Scene and Screen. Cultural Representations of the Industrial Past
Bochum. I come from you.

Manfred Wannöffel – MIERES-GIJÓN – 15th of November 2018
BACKGROUND

- Foundation 1975 / 1979
- Contract between RUB and IG Metall
- Central institute of RUB
- Equally represented committee
- Bridge between social science and labour

ACTIVITIES

- Transdisciplinary research
- Formation projects
- Further education programmes
- Interdisciplinary lectures
Bochum by Herbert Grönemeyer

“Deep in the west, where the sun is smogged. It's better, a lot better than you'd think. Deep in the west. You're no beauty. Grey from work. Like yourself without make-up. You're an honest gig. Unfortunately completey misbuilt. But that's what you're about. You've got a pulse made of steel. You hear it loudly at night. You're simply too humble. Your black gold got us up again. You're the flower of the territory. Bochum, that's where I'm from, Bochum, I belong to you. Oh, dig on, Bochum. You're not a world city. On your King's Alleys no fashion shows take place. It's here, where the heart still counts and not big money. Who is it who lives at Dusseldorf? You're heaven for doves. And you're always on coke. You've got a hut in your garden. With a double pass you check out any soccer rival. You and your VFL-Club. Bochum, that's where I'm from Bochum, I belong to you. Oh, dig on, Bochum.”

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpGIDOBZqgM)
Memories of the industrial and labour period
Memories of Social and Labour Life
Industrial development since the 19th century

Coal | BOCHUM 1.0

Steel | BOCHUM 2.0

AUTOMOBILE | BOCHUM 3.0

Source: RUB
Defeat of the coal crisis in 1962
With Opel Fordism entered into the coal district

„As the coal mine closed, my father realized that he would soon become unemployed or would have to retire early, so he said to me: "Boy, you learn at Opel, go to Opel, that's the future!" It was already on everyone’s mind.

First I noticed the odour in this vast factory. For me, it was very impressive, the tremendous machines, when you walked into the hallway, the front engine and all that with much noise, dirt and dust. It smelled of oil, metal and emulsion of drillings. And that smell, I still remember it today. I will never forget it, all our clothes smelled like that, my working bag smelled like it and every time my mother washed and fixed my clothes, that odour remained in the appartment.”

“I was barely a month, two weekends at Opel and my salary came to no more than 700 Mark, but it was moving up in the direction of 900 to 1,000. And I said, my friend, that’s great. And then I bought a new car, a cadet. An elegante car, at that time…”

(Klaus Hemmerling)
Assembly-line
(Foto: Opel Bochum)
Opel – The car that symbolized Fordism
“Opel was, of course, a very compelling story in Bochum, a good prospect. Opel was known as a company with much prestige and as a large-scale employer, of which not many existed in the Federal Republic. Nothing better could have happened to me than that Opel planted the factory in the district and I could build my professional life as well. And the satisfaction still remains.

My parents did not have enough money to grant me another vocational education. Fortunately, I was able to improve myself through internal training courses, a master class, and other training opportunities at Opel that enabled me to follow my own professional path within the factory.

(Helmut Passmann)
The car mobilized the whole region
Employment with social benefits

“It was a very secure job when you worked at Opel. So, if you did not steal anything, you didn’t have to be afraid to lose your employment contract. Work at Opel was as if you worked in the public sector of the city. Opel was Opel, at the time, it was a good employer, very caring. They had their own canteen, lunch, including something to eat for the night. So, of course, they licked their fingers, when they started at Opel. ... It surely offered job security, many bought apartments or built a house at that time, or even bought a car, for example.”

(Willi Gröber)
The factory – a social space

“All I’ve learned, what I’ve accumulated in professional life, I owe to the Opel company. Who knows what would have happened to me, if Opel hadn’t been built here in Bochum, I wouldn’t have built any cars here. It was the right decision to work right here, and I don’t regret it. As well as the social and professional development I made here at Opel. I also learned a lot about the people around me by working with them. I was happy to work here in the factory.”

(Helmut Rechner)
“I learned the profession of an office clerk and after that I began at Opel at the age of 18. For me, that was the biggest impact of my life. Opel was a male-dominated domain. There were power gestures and clear offers from men. I thought then, you won’t stay here for your whole life. You won’t stay at Opel. You won’t be able to stand it.

But then I had very good colleagues which taught me well, and we formed a close association as well. But the initial period was very difficult for me. At noon, I went home and told my mother I would never go back to the place. Then I cried and my mother said to me: But you chose it.

When I began to work at Opel I was earning 900 marks. I thought I could buy the whole city. Yes, at that time, in the sixties, that was a lot of money.”

(Brigitte Pieper)
Opel was accompanied by the consumer factory in the year 1965
And, of course, with the car to the new department store
At the same time the new teaching factory opened its doors
This factory remains to this day
BOCHUM 4.0 – Urban development based on Knowledge

Source: RUB
Conclusion

• Memory is not written in stone. The past is built according to developments of the present.

• The interpretation of historical events is always the product of social and political controversies.

• There is not one culture of memory, but rather many different memory cultures.
Conclusion

• Social classes, family networks or religious groups have different collective memories that create identity. (Maurice Halbwachs)

• On the one hand, there is a spatialization of collective memory with manifestations of memory in specific places, for instance in the first automobile factory in the Ruhr region. (Pierre Nora)
Conclusion

• On the other hand, experiences with the defeat of GM/Opel in the Ruhr district in 2014 show that global conditions exist.

• Therefore, local and global memory must be analyzed in a comparative and international perspective.
picture: Opel Bochum
Sources

- Wüstenberg, Jenny (2017): Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany, Cambridge
Thank you very much for your attention!

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