

View from the Street:

Time travelling

This newsletter, Executive Committee member and PhD student Heike Wolter takes us east – and back in time – to consider the changes at one of the tourist destinations of her childhood.

An account about a journey is also an account about time. You sometimes travel to a certain place, stay there and in the end take home an image, a snapshot, a mental photograph – not only outward appearances, but also inner conditions and feelings. Back at home this construct gradually loses its nuances. The place may become more hideous as its scars come to the fore. Or it becomes more beautiful, since you remember enjoyable experiences there. Later you

might come back and everything has changed, for nothing is less reliable than memory. Besides, everything will be different because time has gone by and the place you once saw has changed just as you have. This is what I feel when visiting Graal-Mueritz, a village at the Baltic Sea in north-eastern Germany.

I remember longing for the sea as a child, missing sun, fresh air and cold salty water. I longed for all the adventures the beach would offer. I can also remember always being accommodated in the same spartan bungalow owned by a people's enterprise; having to bring a hanger full of tinned food, the local supermarket



only offering a very small range of products and having to spend an hour waiting in the blistering heat at a snack bar. Though I remember all these rather negative things, this does not curtail my good memories of the place. My memories have not changed but by now - being a tourism historian - I reflect about another perspective.

Today I know that the Baltic Sea - providing the only access to the open sea apart from the Black Sea which could only be reached by very few - was a desirable tourist destination for GDR citizens. Nearly 30 per cent of them wanted to stay there in 1988, but for only a fraction of them did this dream become true within the state-controlled socialist tourism. Bungalows of people's enterprises were an important part of state-run travel supply and were meant to be functional and appropriate for as many vacationers as possible rather than being luxurious. Like other offers, they were assigned to people by the trade union in which about 95 per cent of people were organised. Instead of visiting one of many travel agencies like today, people then were just lucky to get an offer. Finally, the tinned food and the queuing I remember were quite necessary to balance and arrange with the inadequate supply of consumer goods. By 1989 the command economy failed - though the situation eased in the 1970s and 1980s - in adjusting supply and demand.

Therefore, strolling through Graal-Mueritz I see things from two perspectives: as an eye-witness and as a researcher in contemporary history. The horizon of my experiences and memories is quite different from the horizon of scientific explanations of the past. This is what makes every kind of historical work attractive and fascinating, especially on such a "sunny" topic like tourism history.

PhD Funding Opportunities: *University of Ulster, Northern Ireland*

A number of PhD Studentships are available for an October 2008 start. Details can be found at: http://www.adbe.ulster.ac.uk/schools/graduate_school/phd/opportunities

Details of transport projects which are available can be found under the 'built environment' list. These are:

- * Ageing and Mobility: A life history approach to the study of changing personal mobility
- * Young people's attitudes towards sustainable transport
- * Design, access and security in public transport infrastructure
- * Car culture and city design
- * Regional governance and transport planning in Northern Ireland
- * Urban Form, Energy and Transport

Potential applicants are encouraged to contact the supervisor(s) associated with particular projects and research areas in sufficient time in advance of applying before the deadline on 4 April 2008.