Goodbye UK – a journey through pre-Brexit Britain

Project Documentation
Lange Nacht der Wissenschaften 2017

Contents

Introduction

Between October 2016 and July 2017, the M.A. British Studies class of 2016-2018 conceptualized and implemented the Centre for British Studies' contribution to the Lange Nacht der Wissenschaften event.

The project was realised within the frame of a course on Cultural Project Management taught by Johanna Zinecker, MA. The course introduced students to the basic tools of project management, project organization and science communication. They then formed teams to handle all aspects of planning and implementing a public event from content development and curating to fundraising, PR work, design, logistics, and catering. Johanna also helped to brainstorm and craft a topic and held regular special input sessions and tutorials to support the students over the course of the two semesters.

After much hard work and preparation, on the evening of 24 June 2016 we opened the doors to our interactive exhibition **"Goodbye UK: a journey through pre-Brexit Britain"** in the Humboldt-Universität's Senatssaal. As we received some visitor requests during the event to make our posters and information permanently available, this publication serves as a documentation and introduction of the project.

All posters can be viewed in full size by following the respective links in this document.

Preparing the Senatssaal.

The key visual for the project, which was designed by Brittany Garcia.

Speaker's Corner

Londonderry (NI)

Hartlepool (E)

Glasgow (S)

Food Corner

Plymouth (E)

Manchester (E)

Brussels

London (E)

Children's Library

Photo Station

Port Talbot (W)

CENTRE FOR BRITISH STUDIES

The Centre for British Studies (Großbritannien-Zentrum) is an interdisciplinary area studies institute of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Established in 1995, it is located in the heart of Berlin near Gendarmenmarkt. Its research, international master programme, and graduate school as well as the public lectures it offers to encourage cultural exchange have ensured that it is now a major voice for all things British.

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M. A. BRITISH STUDIES

The M. A. British Studies is a unique interdisciplinary and international programme taught by Centre for British Studies academic staff as well as guest lecturers from all over the UK. Containing modules in law, politics, economics, history, literature and cultural studies, it aims to equip students with an understanding of pivotal issues and the skills to conduct interdisciplinary research. Practical experience is gained by a 3-month work placement in the UK and an interdisciplinary public engagement project for the annual Lange Nacht der Wissenschaften (Long Night of the Sciences) in Berlin.

BERLIN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BRITISH STUDIES

Established in 2014, the graduate school seeks to bring together excellent researchers with an interest in interdisciplinary work on the UK. It familiarizes scholars with methods typically employed in dissertation research in different disciplines and thus enables them to position their own PhD theses on a unique point between two or more disciplines. Additional support and input is offered by the Berlin-Britain Research Network, also based at the Centre.
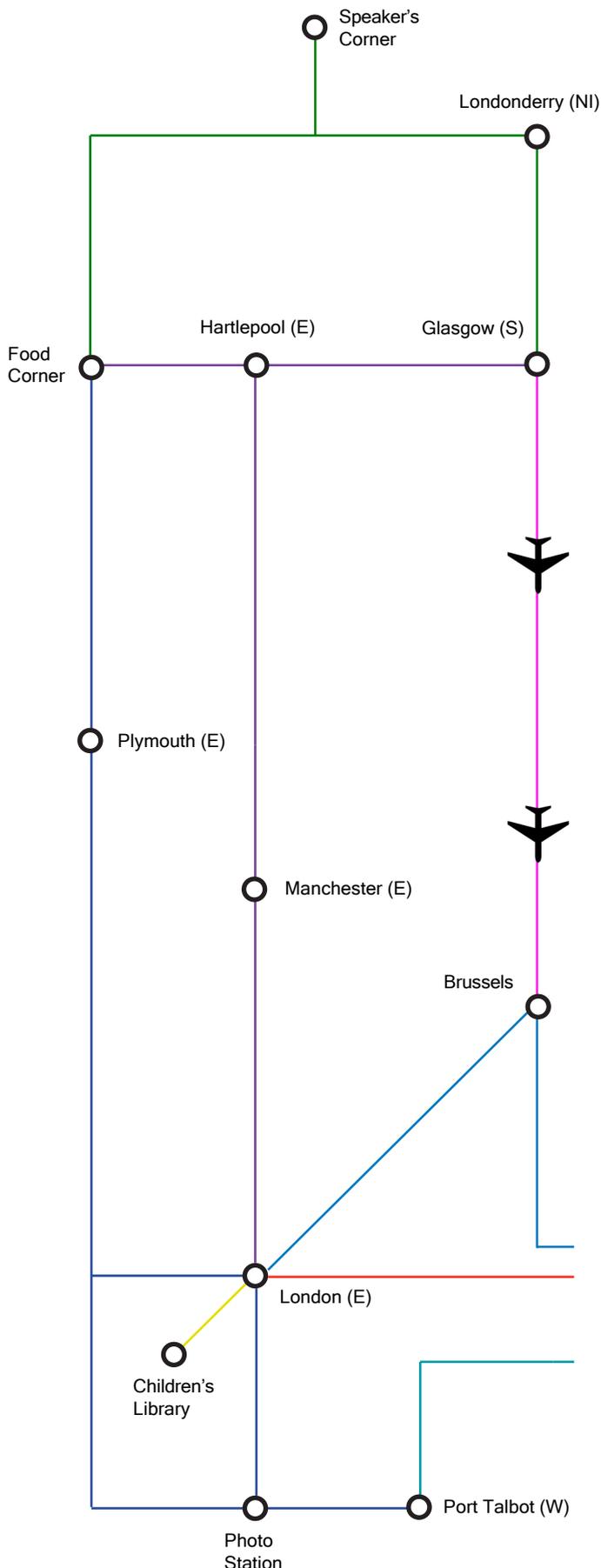
Goodbye UK: A Journey through pre-Brexit Britain

This publication documents the student-led interactive exhibition **"Goodbye UK - a journey through pre-Brexit Britain"** that was prepared and curated by the Master of British Studies class of 2016-2018.

It explored the complexity of moods and motivations behind the EU Referendum vote as well as the diversity of the UK's cultural and political landscape - quite literally, as visitors were invited to wander the room along the physical representation of a 'railway network' that spanned the geographical breadth of the UK and even crossed the Channel. Following different railway lines mapped out on the floor, visitors could reach a range of topically independent 'stations' located in each of the four nations, and there explore aspects pertaining to this particular area. Thus, the exhibition also aimed to increase visitors' understanding of the UK beyond the stereotypical ideas of England or London.
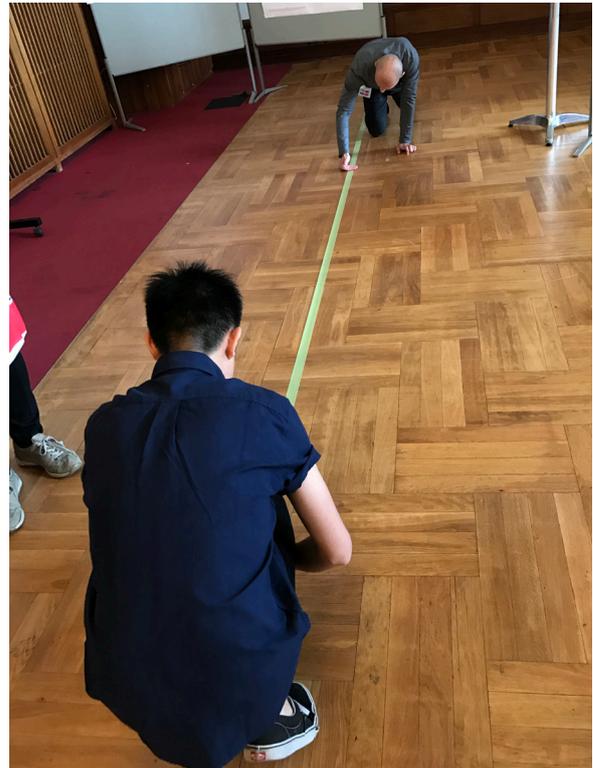
Ricker and Ismail laying the 'railway tracks'.

The finished network: (almost) all roads lead to London.

The Journey

London (King's Cross)
*by Franziska Freytag, Leonore Hinz, Lena Nüchter, and Ricker So*

Following multiple train lines from the entrance of the room, visitors were first led to "London", the largest station of the exhibit. Here, they were invited to explore the organs of central government: Westminster, Whitehall, and their decisions around Brexit which would impact the whole of the UK both politically and economically. But London is more than that - a vibrant, dynamic city with one of the most ethnically diverse populations worldwide, and home to a famous public transport system that is used by a staggering 4.8 million passengers a day.

Political and economic capital
Visitors perhaps best began their journey with an overview: from a bird's eye perspective over the vast sprawl of the inner city, *a poster by Leonore Hinz* located the most important political and economic actors and explained their tasks, purpose, and relationship to each other. What is the difference between Whitehall and Westminster, who really governs the country, and what is the Queen's role in all that?

Those interested in the political process behind Brexit could follow the journey of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill, informally called the Brexit Bill, *on a poster by Lena Nüchter*. It illustrates the steps taken in both Houses of Parliament, shows contested issues and amendments, and explores the relationship between Parliament and Government as well as the role of the unelected House of Lords. Subsequently, visitors could experience the many different variables affecting an MP's vote first-hand by making their own informed decision *through a decision tree*.
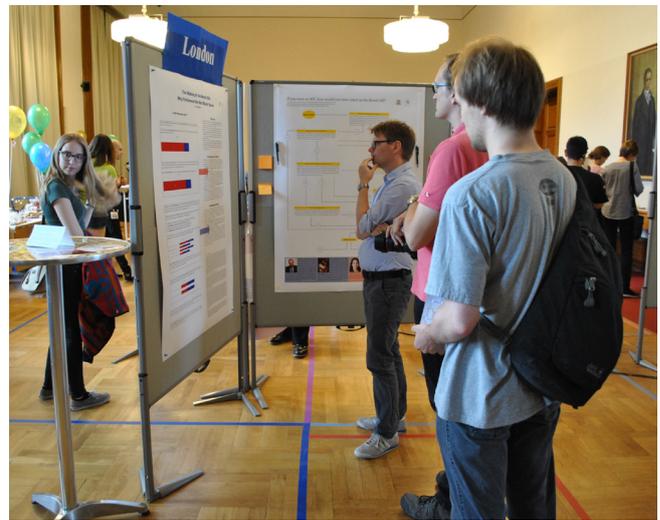
Visitors contemplate the displays at London station.

Another poster asked how consumers in and outside the UK have felt the economic fallout from the Brexit referendum. While the weakened pound has made holidaying abroad expensive for Britons, foreign visitors have flocked to a newly 'cheap' UK - tourism from the US alone has been up 20% in 2017. The poster explained economic terms such as 'trade deficit' and 'consumer price inflation' and showed how these phenomena are tied to regular citizens' daily lives: for example, rising inflation has meant that the average household shopping bill went up by more than £21 in the first months of 2017.
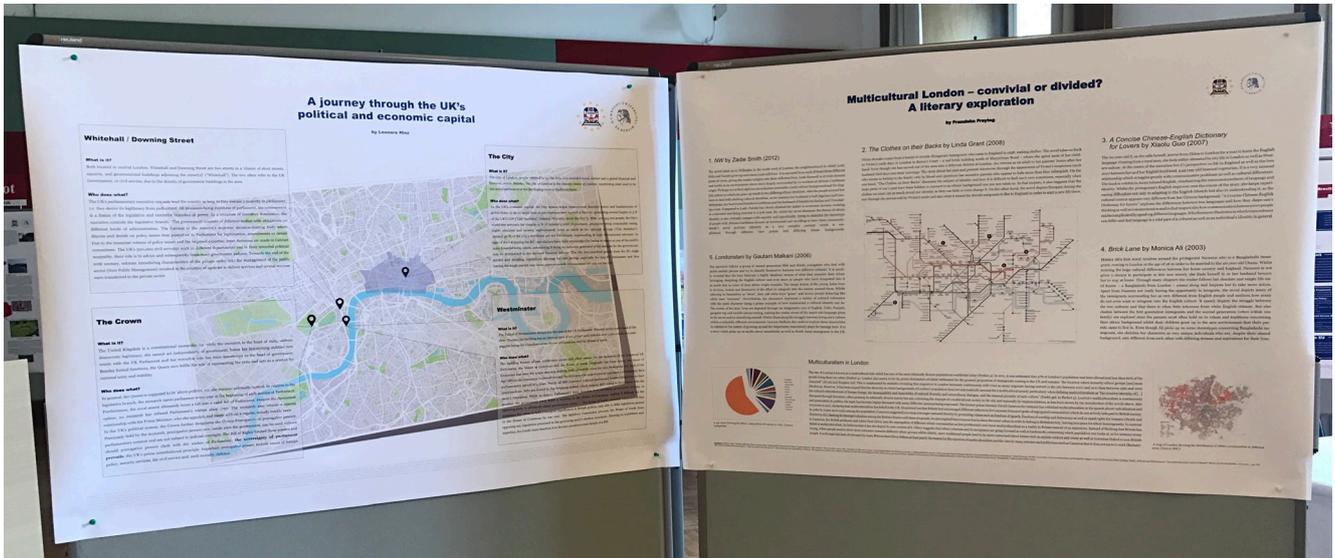
Leonore and Franziska's posters at the London Station.

The multicultural metropolis

But London is much more than the seat of national politics and the City of London. It is also one of the most multicultural cities in the world. Most of the immigrants coming into the UK initially settle there. In 2011, the then prime minister David Cameron criticised multiculturalism, declaring it had failed and resulted instead in segregated communities. Others express less critical views. With a [literary exploration of multicultural London](#), Franziska Freytag introduces novels by authors of different ethnic backgrounds and shows the manifold ways of questioning and exploring one's identity as an immigrant in multicultural London.

Transport hub

London King's Cross/St. Pancras International is one of the busiest interchange stations in the city. From here, rail lines operated by different companies extend all over the UK, and it is also a prime stop for the Eurostar that links the UK to the European

mainland. In addition, six London underground lines meet here. The London Underground was opened in 1863 as the first underground railway worldwide. Today, it transports almost 5 million passengers around the capital every day. *Ricker So has created a poster* that shows the history and ongoing development of the London Underground and equips the dedicated London tourist with useful knowledge for the next trip.

Children's Library
Our dedicated Kids' Team worked tirelessly to set up an inviting corner for children to play in while their parents explored the exhibition. Complete with walls full of books, the Children's library offered readings from children's classics as well as activities such as finger-painting and crafting which were centred around beloved characters like Elmer the Patchwork Elephant and Winnie-the-Pooh.

The kids' team kept young visitors entertained with story readings and crafting activities.

Taylor and a young visitor hard at work colouring a wall-painting of Elmer the Patchwork Elephant.

Ricker, Eva and Leonie from the Kids' Team during the installation.

Plymouth (S-W England)

by Brittany Garcia, Diana Khusaenova, Ricker So, and Phillip Wells-Rhoden

From London, visitors could take the *Great Western Railway* into either Wales or the South-West of England - a historical company that has survived nationalisation and re-privatisation and continues to link much of Wales and South England.

The South-West of England is home to beautiful landscapes and gorgeous stretches of coast, where discontent has been brewing in one of the oldest industries of the country: British fishermen have felt detrimental effects of EU laws on their businesses, especially by the EU's Common Fisheries Policy, which limits the amount of catch they can bring home, and the presence of foreign boats in British territorial waters. Those campaigning to leave the European Union have tirelessly promised to win back the UK's seas and negotiate better conditions for fishermen.

Visitors of all ages enjoyed going on a fishing trip in a sea of EU environmental regulations to discover what Brexit means for the fishing and agricultural industries.

A poster by Brittany Garcia and Phillip Wells-Rhoden explained the far-reaching influence of European law-making on these British industries, and illustrated the danger of negative consequences for the environment, should the UK reject the EU policies that are currently in effect.

Visitors of all ages enjoy fishing for Brexit facts at Plymouth station - and it looks like Phil enjoyed helping the younger ones.

EU policies are also important for agriculture, which accounts for 71% of land in the UK. In the South East, the British even grow their own tea! With 165 million cups of tea drunk a day, tea is arguably the UK's national beverage. While British tea producers have claimed that Brexit has boosted their business, an overwhelming majority of tea is still imported, and prices have increased by up to 50% due to the fall of Sterling - find out more about the tea industry and the rich history of this beloved drink *with a poster created by Diana Khusaenova*.

At this station, visitors were also in for a special treat: at regular intervals, Ana Ornelas and Diana Khusaenova offered tea ceremonies for small, exclusive groups. During the ceremony, visitors could not only learn about the rich history of British afternoon tea – they were also given the opportunity to taste some of the most beloved types of tea in Britain. Earl Grey, Darjeeling, or English Breakfast were freshly brewed and then served complete with home-made scones, jam and cream.

A visitor prepares her scone with explanations from Ana and Diana.

Hartlepool (N-E England)

by Elvira Bolhuis, Eva Kilian, Klára Šašková, and Jianhui Zhang

The station for the North East of England was Hartlepool, a picturesque seaside town - once the home of great iron and shipping industries, it is now struggling with unemployment and social deprivation. Content here dealt with the key themes of immigration and xenophobia that have often been cited as two of the main reasons for voting to leave the European Union. Hartlepool was chosen because the referendum results there showed the largest margin in favour of Brexit nationwide, 69.9% of residents having voted in favour of leaving.

A poster created by Elvira Bolhuis, Jianhui Zhang and Klára Šaškova examined the complex causes behind the dissatisfaction in the North East: not only has deindustrialisation resulted in high rates of unemployment, continued economic decline, and a feeling of having been left behind by an elite in Westminster. The North East's self-perception itself was built around a connection of industrialism and Britishness; the dismantling of the former has left the region reeling under a loss of traditional national identity.

A festively dressed visitor poses at Hartlepool station.

Fans of literature could enjoy a new reading of the gothic novel 'Dracula' by Bram Stoker: Arguably inspired by Stoker's stay in Whitby, a small north-eastern seaside town towered over by the imposing ruins of an old abbey, this beloved classic undeniably shows traces of xenophobia, _as Eva Kilian showed_ – Dracula is the impersonation of the alien evil, come to destroy England: the "Eastern man who does not want to integrate".

Elvira discussing the poster display with visitors.

Manchester
by Leonore Hinz, Anne Hübinger, and Klára Šašková

The UK's long history of political protest could be explored at Manchester station with an interactive display by Leonore Hinz, Anne Hübinger and Klára Šašková. In the form of a social media timeline, it traced political protest in the UK from 2009 to the present, showing peaceful forms of protest such as demonstrations as well as violent protest movements like the August 2011 riots that saw cars burning and shops being looted. It also shed light on the background of crucial developments during the referendum campaign such as the infamous 'breaking point' poster or the claim that the NHS would benefit from £350 million per week if the UK left the EU.

This interactive poster invited visitors to explore a fictive social media timeline to learn more about the background and significance of protest movements in the UK.

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Also at Manchester station, doctoral student Tathagata Sarkar had prepared an interactive video installation with the help of students Leonore Hinz, Anne Hübinger and Klára Šašková.

The display, titled "Protesters, Police and the Media", showed footage from different protests and asked visitors to evaluate what they saw.

Tathagata explaining the installation to staff from the Centre.

Post-referendum Britain has seen many protests against Brexit and against racism. But protests have a much longer and checkered history in Britain. In recent times, the country has witnessed different waves of protests, such as the Occupy, the anti-austerity, and the student protests. These have often been marked by violent clashes with the police. This installation invited visitors to experience the anti-austerity and student protests in Britain, especially in Northern England, and delve into the issues of police brutality, media coverage, depiction of protesters in the media, and developments from there.
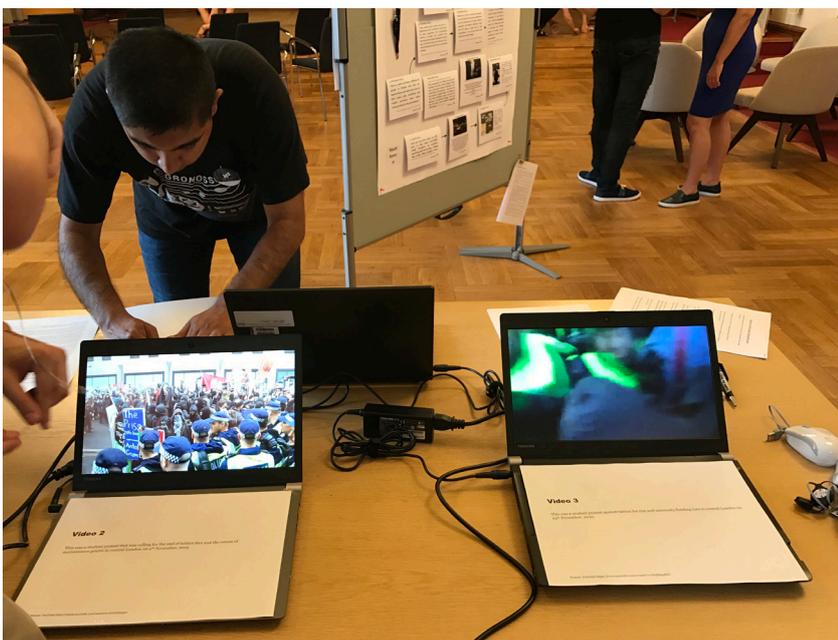
Tathagata preparing the installation setup.

Tathagata Sarkar is a doctoral student at the Centre for British Studies. He works on "The Right to Expression of Social Protest Groups: A comparison of Restrictions Imposed by Law and Police Operations in the UK and in India".

Port Talbot (Wales)

by Yuliya Balakshiy, Anne Hübinger, and Ana Ornelas

Steelworks are "the lifeblood" of the Welsh town of Port Talbot. Having employed about 18,000 workers during its peak time in the 1960s and 1970s, the industry has declined over the last centuries and there are now only 4,000 employees left. Nevertheless, this means that Port Talbot is still home to Britain's biggest steelworks.

A poster by Anne Hübinger and Yuliya Balakshiy explained how the region came to vote leave despite the massive scale of EU funding that helped to further local development in Wales. Visitors could also watch a short interview with residents of the area or test their knowledge of Wales in a quiz.

Those feeling up to a mythical journey were invited to take a closer look at the legend of King Arthur, which has been rewritten and adapted numerous times in popular culture: while his very existence has never been proven, his connection to Wales is strong, and even official Welsh sources claim the mythical king as their own. *Ana Ornelas explored the rumours and claims about Arthur's origins* and explained how the legend is connected to Welsh identity. *On a second poster*, she showcased picturesque places around the country that are rumoured to be connected to the Arthurian legend or have featured in popular reimaginings.

A group of visitors at Port Talbot station.

Glasgow (Scotland)

by Monika Keenan, Sandra Messow, Mary Rahimi, and Ricker So

Sandra Messow and Mary Rahimi constructed a three-dimensional tree model to explain the roots and outcomes of Scotland's specific brand of nationalism. The left-of-centre social democratic Scottish National Party (SNP) pursues a "civic" nationalism, which avoids exclusionary policies and defines the Scottish nation not by its language or culture, but by its political institutions and progressive principles. The SNP is in favour of Scottish independence and has promised to push for an independence referendum in subsequent election manifestos in the past. When the referendum was eventually held on 18 September 2014, 44.7% voted in favour of independence – a number that did not achieve independence, but nevertheless had far-reaching consequences for Westminster's

Mary works on preparing the tree model.

policies concerning Scotland.

Since 62% of Scottish voters also voted to remain in the EU during the Brexit referendum, Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has repeatedly brought up the possibility of a second referendum, should Scotland face significant negative consequences from Brexit.

Visitors were subsequently invited to test their newly-acquired knowledge in a quiz and win small prizes.

Katarina keeps a watchful eye on the prizes while visitors test their new Scotland knowledge in a quiz.

Ricker So's poster on the privatisation and re-nationalisation of the British railways was situated at this station because the debate around re-nationalisation is especially fierce in Scotland. Half of all passenger journeys in the UK are conducted in trains owned by foreign companies and thereby ultimately foreign states. Deutsche Bahn, for example, owns Arriva, which operates multiple railway service throughout the country. Trade unions and other critics are therefore calling for re-nationalisation of the railways, while others warn of the dangers of such an undertaking. Re-nationalisation might however become easier with Brexit, as EU directives ensuring open access operations for private rail companies might no longer apply after the UK leaves.

This station also included an excursion into literature: working with well-known crime writer Denise Mina's novel "The Red Road", which is set in Glasgow, Monika Keenan's interactive poster invited visitors to open the windows of a Glaswegian high-rise housing estate known as 'the Red Road Flats' to discover the stories hidden behind. Once the highest buildings in Europe, the blocks fell into decline and gained a sinister reputation. Demolition of the complex started in 2012. The towers have featured in multiple literary works and films and continue to fascinate people, not least because of the complexity of their history and the impact they have had on many Glaswegians' lives.

A group of visitors reading about Scottish nationalism.

Monika's poster invited visitors to open the windows of a housing estate in Glasgow to discover stories and excerpts from Denise Mina's novel 'The Red Road' hidden behind.

Derry/Londonderry (NI)

by Anastasiia Kutsovol, Maiya Turlybek-ova, and Katarina Živković

The border town of Derry - or Londonderry - has been working to create stability after years of civil war between the Irish Republicans and the Unionists. The naming dispute is only one indicator of the political unrest in the city's and indeed Northern Ireland's recent past. At this station, visitors could learn about the ethno-nationalist conflict in Northern Ireland during the late 20th century, euphemistically called "the Troubles". Posters here also dealt with the question how Brexit might now endanger the delicate peace in the region, and what effect the introduction of a border might have on the reconciliation process.

The Good Friday Agreement has been in the news a lot - but what exactly was it and why is it suddenly important again? Visitors who felt like reading up on the history of Northern Ireland could do so with *a poster by Maiya Turlybekova*: it gives a quick and comprehensive overview over the complicated relationship between Ireland and the United Kingdom as well as the most important issues concerning Northern Ireland.

They could also learn about the European Union's connection to the peace process in Northern Ireland with *a poster by Katarina Živković* - worries are that leaving the EU might seriously endanger the peace in Northern Ireland. However, the political system there has been purposely built to accommodate the region's divided


Katarina, Maiya and Monika ready for visitors at the Scotland and Northern Ireland Stations.

and pluralistic society. Find out what consociationalism means or which steps have been taken to ensure that Unionists and Nationalists could come together to govern Northern Ireland by clicking on the link above.

Anastasiia Kutsuvol prepared a presentation on possible consequences of Brexit on Irish arts and culture and explained concerns that the reintroduction of a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland might have repercussions for cross-border activities not only economically, but also socially and culturally. Free movement has so far been especially important for the Irish language, arts, and culture sector, because while some Irish bands like U2 have become world-famous, for much of the sector the audience is limited largely to the island. Funding, data protection and tax rules might also become future concerns.

*A visitor uses a quiet moment to read up on the history of Northern Ireland and Bloody Sunday.*
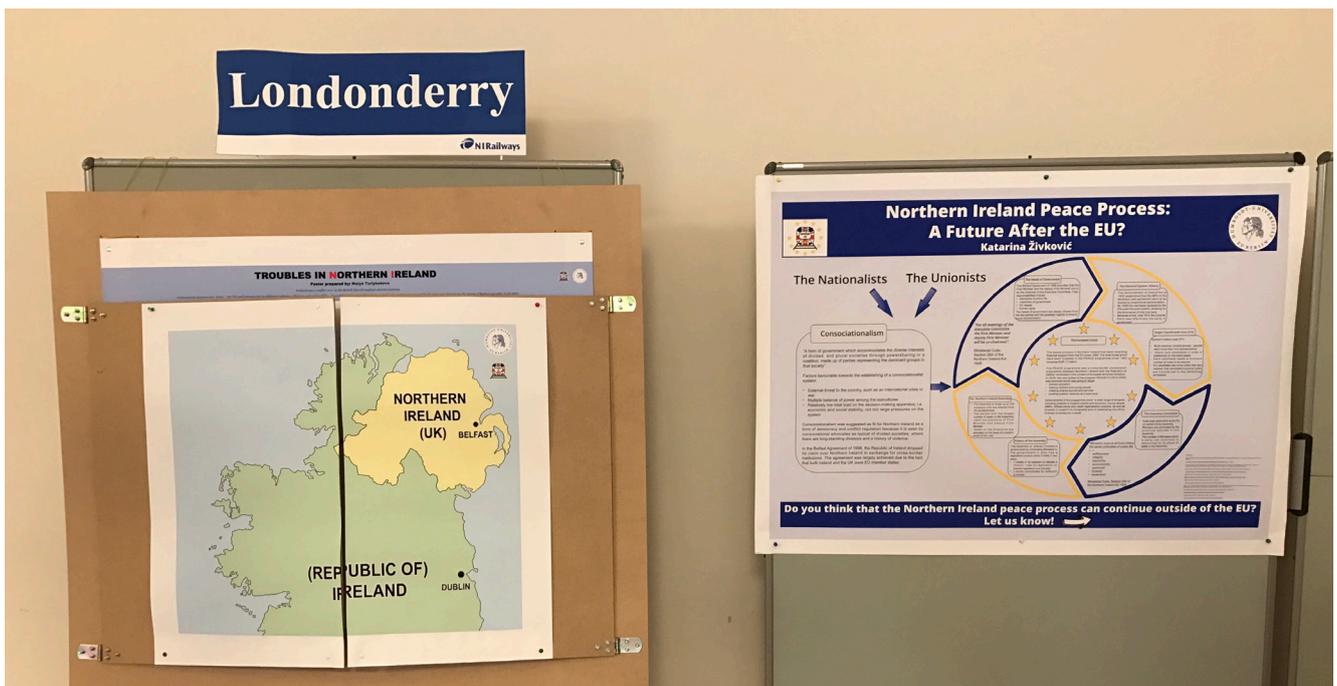
Posters at the Derry/Londonderry Station.

Brussels (Belgium)

by Sacha Beaumier, Ricker So, and Phillip Wells-Rhoden

Of course, there is more to Brexit than just the British point of view. Brussels, often treated as synonymous with the EU, has been alternatively a scapegoat and an opponent, or a friend that is now being cast away in a rash decision – always depending on who is being asked. Travelling from London to Brussels on the Eurostar might not be as easy after Brexit – *Ricker So has presented a picture of what the future may look like* once immigration checks, regulatory divergence and a drop in demand for its services hit the UK-headquartered Eurostar –, but visitors of our exhibition could still follow that train line to take a step back and look at the bigger picture.

An informative poster by Phillip Wells-Rhoden explored the political history of Brussels and its role in implementing Brexit. It briefly reviewed the European institutions that are situated in Brussels (helpful especially for
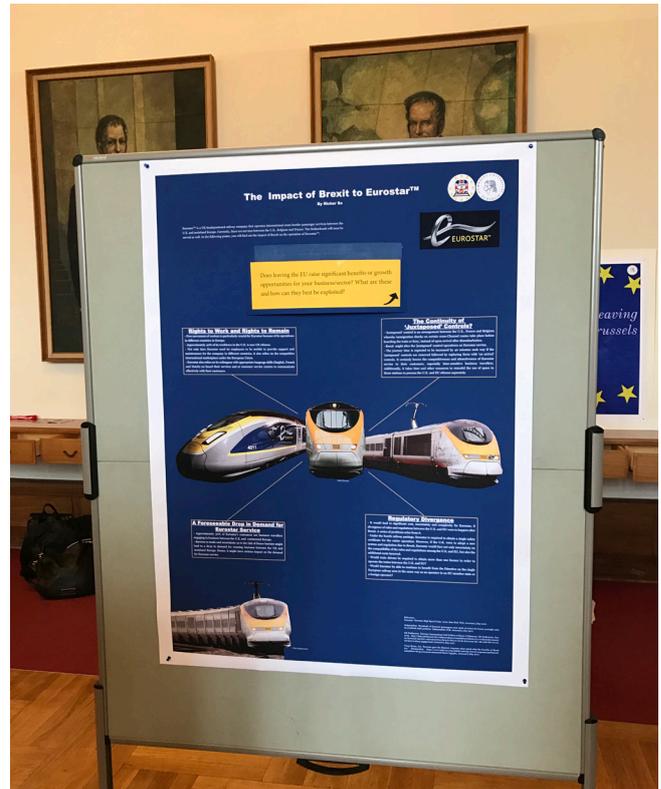
Ricker's poster on the Eurostar welcomed visitors to Brussels station.

those who struggle to keep their European Councils, Councils of Europe, and Councils of the European Union straight – now which one of those is not an EU institution?) and explains how the city came to be the political capital of Europe – a process in which the UK has been involved from the beginning. Brussels will be significantly shaping Brexit as the UK's main negotiating partner; but Brexit will in return also influence the EU, forcing it to reconsider policies and attempt major reforms.

The responses of individual citizens have been considered by Sacha Beaumier – inspired by the "Museum of Broken Relationships" in Zagreb, he put together "Leaving Brussels", an exhibition
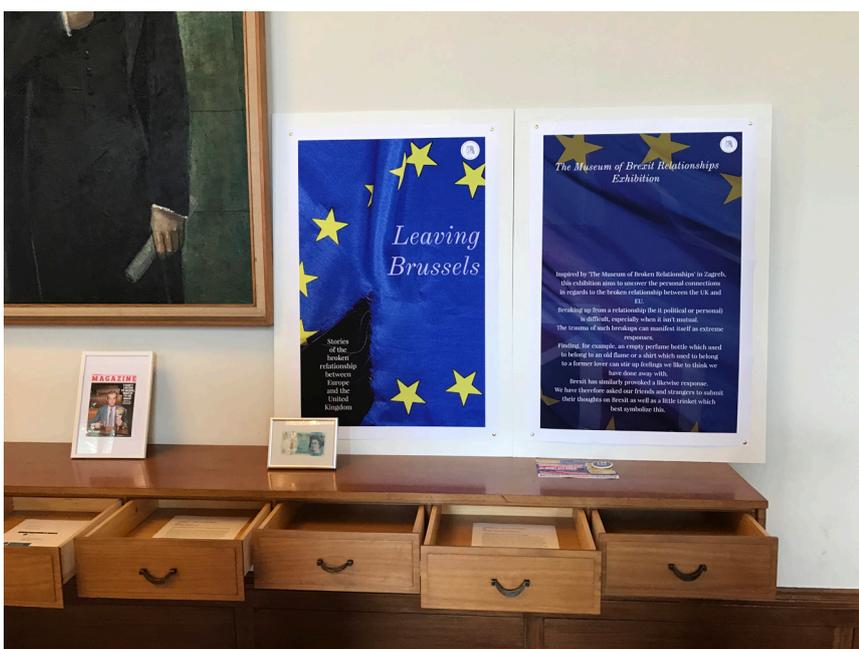
Sacha's exhibition "Leaving Brussels" was a visitor favourite.

that aimed to uncover the personal significance of Brexit on the lives of people on both sides of the Channel. For this, Sacha had asked friends and acquaintances of different nationalities what Brexit meant to or for them. They were also asked to choose an object to accompany the story of their relationship with the EU or Brexit. The resulting collection of stories and objects provides a unique perspective on the disruptive impact of the Brexit vote on individual lives. Click on the link to read some of the stories that were on display on the night.

At this final station of our exhibit, visitors were also invited to write down their thoughts on Brexit and leave them on a bulletin board - an opportunity many used to express strong sentiments of disappointment, disbelief and uncertainty.

A closer look at the stories and the objects connected to them that were on display at the exhibition.

Programme

In addition to the permanent stations, food and drinks were available throughout the night thanks to the food team, who collected donations from external sponsors as well as members of staff and fellow students to present an impressive array of British delicacies. The Centre's PhD students were also invited to contribute to the evening. Along with the interactive exhibit by Tathagata Sarkar (p. 13), visitors enjoyed a talk by Anna Schoon, a talk and poetry reading held and led by Sonya Permiakova, and a roundtable discussion chaired by Melanie Neumann. These contributions are introduced over the next pages. To conclude the night, Berlin-based Irish singer-songwriter Kilkelly played for an audience of late-night visitors.

Head of the food team Sandra makes sure everything is well prepared.

Visitors queueing for freshly-made Gin and Tonic.

Roundtable Discussion: Brits in Berlin after Brexit[1]

by Melanie Neumann

The roundtable brought together and into conversation five British Berliners to talk about Britain's vote to leave the European Union, its possible impacts on their lives, and how they are planning to navigate these impacts. The panelists, representing the 15.135 British citizens registered in Berlin at the moment, were:

Victoria Ade-Genschow, who has been living in Berlin for more than 15 years and is the Editor-in-Chief of the lifestyle expat travel blog *The British Berliner*.

Martin Gordon, a British musician, who has his own label, Radiant Future Records, and to whose music you can listen *here*.

Shoshannah Monteiro, who comes from a town near London and has lived in Berlin for seven years.

Josie Thaddeus-Johns, a freelance journalist and editor, who is currently writing her first novel and blogs about art, culture, music and tech *here*.

Jon Worth, a political blogger and communications consultant, whose *blog* is one of the longest running blogs about European Union affairs.

Upset, disappointment and outrage translate into how the panelists described and understand Britain after the referendum. Yet, they remain quite confident that their own lives in Berlin will not be affected by it much. Or rather, they are making moves, finding ways to protect themselves from Brexit's possible negative outcomes on their lives, for example applying for German citizenship. However, being able to continue to live and work in Berlin as before is one thing; another more private and psychological issue is a widespread sense of having been betrayed and abandoned by one's country. As Josie evocatively explained when an audience member asked her if she was afraid of being used as bargaining chip in the Brexit negotiations:

Melanie (centre) discussing the consequences of Brexit for Britains living abroad with her guests.

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1   This article is based on an earlier publication, to be found *here*.

A lively discussion continues after the roundtable.

[I]n order for us to be used as bargaining chips, Theresa May would have to actually put some value on us. I'm not convinced that she really does.

Strikingly, the panelists felt that the German government and the European Union represent them and their concerns far better in the negotiations than Britain does:

[I] also spoke to the Auswärtiges Amt [German Foreign Office] about this; I as a British citizen in Germany feel immensely better defended by the German government than I am currently defended by the British government (Jon).

Additionally, mainly in relation to the growing xenophobia in Britain and many other social issues that have come to the fore since the referendum, the panelists talked about now having difficulties identifying as British. Josie, for example, talked about somehow swapping identities:

[B]rexit and before that have just really changed how I kind of see my national identity and how I can

really imagine these things. I don't think-, I think I may have been a bit hesitant before calling myself European and now that seems much more obvious an identity to me and much less so to say British […] this is a milestone of an identity shock, really.

Hosting this roundtable was very inspiring and relevant to my own research. However, additionally it was a unique opportunity to introduce everyday experiences, worries and hopes of Britons living in Berlin as well as their perceptions of Brexit to a wider Berlin audience and thus enhance the media coverage of the British referendum by personal stories of British citizens living in the German capital.

Melanie Neumann is a doctoral candidate at the Centre for British Studies at Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. Her PhD research focuses on Irish and British migration to Berlin from 2006 and 2016.

"And we are living in a post-factual world": Brexit – a postmodern dream come true?

by Anna Schoon

During and in the aftermath of the Brexit campaign, 'post-factual', 'post-truth' and similar expressions were hotly debated. By now iconic moments such as Boris Johnson's '350£ a week for the NHS' bus, Michael Gove explaining that people 'have had enough of experts' or Aaron Banks positing that facts don't work, as people need to be reached emotionally[1] – with additional friendly support by Donald Trump and his campaign –, eventually led to 'post-truth' becoming the Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year 2016.

In discussions of the term in the media, post-truth was often presented to be closely linked and even equalled to postmodernism as the embodiment of science denialism, factual and moral relativism and valuing feelings over facts. These alleged key features of postmodernism are argued to have trickled down from academia during the past 30 years with the pro-Brexit vote (and Trump) as direct results.[2] In this case, the answer to the question "Brexit – a postmodern dream come true?" could then only be

an emphatic 'yes!' and postmodernists should smugly rub their hands.

In my talk, however, I presented a more nuanced answer to this question, as the 'easy' answer presupposes a one-sided understanding of postmodernism, ignoring its historical genesis and potential as a productive reflexive tool.

Far from promoting science denialism at the origin of the public's 'trust issues' with experts, postmodernism highlights the mediated nature of science instead. Scientific inquiry involves people (and we have the tendency to be horribly unreliable after all) and it happens in a field marked by competition for scarce resources among scientists and institutions. As a result (and as history has shown), scientific facts are not inherently 'good'; their specific use needs to be taken into consideration as well.

Also, Brexit as a postmodern dream assumes postmodernism to be an inherently destructive force. This view, however, ignores the importance of irony, parody and playfulness in postmodern

Anna during her talk on Brexit and postmodernism.

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1 Allegretti (2016); Cooper (2016); Stokes (2016); Viner (2016).

2 Pluckrose (2017); Pomerantsev (2016); Jones (2016).

frameworks – powerful devices to show what is usually considered 'common sense' in a different light, enabling critical engagement with what we tend to think is 'normal'. Also, postmodernism embraces constant transformation, instability, difference, and a complex understanding of history as constructed – not a linear development of constant progress. This is very emphatically not what the Brexit campaign was or is about. Instead of a vision or clear plans for the future, the Remain campaign relied on warnings and the Leave campaign catered to a strong sense of nostalgia for the 'good ol' days' – a way Britain most likely never was.

Finally, postmodernism has never been about 'switching off your brain to feel'. Moreover, this simple, binary distinction between facts and feelings would not hold in postmodern frameworks in the first place.

In my talk, I showed that it is easy, but not appropriate to make postmodernism a, if not the scapegoat for the outcome of the Brexit campaign. Postmodernism is way more complex than suggested in the debates (and this talk for that matter). Instead, postmodern thought can be a helpful reflexive tool to look behind the façade of seemingly simple answers to complex questions or what we think is 'normal' or 'natural'. At the same time, postmodernism does not make for a reliable moral or ethical platform that would actually be required in these post-truth times. I would therefore advocate for leaving postmodernism and everyday politics quite apart and turn toward other approaches and frameworks instead to (better?) understand Brexit or explain its origins and ramifications.

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My Heart's in the Holyrood: Contemporary Scottish Poets and Politics of Identity

by Sonya Permiakova

What happens when politics and poetics intertwine? The new generation of Scottish poets, with an outstanding figure of Jackie Kay as the current Makar, negotiate and question their position in the new fragmented Britain. The aim of my talk at Lange Nacht der Wissenschaften was to analyse how today's poets interpret and shape Scottish identity in the light of Brexit and the possibility of another Independence referendum.

It would be misleading to describe political poetry as a recent phenomenon; however, it is hard to ignore the curious ways in which poetry has been intersecting with politics amidst the rapid change of political landscape in Scotland, ever since the opening of the new Scottish Parliament in 1999. In 2000, the Holyrood Poetry Link Scheme has been established under the supervision of the Scottish Poetry Library, which brought together Scottish poets and the members of the Scottish Parliament, "with the MSPs commissioning poets to write on subjects of their choice" (Will 2004) – with subsequent publication of the results of this odd collaboration as an anthology. The scheme was considered successful and repeated again several years later. In 2004, the position of the Scots Makar has been established by the Scottish Government, as a Scottish variation on, or an alternative to the institution of Poet Laureate, which existed in England (and then Great Britain) since the 17th century. This was a political and a cultural gesture, which fits

Sonya during her talk.

into the narrative of proclaiming and celebrating Scottish national identity versus the rest of the UK – an important aspect of Scottish Nationalism leading to the Independence Referendum in 2014.

In 2016, Jackie Kay was appointed the new Makar, and in July of that year Jackie Kay read her poem Threshold at the opening session of the new Scottish Parliament – a task previous Makars have also done in the past. In the light of the Brexit vote in June of 2016, the poem transmitted a simple yet powerful message to the Scottish Parliament: "Our strength is our difference", "One language is never enough / It takes more than one language to tell a story" (Kay 2016) – message of multiculturalism and polylinguality and acceptance as cornerstones of what it is to be Scottish. It was the Brexit discourse of "We want our country back" (Farage 2015) that Jackie Kay argued against with an affirmative "This is my country", said in her poem in dozens of different voices and languages, from Mary Queen of Scots to the Syrian refugee.

In 2017 it was announced that Kay's poem Welcome Wee One would become a part of a new popular government initia-

tive – the 'baby boxes' given to expectant parents. This is an example of a very literal intertwining of poetry and politics: poetry comes in a 'package' of public policy. These steps direct towards a very conscious understanding of an important role which poetry occupies in Scottish culture as well as Scottish public discourse. It is no surprise that in this context of mutual cultural and political discussion, especially sharpened in the light of Brexit and the Independence referendum, Scottish poets often choose to proclaim their political beliefs and concerns in poetic form.

Another important cornerstone in the political/ poetic discussion, a new anthology of contemporary political poetry – Aiblins: New Scottish Political Poetry – was published in 2016 following a conference Poetic Politics, which included recent works by some of the new voices in Scottish poetry, many of whom in recent years adapted the famous feminist motto "the personal is political" to their own work, exploring their own identity and deeply personal issues as a part of a bigger public and political debate. These included poems written in Scots – discussing the place of their own language as part of their complex identity, questions of personal and national belonging, and even a peculiar new genre called 'Referendum Poetry' established around 2014. During the lecture, which was held in a 'literary saloon' format, the students of the M.A. British Studies programme recited works by both established and first-time published poets: Hilary Birch, Nancy Somerville, Jackie Kay, Calum Rodger and Carol Ann Duffy.

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Poems recited

Threshold by Jackie Kay; *Family History: The Accent* by Hilary Birch; *Hid* by Nancy Somerville; *A Voter's Reflections in Rhyme* by Calum Rodger; *Campaign* by Carol Ann Duffy

Sonya Permiakova is a graduate of the M.A. British Studies programme at the Großbritannien-Zentrum, and a member of the Berlin Graduate School of British Studies, writing her PhD thesis on British women's poetry of the First and the Second World Wars. Before joining the Centre, Sonya worked on various cultural projects (festivals, theatre productions) in Russia. Her research interests include gender studies, twentieth-century poetry and fiction, and poetry translation.

Katarina reading a poem to the audience.

Conclusion

More than 1.500 visitors were counted during the night. We received very positive feedback: Visitors were impressed with the breadth of content presented and thought it informative, interesting, engaging, creative and topical. They liked the structure of the project and its diversity. The Brussels station with its Museum of Broken Relationships was a visitor favourite. Also singled out were the kids' corner with its crafting activities, the Northern Ireland, Wales and Glasgow stations, and the talks.

We would like to thank our generous sponsors and donors whose contributions have helped to make the night an all-round success!

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We even had a visit from HU Vice President Professor Obergfell and the Berlin Minister for Science and Research Steffen Krach.