with the ideas of grass roots democracy that had become incorporated into the demands and practices of the East German women’s movement. These ideas, concepts and values were still being voiced after the political demands of the early movement decreased; and the association of *ABM* with the movement and the projects depoliticized both.

The *Initiative* meeting provides insights into the larger contradictions caused by the way the projects were institutionalized, in particular the assumption, based on the interpretation of the Centre’s recent history of transformation, that women who work there

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20 Von Dierke (1997:107) describes how alternative concepts developed in the West German “alternative movement” of the 1970s and 1980s before they gained public attention. That is, these were developed in rejection of mainstream society and expressed in a variety of alternative life styles. The concepts used by the *Initiative* were also developed by members of women’s groups long before the trajectory of their activities gained public attention.
would affiliate themselves with the *Initiative* and carry some of the values of the women’s movement into the projects. First, *Initiative* members realized in talking to one another that most of the employees were no longer motivated actively to pursue women’s interest. They felt obliged, therefore, to develop a strategy to motivate the employees and introduce their ideas. The *Initiative* meeting and the members’ discussion about the difficulties and strategies show the direction the women’s agency is taking.

What does this mean for collective politics? The fact that the Women’s Centre, like other projects of the women’s projects movement, has become closely affiliated with the government sponsored work programmes and thus plays a role in socially integrating women means revisiting the purpose and funding of the Centre. Although the *Initiative*, to a certain extent identifies with the possibility of providing opportunities for social integration, their political agenda aims beyond this task. In the recent post- Wende period of the Centre the employees combined this concern with personal engagement has decreased and the users and the *Initiative* have to deal with this dilemma. They believe not only that the project has a role in socially integrating women but also that social gatherings provide an experience for open exchange, discussions and collectivity. To view the Centre as a “women’s space” open for diverse women is an important function for allowing sociability and collectivity to develop which in the future might provide the basis for political action. The *Initiative* remains an alternative and political force behind the Centre’s social service character as they adapt their strategies to the demands imposed by government regulations. Their group remains important as a forum for developing new ideas and responses to questions concerning women in unified Germany.
Chapter 6 THE ROLE OF THE WOMEN’S PROJECTS IN SOCIAL INTEGRATION: WOMEN’S VIEWS IN TWO WORK SETTINGS

In this chapter, I closely look at women’s views from within two projects. Here, my concern is with their sense of social integration and their differing views as employees in a government sponsored work programme (ABM). One group of employees was already introduced in the previous chapter. The first piece of ethnography explores these women’s notion of the work group through a work meeting at the Women’s Centre. The second reveals the views of a different group of women in what was known as the “wool-project” (Woll-Projekt).

The degree to which women in these ABM projects feel integrated into a unified society differs according to their recent experiences of social differentiation. The experience of social integration through work in these ABMs is based on people’s past experiences of being socially integrated through full-time employment and (usually) membership in a work collective. In the present, these experiences are interpreted differently with the employees of both projects in the way they labeled their group. Employees at the Centre used the English term “team” (Team) in order to refer to their group, whereas the women of the wool-project referred to their group as “collective” (Kollektiv). In the FRG, “team” was commonly used in the sphere of sports and business, while in the GDR “collective” referred to basic forms of social organization in companies as well as in other spheres of life under socialism.

In both ethnographic examples, these women formed new social groups with the ABM. Reflecting the variety of women’s projects, these two projects constituted very different settings for their employees. While the Centre was an institution which serviced the wider community and employed mainly women (in their thirties to fifties) with work experience in social work and creative work, the wool-project mainly employed formerly skilled workers (in their twenties and thirties).

To describe the conversations among and with women in both settings I rely on very different kinds of ethnographic data: While the first piece of ethnography depicts a
conversation at a work meeting (Centre) based on my field notes, the second piece of ethnography describes and interprets a recorded group interview at work (wool-project). Before I present the ethnographic evidence let me give a short overview of some of the features of social integration in the GDR and particularly the role of the (work) collectives.

Looking Back at The Experience of Integration: The Work Collectives

The literature on how the transformation processes in Eastern Germany affected the social fabric of people’s lives generally assumes that the breakdown of institutional structures was too radical for any kind of social and cultural components of GDR (work) life to survive. Commonly the institutional breakdown is viewed as setting into motion a process that required the individual to take on more responsibility and (self-) initiative. In the past, GDR companies played a central role in providing services and necessary information. The West German bureaucracy, by contrast, requires individuals to personally take care of registration, insurance etc. In the GDR, many administrative services were provided by one’s company. As Müller-Hartmann (1993:313/4) notes:

.. with the institutional breakdown in East Germany, with the closure of many work places and with the new forms of law of today’s companies those social and cultural functions typical for the conditions in the GDR ceased to apply. The medical care, the provision of food and places to spend vacation offered by the companies [were also discontinued].

In the GDR, women’s employment was viewed both as a right and a duty (Nickel 1993a:254) but employment meant more than just income (Bertram 1993); it was one way of participating in a larger social life and making a contribution to society. Today due to the employment market social integration is no longer guaranteed through work and processes of social differentiation are occurring. Müller-Hartman (1993:305) states that “new social differentiation along the criteria of employed and unemployed” is being established which leads to “psychological barriers” between these two groups. Instead of referring to “psychological barriers” I would rather speak of the social distance that is created between employed and unemployed (e.g. through talk about status symbols) or a process of disintegrating the old networks. The experience of unemployment is described as one of social isolation. Thus, this
process is also called a "process of de-solidarisation" (Entsolidarisierungsprozesse) (ibid.). The effects on women in particular, as Nickel (1995b:67) interprets it, are "social ostracism that is transmitted to them [women] via the labour market". This is so because staying "at home" instead of participating in the workforce enhances feelings of exclusion and alienation (and does not allow for re-integration). Moreover, to understand these women's stories (stories of social differentiation are particularly articulated by women of the wool-project) we need to know not only about these processes of social differentiation, but also about those parameters which shaped their past experiences of work in the collectives.

Generally, social scientists and many ordinary people interpret the breakdown of collectives as a breakdown of social cohesion. In the GDR, collectives in general played an important role in people's daily lives. Collectives incorporated individuals at different stages of their lives into institutionalized social networks (Kindergarten, Youth Club, neighbourhood community) in order to organize, educate and control them. Besides the official dimension there existed an unofficial one. As Huinink and Mayer (1993:154) state:

The state policy of directing and controlling did not only not prevent the genesis of independent-autonomous (eigenständig) 'informal structures' but indirectly [translator's addition] encouraged them in a systematic manner.

In other words, state ideology had shaped these social units and focal points of individual identification. Rosenberg (1996:147) summarizes Eastern European societies' ideology in a nutshell as one of egalitarianism that required "the subordination of individual interests to those of the collective" which was reflected "in practice, [in] a mixture of social identities [that] developed" through association with different groups that were either encouraged (work groups) and supported, accepted (family) or persecuted by the state (dissidents). These experiences of the collective collide with Western individualist value structures which became unacceptable in the GDR (large income disparity, conspicuous consumption) (Rosenberg 1996:147). Böckmann-Schewe et al. (1994:44) interpret the emphasis on intimacy, closeness, warmth in the present representation of the work collective as a reaction to the insecurities and risks in a market economy. To give an example, Böckmann-Schewe et al.'s (1994:44) study shows that women's retrospectives tended to
overemphasize the "relational and community oriented" aspect of their previous employment in the GDR. Such one-sided reconstruction of these aspects might be used in creating myths about the work collectives that ignore the "real conflict structure" that had characterized the work process in the past (ibid.). Because the work collectives came to represent "community spirit" (*Gemeinschaft*) for most GDR people, the breakup of these work collectives is viewed as the destruction of relations that were "based on solidarity", further interpreted as the destruction of community and sociability in general (e.g. Böckmann-Schewe et al. 1994:44).

The emphasis on destruction of sociability is a reaction to the processes of social differentiation. As these processes unfold many authors such as Landua et al. (1993:98) claim that the centrality of the collective and the organized life style that was characteristic of socialism is no longer visible in the New Federal States since the official structures disappeared. This conclusion echoes a common stereotype often used in GDR narratives to describe the impact of transformation on personal life and society in general.

I argue, however, that today's interpretations of the work collective and, in particular, the stories about the social dimension of the past collectives are not only remembering those features of collectivity that stand in contrast to their experience of Western market society but also reveal that certain aspects are being recreated. Today's representations of these work collectives, thus, are not 'accurate' historical accounts (as Böckmann-Schewe et al. 1994:44 point out) as they emphasize particular aspects of the form of organization, and ignore others. As the following will show, as women talk about the past collectives they also comment on their present work environment. I argue that the social aspect of the past is recreated in the present work situation (and with it a few other features).

It is undisputed that the work-place was an important place of social communication (see e.g. Bütow 1995) and social identification (Böckmann-Schewe et al. 1994:42; Meyer and Schulze 1992:73 among others). As some stories of experiences in *ABMs* show, women see continuity in terms of the social significance. As was seen in chapter 2, the social content of working relations points to a fundamental feature of the GDR society that was central to women's and men's lives and identities. Here, I expand on this theme and show that working
relations encapsulated the idea of social collectivism. That is, work was the very act of doing things together in a group (Böckmann-Schewe et al. 1994; Rosenberg 1995; Einhorn 1993). Work collectives were not simply organized to deal with employment and work related issues; they were social groups where individuals experienced and learned about the greater social world. According to Böckmann-Schewe et al. (1994:42) it is through paid work that individuals experienced a variety of communications and interactions. Work collectives also created networks for the acquisition of scarce resources and services for the private sector, they provided networks among colleagues to keep up production and functioned as a “buffer” between the individual and the “political hierarchy” (Böckmann-Schewe et al. 1994:42).

Furthermore, Böckmann-Schewe et al. assume gendered experiences of interaction and identification at the work-place (1994:43). Their study shows that women emphasize the informal community oriented aspects of their social work relations rather than the official notion of the work collective as a unit in competition with others etc. Thus, these authors conclude that work relations have the “status of relations of solidarity, intimacy (Vertrautheit) and empathy” (1994:43). Rosenberg (1996:147/8) points out:

> Individuals in the east tended to see themselves as members of a group—often a family or friendship network defined against the state—within which men and women occupied the same social category and were expected to act in solidarity rather than in competition with one another (Einhorn 1993; Rosenberg 1995).

Within this framework which was set and defined by the state, according to Rosenberg (1996:148), “gender relations as a reflection of power were obscured by the surrounding egalitarianism”. This might explain why many GDR women today dismiss gender politics and display solidarity with East German men rather than West German women. Women in these narratives did not identify gender inequalities before the Wende which suggests that women in the GDR were emancipated through work. That employees place more importance on employment issues than on women’s issues reflects GDR ideology. The feminist literature stresses that emancipation in the GDR was related to the idea of women’s participation in the labour force (and their economic independence) (see Nickel 1993a:233 who refers to the tradition of thought created by Marx, Engels, Bebel and Lenin on the issue of liberating women in socialism) So does Einhorn (1993:19) who notes:
While he [Engels] conceded that women were doubly oppressed, by ‘dependence on men’ and ‘economic dependence’, Bebel contended, as did Lenin after him, that ‘only the removal of the second will allow the removal of the first’. This assertion not only highlights the emphasis on labour force participation as a necessary condition of women’s emancipation. It also prefigures the subsequent relegation of the ‘Woman Question’ to secondary status.

The “dominant focus on labour force participation as the sufficient rather than one of a number of necessary conditions for women’s emancipation” (Einhorn 1993:35) is a result of this theorizing. In the GDR “labour force participation was defined as the essential precondition for emancipation, both in terms of economic independence from men, and for the unfolding of individual potential” (Einhorn 1993:186). Or as Nickel (1993a:233) puts it in reference to the constitution of the GDR, its family law and SED programmes:

Only the world of employment could supposedly liberate women from the yoke and from slavery of housework and offer them the option of fully unfolding their skills and talents. [my translation]

The idea that women’s emancipation was fulfilled through their participation in the work force is evidently continuously upheld by the employees of the Centre in giving primacy to work over women’s issues. Here we have some empirical evidence that these notions are continuously applied. The way social differentiation occurs differs from one site to another. Women in the Centre perceive themselves to be generally more integrated, as illustrated by their definition of the work situation as a “team”. Those in the wool-project, on the other hand, elaborate on social differentiation themes such as the experience of de-solidarization and how they learn to cope with it in an ABM through making new social connections within the project and beyond it within the local women’s network.

The Centre: “We Are A Good Team”

This section provides us with a different view on work in the Centre than the one in chapter 5, a view that is shaped by the desire to be socially integrated through employment. Furthermore, it allows us to understand how the employees perceived and defined the main features of their group’s internal organization of work in the Centre based on their experiences
and interpretations of the past. Here, I draw from my field notes of a work meeting (15.7.1994) at the Women's Centre. Four employees and the leader of the Centre were brought together following a crisis which was due to the lack of alternative forms of organization at the Centre and those difficulties created by it. At the executive committee meeting of the Initiative, decisions and strategies had been made to improve the working relationship of the employees and the leader and to encourage the employees to self-organize (see chapter 5). This meeting of the Centre employees was used by the leader, Linda, to implement some ideas the Initiative members put forward on organizing the work differently to encourage the employees to work more independently.

As we [Linda, Karina, Marianne, Beate, Martha and myself] all gathered around one of the tables in the Women's Centre, Linda used the opportunity to delegate some decision-making power to the employees under the pretense of going on vacation. She gave some directives of what needed to be accomplished during her absence and asked that the Initiative be kept informed....She further announced that during an executive meeting (Vorstandssitzung) of the Initiative it was decided that further direction for work at the Centre would be developed and that responsibilities would be divided according to a “structural plan” in the future.

The Initiative came up with this idea in order to encourage the employees to work independently in certain areas and it had been suggested that Linda should initiate the first steps (for self-organization) by asking employees to take on certain responsibilities during her vacation.

Linda therefore asked the employees to think about the area they would like to engage in, that is, “which area he would like to take over” (welches Arbeitsgebiet er machen möchte).

In addressing them as “he”, Linda referred to the women as employees using a term from the past.¹ The male term er, “he”, was used to refer to a worker regardless of gender, thereby indicating that the “ideal worker” was male (Ferree 1993). This use of language was quite common. For example, Nagelschmidt (1992:5) points out that the use of statements such as Die Frau steht ihren Mann (“The woman stands like a man” meaning she works like a man)

¹ As we already saw during the inaugural celebration of the Initiative, most members of these grass roots group had changed this pattern and invented the term Mitfrauen (see chapter 3) to refer to one another whereas others, particularly those who were non-members, continued to use the old terminology when they addressed women in an employment context.
were typical. In her reflection on “Forty years of emancipation in socialism” she relates it to the formal equality between women and men (in the Basic Law) and to the officially “achieved equality” which was based on the full-time employment of women. Dölling’s (1993:31) article on images of women and men in the work-place of the GDR quotes the following line *Unsere Muttis arbeiten wie ein Mann* (“Our mums work like men”). It shows the importance of employment in women’s “life experience” and their “conception of self” (*Selbstverständnis*) and the fact that women received societal recognition mainly as workers (Dölling 1993:31/2).

The term “he” then, is a word from the days of the work collectives.

In the following we see that the way Linda passed on the message from the *Initiative* also sounded like a directive or order from times past. The *Initiative* supported Linda’s aspiration to seek further contact with other institutions. During the *Initiative’s* meeting, a consensus was reached to further involve and familiarize the employees with the ideas of the *Initiative* and thus to overcome the employees’ lack of understanding of how the *Initiative* envisioned the project. Linda attempted to apply the idea that the employees needed to join events of the *Initiative* in order to develop a better idea of their tasks. The way Linda, however, rephrased these ideas and linked them with the fact that *ABM* constituted only temporary employment, resulted in an immediate protest:

Linda said that they needed to participate in those Centre events that were set up by the *Initiative* and took place in the evening because the *Initiative* was their employer. Beate immediately protested and argued that she did not want to work outside of her work hours because of her family. Linda responded by suggesting this “can be counted as working hours”. She gave the example of Martha, who went to a theatre play together with Linda and other *Initiative* women, and could count this as working hours. Beate and Marianne were surprised, and Marianne said “this was news to her”. Linda suggested that they take turns in the future so that each of them would get to work outside. She further said that “we need more ideas... even if it is only *ABM*, you need to be more active and participate”.

Linda not only appealed to their work ethic but her comment “even if it is only *ABM*’ really meant ‘I know that this is only temporary employment but I expect you to engage more in your job and to participate in the larger project’. Beate’s response demonstrated very clearly that she wanted to draw a line between employment and further engagement with the women’s project of the *Initiative*. Marianne’s comment indicated that she had not considered joining any
extra curricular event either. Linda offered the opportunity of being paid for the participation in evening events such as the ones organized by the Initiative.² It would be in the Initiative’s strategic interest as employer to pay the employees for their hours worked during which they concurrently could learn about women’s issues (e.g. while participating in Initiative meetings etc.). As we see from these dialogues these two employees did not share these expectations and ideas of becoming further engaged with the Initiative, nor did they share the Initiative’s ideas of an alternative work-place. The employees did not discuss further the issues of internal organization. As we will see all tension or disagreement was continuously communicated in terms of “work” or “employment”. Linda argued from the position of representing the employer and they responded as employees who, like Beate, had to strike a balance between family responsibilities and her employment at the Centre. This conversation, on the one hand, confirms the relevance and role of employment in their lives and, on the other hand, illustrates in particular how Beate and Marianne distance themselves from the Initiative’s idea about running the project.

As the following dialogue illustrates, the expressions and parameters of employment shifted as one journeyed from the socialist planned to the capitalist market economy. The participants had just decided how they would spend the remaining funds in the budget for the purchase of a new floor and other appliances for the Centre. Martha said that she would take care of the purchase of a new floor because she “liked to spend money”. Marianne offered to use her connections with a social service office in order to organize kitchen appliances. As the last issue on the agenda Linda asked if they were ‘content” with their work. Marianne replied: “Yes, as long as we can spend money”. Martha had used a similar phrase when she was taking on a particular task but Marianne’s response sounded rather provoking. Because those who worked with Marianne knew that she enjoyed going shopping her comment was multifaceted: It could imply that Marianne was mocking Linda in her role as a leader (or her authority). At the same time, Marianne’s response could be understood as a comment on the general changes in the transition from a planned to a market economy and the “importance of and different value of money” in the capitalist system. Generally, consumer items available in apparently unlimited quantities have superseded the previous scarcity of goods. In Marianne’s case the

² This followed from the Initiative’s idea to train the employees (see Initiative’s executive board meeting, previous chapter 5, Part II).
process of spending money had become a goal in itself. For Marianne, pleasure at work lay in spending money while visiting performances in the evening or Initiative meetings was not desirable.

Marianne and Beate defined their activities as “strictly” related to employment. The virtue of being employed in the Centre made involvement with women’s issues and contact with the Initiative desirable; however, ambivalence to these very issues was responsible for some of the underlying tensions. As possibly in the past, the official ideological framework was less important than the social relations at work.

We can only speculate that Linda intended to initiate a different kind of conversation when she asked the employees if they were “content” with their work. In contrast with other Initiative members, Linda did not have experience with initiating a style of conversation aimed at consciousness raising. She had come in contact with the women’s projects through her search for employment only shortly before she became employed as a leader (see biography in chapter 5). Linda had not addressed women’s issues either, instead she had emphasized the working situation that brought them together in the Centre. The meeting closed after they had talked about the factual organization of work for the next two weeks, about future purchases for the Centre, and Linda had announced that they would work according to a “structural plan” in the future. Her attempts to motivate the employees to become more active within the larger project were rejected and the group discussed neither the self-organization of work nor the dynamics between them (as had been suggested by the Initiative).

Having followed the course of the meeting, I noticed a lack of discussion. The Initiative’s ideas of discussing one’s own group dynamics and relation with women’s issues had not been a topic. As somebody who was also familiar with the daily routines, I noticed a discrepancy between the informal critique that was voiced in daily conversations by individual employees and the silence the same individuals had kept at the meeting. My own assumptions about styles of discourse and interaction led me to address the issue and to inquire further how

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3 In contrast to the meeting of the Initiative members, here, these issues were not openly discussed at the official meeting which points towards a different interaction and strategies of solving problems among the Centre employees.
the women themselves perceived their work in the Women’s Centre and how they defined their work relations and the interaction with their colleagues. Because I was aware that I could not address certain topics directly without being offensive and betraying the relationship I had with individual women, I decided to address the issue in applying their own terminology, “team”.

As the following discussion reveals, the word “team” is more than a new import from the West, because it addresses the relationship between language and experience. At the end of this meeting I asked if they felt that they constituted a “team”. “Yes, we are a good team”, Marianne replied. I had phrased my question in this manner because these women had often used this English expression when defining their group as a “team”. As her response and the other women’s silent agreement shows, they constituted or formed a group one might refer to as “team”. Furthermore, Marianne’s answer indicated that she referred to team only as a work team.

However, I had asked this question with a different intent, namely, to explore the nature and dynamics of this group as a women’s group with the potential for self-critical discussions. I associated the term with an ambiguous meaning that would have allowed them to address group dynamics related to work as well as women’s issues. Because of my association with the word “team” I continued to ask according to this logic: Why were there no “discussions” between members of a “good team”? Marianne, who took discussions to mean having an argument, replied indignantly that they were “used to harmony and getting along well” (gutes Auskommen). So, how could I assume and suggest that interaction might be different? As I explained and gave examples from my own experiences with group discussions in Canada and West Germany, Marianne became offended. Karina began to mediate between these different assertions and to “translate” (reinterpret) what I had just said. Karina, as an Initiative member, was familiar with the concept and practice of group discussions, and suggested that I was probably referring to finding “inspiration within the group”. I agreed with this interpretation. I was still uncertain, however, whether those difficulties that the employees voiced informally had all of a sudden disappeared. As if Martha read my thoughts, I was assured by her and the group that “things were working fine” in the Centre. Martha said that in comparison with some

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4 Several stories I was told by women of the Amt suggest that in the recent past, employees had discussed women’s issues at work (see also chapter 5).
other projects in the area, "we know what we were doing". Before I further explore what this meant for women like Martha and Karina and how they defined their work in the Centre (in contrast to and accordance with the Initiative) (see chapter 7 on "women's work") I would like to draw some final conclusions from this encounter.

In spite of Linda's concerns and the difficulties others perceived with the way the employees carried out their work, they had asserted themselves as a group (e.g. based on their interpretation of harmonious relations among the group members). In times of social change which were accompanied by the breakup of social networks and a threat of unemployment, this experience was reaffirming for the employees. As we saw in their personal narratives (see biographies, chapter 5, Part I), employment had played an important role in their lives and the ABM in the Centre had ended for some of them another period of unemployment.

I had heard statements like Marianne's about "harmonious" interaction among the group of workers many times, e.g., when women described the features of social interaction in their work collectives in the GDR. In a different context, when discussing the pros and cons of ABMs, Gabriele, an Initiative member, had compared an ABM group with a collective. Brauer and Willisch's study (1996) of transformation in a village in Mecklenburg documents that people now speak of "ABM-brigades". All these examples seem to suggest that ABM was associated with older notions of the work collective. "Team", however, is an example of an English Western expression which also came to be used and filled with meaning drawn from people's past experiences. In fact, as linguistic analysis suggests, "teamwork" is one of these "words related to (Western) economic activities and with negative connotations in the former GDR [that] are being rehabilitated" (Lewis 1995:132). According to Lewis it substitutes for the term Arbeitsgemeinschaft (literally work community). As the dispute shows, according to the association of "team" with the "work collective", this notion of a "good work team" refers to older notions and to a use of practices at the work-place which were produced by conditions of existence in the past when women used to work full-time.

At the same time, "team" signified that a new and different social group of colleagues had formed in relation to Western notions of labour. "Team", however, can be associated with
certain values or aspects of the collective because it incorporates the notion of being bound
and oriented towards a common goal (e.g. "Team Canada"). "Team", furthermore, implies a
notion of competition; and it requires professional expertise or skills to become a member,
e.g., of a work team or a sport team. Whereas in the GDR every citizen would be a member of
several collectives, in the unified Germany, under the capitalist regime, only certain selected
individuals can be in a team. Although there also existed competition (Wettbewerb) among the
different socialist collectives, there did not exist the same existential threat of being divided
into winners and losers. The use of the term in the present context carries the connotation of
exclusiveness. It distinguishes between those who belong and those who do not. By the use of
“team” in the context of the ABM at the Women’s Centre, these women loosely linked
themselves with the general development in the corporate world. The particular features of a
“corporate team” such as its ‘de-centralized’ and (supposedly) ‘non-hierarchical’ organization
and its multiple channels of information, however, did not appear to be a desirable form of
organization for these employees. They had rejected the idea of self-organization and had
asked for leadership and orders. In fact, their very disregard of the alternative forms of
organization which the Initiative suggested was based on their unfamiliarity with these
alternatives. The challenge to conform to these very ideas might have elicited the impression
that they were supposed to function as a “team”. That is to say, although they referred to their
group as “team”, unlike corporate teams they continued to organize their work team along the
lines of a collective. They appear to apply a notion of “team spirit”, defined as the “willingness
to act as a member of a group rather than as an individual”, in the way they describe their work
relationships. The “team spirit” was represented by the “harmony” among members of the
group. To establish good social relations seemed to prevent individuals from airing grievances
and issues of discontent in a group meeting.

“Team” also embraced and defined first and foremost the “group of employees” and
not a group of women working for the women’s movement. These women were members of a
project designed to serve a communal and social service purpose, therefore, they did not seem
to perceive a contradiction between their social work activities and the larger Initiative aims to
initiate social changes. These ideas of expanding the processes of democratization and aiming
for collective politics were still alive with Initiative members (see previous chapter). It was
here that the *Initiative* saw themselves engaged in furthering collective politics against the newly established inequalities. Hence, the *Initiative* supported women’s projects and employment on *ABMs*.

The employees share their concerns about women’s employment (based on those notions of the primacy of work) but not necessarily about collective politics. Their notion of emancipation then was closely related to how it used to be espoused by the GDR state. That is to say the employees placed less importance on women’s issues than on employment. The idea that women’s emancipation was fulfilled through their participation in the work force appeared to be upheld by the employees of the Centre in giving primacy to work over women’s issues. In other words, to define women’s problems solely in terms of employment reflects former GDR ideology. In contrast to members of the East German Women’s Movement the employees had not questioned the emancipatory project a la GDR. One might therefore suggest that the smallest common denominator between women in the Centre and the *Initiative* was in sharing their concern about employment for women.

To conclude, the employees of the Centre defined their group as a “team”, indicating that they gave primacy to work over women’s issues and that it was through employment that they had developed new social relations. However, when they referred to their group as “team”, they were, thereby, invoking features of the collective. Thus, the new work relations were based on old values of sociability in the work-place. To speak of “team” instead of collective, however, reflects the profound changes these women perceived as they ventured into employment under the conditions of the market economy. It also seems to indicate that they have a sense of being socially integrated through this employment “even if it is only *ABM*”, although the *ABM* would be considered employment in the secondary labour market and was, therefore, viewed by some people as having low status. Though they would be concerned about the uncertainty of their future, they probably knew at the time that they had a chance to find at least another short-term employment in the future. The past, present and future for those women of the wool-project provides us with a different view of the prospect of what *ABM* employment meant to them. Women in these groups articulated the experience of collectivity in their work groups quite differently (team vs. collective) but possibly valued it
similarly. That is so, because in these women's perspective being part of society required paid employment.

The Wool-Project: Experiences of Long-Term Unemployed Women

...the development of the economic and employment market is being experienced as a breach of the former practice of life (*Lebenspraxis*) and of expectations regarding one's future (Gensior 1995:132).

*ABM* [government sponsored work programme]: First I thought oh my god, spinning that is not my cup of tea but I learned how to knit here, I couldn't do it before, so I am having an experience of success. It is fun but what is most important is to be with people (Kerstin, member of the wool-project)

In Stralsund, this particular government sponsored work programme (*ABM*) for long-term unemployed women, the wool-project (*Woll-Projekt*), was not the only one of its kind in Mecklenburg-Pomerania. In this predominantly agricultural region wool-projects also existed in other small towns along the coastal strip as a training programme where long-term unemployed women learned traditional handicraft techniques such as spinning. For example, they spun their own wool in order to make sweaters, socks and many other things. Four out of five women who joined this work programme had worked as seamstresses in GDR companies. Most of the members of this work programme had lost their jobs by the end of 1989 or during the first half of 1990 (before unification). The criterion for hiring these women was their experience of long-term unemployment after unification. Women who started in 1993 taught those who began a year later. The senior women were in their second year of the *ABM*, whereas the junior women had just started their 'employment' two months ago. In the second year of the work programme's existence a diversified group of women in their early twenties to early thirties, married and unmarried, with and without children were employed.

The wool-project, like other enterprises of the women's projects movement, was characteristically financed through government sponsored work programmes (*ABMs*). The programmes were designed for these women who had an experience of "a breach of the former practice of life and of expectations regarding one's future" (Gensior ibid.). They had had fewer chances in the recent past to find employment. Thus, the wool-project workers
experienced the processes of social differentiation rather differently than the employees of the Centre because of their disadvantage. It is within this context that the wool-project workers allude to the experience of ABM as comparable to a rite of passage, i.e., by providing the opportunities for work thereby allowing them to re-integrate. I do not mean to imply that the rite of passage model\(^5\) can be applied to a complex and problematic transition such as the one from socialism. In fact, in the transition from socialism unknown social and status differences develop as former GDR people enter the united Germany.

This is can be heard in the women's narratives as we learn about their experiences with the societal transformation processes, i.e., the processes of social differentiation, particularly through their experience of unemployment. Social differentiation themes are stories about the loss of the old solidarity of the work collectives and the changing experience of work collectivity after the *Wende*, the experience of social isolation during their time of unemployment, the search for employment and the way money has changed social relationships. The way these women contrast their phase of unemployment with their current employment in the wool-project provides insights into the personal and social problematic nature of unemployment transition and indicates what it is that women themselves want from employment. As my data suggest, the desire to be employed goes beyond merely work for monetary benefit. Women desire to participate in the larger society through work. This relates to their experience of work in the collective.

The government sponsored work programme (*ABM*) provides an institutional framework within which these women could make social contacts and master the new situation. This impression is enhanced by a number of factors in the way they narrate their stories and emphasize certain themes. First, after an experience of long-time employment they are brought together in this group to learn new skills. Second, they form a new social group. Third, they not only have regained a working routine but also a status as a (quasi) working member of society which for the first time allows them to re-integrate into the unified German society. Fourth, through the collectivity of the *ABM* they describe themselves as "socially

\(^5\) According to van Gennep (1960, 1986) *rites of passage* accompany different kinds of passages and support human beings in times of crisis. The *rites of passage* follow a three phase scheme of separation, liminality, and integration. For a critical analysis of applying the model of *rites of passage* to "complex" societies see my MA thesis (Schimkat 1990).
That is to say their experience of social differentiation is described as an experience of social isolation or, in the language of the rites of passage an experience of separation from familiar social networks accompanied by a loss of orientation that required learning new strategies. On this plane, the experience of a period of unemployment was described as a transition period of a particular kind, namely, one that resembles the state of liminality (see van Gennep 1986, 1909, V. Turner 1982, 1977, 1967; Terence Turner 1977; Moore and Myerhoff 1977, 1975). The phase of unemployment is described as a period characterized by unsuccessful search and discrimination against women, particularly women with children. It is also associated with social isolation, alienation, deprivation and a lack of self-esteem. As the women narrated their personal histories, they attempted to make sense of their experiences of transformation in a manner which I have interpreted as incorporating certain aspects of the rite of passage. The group interview itself seemed to encourage individual women to further reflect on their experience of transformation, to construct a story and to confirm among themselves certain aspects of their experiences with others.

The group interview with women of the wool-project was carried out in July of 1994. I had met these women on different occasion previous to this interview. I visited them during their work hours in the facilities on Mönchstrasse and we met several times when they visited the nearby Women’s Centre. A few weeks prior to the interview the wool-project had moved out of the old city into a suburban district where they resided in a former office building on Lindenstrasse. Upon my arrival they showed me the new spacious facilities before we sat down for the interview in the room where they spun the wool. Most of them continued knitting or carding wool while they narrated their work stories individually and discussed certain issues in the group.

I first present those narratives that address issues of re-integration before I interpret the stories of the work collectives and then present an analysis of the final group discussion in which these women discussed changes of networks and solidarity since the socialist economy of the GDR was replaced by the market economy of the FRG.

6 With regards to the transformation process in Eastern Germany Birga Maier (1996) compares some strategies of dealing with these radical changes (Bewältigungsstrategie) in one’s life to the “social death” of the rites of passage.
The Experience of (Long-Term) Unemployment: Disorientation, Loss of Social Contact And the Search for Employment

The following narratives speak to the “normality” of full-time employment in their lives and how it was overshadowed and replaced by an unknown experience of unemployment. During the phase of unemployment these women saw themselves being confronted with a suddenly changing environment including radical and rapid institutional changes. These changes were reflected in stories which describe the different reality of the West German bureaucracy (Ämter). For example, Ina (married, no children, age 33), who had already lost her employment in GDR times, points out:

When I was first unemployed I did not go to the employment centre to register, I did not know about it...where should you get it [the information] from, if you sit at home. I did not have acquaintances who I could have asked or who could have told me.

Ina’s statement addresses a couple of issues: Since she lost her employment she not only became disoriented but also lost important social contacts. She was not used to staying at home. Also, she did not know how to deal practically with the situation and how to manage within the new system of bureaucracy in which these responsibilities are delegated to the individual. Sabine, a young woman in her early twenties (a single mother with one child), has the impression that she has to run after (hinterherrennen) everything, e.g. to all the offices. Sabine also claims that a telephone has become necessary to deal with the bureaucracy. Sabine contrasts these new requirements in dealing with the bureaucracy with past ones: “We did not have to do these things, back then one could await everything”. Another women, Regina, notes that with the changes “.. you had to take care of it yourself” (man musste sich selber kümmern). In other words, these narratives describe the experience of being separated from the old system of bureaucracy and confronted with a new one which requires different personal skills as well as access to equipment (e.g. telephone).

The next section focuses on the topic of searching for employment and the experience of having been assigned a liminal status. Here, the theme of self-initiative was taken up again
and commented on. According to their stories these women had all tried to find employment through the employment centre (Arbeitsamt) as well as on their own initiative. In fact, these stories make me question some local Stralsundian administrators’ comments which suggest that unemployed former GDR people are passive and “need to be taken by their hand”. It appears to me that it was not a lack of motivation or initiative that made these women’s employment search unsuccessful (as sometimes claimed by more successful candidates). It was not successful for a variety of reasons: In general, as mentioned earlier (see chapter 2), reintegration of women into the employment market is extremely difficult in Mecklenburg-Pomerania. To be more specific, these women’s previous professions did not require a high degree of education or job mobility. As Böckmann-Schewe et al.’s (1994) study shows attitudes towards employment as well as success in finding a job largely depend on the individual’s degree of education and previous work experiences such as mobility and flexibility (see also Müller-Hartmann 1993). With respect to both factors the women in this work programme were disadvantaged, prolonging their period of unemployment and thus their experience of being in a liminal state (“betwixt-and-between”, of V. Turner).

Furthermore (and one might say typically in terms of the analogy of initiation rites for new members of a society), they experienced discrimination during their job search. For example, Regina was rejected by employers because she was a woman and a mother of three children. Sabine tells the following story of having considered beginning a retraining programme:

Then I got the idea into my head that I would like to do something like carpentry and that didn’t work. Now I completely gave up on the idea of retraining because I’m not the kind of person who would like to be in an office or be a sales person, that wasn’t for me and what’s up here in Stralsund, there is nothing. Most [retraining] schools are for office clerks (Bürokauffrau) and then there is only the carpentry profession for men.

In GDR times it was not uncommon for a women to choose a “traditionally” male profession (though GDR employment was gender-segregated despite an ideology of equality). Today, distribution of both jobs and training programmes is designed to further solidify a gender segregation in the employment market. It also seems that many employers and government officials at the employment centre do not support women’s attempt to find
employment. Several women mentioned that they were only told about (vermittelt) this ABM after they fought for it with the officials at the Employment Centre (Arbeitsamt). That is to say once they aggressively demanded from those officials in charge of distributing employment what used to be their “right and duty” in the past (namely employment), they eventually became selected candidates for ABMs.

The experience of becoming unemployed itself was portrayed as follows by Sabine who sums up her experiences after being laid off in 1992: “I thought now you are unemployed, well, you will find work and then I noticed how difficult it is. ... Applied, rejected, applied, rejected, applied, rejected”. Sabine continues to describe the effect this experience of unsuccessful employment search had on her: “...in the end I only received rejections (Absagen) and then you feel like the dregs of the earth (letzter Dreck)”. In a similar vein Regina describes how she experienced being unemployed:

....I don’t know, socially absolutely nothing is going on... So everything appears dull... really you can’t describe it, when you tried to find work and you were rejected again and again....somehow you perhaps tell yourself....they don’t want you, maybe only when the children will be older...so that they won’t be afraid that you will have to stay at home because of the child and then you tell yourself, they don’t want you, then you become indifferent.

Regina points out that she felt excluded from the employment market as a ‘working mother’ which was not the case before when women could obtain state guaranteed subsidies enabling them to combine motherhood and employment. Similarly. Sabine describes how she had to drop a computer training course because of childrearing responsibilities.

Among those women who experienced a phase of unemployment in their lives a common story describes unemployment as an experience of personal isolation and lack of self worth. The stories of the long-term unemployed, however, add another dimension, namely, unemployment experienced as social exclusion or “social ostracism” (Nickel 1995b). It points to another aspect of how processes of social differentiation affect the individual and how a developing social distance between members of the same society is experienced. This is illustrated in the following stories about why social distance develops between those who are
employed and those who are unemployed and who, therefore, can no longer communicate with one another. Several women mention that their contact with former colleagues was completely disrupted. Even coincidental meetings on the street remained on a small talk level. I ask why these contacts were given up. The following responses to my question provide an insight into (what has been called) the “process of de-solidarisation” and shows how these women perceived society as disintegrating.

Sabine: “Perhaps you are too embarrassed”.
Regina specifies her comment: “Unemployed people do not want to talk”.
Kerstin: “You do not have anything to talk about”.
Sabine, who is a single mother, suggests: “Perhaps with a partner who takes one along it would be different”.
Regina: “Then you sit next to others when they talk about their work”.

In the following quote Regina describes how, in consequence, her relation with the wider social world began to disintegrate:

..you went into hiding, you did not go out anymore... everything stops somehow. Others [friends, neighbours] still have their employment and when they talk about it during the weekend, they talk about their work and you sit around and are unemployed. So, what can you say, I did so many pieces of laundry today or what, yes, that is dull, it’s not nice.

Regina is a mother of three and married to a husband who at the time was unemployed. As this quote also shows she perceives work in the household as not having the same value as paid work. She also displays a silent resistance against being pushed “back to the hearth” (kitchen stove). These descriptions of being unemployed demonstrate that the women’s social world was greatly affected by the experience of a period of long-term unemployment in which they experienced discrimination and rejections. They all describe reaching a point of depression, indifference, hopelessness and began to feel a lack of self-esteem. These stories are contrasted then with the ones that depict the experience of ABM which marks an important stepping stone to becoming socially integrated.
For most women, this ABM was the first employment position after the Wende. The stories of these long-term unemployed women describe how once they were again in a position of employment they became capable of overcoming those sentiments and relating to the larger society more confidently. This includes friends, family, neighbours as well as administrators. Married and single women mention that the relationship in the family with partners and/or children had changed with unemployment and then changed again when they began their government sponsored employment (ABM). As the following two quotes demonstrate, the government work programme allows for a re-integration into the social world. Ina describes how she had barely managed until she received the ABM position. Being employed again was a "huge" transition in her life, as she describes:

That [delivering newspapers] I did for some time until I got this ABM...I worked very hard to scrape together the money. The little unemployment money was not much. I had to watch it (musste ich mit Haus halten). Later my husband also became unemployed, it became worse then. And, of course I was glad when I received this position.... That was really a very big transition to start all over again, so this sitting at home and everything and then getting back into a profession...was really a huge transition. I was glad that I got it and I did it here, it was really nice. I got out again and I become livelier (lebenslustiger)....I taught people how to spin and had to talk with them. I'd never liked it, it still makes me nervous. ... it was very painful this whole transition.......now I know more again through work, where I could go [in case of unemployment] so that I would not feel as dragged down (absacken) as the first time.

The impact of employment (ABM) on her well-being is also described by Regina. As Ina did earlier she also depicts it as major change in her personal life:

..... once again you are employed you have nearly turned around 180 degrees, because of the group, the colleagues whom you work with brighten you up, you become self-confident, altogether you present yourself differently.... if you had problems you always knuckled under because you did not know how to defend yourself and now, because you are again in the thick of things... you can join in any conversation! (kann man auch ein bisches mitreden, kann man auch ein bisches gegenreden, man kann mitreden!) Then if you do not like what is going on you can get excited again or you can argue.

These women (in particular the older ones in their second year) claim that the experience of the work programme allowed them to re-enter information networks, (private) circles and society. Thus, they emphasize the importance of the social dimension in their
stories, precisely, as Regina says, through conversations and arguments with others. As these stories show, employment allowed for the development of the social dimensions in two ways: First, social relations in the work-place fulfilled the need for communication and information. It was among a group of colleagues where contact with the wider society was initially re-established. Second, consequently, the individual’s relations with the outside world, that is, outside of the work-place, were enhanced. Third, this happens through discussions, exchange and conversations with other people.

At the same time several women described the ABM activities themselves as somewhat challenging due to the new status and skills they have acquired. It clearly represents an experience of learning for them as well as an experience of major personal change. The young women who had just started their first ABM year mentioned in particular that they were going through a period of adjustment to this new work environment. The analogy with the rites of passage indicates that individuals have a sense of mastering a difficult transition in their lives when they take up ABM employment. Although they experience a form of integration into the wider society, the ABM does not really initiate people into a new status; more precisely, it is not a permanent status. Instead, ABM forces people to constantly shift their status as they move between employment and unemployment. Because in these women’s perspective employment remains the main integrating factor. ABM ultimately leaves them in marginalized position where re-integration does not fully happen.

The following conversation between a (first year) junior member and a (second year) senior member of the wool-project shows that these senior and junior women hold different views on ABM regarding its value in terms of providing access to the larger social world. Interestingly, their comments speak to the breach of practices regarding their future (e.g. regarding changes to be reintegrated into the employment market), although their different age and marital status explain some of the differences. Junior member: “[ABM] is only for one year...”. She mentions that she is afraid to become unemployed again. Senior member, who already experienced a full year of ABM and had her contract renewed for a second year.

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7 Some interviewees (e.g. Klara, Renate) who had held an ABM at the Women’s Centre around the time of unification describe their experience with ABM as a learning experience that allowed them to adjust to the West German system.
responds by saying: "...but at least there was something". The senior members (Ina and Regina) are even willing to accept ABM as an alternative to employment in the future. For example Regina: "[there is] hope that you will get in again after a year at home, you could live with it, unemployment wouldn’t be so bad...you have a goal and hope”.

Their experience of the ABM implies that their working lives could follow this discontinuous pattern in the future. They acquired, however, a new self-confidence and conviction that the experience of overcoming social isolation is repeatable (once they acquired a sense of being socially integrated). The women in their second year articulate their hope that they would be more capable of facing another period of unemployment without experiencing the same personal and social stress and isolation. In other words, they had developed new strategies through the experience of ABM (and the contact with the Women’s Centre). Whether this leads to further acceptance of their disadvantaged position in the employment market is presently undetermined. The acceptance of ABM as a future possibility might be read this way; even though they all desire reintegration into the employment market and they see only slim chances for themselves, but at least they feel socially more integrated through this ABM experience.

In the above stories I showed how women stressed the importance of the social dimension in holding an ABM position. Next, I would like to focus on how these women talk about their past and present work-place and how they compare the social aspects of the work programme with those in their former work collectives.

ABM and Work Collectives (The Notion of the Work Collectives in Stories of the Present)

Here, I argue that the content of these narratives not only shows how they perceived the effects of the ABM on their lives but also indicates how they felt ambivalent about them. Moreover, that these women interpret their ABM as substituting for certain features of the

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8 The senior women were less willing to consider further changes in their occupational career or training courses (Umschulung). Both senior women considered building a future on their newly acquired skills. However, setting up their own project does not appear to be profitable. Furthermore, they themselves did not value these skills highly and did not consider them (e.g. a hand made sweater) as having exchange value in the market.
work collective allows for a deeper understanding of how these women experienced the processes of social differentiation and social integration. One important feature that allows them to overcome the personal and social effects is the experience of a work collectivity with other members of the ABM, a social group whose members have been exposed to similar pressures in the employment market and the transforming society and, now, are again exposed to the same conditions as they undergo a transformation into a new status. This creates feelings of solidarity and social cohesion which these women interpret to resemble the collectivity of the past.

The women of the wool-project do not mention the official political function of the collective (Böckmann-Scheve et al. 1994); instead, they stress the social dimension of their work relationships in the collective. First, let us look at how they describe the changing experience of work collectivity. Kerstin, for example, describes the change of social interaction in her collectives as the breakdown of solidarity and a widening gap between employees and management: "...everybody only thought of themselves...many were laid off...the boss acted more stupidly". As Kerstin suggests, with the collapse of the GDR the collectives and a sense of solidarity disappeared. This is also true for those stories I was told of other collectives such as those found in the neighbourhood.

My findings with this group of long-term unemployed women, however, seem to indicate that certain aspects of a collective lifestyle (and daily routines) continue to exist in these women's representations of the past as well as in their daily interactions in the workplace. In other words, the notion of the collective continues to exist in people's memory and social practice. But it is the representation of the work collective in their stories of the present and the use of the term to describe their current social relations and experience of ABM that provides us with another dimension of their experience of the larger transformation process. It is the social contact among members of the collective and the routines of work that are being remembered. Here is Ina's typical description of the workplace and atmosphere in the past:

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9 The use of "ABM-Brigades" in a village in Mecklenburg points in the same direction (see Brauer and Willisch 1996). Recent studies suggest to placing more emphasis on continuity in people's behavior (see ZiF Bulletin 13, 1996).
In the factory I worked as a seamstress, there you had your colleagues with whom you could talk, you did not just sit there; of course you worked, you needed to earn money, worked for output (auf Leistung arbeiten), it is quite hard work although one just sits, like this [sits], of course you also talked, it was fun .... I needed somebody who pulled me along and in the end [of the GDR and the collectives] I had a circle of colleagues who cheered me up, entertained me and everything, it was actually always fun...

In the past, these seamstresses had to work for output (Leistung) to make money. This stands in sharp contrast with today’s leisure handiwork activity, even more so because the product of their work cannot be sold at market value. The wool-project is not permitted to sell its products. It can only donate them. In the past Ina’s social life was ‘fabricated’ while working at a sewing machine. The daily routines and the social dimension of Ina’s work-place were central to the social fabric of her life. In retrospect she describes this fabric as consisting of “income, output and fun”. Today, as Ina sits at the spinning wheel (and regains a working routine) she is producing a new yarn. This yarn will be woven into the new social fabric of her present life. She is, however, aware of the difference between the productivity of the past and the present. Being a member of an ABM allows her to produce useful items and to establish social contacts but she considers herself no longer a “productive” member of society- “one just sits, like this”, whereas in the past, one “worked for output”.

The stories of the work collectives resemble one another but bring to life different aspects of it. Regina similarly recalls the atmosphere of her work collective. Her story also depicts the formal organization of the collective and describes how within this institutional framework there developed an informal clique:

In my sewing room (Nähstube) it was the same, we had three brigades, morning, six hours, and afternoon, eight hours, I belonged to the latter...which was part of one of the two brigades but we were a small group by ourselves... we got together a bit and then we often partied together. While you are sitting at the sewing machine, I mean, you can only work for output, it was not easy but when it was all running well and so, I mean, you nevertheless talked at the same time, so you did not just sit still (stur) at the machine.

Similarly to Ina and Regina, Sabine describes the rhythm of work at her former work-place in the GDR:
at our place upstairs, if the order was bigger we could work at a slower pace (the norm was better), that’s why we always liked it when something big came [such as a flag], then we did not need to hurry as much, yes, it was nice.

These three women point out both the importance of social life in the work collective and their hard work due to the expected productivity (output). They compare the demand to fulfill a certain “norm” with the rather unmotivated production of crafts in their ABM. In comparing their past and present employment, i.e. the work collective with the ABM, these narrators emphasize the position [factor of integration] these work collectives constituted within the larger society. They emphasize, however, the informal communal aspects of their social work relations over the official ones. This contrasts with the official view of the work collective as a unit which is in competition with other collectives for the highest productivity etc. (see Böckmann-Schewe et al. 1994:43). But the wool-project workers possibly do not stress this aspect because it is here where they see the ABM to contrast most strongly in that it does not (directly) contribute to the production of society.

It was the social aspect of that past experience which they could revive by being employed on ABM. These ‘rituals’ of daily working life were important to gain a sense of being reintegrated and to form a new social group (one might call it the ABM-collective.) Like the formal structure of the work collective which provided the framework for the rhythm and social fabric of their past work lives, the ABM provides the framework for their working lives in the present. Since these women began their ABM they have taken up some of the old threads of their former lives and started to incorporate them into the social fabric of their present lives. When Sabine comments on work relations in the wool-project she uses the same words: “it is nice here”. Also, Ina who described herself as more sociable or “lively” since she began working for the wool-project remembers the social life of her collective as comparably enjoyable: it “was always fun”.

All the women of the wool-project describe the relationship with their colleagues today as good. In other words, they construct a parallel between their well-being as members of a collective and their current employment in the government sponsored work programme. Thus, these women depict a resemblance between the social life of the wool-project and the social
life of the work collectives. The content of these stories suggests that this is done in order to stress the importance of this work programme for them in terms of its communication- and information value while at the same time viewing themselves as occupying a different position in relation to the sphere of production.

At times their stories about the collectives might sound like the ‘good old days’ stories of retired people, except that they are told by women in their twenties and thirties who are attempting to come to terms with the recent shift from a socialist to a capitalist regime and its impact on their lives, i.e., the shift from full-time employment to being unemployable in the primary labour market. Whether we read a certain nostalgic undertone into these stories or not depends on our understanding (and emphasizing) of what these women communicate in these stories. Certainly there is the loss of the (job) security and in terms of employment these women are the ones who benefit least from the recent changes. However, the stories of the work collective were modified and re-emerged to signify how they perceive their status as well as their chances for becoming socially integrated. In fact, they articulate a sense of mastering one’s life and of achieved integration. As we saw this integration is perceived as incomplete since we learned that in their view, having made a comparison between ABM and the collective, being completely integrated or part of society requires employment. The processes of social differentiation (caused by the ongoing economic and social restructuring) assign them a particular position in the unified society. How they talk about this experience and what can be concluded from it with regards to collective action follows.

**Remaining On the Margins: The Role of Money and How People Changed**

As the popular east German writer Christa Wolf (1996:404) notes:

...West Germany, which was able to pursue a market economy without ideological hindrance, implanted in its people a catalogue of values different from those in the East. I believe that what separates us most clearly is our relation to property-because, like it or not, people in the GDR dealt with property in a different, looser way, regarding its value as lying merely in its use- and also, horrible dictu, to money, the pivot around which thoughts and circumstances revolve in a free-market economy. It must be offensive to West Germans if East Germans still betray by a glance or by a twist of the mouth that they consider the role of money in the West abnormal. Of course they are eager to learn the new ways, sometimes too eager. They worry about their money; they too are always talking about it now...
The following group discussion highlights how the experience of living in a capitalist society is articulated through stories about money. In so doing these women make references to the West like Wolf’s but unlike her they expand on the effect the transition has on social relations and the social differentiation it causes. Their stories articulate the experience of the social differentiation processes and how money creates social distance. Here again, the past when money was not that important is compared with the present when money seems to be ‘what makes the world go round’. Katja (age 25, single), who is the last to tell her story, addresses the issues that spark a final group discussion. Katja narrates that she was retrained to become a cook but never succeeded in being permanently employed. She also spent some time in the West. Katja’s story elaborates on how social relations have changed in general since the conditions for paid work have changed. She states:

I have a bit of a problem with the people today because everybody is so egotistical and thinks of themselves. Money, money, money. And on the other side [in the West] you are cornered if you show emotions. Perhaps it will sound a bit kitsch but in the past I always thought of other people if I continued like I did in the past then I would end up on the streets and people would say ‘you are out of luck’... nobody will help me I can only help myself.

Katja continues to describe the differences between past and present: “First with regards to work everybody has to make sure they keep their work, otherwise you cannot exist....people became cold”.

And Regina adds: “Egotistical (selfish)”.
Katja: “The people are not the same anymore”.
Regina: “Everybody says it today, you need to think of yourself”.
I provoke: “You did not do this in the past?”
Katja: “Then it was not necessary”.
Regina: “Then it was not like it is now”.
Katja explains: “Some people have to learn it first”.
Sabine interrupts: “Everybody had a job although it was not always the job of one’s dreams”.
Katja continues her line of thought:
People are not the same and some are sensitive and others are not so sensitive. But you need to deal with it [the changes] and some people are not good at doing it....the ones who take have not as many problems as the sensitive ones, the shy and so on and vulnerable. That is how it was in the GDR. In the West, they are already raised like this...

Regina adds her version of the changes:

As she [Katja] said, people have changed. You could not continue like you did in the past although it also existed in the past [egotism] but not to the same extent as today...

Then it was not employment but it was about smaller things e.g. in private when you lined up for fruits, vegetable or what do I know, if there was somathing [to buy] then people were egoistic - scarce resources (Mangelprodukte), eh. Or if there were dresses to buy something nice and then you grabbed for it, you did not care about the size, the bigger the better, children will grow into it but you at least had it. ..... Today everything is there you do not need to fight/ struggle over it, now we end up on a different level [fighting]... now it all has to do with money.

Being asked for further clarification of “it” Regina replies:

In any case employment and everything related to money ..once it has to do with money you see things differently today.

Others join in, in order to explain.

Sabine: “In the past you could invite people (Spendieren)”.

Ina: “You had money”.

Sabine: “Money was there and the people were different”.

Ina:

“They helped one another. Then there was the neighbourhood. You ask somebody to help you and they did... today you ask how much?”

Another women: “There was the neighbourhood. You did lots without money”.

In other words, as Regina phrased the motto of the past to describe how informal networks functioned: “One good turn deserves another (Eine Hand wäscht die andere)”.

This discussion revolves around how people and networks changed with the shift from an economy of scarce resources to a market economy. Regina points out that people used to be selfish with regard to scarce products (Mangelprodukte) but not with regards to work. In other words, people in GDR times were in a way competing over scarce resources (although it was
not a real competition) but not over jobs. This is seen as the major difference between the past and the present. Today's fight over scarce employment and thus over income becomes an 'existential' question. Both the scarcity of products as well as the scarcity of jobs is viewed by these women (and most East Germans) as the responsibility of the state.

The consensus of this final discussion was that money has come to play a different role than in the past. They say that it has become more important and substitutes the exchange value of goods and services for what existed among networks of friends, colleagues and neighbours. This means that old strategies that were acquired in an economy of scarce resources are devalued as the informal network decreases. These women also made references to the West where, as they see it, people are socialized differently and adhere to different values (see Wolf above). What they see developing in the unified society after the breakdown of old collectives and networks are processes of social differentiation that penetrate every niche of social life.

The women of the wool-project describe how with neighbours and family one common topic rules. People talk about "status symbols" and compare the cost of consumer products such as stereos, furniture. The most visible of these symbols are cars. Kerstin views the changes in her old neighbourhood as follows:

In our street where I lived people used to get along; now they say he has this car, I must have it too, he has this, I can afford this as well....in the neighbourhood it is like a competition.

I ask if cars are a topic for women as well.
Kerstin: “Nah, this is usually among men or the whole family if you like”.
Regina: “It is more the men and the older boys...”
(unidentified): “When men don’t get along, it is with the women [the topic]”.
Regina: “There are also women ....with regards to cars it is a bad topic when men get together. I don’t like it.”
Sabine: “Me neither”.
I: “How was it in the past?”
Regina: “In the past it was not that extreme, it was also there...in the past there was not much to talk about cars....what was there Trabi [Trabant], Skoda, Wartburg [brand names of Eastern European car manufacturers]”. (Laughter)
Kerstin: “Now it is like this (jetzt heisst es), look over there, he drives such a car, where did he get the money”.
I: “What else besides cars?”
Regina: “Cars everybody can see, the other things which are in the apartment, you can only show off (kann man nur angeben) by talking about it”.
Kerstin: “Or if somebody shows up dressed up to the nines”.
Regina:

Furniture or technical equipment those who have it, who have money need to talk about the price, it is not something that you see.....When you stand in the butcher shop and they talk about it or in the family....in my husband’s family they have money in the bank (ganz schön was auf der Kante). There it goes like this, one bought a Ford Mondeo, the expensive one and the other a VW, also a good one and then it continues, yes, and until then I want to have my 16.000 marks back in my account and then we want to buy new furniture for the apartment. Anyway, that’s enough of that.

In general, to compare prices and products is a reasonable practice within the context of a market economy. As these quotes also show, however, there already existed a material orientation in the GDR which is now transformed into a fixation that resembles ‘commodity fetishism’. Moreover, these women’s voices highlight that people in Eastern Germany do not equally share this new experience of being consumers in a market economy.

Kerstin confirms Regina’s sentiment: “Such things upset me as well (Über sowas kann ich mich auch immer aufergen), they brag, they have the money, they can buy these things”.
Regina: “Perhaps they do not even notice it, I don’t know”.
Ina (echoes): “They do not even notice perhaps”.
Kerstin (modifies): “Some perhaps, others don’t .......” [several women talk at the same time]

Several women describe their observations and experiences among family and neighbours who show off and behave rudely and ignorantly towards people with low income such as themselves. They clearly perceive the reasons for the destruction of these
neighbourhood networks to lie in the newly established discrepancy in people’s income (unknown in GDR times). According to Berger (1995:21) ‘‘the manner in which participation in the work force (Erwerbsbeteiligung) is distributed has become a central means for establishing social inequality’’. Because of these social inequalities a similar tension is created within the family. The talk about purchases, prices and bank accounts is perceived as a ‘‘painful subject’’ within the extended family. Nevertheless, most women give their family members the benefit of the doubt (perhaps they don’t know) or as Sabine says: ‘‘I know that my aunt and uncle have money but we have a good relationship, they helped me...and when they talk about cars etc. I catch my sisters’ eye and we laugh’’.

These are slim indications that there might exist or develop a certain solidarity among materially disadvantaged family members, and/or a confidence which is based on the skills to manage despite one’s financially difficult situation. Regina fantasizes about a change of roles and in so doing demonstrates a very different self-confidence which is not based on a high income but the ability to survive under the new conditions:

I always tell myself, others who have money should show me (vormachen) how to live on this money with three children. I bet they could not make it (wetten das schaffen sie nicht).

Since informal exchange networks broke down Regina argues that she cannot imagine informal mutual exchange relationships under the conditions of the market economy: ‘‘I don’t know what I should offer, what I could do for somebody’’. Sabine adds quietly: ‘‘Knitting’’ (giggle).
Regina: ‘‘Well, knitting and sewing, what you know how to do (was man so kann), that is, I don’t know, I feel it is a little thing. I see it as a nothing (Lappalie)’’.

I mentioned earlier that those items that are being produced during their working hours in the wool-project cannot be sold at market value but have to be donated. This stipulation exists because the employment centre supports the wool-project. However, this is only in theory. In practice, as one woman puts it : ‘‘We get orders’’. Unofficially, the women of the wool-project take orders from individuals (usually acquaintances) who ask for certain products
such as sweaters, socks etc.. For the records, their payment is treated as a donation. Perhaps it is here that informal networks are being re-established and that their donations are being used to support this project. The wool-project is designed to integrate women in the second labour market by having them produce goods which they are not permitted to sell. However, they figure out how to ‘sell’ without appearing to ‘sell’. The women are aware that the wool-project depends on the ABM support by the state because it would be difficult to survive as an independent economic enterprise in the market. The way they reflect on being caught between state support and market forces is made clear in their responses. It highlights the discrepancy between economic integration in the first labour market and the work programmes in the second.

To conclude, as this group discussion about “status symbols” and “price comparisons” demonstrates, this “price talk” is initiated in diverse social settings. Cars represent a particularly important status symbol. Although male members of the family used to talk about cars in the past, the significance of these talks has changed and acquired a different meaning; and with it the gender dynamics within the family have changed. (It seems that men and women accept the fact that “cars” have come to represent the family income.) Some studies point out that family relations between women, men and children have changed since the Wende, and the stories of the wool-project women seem to confirm it. These women’s stories also comment on a newly arisen gendered dividing line, and they are concerned with the developing social inequalities and the way they impact on their social relations. There is, however, no indication that this awareness or concern could lead towards collective female action. Their stories also demonstrate that the ongoing societal transformations have affected those networks surrounding the work-place, neighbourhood and family, and that new inequalities are being established. In the society of the unified Germany, as these women see it, East German values which were based on relationships of solidarity, collectively and mutual help (once developed within institutionalized collectivism) have shifted towards values which emphasize individualism, egotism and money-based social relations. As these women claim, in order to make the transition from a socialist to a capitalist society, to be able to contribute to society, and be rewarded with the products of a consumer society, they must be employed.
Conclusion

The employees in these two ABM projects differed in age\textsuperscript{10}, education, professional background and experiences with the employment market in the unified Germany. Ironically, the group of younger women, skilled workers, though not educated to work in social service agencies, would have fewer chances to find employment. Although both in women’s projects on the margins of society, the women in these ABMs differ in their general future outlook. Whereas women of the Centre have been a bit better off in the recent past and possess skills that allow them to be hired in other social service institutions (most likely they will again find minimum short-time employment as they did in the past), women of the wool-project face a rather grim future with regards to employment and already know that their only chance might be to oscillate between periods of unemployment and temporary employment on ABM. The social distance between these groups itself exemplifies the process of disintegration and social differentiation. The changing function and practice of money for East Germans contributes to greater social differentiation than in the past.

These stories of long-term unemployed women from Stralsund with regards to ABMs suggest that, on the one hand, they see that the value of ABMs in terms of women’s reintegration into the labour market is limited, but on the other hand, it can be an important step in confronting the personal and social effects of unemployment. It is during their ABM activity that women first develop new and different strategies of mastering unemployment and the unfamiliar personal and social effects of not having guaranteed employment.

The membership in an ABM allowed women of both groups to form social groups, but as becomes clear in the way they interpreted their past experiences of work collectivity, it had a slightly different meaning for those long-term unemployed women. While the employees of the Centre were generally employed in the unified Germany, the wool-project workers felt they were regaining a quasi status as working members for the first time. Their sense of collectivity is related to work and the common experience of ABM. The emphasis of the wool-project workers on the collectivity and sociability can be interpreted as a response to the experience of

\textsuperscript{10} The women of the wool-project were in their mid twenties to early thirties while women at the Centre were in their early thirties to fifties.
isolation and destitution during unemployment. To downplay gender issues in the stories of the past relates to the experience of even bigger inequalities and discrimination in the present. Women in both groups focus on work and not on women’s issues, although in these women’s projects they are also exposed to other social-political forms of collectivity (e.g. associated with the Initiative and activities taking place at the Centre). It is here that their understanding of the gendered restructuring that accompanied the processes of social differentiation is influenced and possibly directed, but it has not yet lead to their active involvement in collective politics.

The way the Centre employees interpret their work relations as based on a team spirit does show that they align themselves with the larger world of (corporate) employment outside of the context of the women’s projects run on ABMs. Their interpretations and experiences of the past reappear in the way they define their work relationships as “harmonious”. In so doing, they continue to emphasize the primacy of work over women’s issues. According to this logic, they are collectively mobilized through work and (in reference to the ideology of the GDR) have a sense of being emancipated as women through work. Thus, how they define “team” based on notions of the work collective prevents them equally from exploring alternative ways of organizing work as their more new “business” like approach to work. When they emphasize their relations in the work group, they give priority to the collectivity in the working context of the project, but not to the collectivity of the women’s group and the wider women’s project and movement. Thus, they do not necessarily link their women’s group to collective politics of the movement. Although women in these ABMs, at times critically reflect on women’s issues and women’s changing role in society, they do not see a discrepancy between their attitudes as employees and members of the women’s project. Thus, employment in women’s projects, was not a matter of discussion for most women. Those women who addressed the issue would talk about “women’s work” and to this I now turn.
Chapter 7 “WOMEN'S WORK” AS SOCIAL PRACTICE IN THE CENTRE PAST AND PRESENT

Introduction

Previous chapters showed how women valued the importance of employment in their lives and how they perceived work relations as these were being transformed. Women saw themselves as being socially integrated through work, and for some of them who were employed in the projects, issues of work appeared to be more important than women’s issues. This chapter provides a deeper understanding of some additional taken for granted meanings of work and women’s issues as these translated into practices at the Centre. Although many of the earlier discussions about employment for and among women alluded to “women’s work” (Frauenarbeit), the women themselves did not explicitly speak of “women’s work” other than in the context of the Centre.¹ I argue that the conceptualization of “women’s work” epitomizes the rapid and radical transformation in Eastern Germany. It reveals most poignantly women’s sense of a difficult transition from a clearly defined past to an unprecedented present and uncertain future.

This is because women and men come from a work-place-society (see p. 30ff.) in which they were generally oriented towards employment, and notions of work would permeate many other spheres of life. In particular, “house work”, the unpaid homework essential for societal reproduction largely performed by women and supported by social policies for women and family, was valued differently (Trappe 1995:19). Instead of viewing women’s position in the GDR as confined by a “double burden” legislated by East German state policy and discourse (e.g. Rosenberg 1991), one can speak with Trappe (1995:20) of a “double orientation”.² For women in the GDR, participating in both family and employment meant they were confronted with different problems and needed to develop a “double orientation” that flexibly and

¹ Feminist studies concerned with “women’s work” usually address issues of development and the gendered division of labour in the capitalist process of transformation (see e.g. Leacock and Safa 1986) including the invisibility of women’s work “as a particular set of interconnections between reproductive and productive relations” (Moore 1988:85) Unlike these studies, this chapter explores the notion of women’s work in the context of the transition from socialism to capitalism from the perspective of the subjects of study.
² For further details see Trappe’s (1995:20) criticism of using the term “double burden” in the GDR context. This author analyses the extensive support that was made available to working women under social policies of the GDR.
strategically dealt with these norms and expectations (Trappe 1995:22). As women are being pushed out of the employment market there is pressure to give up this “double orientation”. Since the social benefits ceased to exist women have to develop different strategies in order to combine both family work and employment if they have employment at all. These changing expectations and strategies can be investigated through their practice of “women’s work”.

In the context of the Centre “women’s work” does not currently refer to “women’s unpaid family labour”. “Women’s work” is not necessarily seen in opposition to employment, it can be employment in the projects or for the institutions for women. “Women’s work”, thus, becomes a term with a particular meaning in the context of the current restructuring that disadvantages women. This becomes clear as we look at how the term was being used in the local context.

In a letter dated March 26, 1992, employees of the Centre expressed their desire to establish contact with other women’s centres (Frauentreffs) through the Offices of Equality in Mecklenburg-Pomerania in order to “exchange experiences with political work for women (frauenpolitische Arbeit) and any other areas of interest”. They were particularly interested in finding out “how many institutions existed with a similar aim in women’s work in Mecklenburg-Pomerania” (ibid.). In contacting other institutions they hoped to build up a provincial network in order to “jointly and strongly engage for the women’s cause” (um uns gemeinsam stark zu machen fuer die Sache der Frauen) (ibid.).

A year later, in 1993, the Initiative applied to the city government to become the non-profit organization of the Women’s Centre. They argued that they were interested in “continuing women’s work (Frauenarbeit)”. They used the term to bolster their application to become the supporting institution and to get funding from the government; however, the way in which “women’s work” plays out and is understood in the Centre is very different from their application in this letter.

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3 Moving on from there allows Trappe (1995) to determine women’s past experiences and to explore how they effect their life course planning today in a united Germany.

4 The notion of continuity here refers to their long-term plan to integrate the Women’s Centre into the Initiative’s larger project, the Fayencenhof. That is to say, the Sundine was conceptualized as a transient organization.
The varied use of this term in these letters points to the ambiguous and blurred meaning of "women's work". It suggests that the employees of the Centre at times used "political work for women" and "women's work" interchangeably and that the term "women's work" seems to allow for an even broader definition ("any other area of interest"). This term was used in three reinforcing but rather different ways. It was used to appeal to the solidarity of women within these institutional frameworks in the present; to get government officials to financially support projects for women (see the Initiative's official application to take over the Centre) and, perhaps most importantly for my own interests, it was used to converse about and communicate one's personal engagement in the Centre. It was the particular way in which "women's work" spanned both the past and the present that fascinated me. As I listened to the tapes and transcribed the interviews I noticed that women applied the term to practices in both the past and the present. This was done by different narrators regardless of their membership in diverse groups such as the DFD, the Initiative or the group of employees.

This general view of "women's work" captures an important outlook: how East German women think about integration and work. For East German women work is not just about employment. Multiple meanings are woven into the concept. As East German women shifted from a socialist planned to a market economy they carried with them a more general idea of work which includes the idea of work for the good of society.

In this chapter we look at how women construct their sense of work. The multifaceted ideas about work are illustrated in their narratives. As we see with these cases a number of different experiences depend on individuals' experiences in the GDR. Their past experiences or rather involvement with institutions and politics colour the way they think about work and the way they are themselves engaged or view other women's activities. Before we can look at what this means in terms of how women connect this with their political activism and how they perceive their political role in the unified Germany, we need to hear different women construct their ideas of "women's work" as it began in the GDR and then as it has become for those who work in the Centre today. In order to contextualize their narratives I provide some information about the institutional structures of [work and] "women's work" in the GDR.
The History of “Women’s Work”

“Women’s work” is a translation of the German term Frauenarbeit and implies “work for, with and by women”. It encompasses a variety of meanings in diverse contexts, but here I focus on what it means for women who have been involved with the Centre in the GDR and how they communicate their views of work in the present. In the GDR, “women’s work” could span a broad spectrum of activities and areas such as educational activities, public relations work, social work, trade union work or cultural work but it always entailed “work for, with and by women” within the confines of state controlled organizations. Subsequently, “women’s work” was also elevated to stand for, literally, “societal work” (gesellschaftliche Arbeit) or rather “work for the good of society”.

The notion of “societal work” has per se political connotations because the role of the so-called “societal organizations”, such as the Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB), Free German Youth (FDJ), League of Culture (Kulturbund), German Gymnastics and Sports Federation (DTSB) or the DFD guaranteed a more general education and the citizen’s solidarity with or attachment to their socialist country. As one woman, Karina, notes: “.. everybody in the GDR.. had to do something relevant for society”. By this she means that everyone was expected to contribute to society through other activities beyond their employment in other groups and collectives. Collectivism was part of the state ideology and provided the framework in which social relations were established. Accordingly, women were in large numbers organized at the lower levels of the mass organization and the political parties whereas they were rarely found in leading positions at the upper levels. There were, however, institutions in place designed to increase the number of women employed full-time, to encourage them to gain (often additional) professional qualifications, and to motivate and support them to move into leading positions.

While people were generally encouraged to develop themselves through work and engagement in societal organizations the women’s cause specifically could be furthered in two organizational settings. It is in these contexts that women speak about their work as “women’s work”. So, one might distinguish between two basic types of “women’s work”: First,
"women’s work" that was conducted in companies and could be called betriebliche Frauenarbeit (women’s work in the company). This type of “women’s work” was carried out in companies through so-called “women’s commissions” (Frauenkommissionen) which were integrated (on the lowest level) into the union mass organization (FDGB) of the GDR. Work for the FDGB-union was considered political work as it directly realized state policies. Consequently, work with or for the “women’s commissions” was viewed as “political (women’s) work”. The so-called Frauenförderplane (plans in support of women regarding professional qualifications) were instruments of the Party’s intention to put into practice its state policies (Hampele 1993a:292). Second, “women’s work” also entailed the administration of the socialist mass organization for women, the DFD, and of the DFD women’s groups in residential areas (Wohngebiet).

In contrast to the union, the DFD was supposed to attract and organize those women who could not be reached via Party or union membership (Hampele 1993a:296). The organizations were embedded differently within the political system. Women themselves saw the effect and influence that they could exercise in these two institutional settings differently. We will look at two different perspectives on “women’s work”, as it was carried out in the administration of both organizational settings, through the narratives of two women and the way these women compared the difference between “women’s work” with the union and the DFD. First, I will present Hilde’s reflections on her “political work” for both organizations and second, Christa’s retrospective on her longtime engagement with the DFD.

Hilde: “Women’s work” With The DFD And The Union

Hilde, who was born in 1949, had instructed the women’s commissions as an executive board leader (Vorsitzende) since 1971, working for the regional board of the Union (Kreisvorstand der Gewerkschaft). She had received her education in the Union School (Gewerkschaftsschule) in addition to her profession as a lathe operator (Dreher). She had also been a DFD member since 1972-3 and became the regional (Kreis) executive board leader (chair) in 1988.

Hilde distinguishes between the women’s commissions and DFD based on the degree to which each dealt with what she calls “women’s problems”. These included issues related to
how to combine family responsibilities and employment such as accommodation for children (Unterbringung der Kinder) and providing women with opportunities for continuous professional qualifications. These organizations encouraged women to take on positions at the management level (Leitungspositionen):

Where there were strong women’s commissions in the companies they pushed through a lot such as that they [women] were qualified and employed accordingly and so on; that you could have a bit more of an impact. With the DFD it was always like, well you do it, it was not a must; or, well, if you collected bottles or paper or visited a counseling session (Beratung) or went to the women academy (Frauenakademie) it was on a voluntary basis and you could not somehow make an impact with it but here in the companies one could do something for women (etwas bewirken) (HZ: 19).

Hilde’s comparison reveals how in each organization the aims, effectiveness and opportunity for influence differed. The commissions, she argues, did strive for women’s equal access to professional education/qualifications while the DFD was responsible for a more general education and for improving women’s knowledge (e.g. through visits to the Frauenakademie) as well as for performing certain societal tasks. However, she considers both to be “women’s work”, although she distinguishes her employment with the union from the kind of “societal work” that the DFD members were expected to perform. She contrasts the political impact of the DFD with that of the union (Hampele 1993a also describes this). In her view, the DFD’s impact was reduced by certain societal responsibilities that were assigned to the DFD, such as cleaning up residential areas and collecting recyclable material as well as taking care of the neighbourhood kindergarten. Her statement that defines DFD activities as “voluntary” is contradictory, however, since the expectation to do “something relevant for society” defined the tasks and responsibilities that formed and directed the organization. Hilde recalls:

there were such obligations [as part of competitions] cleaning up the residential areas, children, to organize events with children and whatever else we always got stuck with (was uns immer angehängt wurde), collecting bottles and glasses and, well, collecting recyclable materials (Altstoffe) that also was our task [besides organizing events] .. then the DFD collected... it was kept clean (HZ: 7).

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5 According to its statute (1975), the DFD intended to propose and create options for women’s participation in cultural life (geistig-kulturellem Leben) and to improve their knowledge. This was part of the wider socialist programme to encourage women to join the labour force and to pursue professional education as well as a more general education that allowed for the “unfolding of individual potential” (Einhorn 1993:186).
In Hilde’s mind DFD neighborhood groups had to fulfill these activities because they were seen as societal obligations. The societal obligations, however, were not seen by former board members as gender specific. They had interpreted them differently (as we will see with other accounts). Now that we have seen how Hilde perceived “women’s work” in the past let us turn to how it is related to her employment and engagement with women in the present.

With the Wende, as chair of the regional executive board, she had first attempted to maintain the Centre for the DFD and then negotiated its takeover (see chapter 4). Hilde continues to be involved with the Centre. She remains a member of the transformed DF e.V. and set up a women’s project called “country women help country women” (Landfrauen helfen Landfrauen) on government sponsored (ABM) funds supported by the DF e.V. in a nearby village. The ABM funds for women’s projects which are applied for by the DF e.V. allow her to coordinate the ABM position with further voluntary work for the DF e.V. Politically, she continues to be involved with the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) - the successor of the Socialist Unity Party (SED). With regard to her political activism in the interest of women she is building on the tradition of the original aspirations of the DFD for the equality of women which for her includes (political) participation in the public sphere (and taking on leadership positions). Hilde continues to work for women in projects and for the association which provides counseling for women as in the past. In fact, she works with those who write the applications for the funding of these projects. Her categorizing of work for women in the past through the mass organizations now translates into a similar type of work in the social service sector.

Elisabeth: “Women’s work” For The DFD

Elisabeth (whom we met in chapters 3 and 4) is viewed as a local DFD authority due to her twenty years of employment with the women’s organization. She held the position of executive board leader (Kreisvorsitzende) prior to Hilde from 1969 to 1988. Elisabeth also belongs to an older generation of DFD women and perceived the relevance of the DFD activities and its political relevance somewhat differently. Before she became employed by the DFD, she had long been a DFD member.
She was recruited as a *DFD* member in 1953 during a campaign in Leipzig where she worked for the city administration. Originally from Görlitz (a town along the German-Polish border) Elisabeth moved to Stralsund with her husband who was stationed with the *Volksmarine* (people’s navy). During the four years she stayed at home with her children, as she says as a “*Hausfrau*” [house-wife], she discovered her “task”/calling. By this she means that she first became engaged with the *DFD* as executive board member of a neighbourhood group where she founded a cabaret-style group which addressed daily problems of “citizens”, “family problems” (e.g. of husbands oppressing their wives). Elisabeth recalls:

That was *DFD* work in the residential area for us. .. On the one hand we did *DFD* work and on the other hand we did culture. Then we did recycling and such things. (ES:2)

Since 1959 Elisabeth had worked for the city administration and engaged in her honorary capacity as *DFD* member in the residential area. Then she was asked to become the chair of the executive board and was elected in 1969. In this position she visited hundreds of neighbourhood *DFD* groups in the city and the surrounding countryside:

Then we talked with the women about all these things that used to concern us at the time beginning with big politics (*grosse Politik*) down to the small every day issues of life (ES:21).

For Elisabeth, almost twenty years of her working life were dedicated to the *DFD*. As her stories indicate it was more than a job because she had followed a calling; working for the women’s cause. Because of her previous involvement in the residential group she had a strong connection with the women and a solid insight into the workings of the mass organization.

Like Hilde she also describes the specific features of the *DFD* organization and thereby distinguishes them from women’s activities in the union:

The *DFD* did not have its organization in the companies such as for example the unions who had a women’s representative (*Frauenbeauftragte*)... the *DFD* had its basis in the residential areas/neighborhoods. There was its membership, there every second year the leadership was elected (*Vorstand*) who worked with the women, every month an event, every quarter of a year a get-together, then it we did what women liked and what was fun (*Spass machte*) but also political basics (*Grundfragen*) were discussed” (ES:13).
In other words, in contrast to the union, work with DFD had an element of “fun” in it. Elisabeth’s comment on how these DFD structures provided the framework in which “politics” and “fun” merged also reflects her position within the DFD hierarchy (one which is closer to the membership than the DFD chairwomen in Rostock). As Elisabeth reflects on her employment and additional engagement with the DFD (which is the same for her, she does not distinguish between employment and societal work):

My husband never held me back from my work. Sometimes he said isn’t it a bit too much for you but he always said it is all right, you go ahead, you need it. And that is what I have always told myself, that my conscience is clear about what I did previous to the time of the Wende because I always did it in good will and with good intentions. everything I have done, that I did in the end for women in those twenty years when I did women’s work (ES: 23).

In Christa’s case, combining the need for employment and a personal interest in and commitment to the women’s cause motivated her to become involved. Elisabeth is now retired but is still an active member of the DF e.V. and occasionally visits the Centre. It is through this lens of the past that she sees the activities of the Initiative women and those women employed in the Centre as “women’s work”. However, one could also argue that it is through the lens of the present that Elisabeth defines her DFD work as “women’s work” because it is in this way that continuity with current practices at the Centre can be constructed.

Unlike Hilde, Elisabeth felt that the DFD ultimately pursued the same aims (in supporting women) as the union. What both former leaders identify as unique to the DFD was the experience of autonomy even though it was state supported. Elisabeth claims that what was done was “fun”. Hilde points out that besides the political agenda of the DFD during meetings at the local level, activities took place in response to the needs of women. For example, Hilde describes how guidelines were passed on from the top down and how the decision making procedure between her office and the Women’s Centre functioned:

They worked out the programmes and presented them to us. Then we signed them. .. usually we had talked with them before and suggested what we had heard at our work meetings in Rostock [next level in hierarchy]..then it was worked into the programmes and the women did that independently as well as the activities (HZ:4).
These DFD women were able to pursue their work independently from the decision making body because they were further down in the structure. This will in a moment be made clearer by other women's voices. As Hampele (1993a:299) points out in the course of the DFD's history it was mostly the leadership, the federal executive board (Bundesvorstand), which was politically and ideologically aligned with the Party and became well adjusted to the state leadership. The existing discrepancy between the DFD leaders and the active membership interests (see also Hampele 1993a:296) provide a framework in which the following women's descriptions of the DFD gatherings in the residential areas and the Women's Centre could be understood.

As one woman summarizes: "DFD meetings were societal events". The Women's Centre played an important role and became a focal point for the "societal work" of the DFD organization. However, although the Centre was an important institution through which to implement the DFD's objectives and to engage in "interesting and multilayered (vielseitig) shaping of leisure time.." (according to the Statute of the DFD (1975:6) and its self definition), the stronghold of the DFD, or rather of its membership, was in the residential areas.

**DFD Neighbourhood Groups: “We did what we (women) wanted”**

We can see from Erna’s and Birgit’s accounts below that a common theme emerged in many women’s personal narratives when reflecting on their past activities in DFD residential groups and in the Women’s Centre: that is, “we did what we wanted”. These women emphasize that despite the hierarchical structure of the DFD, concerning its decision making process, and its close link with the Socialist Unity Party, getting together in these DFD groups did not just mean having political assemblies. I had first been surprised that several women described how they coped with a stagnant political apparatus by carving out niches in which

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6 It was here where the DFD in its early years saw its task as one to ease the “life of women in the residential area (Wohngebiet) of cities and villages” (Statute of the DFD ibid.). The underlying assumption here is that women were mainly responsible for domestic issues such as shopping etc. and the DFD's directive was to support women in their role as workers and mothers (Statute of the DFD 1975:5).

7 One story from the early years of the DFD suggests that the DFD-leaders at times used to pursue their own interests: A commentary by Walter Ulbricht, the First Secretary of the State, in June 1949, states that “the comrades of the DFD ‘sometimes did things different than it was agreed upon’” (die Genossinnen im DFD hätten dort ‘manchmal etwas anders gemacht als besprochen war’) (quoted by Hampele 1993a:298) exemplifies this.
the political agenda was ignored. The DFD-women in the local groups (Ortsgruppen) were only to a limited extent concerned with the official DFD guidelines handed down from their federal board (Bundesvorstand). This becomes apparent in the following narrative of a woman in her voluntary capacity as a local leader.

Erna, an executive board member of several local DFD groups (Ortsgruppen), describes feeling responsible for a group of a hundred women in her residential area but not for carrying out the official Party policies. Erna notes:

they [the women in the DFD group] knew what we [the DFD] did, the political agenda, but I did not organize political gatherings for them, of course we also spoke about politics, they read about it every day in the newspaper...that we did not, we did not follow what we read there did not bother me... we did anyway what we wanted... even if it was politically not desirable or desired differently we did not bother and we did anyway what we wanted.

This narrative confirms the ambivalent situation towards orders from the top ("von OBEN"). At the lower level of the organization women got together to pursue their interests. Through events organized around crafts the "talk" could span a variety of topics: critical-political and cultural dialogue or the best way to develop a new technique. Contrary to popular belief they were not concerned with concerns of the DFD or state maxims. Birgit, a former DFD member who had been employed in the Women's Centre before and after the Wende (see details in chapter 4) and also was an active member in her neighbourhood DFD group echoes these sentiments:

.. [in the groups] we got a programme and nobody followed it, perhaps a few groups but nobody really followed it (went by the rules). We did what we wanted (wir haben gemacht, was wir wollten).

In these stories the DFD is constructed as the provider of a formal framework which actually allowed for the creation of a women's space. Despite the organized nature of these gatherings DFD women felt that their meetings had a particular function in their daily lives.

Many stories told by former members depict, sometimes with great enthusiasm, how they learned about new handicraft (arts & crafts) techniques and what kind of hand-crafted
items they produced. In recalling how their DFD activities were linked to daily problems of women, including those which women encountered in an economy of scarce resources, these narratives describe the pressures which had shaped their lives in the past. Birgitl’s narrative is one example of how everyday life pressures, issues such as the scarcity of resources and the compatibility of family responsibilities and employment, are depicted:

It was a problem to dress [to buy nice clothes] in the GDR. So we showed women, there were always women who knew a lot and they showed how to sew a skirt... We helped one another. For example, I took care of other women’s children .... if someone wanted to do something and there were children and the husband was not around [could refer to sailors] then another woman took care of the children. This was our DFD work!

In socialist Germany, the DFD was an official instrument for supporting women in their role as workers and mothers (Statute of the DFD 1975:5) and it is my impression that it served this purpose in a redefined way since women had used the existing structure, for example, for the production of scarce goods. Birgit tells this story in 1994. At this time she has arrived at a reformulated post GDR-version of DFD work, one that stresses values of mutual help and support in coping with everyday tasks of child raising or those difficulties which arose out of the management of the economy of scarce resources. She then contrasts the old economic pressures with the new pressures in the market economy of the united Germany:

.... and [this interest] still brings us together after the DFD groups ceased to exist in the neighborhood, those women who were active still help one another and now this help seems to be as important as before, for some women even more so, because they cannot cope with unemployment.

The conventional view of formal (political) institutions versus informal ones is contested by these stories which emphasize the informal aspect of mutual help in the DFD work in the past. A colleague of Birgit during the time of transitions following the Wende confirms this reformulated version of DFD work and applies it to the Centre of the post Wende era. Renate was employed in the Centre in 1991-93. She notes:

*These stories are told as if to counter-balance the often heard deriding critique of the DFD as a women’s organization that, in the 1980s, was degenerated to “coffee-chat knitting circles” or “knitting and crochet circles” (Teschner 1994, Einhorn 1993). These critiques, which were most often voiced by younger women, show that the DFD had lost touch with the needs of women in the GDR (Einhorn 1993:186). However, these stereotypes of the “knitting circles” might also demonstrate a generational difference worthwhile exploring.
I believe one has to do what women want.... For political discussions [after unification] we had a turn out of one woman. You need to link these things with others that interest women and that worked only with the silk painting, that worked really great (super) I must say. Mrs. K. [Karina] did that and there you talk about political things and everything.. because doing handicrafts you talk about personal issues, and then women mutually exchange information: this and that happened to me or do you know where this is.. an awful lot of new things we encountered and you had to reorient yourself (RV:5).

In other words, getting together for mutual support is significant in times of extreme social change. These women do not form a political interest group but rather discuss politics while doing handicrafts. As both Renate and Birgit point out, in times of political and social transformations these gatherings also serve a self-help purpose. In Renate’s narrative it is not so much the critical and political conversation but the aspect of mutual help that remains an important aspect of women’s gatherings post unification.

To conclude, these characteristically female activities (e.g. sewing), as they had been carried out in an official organized framework such as neighbourhood groups or the Women’s Centre in the past, were clearly acknowledged as “women’s work”. Getting together in women’s groups at the Centre continued to be perceived as “women’s work”. Though “women’s work” is based on a gender specific notion of the division of labour in society, it is clearly not seen as a private issue but a societal one. This is so because “women’s work” was carried out within the framework of the DFD mass organization, which gave these gatherings societal importance. DFD work was designed to engage women in furthering the development of a socialist society and was perceived by women themselves as a contribution to the wider society. It is this “societal” feature of the DFD meetings that is emphasized in personal narratives today. In other words, the notion of contributing to the common good is an important aspect of how women conceptualize and interpret “women’s work” today. The rather contradictory accounts of “women’s work” with the DFD that present this work as “we always got stuck collecting bottles” and at the same time as “we did what we wanted” highlight not only the state assigned “societal” task of the DFD and its inability to express women’s interest, but also, within this ‘over politicized’ framework of the DFD, women’s claim that they were not controlled but rather had the freedom to do “what they wanted”.
In the following section I present more personal narratives to illustrate what is meant by women’s political work in relation to the mass organizations in the GDR and how it is re-interpreted today. I then highlight how the notion of societal work is derived from women’s experience with the organizations and how it is applied today.

Erna: “I have always felt responsible for the common good (Allgemeinheit)”

In this section I have chosen Erna’s account for a variety of reasons: her long-term engagement with the DFD, her age representative of the DFD members (a generational criterion), her continuous and regular involvement in the Centre, and her support of the grass roots move to take over the Centre.

Erna was born in 1928. She married at twenty and has two daughters and several grandchildren. Before she began to receive an invalid’s pension in 1980, she worked as a trainer for the Volkspolizei, state police, after her initial training as a Neulehrer, a teacher in the immediate post war period of the socialist Germany. Erna’s life was intertwined with the so-called Aufbaujahre, the building of socialism in the GDR. She also emphasizes the socialist and communist traditions within her own family. Erna recalls vivid discussions in her family, among other social groups and in public about the future of the socialist and communist parties until the formal founding of the Socialist Unity Party (SED), which in 1948-9 became the state party of the GDR. Thus, Erna links her lived experiences directly with politics and the history of the GDR. She also remembers that she as a DFD member had supported the formation of the SED but adds a critical retrospective:

Back then I voted for the merger (Zusammenschluss) of the SED. We [the DFD] in the beginning had a good relationship with the Party, so that we felt at home. But with time it changed and the Stalinist influence (Einschlag) certainly had consequences” (ED:13).

Erna has been an active member of the Democratic Women’s Federation since the 1950s and continued her involvement after unification. She is still active in one of the few

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9 The age segregation of the DFD I heard mentioned many times in conversations and personal narratives. “By the late 1980s, its membership was also aging. Only 25 per cent of DFD members were under 35 as opposed to 45 per cent of the GDR’s total female population” (Einhorn 1993:186; see also Teschner 1994).
existing DFD neighborhood groups and the Women’s Centre where she teaches creative
courses such as silk painting and other textile courses. The following is from the beginning of
our interview, and presents in her own voice what “women’s work” meant for her, namely
active engagement with the DFD in the neighborhood or residential groups and in the
Women’s Centre. As we sit down at one of the tables in the women’s Centre Erna asks “where
would you like me to begin? With women’s work?” As the tape recorder is running she begins:

After 1958 I was more active in the Women’s Organization, in the Democratic
Women’s Organization, because I was elected to the board (Vorstand). In our area,
which consisted of 5 streets with more than a hundred members, we did questionnaires
to find out about what interested these women and then we noticed that there existed
very different interests but one thing we had in common (gemeinsam gehörte), we took
care of our playground, children’s playground in the neighborhood; and we cleaned it
up together and kept everything in order. And then we also made a contract with the
kindergarten. Because it was our neighborhood (Wohngebiet) there were some women’s
children and grandchildren, [we] built up a tent that we had made (sewn), things like
this which you can do for support.... (ED: 1).

Erna’s emphasis on women’s common goals, for which the caretaking of the
kindergarten and the activities concerning the playground serve as a symbol, exemplifies her
appropriation of the DFD statute claim to unite women, “independent of their world view and
religion” and to represent their “united will” (Statute of the DFD 1975:3). These particular
practices in the residential areas were individually interpreted and given a societal meaning.
Here this aspect of the official statute of the DFD was made personally meaningful.

For Erna the DFD’s task of cleaning up residential areas and collecting recyclable
material was as much part of the responsibility for the neighborhood as the caretaking of the
kindergarten, with which she identifies, because she perceived both those activities as
contribution to the good of society. (Unlike Hilde who saw less opportunity to engage
“politically” in women’s interest through the DFD which for her would have meant having an
impact on furthering, for example, women’s professional careers.)

In the following passage Erna constructs societal work as a value that is based on and
derived from her political convictions which date back to what she experienced as a teenager
and a young adult:
The wartime and the post war era and what I experienced has created me and my political convictions (Auffassungen). That is why I have always felt responsible for the common good (Allgemeinheit).

And she adds:

I always took care of my playground although I could not walk very well [because of her physical handicap] I went there and cleaned it to keep our neighborhood in order, something small one could do.

Erna’s construction of her political involvement in conjunction with historical events might suggest that her experience of a new self confidence (Selbstbewußtsein) and the opportunity to acquire the ability to express one’s interests, that is in her case women’s interests, had never led Erna to question the existing structure.10 Her narrative suggests that because of the experience of Nazism, the Second World War and the post war period she generally was inclined to accept the “leading role” of the “revolutionary party”, the SED, as it was outlined in the statute of the DFD (1975:3), where the Party’s claim is defined as one that “with its politics (policies) fulfills women’s claim for peace, freedom, equality and human dignity” (Statute of the DFD 1975:3/4) (even though she presents herself as critical of the Stalinist influence). However, Erna indicates that she did not derive from those historical experiences Party loyalty but rather a personal dedication towards the common good (or good of society). In other words, Erna distinguishes between political activities associated with the Party and her political convictions, which make her feel responsible for the common good. These responsibilities and convictions have become transposed to the Women’s Centre:

All these years I always worked for the good of society. I could combine this with my work [employment]. I had a regular work day, in the evening we also meet at the Sundine [Women’s Centre].

This notion of contributing to the common good is an important aspect of how women continue to conceptualize and interpret “women’s work” today. In the past it allowed women

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10 Hampele (1993a:293) argues that women of this generation, who worked for women’s interests, thus acquired their pride. Furthermore, that possibilities to articulate women’s concerns outside of the existing structures remained unnoticed (such as non-state women’s groups of the 1980s) and eventually they were treated according to the Party directives as enemies of the state.
to be members and to operate within the framework of the official mass organization such as the DFD although they would not necessarily support the official Party line. To simultaneously be a member of a mass organization and not accept the official Party directives created a contradiction which was reconciled by the idea of working for the common good. The idea of the common good and the collective form of organization were personally made meaningful. Whereas Erna relates societal work to her political convictions, women carrying on “women’s work” in the Centre in the present view it as “not necessarily political” or separate “politics for women” from “women’s work”.

Martha: Centre Employee In The Present

Martha, a fifty five year old women, was a member of the (old) DFD and at one point in her life had worked with the women’s commissions of the union (for more details see chapter 5). Martha had coordinated the “women’s work” of the union which defined women’s politics as mobilization and agitation politics (Hampele 1993a:292). She was also employed for the training of Party cadres until the Wende and remained a member of the reformed socialist Party, the PDS. In the years following the Wende and unification she had lost employment several times, was on short time work and unemployed before she became hired in the government sponsored work programme of the women’s Centre. When Martha became employed at the Centre (in 1994) she developed a sense of her task and employment based on her notion of “women’s work”. This becomes clear as I ask her if her actual work at the women’s Centre resembles the ideas which she had held previous to her hiring; she notes:

Well, I had a similar idea, I did not have a different idea more or less, that you have to organize events (Veranstaltungen), attract people....

The way Martha describes her job interview reveals how she defines “women’s work” by separating it from politics for women. This becomes clear in the way Martha describes the conversation between herself and Anne, an Initiative member on the hiring committee. Martha recalls how Anne questioned and challenged her:

For Anne that was not enough. [Anne said] If you work here at the Frauentreff you have to have more ideas, where you can work and how (laughs). I mean, I had in the
back of my mind, I knew what women's work is, if I say, I organize events or put something on its feet (*bringen was auf die Beine*) then it is clear to me that I know how to do it, it will work and the course of work (*Arbeitsablauf*), I say, I am certainly not alone, I will get some guidance. [She imitates Anne] well, yes, well, well... then I described some things one could do for women... but I did not let myself be pushed on a political level because I had had bad experiences with it in the past. No, I did not want to talk about politics for women because I had lost my job (because of political involvement). I think it was Anne’s line, that is what she wanted to hear but I did not let myself be pushed this way (*habe mich nicht draufschieben lassen*), I thought, when you say that you are politically engaged they won’t take you. So I talked around it all the time.

Martha was afraid that she might not be employed based on her political affiliation or ideas about “women’s work”. Furthermore, she believes based on her experience of the *Wende* that she should separate her political views regarding the “politics for women” from her ability to do “women’s work”. Martha’s impression that there exist different ideas about “women’s work” is confirmed by Anne’s reaction. She did contest, however, Anne’s version of women’s work when she presented her skills for working in the Centre and “described some things one could do for women”. As an employee of the Centre today Martha defined “women’s work” as work with, for and by women for a social service institution. This is similar to how Karina views it.

**Karina: “I was into women’s work but not necessarily politics”**

Karina is a married woman in her forties with a grown up daughter. In 1994, Karina was for the second time a member of the government sponsored work programme in the Women’s Centre. During Karina’s temporary employment in the Centre, she has taught many creative courses such as silk painting, and is generally responsible for issues of design. In the GDR, Karina was trained as a designer but had mostly worked as a leader of so-called textile circles (*Textilzirkel*) and folklore art collectives (*Volkskunstkollektive*) on a free-lance basis (*Honorarvertrag*). These circles and collectives were linked to and financed by GDR companies. Karina became unemployed as the companies stopped financing these circles in early 1990 (before the monetary union). Between the *Wende* and unification Karina started her

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11 Martha’s impression that their politics differed is certainly based on legitimate grounds. Whether a revelation of her past political career would have been an obstacle for hiring her remains open.

12 The interview with Karina was recorded in the presence of her colleague Martha (August 1994).
own home cottage industry selling handicraft items such as silk painted scarves. But the demand for these products was low. With unification, the costs of medical insurance and income tax for Karina, as a self-employed person, presented serious obstacles to continuing her business. Karina registered as unemployed but was ineligible to collect unemployment insurance because of her previous self-employed status. However, being registered as unemployed made her eligible for government sponsored work programmes. In 1991, Karina became employed as a member of a government sponsored work programme at the Women’s Centre. In the Women’s Centre she came to know members of the grass roots group, Women for Women Initiative, who participated in activities in the Centre, initiated performances and introduced their agenda. Karina decided to become a member because she was attracted to their activities and, in particular, their ideas and plans to build up a women’s Cultural Centre which included facilities for artists and a women’s hotel. Her motivation for joining the Women for Women Initiative, Karina labels as “women’s work”. In a moment this will become clear in her own words. In the GDR, Karina’s professional career was a bit unusual. She was not a full time employed woman and had found a niche as a leader of textile circles and collectives.

Karina’s narrative shows that her notion of “women’s work” was informed by her experience as a teacher in textile circles and folk art collectives in socialist Germany and based on her understanding of what engagement in women’s interest meant in the GDR. These groups consisted of employed women who engaged in these textile circles and folk art collectives, which because of their organized nature constituted a framework for societal activities. (They also participated in the socialist competition among these collectives.)

All of them [the women in these circles] were employed women but for them it was societal work (gesellschaftliche Arbeit) (KU:2).

Karina points out that this kind of societal work was a way to prove and check off one’s societal concern and engagement as a good citizen without having to get involved otherwise (i.e. “politically”). To distance herself even further from the official framework, Karina acknowledges that what the women of her group did was societal work but in describing her own work she prefers a different dictum and emphasizes the collective experience. Karina
differentiates between her employment and her "societal involvement" via work. She speaks about the collective aspects of her work experience and tells stories which are rich in detail about handicraft techniques which she learned and passed on in those circles. These stories include descriptions of the items and, in particular, collective pieces of work that they produced. She points out the aspect of mutual learning:

And these collective works [such as a textile mural] brought the collective together, one learned from the other... it was nice (KU:4).

Today she reminisces about the collective aspects of work in these circles:

We [one of the circles that still exists] would like to do a collective piece of work again... this work brings you together (zusammenschmiedet). I had the best experiences with it, it is a lot of fun (KU: 2).

In retrospect Karina reflects at the same time on the politics and directives which had shaped the form of these officially "societal" gatherings. Karina, herself a non-party member, describes how the reality of the political system defined the framework and penetrated the gatherings of these circles and collectives. It almost seems as if those past occurrences and the degree to which one's life was defined by the political system (and one's own opportunism) have become more obvious since the Wende and the disappearance of the system. This includes the practice of the Secret Service (Stasi) of using informers in work and other collectives (which provide evidence of the state's interference). Today she comments on this as follows:

...as a non-party member I had a circle in the House of the Army [a military institution], I cannot understand this...I had contact with the West [relatives in West Germany]... afterwards [after the Wende] I came to know that one of those who sat in on the course was there to observe me (die auf mich angesetzt war). She [the informer] did not do anything bad.. but we never talked about politics either, I did not tell them that we had visitors from the West [Germany].. we spoke about our work.. (KU: 3/4).13

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13Like some other women who had talked about their own or their husbands' experience with informers of the secret service in work place collectives, Karina also points out that no damage occurred. Because this was a common practice many reports etc. might never lead to any actual consequences for the individual who was reported on; but many other incidences are testimony to the damage it has done to individuals who were under the surveillance of the Secret Service. On informer problematic in e.g. women's peace groups, see Einhorn's (1993) Monica story.
Karina views the arts and crafts work as the communal activity which brought women together in these circles and collectives. Karina expresses her enjoyment of her work in the past because of the collectivity in those women's groups (textile circles and collectives). Focusing on your work could help you to ignore the aspect of surveillance by the state. Doing your societal work insured also a form of political participation. Karina does not view these collectives, however, as a place where critical political reflections could have or did occur. Like most people, Karina knew that in such an official context one would not address certain topics and therefore, she claims, one focused on one’s work.

These stories reflect Karina’s attempt to distance herself from the political purpose of societal organizations and generally from politics. This becomes even more apparent when she defines her work as a leader of circles and collectives in the GDR as “women’s work”:

You somehow were linked with women (verbunden) and in such groups from time to time (mitunter) very private things happen so that you become someone to confide in and you were asked and consulted... Well, I was into women’s work (verbunden) but not necessarily politically, no not that! And then I said to myself (habe ich mir gedacht) that is a good thing (schöne Sache), why not [pause] and what the Initiative originally envisioned (vorhalten), what was built/set up once they formed when I was not a member yet... that is something I am interested in because I could surely contribute with my work (da könnte ich ja mit meiner Arbeit sicher auch etwas tun) that was perhaps the motivation for me, that I said to myself, there you could maybe get involved (einstieg).

In other words, Karina is not so much interested in the Initiative’s political activities and aspiration to initiate change but in their attempt to organize a women’s infra-structure and social service projects for women. As the last sentence indicates, Karina hopes to utilize her skills again for a common purpose- this time a women’s project which the Initiative envisions. Therefore, Karina has become involved with the women’s grass roots group in Stralsund (although she might not share all their political convictions, as in the past she did not share those of the organization she worked for). She is mainly linked to the Initiative through her employment, i.e. “women’s work”, in the Centre and not with other activities of the grass roots group (such as meetings of Initiative members in private).
The **Initiative** is the post *Wende* women’s group which set up the structures, as they apply for government funds, in which “women’s work” can be done. Karin’s move to include the grass roots group into the category of women who do “work with women” and who have a societal or political vision allows her to extend this category and to further include western non-feminist and feminist groups alike.\(^{14}\) Although her knowledge about the women’s and feminist groups in the West is less differentiated than that of some Initiative members, she generally perceives diverse activities as “women’s work”, as her reference to visitors from West Germany in the Centre indicates. Karina states:

**In the beginning [that is 1991] many [West German visitors] dropped in who were involved in women’s work.**

To include those West German women, who were involved in diverse (feminist and non-feminist) institutionalized women’s projects and other social service agencies for women in West Germany, suggests that Karina’s notion of “women’s work” does not discriminate between women and feminists\(^{15}\). Thus, her concept of “women’s work” is inclusive. It is this view of the inclusivity of “women’s work” that allows for a variety of women’s groups with different political orientations to engage in women’s issues. In the future “women’s work” could thus collectively motivate women to once again demand political change.

**Conclusion**

“Women’s work” is described as a social practice which prior to unification was associated with membership or employment in a mass organization for women, the Democratic German Women’s Federation (*DFD*) and the women’s commissions of the union. “Women’s work”, thus, is a term from a recent but irretrievable past that continues to be used in the changed context of this women’s project after unification. Some women subsequently associate the notion with membership in any kind of women’s group or association (feminist and non-feminist) and with employment in a women’s office or project such as the Women’s

\(^{14}\) East and West German feminists do not share the same social values and not “even a common definition of feminism” (see e.g. Rosenberg 1996).

\(^{15}\) “Woman-work does have a broader scope than feminism” concluded Judd (1995:43). Judd (1995) derives this from her study of how the Chinese Women’s Federation conceptualizes the category of “woman-work”.
Centre. "Women’s work", thus, stresses the possibility of combining employment and engagement in the women’s cause.

"Women’s work" and its current conceptualization provide an insight into and allow us to understand the multiple meanings attached to work. So, women’s ideas about “women’s work” differed depending on their experiences of the past. Erna’s narrative, for example, illustrates how “women’s work” is constructed to equal DFD work, and how she came to value “women’s work” as a contribution to the good of society. Moreover, Erna’s personal narrative serves as an example of how “women’s work” is not only conceptualized and practiced but also how official guidelines from the DFD statute were made personally meaningful. Karina, although not a DFD member, shares a similar notion of societal work, as it was transmitted in the GDR via the mass organizations, but prefers not to stress this aspect of “women’s work”. Furthermore, Karina applies the notion of “women’s work” to the actual practice of working at the Centre today. Martha agrees with Karina’s understanding that work with and for women is now carried on within the context of those social service institutions for women which came to exist in Eastern Germany.

The women’s use of the term “women’s work” makes visible the kind of work with which women see themselves contributing to the common good of a unified German society in (communal) institutions and projects. Whereas in the past “women’s work” in the Centre occurred within the structure of the DFD organization, in the present the state mediator for social services, the non-profit organization Initiative, provides a structure in which “women’s work” can be applied. And we can see a similar thing happen as in the past: The grass roots group sets up the women’s projects but at the same time the women in the Centre do “what they want”. The Initiative’s aspirations to provide “opportunities of change” only seems to provide the framework in which the employees practice their vision of “women’s work”, a vision that can differ from the Initiative’s ideas. Women’s ideas about “women’s work” are varied: it is not just associated with employment but with a broader sense of a societal contribution. Because it is inclusive it can be used to serve as a political category to create a sense of soliarity among diverse groups of women engaged in women’s interests in the unified Germany.
CONCLUSION

This ethnography has addressed issues regarding the connection between larger collective transformations and women’s experiences in the everyday during the period from 1989-1994. The focus on a heterogeneous group of women involved with local women’s projects has shown how many of their main concerns were linked to issues of work, collectivity and politics. The way women, particularly in the Women’s Centre Sundine, dealt with the discontinuity in their lives created by the rapid and radical changes since 1989 led me to explore their collective experiences and practices in the context of this institution as it was itself being transformed. The ethnographic material I selected explores these issues of how women dealt with the ongoing transformations four years after unification: women’s voices still can be heard amid the turmoil of change. Field notes of group conversations, discussions at meetings, and recorded group interviews show that in talking about these events, women were presented with an opportunity to come to terms with and attempt to formulate their versions of recent changes and their involvement in these changes.

I explore the transformations of the Women’s Centre to show how the transition from socialism that was set in motion by a civil and social movement continued to elicit collective responses even after the movement lost its influence. I argue that despite the dissolution of socialist institutions and networks there are “carry overs” (remnants, habits, values, notions of gender, collectivity and work) from the past that are manifested in institutional, political and social practices. Yet, these notions of collectivity have been applied in the new social context of a united Germany. My particular focus here is with women and how they conceptualized work and created and transformed the institutions for women. With the larger collective transformations, the idea of what the collective meant was transformed and put into practice with new initiatives, self-help groups, and ABM projects. In turn, these initiatives reshaped the notion of integration and its dependence on employment.

To explore how women experienced their integration into an enlarged unified Germany it was important to investigate how they practically and collectively dealt with the changes in their lives rather than to focus on how they modified their biographical narration. Consequently,
I shifted my analysis of ethnographic data from their reformulation of identities to their collective (social, political and institutional) practices. Their narratives, however, remain important as they reflect on these changes and allow for an understanding of what shaped these women before 1989 (as they entered the transition period) and how they came to terms with the recent historical events.

The Women's Centre *Sundine* constituted an ideal site to study institutional transformations and women's experiences throughout the transition period as a place where change has constantly been discussed by diverse women - members of the *DFD* and the women's movement, feminists and non-feminists. The Centre was founded during GDR times; while this continuity was welcomed by some women and disliked by others, it was nevertheless a common reference point for all women after the GDR ceased to exist. This is important, as the women themselves came from very different backgrounds. Their diversity reflects directly on the small town's constituency, given that *Sundine* was the only women's centre.

The heterogeneity of women at the Centre created an opportunity as well as a challenge for my analysis. With the *Wende*, as diverse women attempted to keep it as a meeting place for women, it became a space where new contacts and decisions were made about new kinds of collective strategies and politics. In other words, with the *Wende* the *Sundine* became that public space in which, suddenly, women's issues and concerns could be discussed in terms of what was happening to them and what they could do with the "new" democratic opening. Diversity became also apparent in programmes, the groups involved such as the different group of employees running the Centre over time, and their ways of organizing work. This diversity in their opinions, ideas and actions also posed a tremendous challenge to collective politics.

International Women's Day in 1994, however, was an exception. Women came together in a united Germany to protest. As the day unfolded, the challenges to collective action were revealed. The difference between women's activism, strategies and practices in East and West is described through the protest on International Women's Day. How women in Stralsund positioned themselves against women in the West and against other East German women shows not only their diversity of ideas, but also that most women's groups in Stralsund did not want to
identify with the unified perspective of a women’s strike (see chapter 3, I). In this way their feminist position is based on their different experiences and ideas of how they envisioned equality. Women’s ideas about collectivity in Eastern Germany were not necessarily non-feminist: feminism refers to different ideas of collectivity and manifests itself in different forms of protest. Rather, the strike was questioned by many women because they could not identify with this kind of protest. For the majority of East German women protesters, it was difficult to “own” the strike idea. However, the analysis of this event in Stralsund shows that it was important for the women to gather and to experience once again a moment of collectivity through political action.

Collective activities, however, did not always have to be a political protest as my description of a meeting and the inaugural celebration of the Initiative at the Women’s Centre demonstrates (see chapter 3, II). How East German women positioned themselves against one another in the way they disputed the name of the Centre once again shows their heterogeneity. These differences date back to women’s diverse experiences of the political system under socialism. For the most part, these differences were not disputed instead, women stressed the importance of gatherings (chapter 3) and collectivity (chapter 6), but they did not necessarily understand them the same way. This would depend on their past experiences and position in society.

As knowledge of its past is important to understand its present, the Women’s Centre’s history has provided an opportunity to explore some themes regarding the links between the past and the present in this process of transformation. In the past, the official framework for collective women’s politics rested with the mass organization. Some women pursued women’s issues in the particular institutional and organizational setting of the DFD, while others were in opposition to it. In both cases, it shaped their different ideas and experiences of collectivity. Consequently, as women’s differences in the Centre show there is not a single past for which the Centre provides a common reference point. Collective practices, however, require some agreed upon general vision of the past. The consensus not to change the name was one way of agreeing to keep something from the past. It appears that in 1994 it had become more important to
remember and create an otherwise silenced *DFD* history of the Centre\(^1\) than to point out the discrepancies among women in the past - between members of the socialist women’s organization (*DFD*) and non-members (or members of the non-state women’s movement) opposing the state policies for women.

For the purpose of this thesis, however, the Women’s Centre *Sundine* represents a focal point in my presentation of ethnography. Describing the *DFD* Centre, serves to represent characteristic forms of social and political organization in the GDR and to explore the different ways women positioned themselves vis à vis the institutions for women (see chapter 4, I). The *DFD* Centre was designed to further women’s equality through improving the conditions for integrating them into the workforce. The Centre was an institution through which women experienced being integrated in society. In the GDR, the *DFD* Centre was part of the larger system of mass organizations and the ruling party, the *SED*, extended the state policies to a female constituency.

Then, during the *Wende*, in the Centre we see simultaneously the dissolution of the mass organization, the emergence of the social movement, how women used the opportunities, and then inserted themselves into the new structures differently. As shown in chapter 4 (II) the Centre was an open forum and catalyst for the movement. First, during the *Wende* the opening of new possibilities for agency allowed new collective groups such as the *Initiative* to surface, thereby allowing their members to experience a ‘moment’ of being part of a larger women’s movement which instigated change and directly influenced the reform process. Second, as shown with women involved with the Centre and active in the women’s grass roots group, *Initiative*, these possibilities for initiating social change closed again with unification. As demonstrated further, women continued within the new Western structures to use different ways for whatever conditions were left for their agency. The collective efforts of transforming the Women’s Centre were shaped by the larger process of unification which was out of their control. The Centre then represents an attempt by diverse groups of women to establish a foothold in a unified Germany.

\(^1\) This became clear to me in the process of collecting, analyzing and getting feedback on the presentation of the *DFD* history of the Centre.
It is through the Centre that I describe institutional transformations, collective practices and a process of institutionalization, and investigate limits and possibilities for collective politics. Furthermore, the Centre’s history shows that the socio-political and economic transformation from socialism is a gendered process, i.e. the work force was restructured and therefore women became disadvantaged in the employment market with unification. The Centre through the use of state employment policies attempted to fill this void. Specifically, the state’s involvement in this endeavour occurred through government sponsored work programmes (ABMs). It is on this level that employment policies met with the efforts and alternative practices of the women’s movement (see chapter 2, II), and that issues of work and integration became part of the women’s projects movement agenda. In these projects women envisaged their future and developed new collective enterprises (ibid.). In chapter 4 (II) and 5 I took up some of these issues and investigated how collective activities unfolded in the particular setting of the Centre in unified Germany.

Chapter 4 also explores the experience of the immediate transition. Unification presented institutional and structural discontinuity, but the example of the Centre shows that the break with the old was not as radical as one might imagine. Simultaneously, with the establishment of Western structures, the employees of the Centre experimented with reformulated old concepts until, through the experience of women’s changing positions, they developed and applied new ones to guide the Centre (see chapter 4, II). In developing a concept for women in unified Germany, they used some of the ideas from both the East and the West German women’s movements. To conceptualize the Women’s Centre as a “woman’s space” in what they perceived as “a man’s world” exemplifies their changing perception of women’s role and highlights how these women came to view their position in a united Germany (see chapter 4, II).

As the women’s movement ideas became institutionalized, setting up a women’s infrastructure of projects instead of demanding social and political changes occupied most of their energy, talents and activities. The radical potential of the women’s movement under conditions of unification was thus hindered from developing. This development was criticized for its depoliticization by activists of the East German women’s movement, who attempted to distinguish themselves and to maintain a radical notion of women’s politics (see chapter 2, II).
Institutionalization of the East German women's movement under conditions of the West German state, as exemplified by the Centre's history, limited the possibilities for collective politics. The dependency on government sponsored work programmes (ABMs) played a major role in the depoliticization of projects such as the Centre as they became institutionalized. The earlier political impact of the women's movement in the GDR had been based on the members' ability to quickly form effective new social groups. In the Centre, as elsewhere, these original groups dissolved or changed their membership and new groups formed in the projects as the projects developed more into social service institutions. In chapter 5, I analyzed this change in direction and showed that the set-up of and government support for the Centre did not guarantee its stability. In fact, as a result of the institutional and personnel changes in 1994 in the Centre, women's different ideas about the Centre in terms of social services and opportunities for social changed surfaced; this time not only in one meeting, but in disparate occurrences, meetings and conversations.

In short, women who ran, worked and used the Centre had different ideas concerning its purpose revolving around different notions of work and political engagement for the women's cause. To explain these differences, I argue that it was important to take into account their experiences of collectivity during the Wende which motivated their involvement differently and shaped their perception of the Centre's purpose (see chapter 5, I). Unlike the employees of the Centre, most of whom saw themselves providing some social services, the Initiative group clearly viewed the Centre as a space for gatherings which potentially overcame isolation, developed critiques and collective action (see chapter 5, II). Despite, therefore, practical obstacles, the supporting Initiative continuously envisioned the Centre as a place where gatherings could take place and in which women could articulate their interests, find ways of negotiating them, and form new (interest) groups; thus, they aimed at providing a space from which to develop collective politics. In turn, collective politics are viewed as being based on the sociability or collectivity of women's gatherings. Herein lies a possibility for collective politics in the projects within the limits previously posed.
My ethnography documents how a local project became depoliticized, testifies to divergent opinions on its current purpose, and how "alternative" and political visions are still kept alive by some women. What distinguishes these locally political active women from those analysts of the women’s movement who criticize its depoliticization is that they emphasize the potential the projects still have in socially integrating people. This is how diverse women, not only activists, involved with the projects viewed them, i.e., to function and play an important role in the process of social integration. However, projects became depoliticized as women gave priority to the importance of local projects and the opportunities to work on government sponsored work programmes over pursuing social change. The Centre, in particular, shows a transforming sense of integration and collectivity.

The view from inside the projects is important as it provides another perspective, one that is not represented by hegemonic (national) discourses of unification (see chapter 2, 1). In addition my analysis shows certain limitations to feminist interpretations of the nature of gendered restructuring. For the latter, women’s desire to remain employed, despite economic and social difficulty, is mainly motivated by their desire to be economically independent. This was confirmed by the claims of the women’s protesters at International Women’s Day and the descriptions of how women articulated their experiences with unemployment in the Centre immediately after unification (see chapter 4, II). In 1994, however, interviews with women in the projects shows that this concern shifted (see particularly chapter 6). Now, the value of women’s desire to achieve social integration through work, rather than purely economic independence, was highlighted in the interviews; although the importance of employment to women’s equality was still stressed in political protests. I then followed the various directions that this process of social integration took: the process changed over time but, it impacted on different women in different ways.

In the collectivity of women affiliated with the projects lies a possibility for collective politics, but a limit is posed by women’s experience of social differentiation that was set in motion with unification. In chapter 6, I looked at this particular issue. The experience of social differentiation contrasted with the former experiences of being socially integrated through collectives; or rather it was articulated in those terms by employees in Centre and wool-project.
A discussion among the groups of employees at the Centre shows what their ABM work-place meant to them and how the employees of the Centre focused on work issues instead of women's issues. As the project became more depoliticized, they also became more “business” like in their approach. Some of them saw themselves as a “team” and thus related themselves to the corporate world. For some women in the Centre, it was not the idea of developing an alternative form of work organization in the context of the projects that prevailed. Instead, they began to see themselves more as individuals who need to mostly rely on their own initiative in manipulating existing institutions in order to find employment. Therefore, their experience of the ABM and the project was quite different from how the long-term unemployed women in the wool-project perceived the particular role the ABM played in their lives in making the transition from socialism. Substituting for old work collectives, they experienced work collectivity and social integration through the ABM - a process which at times resembles aspects of a rite of passage. Re-integrating into society was not without its own problems. Women discussed the difficulties they face due to social differentiation in their neighbourhood, among friends, and family. However, social differentiation also took place within the groups of women associated with the Centre and the wool-project, thus limiting possibilities for collective politics.

I argue that the social practice and the concept of “women’s work” that was applied by several women in the Centre has the potential to counterbalance this development. As I explored the varied meanings of “women’s work”, it became clear that women’s ideas about work go beyond employment. Because “women’s work” is defined as a contribution to the common good, informed by ideas of the past, it has a political connotation (chapter 7). According to local women, “women’s work” makes visible the kind of social services women perform in diverse projects and other institutions and thus articulates how women perceive the institutionalization of women’s projects under Western conditions. Applied within the projects and other women’s offices, this creates a sense of commonality among these diverse women. As I show, “women’s work” can include diverse women, feminists and non-feminists, women in the East and the West and those diverse groups of women in government sponsored projects and Offices for the Equality of Women. Rather then seeing “women’s work” as completely depoliticized in the way women claim to practice it in the projects², it could be viewed as a strategy adjusting to

² This kind of secondary employment in women’s projects has been viewed as a mirror world (Kenawi 1995c) of the one in which the reins of power are held by men; and a niche in which women have lost their political vision.
institutionalization following unification. It is however, a practice which insists on creating spaces to socialize and experience new forms of collectivity and political engagement.

“Women’s work” also encompasses an awareness of the new gender inequalities that are being established through the employment market that discriminates against women. In other words, it denotes an awareness and a willingness to act, but is deprived of its radical edge.

**Post Field Work Developments in Stralsund: The Process of Transformations Continued**

This ethnography captures a brief but tumultuous moment of transformation for diverse groups of women involved with the Centre, some of whom were involved with the women’s movement and instigated its institutionalization. The analysis of what happened at the Centre in 1994 shows that the transformation processes have not ended yet. This is further confirmed by the developments in the projects in Stralsund following 1994. The process of institutionalization for the projects and women’s politics in Stralsund was shaped by continuous changes of their framework. In Stralsund, the cut backs of ABM for the projects, as described in this thesis following the years of unification (chapter 2), began to affect the projects later. The Centre and the wool-project were confronted with a changing framework and reduction of both ABM and city funds, as a result of general regional and municipal reforms of the administration. The Amt, “the unloved child” of the local administration, as a former employee called it, forcibly closed (“wegrationalisiert”) in November of 1995 leaving behind only an Office for Women (Frauenbüro) with the Equality Officer and another employee. The Centre’s ABM funds were reduced by 50%. In the wool-project ABM, funds in 1995-6 began to be granted under the stipulation that they would employ and train disabled women. In both cases, running the projects become more restricted by these kinds of constraints and subsequently the space to develop their own ideas and practices was constrained.

The difficulties which existed during the time of my stay between the women on ABMs and the Centre’s supporting institution were somewhat minimized by the supervising committee’s more careful selection of the next generation of ABMs. While there were few discussions about these issues during my stay, they seemed to have increased in the following years. The struggle and debates between different groups of women involved with the Centre
continued over their degree of initiative, competence, and a controversy over what a women's political approach ("Frauenpolitischer Ansatz") might be. The Initiative was criticized by other women involved with the Centre for not being competent enough to access the special women's programmes for employment and training that were part of the restructured regional employment policies designed and distributed by the state of Mecklenburg-Pomerania. This seems to suggest that more specialized knowledge of how to apply for funds became more important and that institutionalized women's politics became more prevalent. The Initiative, however, did remain an open "independent" group that invited women to join their monthly meetings. They pursued their plans for the bigger Fayencenhof-project (designed as "an alternative meeting place for those interested in creating employment and training for women and girls"), conceptualized as a women's space and workshop. In the Centre, programmes continued and the clientele of visiting women began to consist more and more of employed women beginning to look for further opportunities in which to engage themselves. The employees of the past continued to be in contact with the Centre. It continued to be a meeting place for women, for exchange and for mobilizing women, with the possibility of influencing public discourse in the future.

Outlook for the Women's Project Movement and Future Research of its Development

Since unification a growing awareness among women of what is happening and how it affects them has not surprisingly led to political action and collective politics (e.g. Behrend 1994, Nickel 1995a,b). On a theoretical level, some feminists have addressed questions concerning the dependency on the state, that is, the relationship between the women's projects, institutionalized women's politics, and state funding. Analyzing the current situation of projects and the movement, they voiced concerns and raised theoretical questions about strategies feminists and women politicians could take (see e.g. Penrose and Ruppert 1996, Lemke 1996) since the institutionalization of women's projects has blunted the movement's more radical edge. That the women's movement has given up its radicalism and now envisions radical reforms is identified by social movement analysts as a typical dual strategy (Cohen and Arato 1995:493). What common strategy for the women's movement in East and West is possible from here? Is there a common vantage point? Can the different experiences of women in the social movement of the East and West be merged into one political strategy?
My evidence shows that heterogeneous views within those politically active groups in local projects and institutions in Stralsund can be reconciled and lead to a common strategy only if the hopes of the Initiative and some others have been put on hold. The concept of “women’s work” indicates that it is viewed as an alternative practice to feminism and thus can provide a stepping stone for developing a common strategy for women in Eastern and Western Germany. Though “women’s work” appears to be inclusive, it is not certain to what degree it can include autonomous women’s groups. The concept may also be limited in terms of its political radicalism. Before a common strategy can exist, it needs to be understood that feminism for the majority of East German women has a negative connotation and it is often viewed as “a Western package” and “politically charged”. Furthermore, feminist collectivity appears to be geared towards confrontational political action and therefore seemed suspect to those women who preferred to separate their politics from their practices in the Centre, or no longer wanted to pursue any kind of politics because of their past experiences with the political system (and women’s politics) under socialism. For many women in my study “women’s work” is political in the sense of contributing to the common good; to follow feminist practices for many women who practice “women’s work” would require redefining the political (or radical collective politics). Gerhard (1997:9) suggests that it could be a fruitful endeavour on a theoretical level, as well as on a practical level, to redefine one’s understanding of radical politics in order to develop a strategy for the women’s movement in East and West. However, if this is what we do, we need to take into account the larger processes of the transition from socialism and how our view of the world including politics, equality or work, is still shaped by the Cold War dichotomy of East and West that provided the framework in which radical collective politics used to be envisaged.

In 1998 as in 1994, the very existence of the women’s movement is questioned, as if its only justification is to generate social and political change. Presenting the views of those women who did not always feel represented by the East German women’s movement, but whom many of these projects on ABMs were trying to reach, seems to suggest that their emphasis was on establishing women’s structures and reform from within instead of engaging in a radical change of society. As the experience of women active around the Wende shows, it was not only the
individual’s willingness to act but also the particular conjunctures created by the larger transformation that allowed for a moment of collective praxis and for radical change to occur. The emergence of the movement represented collective action which was based on collectivity established in women’s groups prior to the event. At present, the potential for collective politics lies within the existing women’s network where collective learning processes occur. Yet, as Gerhard (1997) and others reminded us, the questions, almost a decade after the emergence of the East German women’s movement, remain: Will the strategy for the next decade remain one of women’s politics within the institutions? Or is the silence of the movement we have been experiencing just a break from the exhausting years of transition from socialism and is it only a matter of time before a united movement once again emerges? Or, is there a third possibility, implicit in certain women’s views affiliated with the Centre in Stralsund, that suggests moving away from ‘hegemonic’ definitions of feminism and the women’s movement towards multiple, diverse conceptions of the women’s struggle?
## ANNEX

## List of Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABM</td>
<td>Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahme  Government Sponsored Work Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amt</td>
<td>Amt für Frauen und Familie  Office for Women and Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDU</td>
<td>Christlich Demokratische Union  Christian Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFD</td>
<td>Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschland  Democratic German Women’s Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSF</td>
<td>Deutsch-Sowjetische Freundschaft  German-Soviet Friendship Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTSB</td>
<td>Deutscher Turn-und Sportbund  German Gymnastics and Sports’ Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDGB</td>
<td>Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund  Free German Trade Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDJ</td>
<td>Freie Deutsche Jugend  Free German Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany  (<em>Bundesrepublik Deutschland</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic  (<em>Deutsche Demokratische Republik</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HO</td>
<td>Handelsorganisation  Trading Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiative</td>
<td>Initiative Frauen für Frauen e.V.  Women’s Initiative for Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>KB</td>
<td>Kulturbund  League of Culture</td>
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<td>LPG</td>
<td>Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft  Agricultural (Production) Cooperative</td>
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<tr>
<td>NVA</td>
<td>Nationale Volksarmee  National People’s Army</td>
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<td>PDS</td>
<td>Partei Demokratischen Sozialismus  Party of Democratic Socialism</td>
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<tr>
<td>SED</td>
<td>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands  Socialist Unity Party of Germany</td>
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<td>SPD</td>
<td>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands  Social Democratic Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>UFV</td>
<td>Unabhängiger Frauenverband  Independent Women’s Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>VEB</td>
<td>Volkseigener Betrieb  People’s Own Enterprise</td>
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Fig. 1  Map of New German Federal States
Fig. 2 Map of The Problematic Areas in the New Federal States From 1-85 (Wochenpost July 4, 1996).
Fig. 4 Women’s Centre *Sundine* on Ossenreyer Street
Fig. 5  Banner at the Corner of Ossenreyer Street and Baden Street
Fig. 6 International Women's Day Rally at the Old Market
Fig. 7 Bed-Sheet on Clothes Line with "10 Desires"
Fig. 8 "Women’s Utensils"
Fig. 9  Protesters Listening to Speech
Fig. 10. The Structural Set-Up of the *DFD* Counseling Centre (Phase 1: 1973-1989)

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DFD
  federal
  regional
  local

DFD Counseling Centre

Sundine

DFD Neighbourhood Groups
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Fig. 11  Women's Centre *Sundine* and Supporting Institution (Phase 2: 1990-1993)

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<td>Women's Shelter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women's Centre <em>Sundine</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Language Classes</td>
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<td>Political Round Table</td>
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<td>Mother &amp; Child Group Breakfast</td>
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<td>etc.</td>
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Fig. 12  Change in Supporting Institutions 1973-1994

phase 1          phase 2          phase 3

SUNDINE

DFD federal
DFD regional
DFD local

AMT
Combined Office
for Women and Family /
Office for the Equality of Women

City of Stralsund


Women for Women Initiative
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