

An Epilogue

Reflections on Working with the Concept of Memory Box

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Dealing with the concept of memory box was more than a theoretical approach to cultural exchange, as in practice, cultural exchange has also been going on between the two parts of the project group. Our Finnish-German discussions about the concept and every article in this volume revealed some differences in our academic cultures, even though all of our discussions were in the third language English, and thus oriented on a different approach to academic culture. Aside from such different practices, the meetings and constant online-discussion, we showed that most accordance was achieved between researchers focusing on similar time periods: the similarities of the research subjects were more important than the differences of the scholars' culture. The surplus of working in a binational group was certainly to have our own assumptions questioned and ideas, which were taken-for-granted, challenged.

When we first started discussing different ways of cultural transfer and cultural exchange, we soon discovered Roeck's concept of memory box. Since it resonated with all of us, we chose it to explore cultural transfer in more depth. Keeping the concept in mind, we nonetheless tried to adapt our research interests to this concept – and sometimes, this just did not work. The concept of memory box turned out to be one possible approach to cultural transfer. One which was especially strong when processes of transfer and aspects of collective memory came together, because the approach allowed to combine those two in focusing on one element (the box). When either transfer or memory was not in the centre of research, or when there was not one thing to

focus on, the approach did not work. We do think it important to mention this inaptitude of the concept as well as our positive experiences with it.

We see the surplus mostly in the possibility to combine synchronic and diachronic transfer processes, in its concreteness by focusing on one element as an anchor for memories (*Erinnerungsanker*). This focus on one element, its *isolation* by the researcher, could be criticised as achronistic, since nothing is ever really isolated from its context. However, using exactly this method of identifying an element, thereby isolating it, and looking at it in its original context and/or several other contexts when it was later displaced, made cultural transfer tangible. This (artificial) isolation made it also possible to concentrate on the different ways, people made sense of these boxes or elements.

After two years of working on our articles as well as on and with the concept, we judge our approach to be especially apt for combining different aspects of cultural transfer as well as for dealing with collective memory.

By comparing our articles on an abstract level and having more case studies, it will be possible to learn more about general aspects e.g. of characteristics of memory boxes, of the way actors use these memory boxes, of similarities and differences in opening moments, and of the relationship between memory box and public. The concept of memory box should be used further, e.g. to answer these questions on the meta-level. Nonetheless, the memory box-approach should not be confused with an entire theoretical system that opens up new questions or changes the way scholars see the past. It allows for an in-depth-look at certain elements in their context and provides a specific approach within the concept of cultural transfer.