

<b>Institution:</b> Loughborough University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UOA34 - Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Challenging Cold War stereotypes: Transforming public understanding of media and everyday life under communism through exhibitions and documentaries		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> September 2006 - March 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by LU:</b>
Sabina Mihelj	Professor of Media and Cultural Analysis	Aug 2004–present
Susan E. Reid	Professor of Cultural History	Sept 2015–Sept 2019
Simon Huxtable	Research Associate	Aug 2013–April 2016
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> December 2014 - December 2019		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Public understanding of media and everyday life under communist rule remains dominated by stereotypes formed during the Cold War. Loughborough research challenged these stereotypes, and proposed a more nuanced understanding, which avoids the binary division of communist East versus liberal democratic West and acknowledges the diversity of communist societies. The research findings informed museum exhibitions in the UK, USA, and three east European countries, and a BBC Four documentary, reaching 170,000 museum visitors and 700,000 TV viewers, leading to the following impacts: 1) a transformed understanding of communist media and everyday life among cultural industry professionals; 2) improved understanding among museum visitors and TV viewers, and 3) enriched museum collections and larger and more diverse audiences.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>This impact builds on a body of externally funded research on Eastern European media and culture, conducted at the Centre for Research in Communication and Culture at Loughborough since 2006. A central aspect examines cultural and media history and memory, with a focus on the Cold War. This work challenges stereotypical perceptions of everyday life and culture under communist rule as backward and pervaded by propaganda, highlights important similarities with the West, and reveals significant differences between communist countries.</p> <p>Two interconnected research strands were developed. The first was led by Professor Mihelj, comprised research on media and everyday life during communism, and was funded by the British Academy (<i>On the Margins of Europe</i>, 2006-2007, [R1]) and the Leverhulme Trust (<i>Screening Socialism</i>, 2013-2016, [R2, R3, R4]). The early work focused on the print media in Yugoslavia, showing how journalists appropriated the idea of the Cold War as a bipolar conflict to negotiate the relationship between ideology and everyday realities [R1]. More recently, Mihelj led an interdisciplinary research team to develop the first transnational study of television and everyday life under communism, covering five countries [R3, R4]. Unlike prior research, the project's focus extended beyond official policies, elite discourses and news genres, to examine fictional and entertainment programmes and to investigate how television was used by audiences. The results showed that explicit propagandistic content was rare, that TV programming had much in common with Western public broadcasting, and that audience preferences were often at odds with official ideologies. Rather than perpetuating propaganda, television influenced political developments in unexpected ways, especially during key historical moments such as the fall of the Berlin Wall. The research also revealed notable cross-country differences, with some countries considerably more open to the West and more tolerant of dissent. Extending the reach of this research, Mihelj also studied the role of television in post-communist memory [R2].</p> <p>The second strand of research, led by Professor Reid, focused on everyday life in the Soviet Union [R5]. Reid sought to understand how the social, material and cultural transformations that took place in the USSR after Stalin's death – including rapid modernization, formation of a consumer society, growing availability of everyday technologies (including ICT), and increased international contact – were experienced</p>		

by 'ordinary people'. Examining the move by millions of citizens to new, prefabricated housing built in the 1960s, Reid investigated the ways individuals and households made home in these standard spaces. Challenging Cold War stereotypes of passive subjects, Reid found that homemakers negotiated their relations with the state over the exercise of taste, consumption, DIY, and the appropriation of state-produced consumer goods. Contrary to the standard Cold War emphasis on shortage, Reid's research attends to the production of new 'needs', including the need for technologies such as television sets.

Together, Mihelj and Reid's research developed a multifaceted account of the interactions between media, processes of change affecting everyday life, and political developments in communist Eastern Europe.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

**[R1]:** Mihelj, S. (2011) 'Negotiating Cold War Culture: Uplifting the Working People, Entertaining the Masses, Cultivating the Nation', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 53(3): 509-539. doi:10.1017/S0010417511000235

**[R2]:** Mihelj, S. (2017) 'Memory, Post-socialism, and the Media: Nostalgia and Beyond', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20(3): 235-251, doi: 10.1177/1367549416682260.

**[R3]:** Mihelj, S. and Huxtable, S. (2016) 'The Challenge of Flow: State Socialist Television between Revolutionary Time and Everyday Time', *Media, Culture & Society* 38(3): 332-48. doi:10.1177/0163443715594869.

**[R4]:** Mihelj, S., and Huxtable, S. (2018) *From Media Systems to Media Cultures: Understanding Socialist Television*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108525039>. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**[R5]:** Reid, S.E. (2016) 'Cold War Binaries and the Culture of Consumption in the Late Soviet Home', *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 8 (1): 17 – 43. doi:10.1108/JHRM-09-2015-0038.

Mihelj's research was funded by a British Academy Small Grant (*On the Margins of Europe: Media, Space and Identity between Migrant Borders*, 2006-07, £7,450) and the Leverhulme (*Screening Socialism: Television and Everyday Life in Socialist Eastern Europe*, 2013-16, £242,000). All research outputs were peer reviewed and published in leading journals or book series. Mihelj's 2018 book received pre-publication endorsements from key figures in the fields of media research, communist media, and Eastern European history (Dan Hallin, Anikó Imre, Stephen Lovell and Barbie Zelizer) and a commendation from the British Association for Film, Television and Screen Studies in the Best Monograph Prize 2019 category. Reid's 2016 article was awarded the Emerald Publishing Literati Awards for Excellence Outstanding Paper.

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Building on their research, Mihelj and Reid advised on and curated three exhibitions in five countries and a BBC Four documentary. Details of **four impact pathways** are as follows:

- (1) *They Never Had it Better: Everyday Life in Yugoslavia* was a traveling exhibition developed by the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, Serbia (2014-2015), which then travelled to the Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo (2015-2016) and to the Museum of Contemporary History in Ljubljana, Slovenia (2016-2017). The exhibition was curated by Ana Panić, with Mihelj as External Advisor **[S1, S2]**. It attracted positive reviews in three countries **[S3]** and awards for the best curator and best exhibition in Serbia in 2014-15 by the Association of Art Historians in Serbia **[S1]**.
- (2) *Currency of Communism* (2017-2018) was the first ever exhibition dedicated to communism at the British Museum. It was curated by Thomas Hockenhull, with Mihelj and Reid as External Advisors **[S4]** and received a large amount of favourable coverage in the UK and abroad **[S5, p. 9]**.
- (3) *Watching Socialism: The Television Revolution in Eastern Europe* (2019) was dedicated specifically to television and everyday life and opened at the Wende Museum in Los Angeles, the only specialist Cold War museum in the USA. Mihelj and Reid were lead curators, and Mihelj's research also informed tour guide training **[S7]**.
- (4) *The Fall of the Berlin Wall with John Simpson* (2019) was a TV documentary produced by Alleycats TV for BBC Four, to mark the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Mihelj acted as expert interviewee and advisor [S9].

Through these impact pathways, Mihelj and Reid helped transform the public understanding of media and everyday life under communism, contributed to professional development of cultural industry professionals, as well as facilitated the enrichment of cultural heritage and diversification and enlargement of audiences, thus achieving impact in three key areas.

### **1. Transformed understanding among cultural industry professionals**

Through their interventions, Mihelj and Reid **contributed to professional development of museum and media professionals in five major museums and a TV production company in five countries, through transforming their understanding of the role of the media and everyday life in communist Europe.** The initial plan for *They Never Had It Better* exhibition made little reference to the media, and this angle was added as a result of Mihelj's contribution. As noted by the Director of Museum of Yugoslavia, Mihelj provided "*invaluable advice and assistance to the exhibition curator*" and as a result, "*the exhibition was enhanced considerably and paid more attention to television than it otherwise would*" [S1]. For the Wende Museum, the *Watching Socialism* exhibition was the first exhibition dedicated entirely to media history, and as the Chief Curator Dr Joes Segal explained, Mihelj and Reid's contribution "*was absolutely essential for making this exhibition happen*" and "*presented an opportunity to venture into an aspect of Cold War history that has so far remained neglected in our collection and activities*" [S7]. As a result of the collaboration, several curators and visitor engagement staff at Wende "*developed an in-depth understanding of communist television and media more generally, and their place in everyday life*" [S7]. Tour guides also appreciated "*being able to talk about research*" and thereby "*communicate that the exhibition is also about how people experience television, not just what was on view on television*" [S7].

Mihelj and Reid's knowledge about the role of consumption and currency in everyday life had a similarly transformative impact on the *Currency of Communism* exhibition, and contributed to the curator's professional development, as highlighted in his report [S5, p.4]. As noted by the Head of Department of Coins and Medals, Mihelj and Reid "*impacted on the conceptualization of the exhibition and on the exhibits and texts through which the concept was represented*". Their intervention "*enhanced [the curator's] understanding of alternative exchange mechanisms*", "*led to a restructuring of the treatment of gender*" in the exhibition, and stimulated "*a more rounded approach which highlighted the ways in which currency was used in the context of everyday life, consumption and leisure*" [S4]. In the case of the Berlin Wall documentary, Mihelj revealed crucial aspects of historical information that neither the director, Des Henderson, nor the key protagonist of the documentary, BBC Foreign Affairs Editor John Simpson, were aware of. Specifically, Mihelj was able to point out the critical role of Western reporting, live TV coverage, and cross-border audience reception in the fall of the Berlin Wall. The moment when Mihelj explains this dynamic to John Simpson formed, as the director of the documentary explained, "*the heart and soul of the film*", and "*no-one else [...] could have really told him that with as much authority as Professor Mihelj did*" [S9]. Mihelj's intervention thus transformed the narrative arc of the documentary and constituted a key moment of surprise for both the documentary's narrator Simpson and for the audience.

Mihelj and Reid's contributions left a legacy in partner institutions, **inspiring professionals to produce further work that engages media history and everyday life.** The collaboration led the Museum of Yugoslavia "*to pay more attention to media as an integral part of the cultural heritage we collect and exhibit*" [S1]. The Wende Museum emphasized the importance of the "*accumulated knowledge and expertise in media history among our staff*" as a result of the collaboration with Mihelj and Reid, and is planning "*another exhibition on another aspect of media and communication history, in the near future*" [S7].

### **2. Improved understanding among museum visitors and TV viewers**

Mihelj and Reid's **impact reached a combined total of over 864,000 museum visitors and TV viewers in five countries.** The BBC documentary reached 585,000 viewers in the during its first broadcast on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2019 and attracted 104,947 iPlayer requests within four weeks [S9], the travelling exhibition attracted close to 30,000 visitors in three countries [S1, S2], the British Museum exhibition was attended by 141,000 visitors [S5], and the Wende Museum exhibition attracted over 3,300 visitors [S7].

Audience research conducted among museum visitors at the British Museum [S6] and the Wende Museum [S8] confirmed that the exhibitions, and specifically the aspects influenced by Mihelj and Reid's research, **improved visitors' understanding of media and everyday life in communist Europe**. Qualitative interviews with 84 visitors of the British museum exhibition [S6] demonstrated that aspects of the exhibition influenced by Mihelj and Reid's research led to new knowledge and greater enjoyment. A significant number of interviewees brought up alternative exchange and reward systems as something they were not aware of prior to attending the exhibition, with one visitor noting that *"it hadn't really occurred to me that money is less important in a society that is less capitalist"* [S6, p. 6]. Several visitors also commented on similarities with the West or noted the diversity of countries [S6, p. 6-7]. The inclusion of everyday objects also proved effective, with several visitors mentioning such items as key points of entry for their engagement with the exhibition, and a source of pleasure [S6, p. 7-8, 10]. Several visitors also noted the prominence of female heroines on banknotes, thus confirming the effectiveness of Mihelj and Reid's suggestion to restructure the treatment of gender [S6, p. 8].

A similar study was conducted among visitors at the Wende Museum, based on thematic analysis of 78 visitor interviews [S8]. Prior to visiting the exhibition, 36 (46%) interviewees associated communist TV with propaganda or state control, and 16 (21%) expected it to compare unfavourably with Western television in terms of quality, content, or form. Most interviewees thought their perceptions changed considerably thanks to the exhibition. 22 (37%) reported being surprised at the range of genres, with one interviewee noting that *"it never dawned on me that they would have game shows going on"* [S8, p. 5] while another highlighted the surprisingly large amount of entertainment and cultural imports [S8, p. 6]. Another common conclusion was that communist television programming and audience interests were less distant from their own experiences, with one interviewee commenting: *"You can tell that it was a lot more open than I thought it was before. It was really pretty similar to American television at the time,"* [S8, p. 6]. Several respondents (18%) also commented on children's programming in this context, with one noting that it *"helped complicate the narrative of Soviet bloc countries ... there was also television programming for kids, and cartoons, and regular homelife going on throughout this period"* [S8, p. 7].

Visitors also expressed interest in the presence of socialist advertising, western imports, and access to Western television signals. For instance, one interviewee noted that he *"wasn't aware of how easily people had access to Western television"*, while another noted that he was *"surprised to see that there were many American TV shows"* [S8, p. 8]. When asked to discuss similarities and differences with Western television, interviewees focused heavily on similarities, primarily in terms of aesthetics (28%) but also genres (19%). A notable proportion of participants (14%) highlighted similarities with regards to propaganda. According to one participant, both communist and Western television *"tried to show from one point of view how great their systems were"*, while another concluded *"It's all kind of the same in the sense that we're all trying to, you know, promote our ideals."* [S8, p. 11]. A significant proportion of participants (19%) also argued that the exhibition led to a change in their attitudes to Western media, in the sense that they became more critical of contemporary Western media, for instance because they became more aware of ideological messages [S8, pp. 13-14].

To ascertain the impact of the TV documentary, the market research agency Opinium was commissioned to conduct a study comprising of a two-wave survey (before and after viewing) and qualitative follow-up interviews [S10]. The first survey wave was conducted among 536 viewers selected from a nationally representative sample of BBC Four viewers who regularly watch history documentaries. The second wave was conducted among 257 viewers (of the initial 536) who watched the Berlin Wall documentary. Results showed that the documentary was well received, with 86% stating that it made them more aware of the role of television in the Cold War, and 74% agreeing that the discussion of the role of television was one of the highlights of the programme [S10, p. 7]. The comparison of the two waves confirmed that the documentary increased understanding of Cold War television and its impact on politics. In the first wave, only 22% of respondents knew that East German citizens were able to watch West Germany TV, and only 21% were able to correctly identify Schabowski as the politician announcing border regime changes during a TV press conference. After viewing, the proportions increased to 59% and 68% [S10, p. 4-5]. The documentary also inspired

viewers to learn more about the subject: 60% of participants stated they intend to find out more about the media in the Cold War as a result of watching the documentary [S10, p. 7].

### 3. *Enriched cultural heritage and larger and more diverse audiences*

Thanks to Mihelj and Reid's interventions, exhibitions in five museums in five different countries included several objects relevant to the history of media and everyday life during communism, and most of these were **new acquisitions** that will remain in museum collections and enable the three institutions to re-use them in future exhibitions. This also means that Mihelj and Reid's work has contributed to **enriching the cultural heritage of the Cold War**. For instance, the *They Never Had It Better* exhibition included several TV-related objects which since remained in the collections of the three participating museums in three countries [S1, S2, S3]. The exhibition also included an extensive public engagement component, which involved the acquisition of everyday objects via donations from the public [S1, S2]. These donations included several TV sets, which were added to collections in the three countries [S1, S2]. For the *Currency of Communism* exhibition, Mihelj and Reid's assistance with the selection and sourcing of exhibits led the British Museum to acquire archival photos and medals from the period, and materials from Reid's private collection [S4], thus enriching national collections of communist material culture [S5, p.1].

Mihelj and Reid's impact on cultural heritage was particularly notable in the case of the *Watching Socialism* exhibition. Their advice and existing links with heritage institutions in Eastern Europe was instrumental in expanding Wende's collection, both by adding objects relevant to media history (TV sets and antennas, everyday domestic objects, archival photos and video) and by expanding the regional scope of the collection (while most of Wende's original collection was sourced from East Germany, it now includes several objects originating from the Soviet Union, Hungary, Poland, Romania and socialist Yugoslavia). As Wende's Chief Curator explained, this expansion of the collection "enables us to tell a more complex story about everyday life through comparing these items with those from East Germany that we already had. As these new objects are now in our collection, we are likely to use them in later exhibitions" [S7].

Through generating richer and more diverse collections and narratives of the past, **Mihelj and Reid's work also helped partners reach larger, new, or more diverse audiences**. In south-eastern Europe, the travelling exhibition enabled the museums, which are traditionally attracting primarily foreign visitors, to strengthen their connection with local audiences: the Historical Museum in Sarajevo noticed a surge in the proportion of domestic audiences [S3], and the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade noted a considerably higher proportion of families, with parents using the exhibition to introduce children to their personal experiences of life under communism [S1]. The BBC documentary had an audience share of 2.6%, which is considerably higher than the slot average of 2.1% [S9]. Finally, the British Museum exhibition attracted the largest share of all free exhibitions held that year, a higher than average proportion of younger visitors, and visitors from central and Eastern Europe, suggesting that "it enabled the museum to attract new audiences" [S5, p. 9].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[S1] Letter, Director of the Museum of Yugoslavia.

[S2] Letter, Director of the National Museum of Contemporary History.

[S3] Selected media coverage and reviews of the *They Never Had It Better?* exhibition.

[S4] Letter, Department of Coins and Medals, The British Museum.

[S5] Tom Hockenfull: '*The Currency of Communism – Art Fund New Collecting Award*' (curator's final report, prepared for the funder of the exhibition).

[S6] Leila Wilmers: '*The Currency of Communism: A Study of Visitor Understanding, Learning and Engagement*'.

[S7] Letter, Chief Curator and Director of Programming, Wende Museum.

[S8] Leila Wilmers: '*Watching Socialism: A Study of Visitor Understanding, Learning and Engagement*'.

[S9] Letter, Producer and Director, Alleycats TV.

[S10] Opinium Research: 'Loughborough University – Reception of Documentary'.