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Socialist Monuments in GDR Picturebooks on Berlin

Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park, Lenin Monument, and Thälmann Monument

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Based on the observation that there is usually a mixture of information and propaganda in descriptive picturebooks of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), this paper examines the presentation of socialist monuments in three Berlin travel guides for children published in 1979 and 1987. In particular, the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park, the Lenin Monument, and the Thälmann Monument are considered. The picturebooks chosen are *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave and Pansch 1979), *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* (Dänhardt and Fischer 1979) from the series *Mein kleines Lexikon*, and *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper and Döring 1987). The comparative analysis shows that different methods of mixing information and propaganda are used and that relevant differences can also be found in the visual design of these picturebooks.

Keywords: Berlin, information, monument, picturebook, propaganda, travel guide

The GDR's building programme included equipping cities with monuments. In line with party ideology, these monuments were to represent role models for the socialist personality. Ernst Thälmann and Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, for example, were considered such role models. But while Thälmann was a communist fighter against National Socialism and had earned certain respect even among bourgeois non-communists despite the cult of personality that was waged around him (Leo 2002), the people's relationship with Lenin was full of tension. A monument to Lenin had more the effect of reminding people of the GDR's existing dependence on the Soviet Union, and so the democratic decision after the reunification of the two German states to take down the Lenin monument in Berlin was only logical, albeit controversial to a certain extent.

Good Bye, Lenin!, the title of the 2003 film comedy by Wolfgang Becker, which deals with the demise of the GDR, alludes to the dismantling of the Lenin monument shown in digitally created scenes, in which the torso of the monument floats through the air on a crane hook.

According to the classical definition of Alois Riegl (1903: 1), a monument is “a work of human hands, erected for the specific purpose of keeping individual human deeds or fortunes (or complexes of several such) ever present and alive in the consciousness of succeeding generations”.¹ However, although those who erect a monument certainly have a specific intention as to the manner in which the relevant human deeds or historical figures are to be remembered, everyday recipients are nonetheless unbound in their recollection or interpretation of monuments. Therefore, monuments can be evaluated in different ways, which can lead to the well-known phenomena of their neglect, damage, remodelling or even demolition.²

In this context, the cognitive function of monuments (what recipients know about them), the evaluative (axiological) and emotional function (how monuments are evaluated and felt), and the pragmatic function (how they are dealt with in everyday life) are likely to play an important role (Bellentani and Panico 2016: 33–36).

Here, I would like to understand the kind of intended influence on recipients of a monument as a kind of propaganda. With Jason Stanley (2015: 53), I conceptualise propaganda as “a contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to increase the realization of those very ideals by either emotional or other non-rational means”. Though propaganda in this broad sense need not be bad *per se*, propaganda always has a manipulative character: “Insofar as a form of propaganda is a kind of manipulation of rational beings toward an end without engaging their rational will, it is a kind of deception” (Stanley 2015: 58). This can probably be seen most clearly in those monuments that concern war and justify warlike activity (Abousnnouga and Machin 2013). Since monuments have a certain artistic-aesthetic form, from the point of view of those who erect them, they are chosen in such a way that the impact on the ordinary citizen is optimal. This leads to certain styles that may be associated with the propagandistic purpose of monuments.³

¹ The complete classic definition reads as follows (Riegl 1903: 1): “Unter Denkmal im ältesten und ursprünglichsten Sinne versteht man ein Werk von Menschenhand, errichtet zu dem bestimmten Zwecke, um einzelne menschliche Taten oder Geschicke (oder Komplexe mehrerer solcher) im Bewußtsein der nachlebenden Generationen stets gegenwärtig und lebendig zu erhalten.”

² On the treatment of socialist monuments in post-GDR, see Johst (2016) and Ziesemer (2019). A detailed analysis of the treatment of Soviet monuments in contemporary Estonia has been presented by Bellentani (2021).

³ Styles can be understood as abstractions of the visual-material dimension of monuments. According to Federico Bellentani and Mario Panico (2016: 36), these include the following aspects: “Dimensions: large/small, wide/narrow, tall/short; 2. Location: degree of elevation, distance/proximity, angle of interaction; 3. Materials of construction: solidity/hollowness, texture of the surface; 4. Topological organization: form, shape; 5. Eidetic organization: regularity/irregularity, curvature; 6. Chromatic organization: colors, brightness/opacity, lighting”.

Monuments are often supplemented with inscriptions or other texts. For example, on monuments to the victims of the world wars, one finds entire lists with the names of fallen soldiers. In order to achieve the greatest effect, these texts should be designed to allow the support of narratives conveying the propagandistic intent (Bellentani and Panico 2016: 37–39). Usually, the texts in question have an intertextual relationship with other texts (Bellentani and Panico 2016: 39–40), just as the monuments themselves have a relationship with (a set of) other monuments.

Monuments in urban space influence the image of a city. European metropolises especially have a considerable number of monuments from different epochs. They often occupy a prominent place in the urban space, for example in the middle of squares, and are therefore “landmarks” in the sense of Lynch (1960). They can serve as a point of orientation or as a meeting place, but the monuments are often ignored by the inhabitants in urban everyday life, or it is completely unclear to them why they exist and what function they serve; this means that recipients are ignorant (without any knowledge) in this respect (Shanken 2022). One needs *urban literacy* – understood as an ability to interpret the urban environment – in order to decode their meaning (cf. Serbulo 2022). Tourists often get helpful information about monuments from city guides, but for child residents of a city (and their parents) there may well be an information gap.

Herein lies a starting point for socialist education. Descriptive picturebooks in the GDR attempted to impart knowledge about socialist monuments to children. A Thälmann pioneer⁴ in particular should have knowledge of the meaning of socialist monuments. For this reason, one can study how such monuments were represented in informational literature for children.⁵

This article contributes to three strands of discussion in current picturebook research. First, it discusses the representation of (socialist) monuments in picturebooks. The fact that monuments represent a special type of architecture has hardly been considered in current research on the representation of architecture in picturebooks (Campagnaro 2021; Schmiedeknecht, Rudd & Hayward 2023). This could be due to the fact that monuments, in contrast to outstanding and canonised architecture, play only a marginal role in picturebook literature – perhaps with the exception of monuments such as the Statue of Liberty with its great social and cultural significance. Second, using the example of socialist monuments, the article deals with the relationship of information and propaganda in picturebooks, particularly since the propagandistic aspect of informational picturebooks has been little researched (Goga, Hoem Iversen & Teigland 2021). Third, it contributes to the study of the visual culture of East German

⁴ The pioneer organisation “Ernst Thälmann” was named after the former chairman of the German Communist Party (KPD) Ernst Thälmann. Founded on 13 December 1948, it was the mass organisation for children from the first to the seventh grade. It comprised the Young Pioneers (6–10 years) and the Thälmann Pioneers (11–13 years). Its organisational model was the Soviet pioneer organisation “Vladimir Lenin”.

⁵ In children’s literature research, there is little discussion of the representation of monuments in picturebooks. A rare exception is the article by Petros Panaou and Angela Yannicopoulou (2021), which examines picturebooks about the Statue of Liberty and Cycladic sculpture.

picturebooks, which are part of communist visual cultures (Meibauer 2025; Skrodzka, Lu & Marciniak 2020), by proving and using examples to show that children in the GDR were actually given information about socialist monuments.

By information, I mean all true statements about reality. These true statements constitute our knowledge about the world. This knowledge does not consist simply of a list of “facts and figures” or “data”, but is organised in a complex way. Merveldt (2018: 232) emphasises that information(al) books “select, organize, and interpret facts and figures using verbal and visual codes – drawing on narrative and descriptive forms specific to their historical and cultural contexts”. The way in which this is done also depends on the underlying ideology, which can generally be defined as a cognitive framework that contains the “norms, values and goals” of a society (Stephens 2018: 137). In socialist societies, these were by definition socialist in nature, for example by being associated with concepts of the new socialist personality. Of course, it cannot be assumed that these values were shared by all members of society, so there was always a great need for propaganda from the party’s perspective.

In the GDR, the propagandistic influence of the party was secured by censorship procedures (so-called *Druckgenehmigungsverfahren*, that is, printing approval procedures). It can therefore be assumed that informative picturebooks in the GDR always conveyed socialist ideology and propaganda alongside information about the world. It is an important task of historical and theoretical picturebook research to describe exactly how this relationship was achieved in picturebooks and how it changed over time. The aim of this study is precisely to establish the relationship of facts and propaganda in representations of socialist monuments in East German informational picturebooks before the major political changes and the unification of Germany into one state.

The study focuses on three picturebooks from the GDR, namely *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* [Alex, Spree, and Memorial, 1979] by Reimar Dänhardt and Karl Fischer (illustrator), *Bärchens Bummelbus. Ein Berlin-Bilderbuch für Kinder* [Little Bear’s “Strolling Bus”: A Berlin Picturebook for Children, 1979] by John Stave and Dietrich Pansch (illustrator), and *Erst mal kucken in Berlin. Lina-Geschichten von Katrin Pieper* [First Look in Berlin. Lina’s Stories by Katrin Pieper, 1987] by Katrin Pieper and Karl-Heinz Döring (illustrator).

These picturebooks, published between 1979 and 1987, represent very well the period under research and allow for a comparison of the representation of three monuments in East Berlin, namely the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park, the Lenin Monument, and the Thälmann Monument. It will be shown that the three books use different strategies of representation, both at the pictorial level and the textual level. However, they always strive for a balance between information, in the sense of truthfully conveying knowledge about reality, and propaganda, in the sense of emotionally influencing children’s attitudes towards the socialist state. Insofar as the monuments themselves are a type of propaganda and are represented in picturebooks in a propagandistic way, a child may be subject to double propaganda. This can either

lead to the internalisation of the corresponding messages or to their rejection, while the family, school and party organisations have a controlling influence.

First, I will present the three books before going on to discuss the representation of the three monuments in turn. The article concludes with a discussion of the functions of these picturebooks.

Picturebooks on East Berlin

The picturebooks about (East) Berlin under analysis can be classified in a broader sense as “city guides” for children. They contain a representative selection of buildings, streets, and monuments, and are indeed in the tradition of travel guides. While *Alex, Spree and Ehrenmal* [Alex, Spree, and Memorial, 1979] is actually an encyclopaedia, I will argue that it can be used as a city guide. It turns out that there were already GDR picturebooks about (East) Berlin in the 1950s, but the emphasis on socialist monuments is a more recent phenomenon, which appears to be connected with the forced revival of the socialist heritage at the end of the 1970s; in the 1950s, the Soviet War Memorial was certainly not yet part of the canon of famous monuments in East Berlin.

According to Remo Cadalbert (2020: 13), a children’s travel guide is “a nonfiction book that has as its subject a travel region with all its facets, history, tourist attractions, and facilities”. The region in question is Berlin. The target audience is, on the one hand, children who come to Berlin as tourists, and on the other hand, children who want to “discover” or “stroll” through the city. While Berlin travel guides for adults already existed in the 19th century, i.e. with the advent of modern tourism (Görlich 2007), Berlin travel guides for children are probably a newer text genre.

Two children’s books published in the 1950s in the GDR that provide information about Berlin and therefore constitute a historical context for the three picturebooks under investigation are *Wir gehen durch die große Stadt* [We Walk Through the Big City] by Werner Reinicke and Ilse Wagner (illustrator) (1953) and *Das Buch vom Meister Zacharias und den acht goldenen Zeigern. Mit lauter bunten Geschichten und Bildern über Uhren, Kinder, Bären, Schleppekähne, Studenten, Spatzen und Zeitungen, über das Kino, das Nilpferd, das Segelflugzeug, den Müggelsee, vieles andere und natürlich über unser Berlin* [The Book of Master Zacharias and the Eight Golden Hands: With Lots of Colourful Stories and Pictures about Clocks, Children, Bears, Barges, Students, Sparrows and Newspapers, about the Cinema, the Hippopotamus, the Glider, the Müggelsee, Much More and of Course About Our Berlin] by Paul Wiens and Karl Fischer (illustrator) (1955). However, these picturebooks do not deal with socialist monuments. They primarily seek to report on the reconstruction of the city of Berlin and present its well-known attractions. A clear reminder of war events, for example through the depiction of the Soviet War Memorial, would not have fitted into this picture, especially as these books were intended to appeal to younger children.

Comparable picturebooks about West Berlin or the entirety of Berlin from a western point of view are unknown to me. In view of the urban rivalry between West

Berlin and East Berlin, this is not self-evident. One possible explanation could be that East Berlin (as the capital of the GDR) was considered as a homeland (“Heimat”) to a greater extent than West Berlin (see Pugh 2014: 106–154). In addition, love of the homeland was an important part of early education in the GDR (Zintler 2021).

Below, I consider monuments of the Soviet Occupation Zone and the GDR⁶ that were erected after 1945, namely the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park, the Lenin Monument, and the Thälmann Monument. All three monuments are examples of “socialist monumental art” developed in the Soviet Union, which was committed to socialist realism (Zimmermann 2018) and favoured powerful, figurative forms that concerned the idealised present or future aspects of socialism (see Siegert 2018: 19–27). This art form was exported not only to the GDR, but to many countries around the world, as Nadine Siegert (2018) shows using the example of Africa. By socialist monument, I understand a monument that has a clear reference to the history of socialism or communism.

Bärchens Bummelbus [Little Bear’s “Strolling Bus”] is a “Berlin picturebook” aimed at children from the age of 5. Led by the character “Bärchen”, who drives an old double-decker, fifteen children from all districts of the GDR take a bus tour of East Berlin, during which the most important sights are shown and briefly explained. The name Bärchen (Little Bear) is, of course, an allusion to Berlin’s heraldic animal. On the whole, *Bärchens Bummelbus* pursues a nostalgic, humorous perspective. Probably following the “nostalgia wave” of the 1970s, which was also rampant in the East, with its revaluation of old furniture, vehicles, and clothing styles, reminiscences of the “old” Berlin became important. Newsboy caps, nickel glasses, the pre-war double-decker bus and even a carriage-like automobile appear as attractive, or as something that is considered funny and is supposed to make the otherwise perhaps boring presentation of important buildings, streets, and squares more entertaining. The interspersed comic-like picture stories also point in this direction.

However, *Bärchens Bummelbus* can also be placed in a touristic context. Note that the children are without any parental guidance. The members of the children’s group are by no means marked as pioneers, which is rather unusual for picturebooks of this period. One reason could be that the authors also wanted to appeal to children from the West. A city tour in Berlin was certainly still an attractive thing for GDR children at the end of the 1970s. To “stroll” around the city for once without the supervision of adults (because the character Bärchen is not an adult) would have been a change from the routine of kindergarten or school.

Erst mal kucken in Berlin [First Look in Berlin] is aimed at children from the age of 10. It follows the didactic strategy of impressing with “facts, figures, information”, which are integrated into the pictures. The factual information is interspersed with short stories about the protagonist Lina, who lives at Strausberger Platz and takes a stroll through the city. Lina is characterised as a smart and quick-witted young Berlin girl. Unusual are

⁶ The Soviet Occupation Zone, governed by the Soviet Military Administration, was established on 9 June 1945. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was founded on 7 October 1949.

the fold-out panels that include larger representations, for example from the axis of the TV Tower to the Brandenburg Gate. In this book, the images emphasise the urbanity of the city. Daily work is not so much in the foreground, but rather the enjoyment of life, tourism, and cosmopolitanism. This also corresponded to the political intention in the 1980s to make East Berlin more attractive to tourists.

Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal is a volume in the series *Mein kleines Lexikon* [My Little Lexicon] aimed at children from the age of 9.⁷ The aim of the series is explained on the spine as follows: “Mein kleines Lexikon is a series of popular scientific introductions to various fields of knowledge, published for children, which explain essential terms in alphabetical order in an understandable and entertaining way”. As is appropriate for an encyclopaedia, a reference system is used. In total, there are 31 terms (lemmas) in the volume of 75 pages. In addition, two maps are presented, “Berlin Capital of the GDR Centre” and “Berlin-Cölln around 1650”.

The encyclopaedia entries convey rather sober historical information, which is repeatedly framed in terms of state ideology. The encyclopaedic structure means that this is not a travel guide in the strict sense, but just as a travel guide can be used as a reference work, this encyclopaedia can serve as a guide, too. Karl Fischer’s realistic illustrations do not appear as colourful as the illustrations in *Bärchens Bummelbus* and *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* due to the preferred brown shades, although the artist strives to add accents in colour.

Soviet war memorial in Treptower Park

Alex, Spree and Ehrenmal informs readers under the lemma “Ehrenmal für die gefallenen Helden der Sowjetunion” (Memorial to the Fallen Heroes of the Soviet Union) about the Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park (Dänhardt and Fischer 1979: 13–16). The memorial was designed by the Soviet sculptor Yevgeny Viktorovich Vuchetich and inaugurated on 8 May 1949.⁸ The encyclopaedia article does not explicitly address what the memorial shows in its artistic design: a Soviet soldier carrying a “rescued” small child on his left arm, pointing his sword downward and at the same time crushing a huge swastika.⁹ Instead, it tells how the memorial is used. It is employed for solemn public commemoration, it is frequently photographed, wreaths and flowers are placed

⁷ The publication series *Mein kleines Lexikon* (My Little Encyclopaedia) was published from 1971 and comprised over 40 volumes. See the overview by Helm (2017).

⁸ Yevgeny Vuchetich (1908–1974) was a prominent Soviet sculptor who is known for his heroic monuments in the Socialist Realism style.

⁹ Monica Rùthers (2021: 67–69) shows that the monument of the Soldier Liberator mixes elements of ancient and Christian iconography (67). It borrows from the heroic motif of the dragon slayer, Saint George, but also cites the pictorial tradition of Saint Christopher (68). This monument was reproduced on stamps, postcards, and other artefacts in both the Soviet Union and the GDR. The monument has a purely symbolic meaning, but an urban legend traces the motif to an authentic incident on the occasion of the liberation of Berlin, when a Soviet soldier, Nikolai Ivanovich Massalov, saved a little girl. A memorial plaque on Potsdamer Brücke in Berlin-Tiergarten commemorates this event.

at the foot of the monument, and the author even suggests that brides and grooms should lay down flowers (as a “beautiful custom of gratitude”), just as was the custom in Russian cities. Given that the author of *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* is writing about a monument that was 30 years old at the time of publication and that Soviet soldiers were not regarded only as liberators,¹⁰ this seems to be wishful thinking. Although the German-Soviet friendship was repeatedly invoked, contact in everyday life only took place in very specific, close contexts, for example in official invitations to each other or during harvest aid.

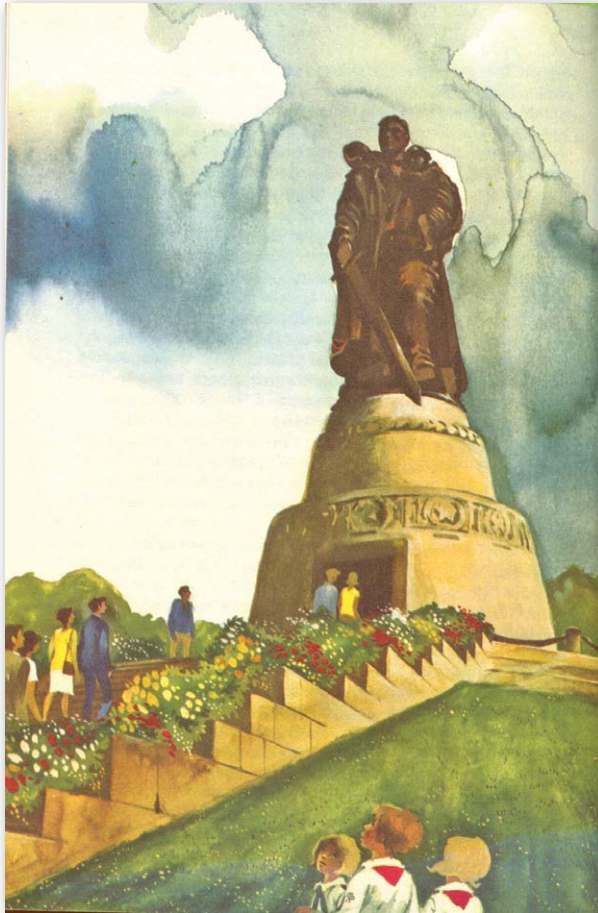


Fig. 1. *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* (Dänhardt and Fischer 1979). Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park.

Sl. 1. *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* (Dänhardt i Fischer 1979). Sovjetski ratni spomenik u Parku Treptower.

¹⁰ Soviet soldiers were also identified in cultural memory with mass rape at the end of the Second World War (Münch 2015) and with the suppression of the uprising of 17 June 1953.

The watercolour illustration by Karl Fischer shows the heroic figure against a dramatic cloudy sky (Fig. 1). On the staircase, which is depicted from a lateral bottom view, individual figures can be seen striding towards the entrance of the pedestal in which there is a memorial room. The sculpture is shown from below, which also corresponds to the architectural intention that one should look up to the soldier. The 20m high hill and the 12m high figure also serve this purpose. The swastika on which the soldier steps is not visible in this representation. In the foreground three children marked as pioneers look towards the staircase.

What is not clear from the text or the picture is the sheer size of the entire complex which covers 200,000 square metres because the memorial still includes the sarcophagi with their friezes and a complex entrance area with its own art programme.¹¹ It is a total work of art of “architectural, sculptural, textual, and pictorial and garden art elements” (Fibich 1996: 138), which Peter Fibich also calls a “memorial complex”. However, reference is made to the playgrounds in Treptower Park, with the accompanying comment “that a memorial is not a playground need not be emphasized” (15). Many contemporary visitors were apparently unaware of the significance of the burial mounds and it was tempting for children to play in the complex.

Fibich (1996) convincingly points out that on the one hand this memorial is a burial place, and in this sense it is a memorial of mourning, but on the other hand it also manifests Russian victory and Soviet power and in this context it is a memorial of victory. It is a socialist monument as it foregrounds the victory of Soviet power. The monument’s reference to German socialism or communism must be established – and this is also what is implied in the lexicon context of *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* – by reference to the historical fact that Treptower Park was a meeting place of the German labour movement. Fibich (1996: 140) summarizes this briefly and succinctly:¹²

The victory of the Soviet Union over National Socialist Germany was reinterpreted in this way as a victory of the workers’ movement; the memorial to the fallen Soviet soldiers became, as it were, a victory memorial to socialism on German soil.

In *Bärchens Bummelbus*, the depiction of the memorial appears in somewhat lighter tones (Fig. 2). “The monument soldier on the high hill is protecting a child”, reads the accompanying text to the image, which is rendered in a central perspective, again showing the soldier from below, appearing against a white and light blue sky. Five children with bouquets in their hands walk up the stairs and the child viewers are directly addressed with the question “Who does Schorsch discover (on the steps)?” (Schorsch is the name of a member of the visiting group who lives in Schwerin.) Through Schorsch’s example, child viewers can learn how to behave reverently at a memorial.

¹¹ The entire memorial complex consists of several parts. One enters through a triumphal arch and then comes to the sculpture of the mourning Motherland. From there, one walks through an avenue adorned with weeping birches through a gate flanked by pylons to the burial grounds of the complex. This is lined with 16 sarcophagi depicting scenes from the “Great Patriotic War” together with quotes from Joseph Stalin. The monument to the liberator stands at the end of the burial grounds.

¹² „Der Sieg der Sowjetunion über das nationalsozialistische Deutschland wurde auf diesem Wege zu einem Sieg der Arbeiterbewegung uminterpretiert, das Ehrenmal der gefallenen Sowjetsoldaten gleichsam zu einem Siegesmal des Sozialismus auf deutschem Boden“ (Fibich 1996: 140).

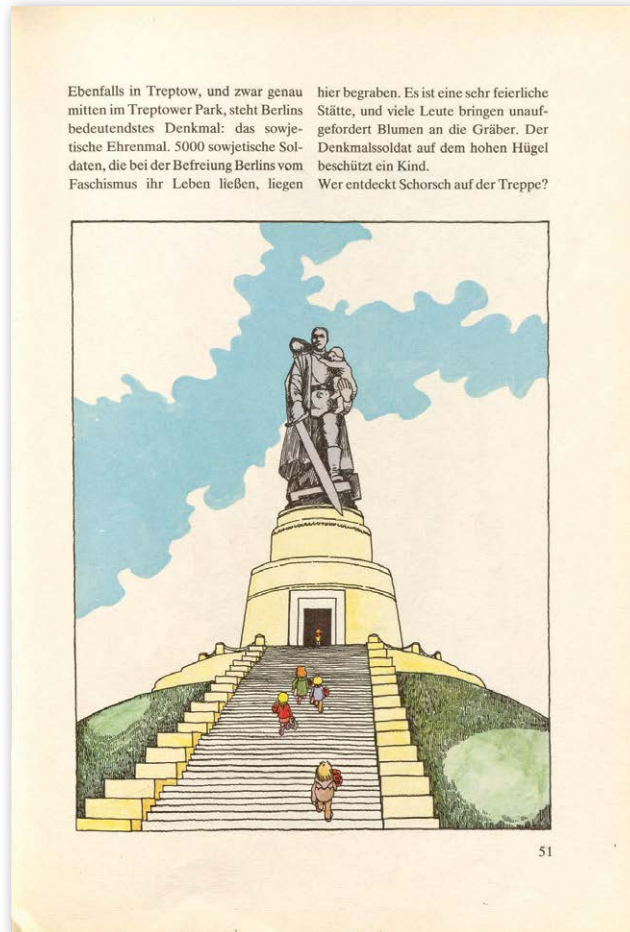


Fig. 2. *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave and Pansch 1979: 51). Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park.

Sl. 2. *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave i Pansch 1979: 51). Sovjetski ratni spomenik u Parku Treptower.

Compared to these two illustrations, the depiction of the Soviet Memorial in *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper and Döring 1987) is reduced (Fig. 3). The soldier is shown from behind, the large complex with the two rows of sarcophagi appears as foreshortened in perspective, so that the terraced entrance to the burial complex with the two pylons is in the background. In the whole picture, the embedding in a green area is emphasised. Above all, the memorial does not seem to be as significant as the giant telescope in the foreground, which belongs to the Archenbold Observatory, also located in Treptow Park. Interestingly, the accompanying text first mentions the memorial and then goes into more detail about the telescope. Perhaps the authors think that the latter is of greater interest to contemporary children.

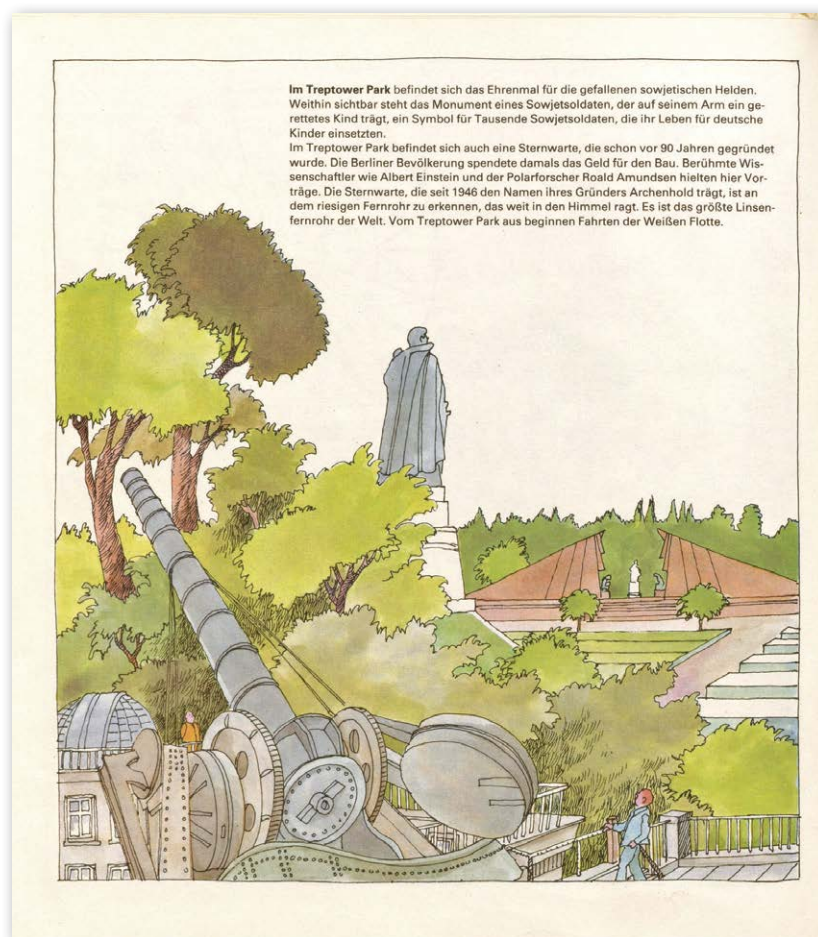


Fig. 3. *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper and Döring 1987). Soviet War Memorial in Treptower Park with telescope and observatory.

Sl. 3. *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper i Döring 1987). Sovjetski ratni spomenik u Parku Treptower s teleskopom i opservatorijem.

A comparison of the images shows that – depending on the conception of the books, the intended audience and the various artistic preferences – different pictorial representations of the memorial are chosen. While Karl Fischer’s artistic design is still rooted in socialist realism and is supplemented by the partisan informational text, the other two illustrators, Karl-Heinz Döring and Dietrich Pansch, apply a more modern, linear illustration that is also embedded in a story and thus attempt to involve the reader more emotionally.

It can be assumed that visual culture in a given period is never uniform, but that a certain variation results from the different artistic approaches. Although the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the Free German Youth (FDJ), and the Ministry of Education

tried to establish certain standards, there was also a certain amount of leeway for the contemporary further development of the range of picturebooks on offer. The 1970s in particular were characterised on the one hand by an increase in expressive pictorial offerings and on the other by a rather dogmatic return to the socialist heritage.

Lenin Monument

The Lenin Monument was commissioned by the Central Committee of the SED and designed by the Russian sculptor Nikolai Tomsky.¹³ It was erected on Lenin Square against the backdrop of a skyscraper complex to mark the 100th anniversary of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's birth. The 19m high monument was made of Ukrainian red marble. It stood on a pedestal with a diameter of 26m. Lenin is shown in a typical statesmanlike pose, his left hand on his lapel. The background is formed by a stylised flag. On 10 September 1991, the Berlin Senate decided to demolish the monument and on 8 November 1991, the demolition began. Lenin Square was renamed United Nations Square (Platz der Vereinten Nationen) and the monument was replaced by a fountain.

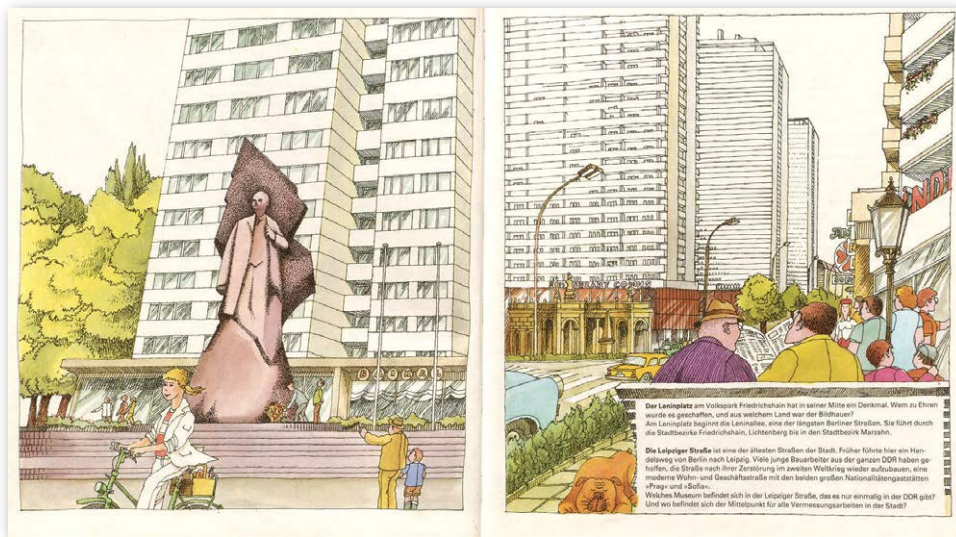


Fig. 4. *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper and Döring 1987). Leninplatz with the Lenin Monument and Leipziger Straße.

Sl. 4. *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper i Döring 1987). Lenjinov spomenik na Lenjinovu trgu s pogledom na Leipzišku ulicu.

The entire Leninplatz complex, which was designed by a collective of architects led by Hermann Henselmann and Heinz Mehlan, was considered an outstanding example of modern socialist urban planning (the so-called “Ostmoderne”) and

¹³ Nikolai Vasilyevich Tomsky (1900–1984) was a renowned Soviet sculptor, working in the style of Socialist Realism.

was also recognised accordingly in *Das große Buch vom Bauen* [The Big Book of Building] by Irene and Hermann Henselmann (1976) (cf. Meibauer 2021, 2022).

In *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper and Döring 1987), a double-page spread shows modern urban development, namely Leninplatz (on the left) and Leipziger Straße (on the right) (Fig. 4). The Lenin monument in the centre of the picture in reddish colours stands out clearly against the bright facade of the high-rise building. At the base of the skyscraper, we can see the restaurant sign *Baikal* and at the monument itself two figures are laying a wreath. In the foreground, there is a passing cyclist and a man with a child pointing to the monument. The picture thus shows how parts of the population interact with the monument.

To the left of the skyscraper, trees are shown that are probably meant to suggest Friedrichshain Park. As with the other images in *Erst mal kucken in Berlin*, an attempt is made to depict an everyday urban situation in which the giant Lenin sculpture fits naturally into its surroundings. It is not so much about the significance of Lenin for the group of children, but about the fact that the monument is a natural part of the built urban environment and thus an integrated part of everyday experience.

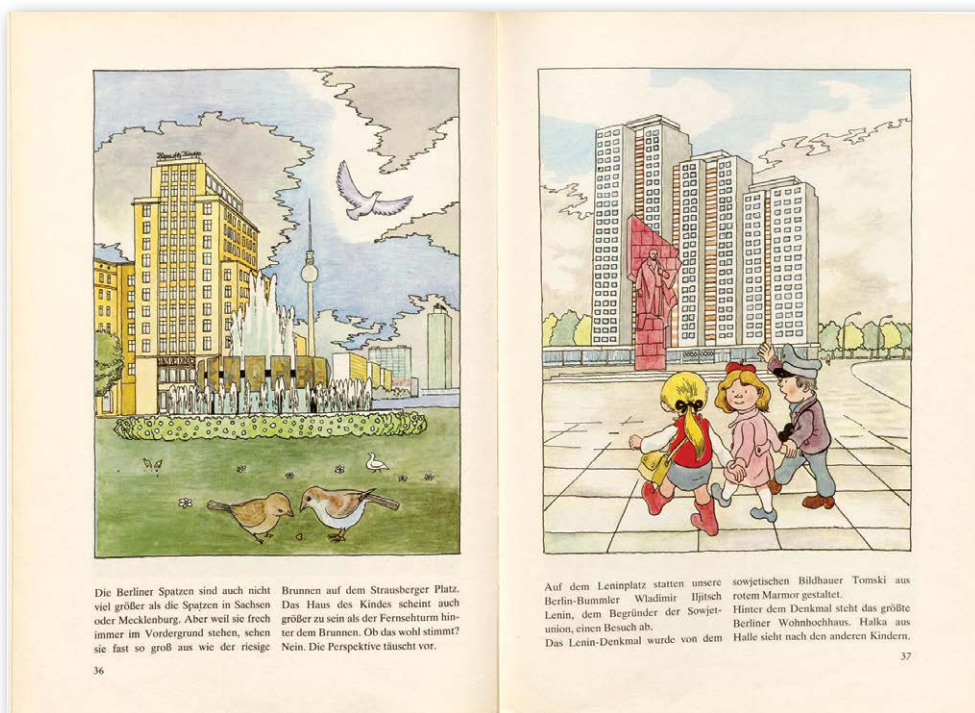


Fig. 5. *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave and Pansch 1979: 36–37). Strausberger Platz and Leninplatz with the Lenin Monument.
Sl. 5. *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave i Pansch 1979: 36–37). Strausbergerski trg i Lenjinov trg sa spomenikom.

In contrast, the image of Leninplatz in *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave and Pansch 1979) seems more banal (Fig. 5). The double page shows Strausberger Platz on the left as part of Karl-Marx-Allee (the former Stalinallee) and Leninplatz on the right. This suggests the formation of the concept of “urban square”. A square obviously needs a centre in the form of a fountain or monument. In the image of Lenin Square, three child figures walk hand in hand across the square, with the child in the middle turning her face to the viewer. The Lenin monument can be seen offset to the side in front of the staircase-shaped skyscraper complex. The fact that the square is depicted as almost empty, and that the clearly highlighted slab pattern directs the viewer’s gaze to the monument, is intended to highlight the monumentality of the complex. In the text accompanying the image of Strausberger Platz, the concept of perspective is emphasised (Stave and Pansch 1979: 36):¹⁴

The Berlin sparrows are also not much bigger than the sparrows in Saxony or Mecklenburg. But because they are cheekily always in the foreground, they look almost as big as the huge fountain on Strausberger Platz. The House of the Child also seems to be bigger than the TV tower behind the fountain. I wonder if that’s true. The perspective is deceptive.

Considering that *Bärchens Bummelbus* is aimed at children from the age of 5, the introduction of the concept of perspective is quite challenging. In the picture of Leninplatz, the reader can again think about perspective, since the children’s figures appear to be quite large in relation to the front of the skyscraper. The significance of the Lenin Monument, on the other hand, seems to be reduced. Although the monument is designed to create a sense of grandeur for the viewer, it appears to be adapted to the world of children in its reduced perspective.

The Lenin Monument is also mentioned in *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal*, namely in the context of an entry on the keyword *Leninplatz* (Dänhardt and Fischer 1979: 35–37). The accompanying image (36), which takes up about all of the top half of the page, shows the square with the skyscrapers and the Lenin Monument in a nocturnal scene in which a fireworks display, probably held in Friedrichshain Park, provides a strong accent. The accompanying text claims that the “working people of Berlin” wanted to honour Lenin with this square (36), which may have corresponded more to partisan wishful thinking.

Both illustrators, Dietrich Pansch and Karl-Heinz Döring, use a contemporary linear illustration style, but *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave and Pansch 1979) emphasises the children’s emotional connection to East Berlin a little more, both visually and textually, while in *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper and Döring 1987), despite the accompanying stories, facts and information are in the foreground. The authors and illustrators are therefore adapting precisely to their target group, as the former book is intended for children aged 5 and over, and the latter for children aged 10 and over.

¹⁴ „Die Berliner Spatzen sind auch nicht viel größer als die Spatzen in Sachsen oder Mecklenburg. Aber weil sie frech immer im Vordergrund stehen, sehen sie fast so groß aus wie der riesige Brunnen auf dem Strausberger Platz. Das Haus des Kindes scheint auch größer zu sein als der Fernsehturm hinter dem Brunnen. Ob das wohl stimmt? Die Perspektive täuscht vor” (Stave and Pansch 1979: 36).

Thälmann Monument

The Russian sculptor Lev Kerbel worked between 1981 and 1986 on the bronze monument in honour of the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) leader Ernst Thälmann, who was hyped as a communist hero by the SED (Socialist Unity Party) in the post-war period (Leo 2002).¹⁵ The monument was erected on 15 April 1986 to mark the 100th anniversary of Ernst Thälmann's birth. It is placed in Thälmann Park, which forms an ensemble with a newly built housing complex. Unlike the Lenin Monument, the Thälmann Monument in Prenzlauer Berg has been preserved, although the stelae with inscriptions placed on granite pedestals in front of the monument were dismantled and transferred to the *enthüllt* (unveiled) exhibition in the Stadtgeschichtliches Museum in the Spandau Citadel. The 14m high monument shows in half-profile the bust of the KPD leader, who was murdered by the National Socialists in 1944 after 11 years of imprisonment. In the background there is a stylised banner crowned by a hammer and sickle symbol.



Fig. 6. *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper and Döring 1987). Thälmann Monument in Ernst Thälmann Park.

Sl. 6. *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper i Döring 1987). Spomenik Thälmannu u Parku Ernsta Thälmana.

¹⁵ Lev Yefimovich Kerbel (1917–2003) was a Soviet and Russian sculptor who worked in the style of Socialist Realism. His busts of socialist politicians and intellectuals are distributed across the world. He is the creator of the Karl Marx Monument in Chemnitz (formerly: Karl-Marx-Stadt), Germany, showing the bust of Karl Marx in front of a huge metal wall on which the words “Proletarians of all countries unite!” from the *Communist Manifesto* can be seen in four languages: English, French, German and Russian.

Erst mal kucken in Berlin was published in 1987, so the picturebook reacts quickly to the new monument, which was already entirely outdated in its architectural design when it was erected. (In *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* from the same year, the monument is not mentioned). Only a few years before the collapse of the GDR, the idea of such a monument was possibly difficult to convey, especially to children. Although they will have been aware that their pioneer organisation owed its name to this famous communist and may have read children's literature dealing with Thälmann, homage in this particular form aimed at emotional overwhelming must have seemed anachronistic. In the 1980s, a Thälmann memorial may have had emotional value for the generation of those who identified with the SED, but not for the rest of the population, who were more interested in the consumer opportunities they were well informed about by West German television. Although enthusiasm and pathos could still be achieved through world festivals and youth festivals, the majority of young people adopted a critical and distanced attitude towards the GDR (Dietrich 2019: 1683). By the 1980s at the latest, the influence of international pop culture in the GDR was so great that constant references to the communist legacy were no longer taken seriously in many families.

The double-page spread shows a panorama of Thälmann Park, with a crowd of people, park users, in the foreground (Fig. 6). Children are playing, men are reading the newspaper, young athletes and a young family are enjoying their time in the park. The Thälmann monument on the right of the picture appears rather inconspicuous in comparison to the attractive wooden playhouse (alluding to different cultures) on the left. The new buildings of a housing estate can be seen in the background. The accompanying text refers to a newly built planetarium, but it is not visible in the picture. Note that none of the children is identified as a pioneer, and even Ernst Thälmann is apostrophised as a “workers’ leader”, not as an important functionary of the former KPD. The insistence on being labelled a pioneer, which was still very common in the 1970s, has now gone, as has the evocation of the SED's communist roots.

Further socialist monuments

In addition to the three monuments focused on here, the three picturebooks also refer to other monuments, returning to the general pedagogical intention of making the stock of monuments accessible and attractive to children, and thus fostering socialist urban literacy. Children are therefore able to establish a conceptual class of “socialist monuments”.

These socialist monuments are the *Denkmal der deutschen Interbrigadisten* (Monument of the German Interbrigadists), *die Gedenkstätte der Sozialisten* (Memorial of the Socialists), and, with restrictions, the *Mahnmal für die Opfer des Faschismus und Militarismus* (Memorial to the Victims of Fascism and Militarism) aka *Neue Wache* (New Guard).¹⁶ All of these monuments in various ways are part of the socialist or communist memorial culture. The Monument of the German Interbrigadists (also: Spain Fighters

¹⁶ A detailed overview of the Berlin monuments can be found on the website *Bildhauerei in Berlin* (BiB-Team n.d.).

Memorial) is mentioned in *Alex, Spree and Memorial* in the encyclopaedia article about the Volkspark Friedrichshain (Dänhardt and Fischer 1979: 25–28) and shown with a small picture. This memorial was commissioned by the Spanish Committee of the Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (Association of Persecuted Persons of the Nazi Regime) and designed by Fritz Cremer in 1966. It commemorates the victims of the Interbrigades (international brigades) who fought alongside the Republic in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939. The occasion for the erection of the monument was the 30th anniversary of the beginning of the war. The monument depicts a dynamic fighter thrusting his sword forward in a leaping motion. In its formal language, it is reminiscent of works by Ernst Barlach, especially *Der Rächer* (The Avenger, 1914). The use of the anachronistic sword also creates a reference to the Soviet Memorial in Treptower Park, where the soldier also carries a sword. In contrast to the modern rifle or the submachine gun, the symbolic sword refers to a long tradition of artisanal fighting and a corresponding reflection in art history.

The Gedenkstätte der Sozialisten (Memorial of the Socialists) was built in 1951 and contains the graves of famous socialists next to a central stele. The place bears the inscription “Die Toten mahnen uns” (The dead admonish us). A smaller picture in *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* shows this stele where wreaths are laid. It is explained in the accompanying text that the memorial is actually based on the Denkmal für die ermordeten Revolutionäre des Spartakusaufstands (Monument to the murdered revolutionaries of the Spartacus Uprising aka Revolutionsdenkmal (Revolution Monument), which was erected back in 1926. This monument was designed by Bauhaus architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, but was demolished by the Nazis in 1935 (which, oddly enough, is not mentioned in the article). In *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave and Peschel 1987: 42) one can see a group of eight children in back view looking towards the installation with the stele in the centre. The destruction of the Revolution Monument by the National Socialists is explicitly mentioned in the accompanying text.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the Neue Wache, which was destroyed in World War II and rebuilt in 1960 as a memorial to the victims of fascism and militarism. Inside the building, an “eternal flame” burned next to the urns of an unknown concentration camp prisoner and an unknown soldier. Only insofar as the GDR leadership claimed German anti-fascism (and saw it legitimised, for example, by the German communist Spain fighters of the Interbrigades) can this memorial be understood as a specific “socialist” memorial. The commemoration of the victims of fascism and militarism manifests itself worldwide even without any socialist ideology. However, there was a certain pragmatic use for this monument, namely that two soldiers of the National People’s Army constantly kept a guard of honour in front of the monument and once a week the military ceremony of the Great Changing of the Guard (Große Wachablösung) took place. This was a tourist attraction that could also be seen as advertising for the National People’s Army.

Pictures of this memorial can be found in *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave and Peschel 1987: 6), where the popular Great Changing of the Guard is also shown, and under

the catchword “Unter den Linden” in *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* (Dänhardt and Fischer 1979: 67–72), where one finds a full-page illustration of the changing of the guard, with the watching tourists in the foreground and to the side of the guard. A figure in the foreground even pulls out a camera (69).

The picturebooks thus represent tourist behaviour that is evoked by the ceremonial changing of the guard, which itself stands in the context of the socialist claim to fight against fascism as well as militarism and for peace. Children who see these picturebooks are invited to participate in this tourist behaviour themselves and potentially identify with socialist military power.

Conclusions

The analysis of the three picturebooks has shown that the representation of the three socialist monuments in words and pictures provides information that potentially increases the knowledge of the addressees and promotes recognition of the monuments in the cityscape. However, the picturebooks – with a view to the emotional function of the monuments – have a more or less propagandistic underpinning which is in line with the ideology of the socialist state.

City guides for children, as I have assumed above, serve to convey urban literacy. What can the reader learn from these city guides for children (see Kümmerling-Meibauer et al. 2015)? Two learning situations can be distinguished. In the first, the children are not familiar with the monument, but the book provides a picture and information about it. This should enable children to recognise the monument when they encounter it in real life and possibly classify it in terms of some facts. In the second learning situation, the monument is familiar to the children, but they learn things about it that they may not have known before and, above all, they receive a visual representation as new information.

In the analysed books, both the visual representation and the textual description are framed in a propagandistic way, as is typical of the informational picturebooks of the GDR (Meibauer 2025; Schmideler 2017). However, in *Bärchens Bummelbus* and *Erst mal kucken in Berlin*, the authors and illustrators attempt to open up a cheerful, rather undogmatic perspective on the city, while critical questions such as why these monuments are actually needed are suppressed. Instead, a fundamental trust that the monuments are relevant and significant is assumed.

The Berlin picturebooks under consideration serve to inspire pride in the capital city in children from the GDR (and even foreign visitors who had access to these books) and to enable them to “read” the city. The city was also seen as part of the socialist homeland, which had undergone a propagandistic revaluation in the 1970s and was an object of education in kindergarten and school (Dietrich 2019: 1662–1670; Zintler 2021). Note that inspiring pride is not a typical goal of a city guide for adults. It is almost self-evident that West Berlin is not mentioned. The Brandenburg Gate at the border between East Berlin and West Berlin is always considered tricky in this respect. In *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave and Peschel 1987: 7), a manipulative image appears in

which a group of children is looking at the gate from a certain distance, which seems to be embedded in a park. The urban surroundings, the guarding of the border, and a view of West Berlin are simply omitted. The depiction in *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* (Dänhardt and Fischer 1979: 9) proceeds in a similar way, although a wall there seems to indicate that the international tourists in the foreground of the picture should not go any further. In the manner of Cold War propaganda, the lexicographer explains (*ibid*):¹⁷

Today the black-red-gold flag with hammer, compass and a wreath of wheat flies over the Brandenburg Gate; it announces that the power of imperialism ends here. For behind the gate begins West Berlin, a special political area where the laws of capitalism rule. The soldiers of the border troops make sure that the state border of the GDR, which runs here, is respected. Since 13 August 1961, our state has been reliably protected from all forces that have attempted to disrupt socialist construction from West Berlin. Peaceful citizens of West Berlin can enter properly at the official border crossing points.

The question of whether and how citizens could leave East Berlin is not raised here. The fact that the Wall was also built to thwart mass escape from the GDR was not be mentioned under any circumstances.

Bärchens Bummelbus (Stave and Pansch 1979) avoids an authoritative tone and rather tries to stimulate childlike wonder at Berlin's sights. It is also Bärchen's faux character who leads the children, rather than a figure of respect such as a teacher or pioneer leader that could have been expected. On the other hand, the idea of showing children from all over the republic as an ice-cream licking, dancing and always happily marvelling group seems a bit forced with regard to the general behavioural norms of a modest and well-mannered pioneer. The striking reference to the marriage of the old and the new, for example on the cover contrasting the old-fashioned means of transport, the penny-farthing bicycle, with the modern touring bicycle, or on the back cover contrasting the automobile of 1890 with the modern Trabant, also seems forced. Both show an attempt to connect with the contemporary "nostalgia wave" in the 1970s that popularised an emotional re-evaluation of artifacts from the past. Note that traditional monuments, which stand for the "old" Berlin, are also mentioned.

Erst mal kucken in Berlin (Pieper and Döring 1987) is the most modern city guide variant. Although this picturebook manages without photos, the combination of teaching "facts, figures, information", as its subtitle announces, with fictional stories by the protagonist Lina makes for a wide range of information. The figure of Lina is designed as a role model for all children who want to discover the city. The two fold-out panels show the urban layout of Lindenallee and the architecture of the Pioneer Palace

¹⁷ "Heute weht auf dem Brandenburger Tor die schwarzrotgoldene Fahne mit Hammer, Zirkel und Ährenkranz; sie kündigt davon, daß hier die Macht des Imperialismus endet. Denn hinter dem Tor beginnt Westberlin, ein besonderes politisches Gebiet, in dem die Gesetze des Kapitalismus regieren. Die Soldaten der Grenztruppen sorgen dafür, daß die hier verlaufende Staatsgrenze der DDR respektiert wird. Seit dem 13. August 1961 ist unser Staat zuverlässig von allen Kräften geschützt, die von Westberlin aus versucht haben, den sozialistischen Aufbau zu stören. Friedliche Bürger Westberlins können ordnungsgemäß an den offiziellen Grenzübergangsstellen einreisen" (Dänhardt and Fischer: 1979: 9).

“Ernst Thälmann”. A concession to socialist propaganda consists of Lina presenting a bouquet of flowers to a distinguished member of her sponsor brigade in front of the background of the State Council building.

Ultimately, one can ask how the functions of monuments described by Bellentani and Panico (2016) become prominent in the analysed picturebooks. The cognitive function refers to the recipients’ knowledge of the monuments. This knowledge may not be held by child recipients, or it may be merely rudimentary, and so the details in the picturebooks help fill this gap. That these are socialist monuments needs no further justification — they simply appear as a point of fact. It is assumed that a contemporary socialist society also has genuine socialist monuments and not only inherited monuments from earlier historical contexts, such as the Neptunbrunnen (Neptune Fountain, 1886/91) and the statue of the Heilige Gertrud (Holy Gertrud, 1895/96) from the Wilhelminian era.

The greatest need for explanation is certainly with regard to the Soviet Memorial in Treptower Park, because understanding it requires knowledge of World War II. This monument is also best embedded in a narrative of the selfless, child-loving Soviet soldier, which was repeatedly presented in the children’s literature of the GDR (see, for example, the anthology *Mein Freund, der General* [My Friend, the General, 1967] by Marianne Feix and Dieter Wilkendorf).

Regarding the axiological and emotional function of the monuments, it can be said that great enthusiasm (euphoria or rapture) could hardly be expected from the child recipients. But respect for the monuments and the associated memory contents is certainly demanded. That one should not play at the Soviet Memorial is explicitly expressed in *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* (Dänhardt and Fischer 1979). In *Bärchens Bummelbus*, the protagonists show respect by eagerly placing bouquets of flowers at the monuments, for example, at the monument to Käthe Kollwitz (Stave and Peschel 1987: 22) or reverently doffing their caps when visiting the Gedenkstätte der Sozialisten (Memorial of the Socialists) (42). This suggests that even for these young visitors to Berlin there is an unquestionable social norm of paying respect to great figures in history.

This simultaneously addresses the pragmatic function. How to behave in the context of the monuments is shown in the pictures. The typical function of holding marches or celebrations at the monuments, however, is left out. In *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper and Döring 1987) the Thälmann Monument is embedded in the popular context of celebration and play, so that the monument’s Stalinist-like aura is counteracted to some extent.

The analysis presented here has shown that the three picturebooks use different strategies to convey information and propaganda – from encyclopaedic presentation through nostalgically coloured visualisation to fact-oriented communication. The socialist framework remains the same, as is to be expected, but the artistic implementation strategies differ. The books suggest that one should engage with these monuments and

respect them, but they hold back from being overly dogmatic – children, like adults, have a certain amount of leeway in interpreting these monuments and their depiction in the picturebook. Nor should one ignore that many adults in the GDR supported certain assumptions of socialist ideology – for example, the commitment to anti-fascism, the fight against capitalism, and internationalism.

All the books can be used in the context of the preparation for a trip, the trip itself, or the memory of a trip. However, the information about the socialist monuments is only one part of the total information given in these picturebooks. Arguably, an attempt is made to inscribe the socialist monuments in the canon of important East Berlin sites and cultural monuments. The traditional cultural heritage is respected and enriched by socialist buildings and monuments. There should be no sharp contrast in the cityscape between the pre-war architecture and the new socialist architecture erected in the post-war period. This is reflected very well on the cover of *Erst mal kucken in Berlin*, where a mixture of buildings from different eras is presented in the context of the Neptune Fountain (Neptunbrunnen). A reference to West Berlin, which one would naturally expect in an informative Berlin travel guide, is taboo: this is deception by omission, because it gives the impression that the other part of the city does not even exist.

But if one has come to terms with restriction to the socialist world of East Berlin, one will find quite interesting factual information in these books. The fact that in Berlin, despite the massive war destruction, the pre-war architecture is preserved and transformed into a modern socialist mode of the city is certainly an important ideological message of the discussed Berlin travel books for children.

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Socijalistički spomenici u slikovnicama DDR-a o Berlinu objavljenim u Njemačkoj Demokratskoj Republici (NJDR)

Spomenik sovjetskim vojnicima u Parku Treptower, spomenik Lenjinu i spomenik Thälmannu

Na temelju uvida da u deskriptivnim slikovnicama objavljenim u Njemačkoj Demokratskoj Republici (NJDR) obično postoji mješavina činjenica i propagande, ovaj rad istražuje prikaz socijalističkih spomenika u trima dječjim turističkim vodičima kroz Berlin objavljenima 1979. i 1987. godine. Posebice se razmatraju Spomenik sovjetskim vojnicima u Parku Treptower, spomenik Lenjinu i spomenik Thälmannu. Proučavaju se slikovnice *Bärchens Bummelbus* (Stave i Pansch, 1979.), *Alex, Spree und Ehrenmal* (Dänhardt i Fischer, 1979.) iz serije *Mein kleines Lexikon*, te *Erst mal kucken in Berlin* (Pieper i Döring, 1987.). Komparativna analiza pokazuje da se rabe različite metode miješanja informacija i propagande te da se bitne razlike mogu uočiti i u vizualnom oblikovanju tih slikovnica.

Ključne riječi: Berlin, informacije, spomenik, slikovnica, propaganda, turistički vodič