Research project led by the University of Bremen wants to close the gaps in our knowledge of GDR

Joint press release of the University of Bremen with the Research Centre for East European Studies, the Technical University Berlin, the Friedrich Schiller University Jena and the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder) Hurdles to modernization in the science and economy of the former GDR and their consequences in the transition to the Federal Republic of Germany: This is the topic of a collaborative research group led by Professor Jutta Günther in the Faculty of Business Studies and Economics. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research has approved three million euro for the first four years. Four universities are involved with six chairs.

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A coup for Jutta Günther, Professor of Economics, Innovation and Structural Economics at the University of Bremen: Her proposal for a research project that seeks to close the gaps in our knowledge about the former GDR has been approved at federal level. The German Ministry of Education and Research is funding the project with three million euro over the first four years. Jutta Günther works closely together with the Research Center for East European Studies at the University of Bremen as well as the Technical University Berlin, the Friedrich Schiller University Jena and the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder).

Interdisciplinary approach

“We pursue an interdisciplinary research approach,” says the professor. “We want to examine the influence of past policies on the current state of the economy in the eastern part of Germany.” What does the “legacy of the GDR” mean for the economy? How can we explain the visible structural weaknesses in the East of Germany today? What are the long-term effects of past socialist policies and the transformation that started in 1990? The project members also want to investigate what has become of the intellectual potential of GDR scholars and scientists. And what role does the “Wendegeneration” so decisively shaped in the period of transition play, for example, in the area of start-up activities? These and many other questions can only be analyzed and brought together in a large collaborative research group working with pluralistic methods.

Past structural deficits

“These are highly complex questions,” says Jutta Günther. She is happy, though, about the mix of disciplines and research methods. For example, economic historians and political sociologists from the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder) are just as involved as science sociologists from the TU Berlin and economists at the University of Jena. “So far, we have the general economic finding that the economy in East Germany reveals a productivity gap of a good 20 percent compared with the West,” says the expert. “But in order to understand why, we must not content ourselves with a present-day perspective, but also illuminate the structural deficiencies of the past. Only in this way, almost 30
years after the end of the GDR and the subsequent transformation period, will we be able to better understand today’s situation.” The project team hopes to gain special insights by making comparisons between developments in the GDR / Eastern Germany with those in neighboring Central and Eastern European countries. All in all, the project wants to examine the tension arising from the hurdles typical of state socialism, on the one hand, and the creative potentials on the other.

What is the expected outcome?

“International research papers, doctoral dissertations, habilitations, high-level conferences and in the end also a book on the overall findings,” says the Bremen economist. All members of the research project place great value on the transfer of research results. “We work together with memorial sites, associations, museums and collections,” she emphasizes. “We don’t intend to conduct our research isolated in an ivory tower, but want to communicate our findings to the public at large.” Ultimately, the scientists hope to derive recommendations for future action and they expect their results will help to resolve contemporary issues.

If you would like to know more about this topic, feel free to contact:

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