

Left-wing bookshops and infrastructure in Germany: platforms for a counter-public sphere from the 1970s to the present day

Donnerstag, 11. September 2025 12:00 (20 Minuten)

The left-wing movement in the Federal Republic of Germany from the late 1960s onwards was closely linked to the book trade and had a major influence on it, as well as on the publishing landscape and the dissemination of critical literature. The protest movement led to the proliferation of alternative and left-wing publishing houses. Classics of critical theory, Marxist writings and socially critical works were increasingly published. Many independent bookshops became meeting places for the left-wing scene. So-called 'left-wing bookshops' sprang up, which deliberately set themselves apart from established bookshops, stocking progressive literature that was not available there and thus promoting a counter-public. They sold writings critical of capitalism, feminism and anti-imperialism. Some activists in the student movement wanted critical writings to be available to more than just the academic elite. Therefore, pirate editions (illegal copies) of Marxist classics or hard-to-find critical theory writings were produced and distributed. In this context, alternative distribution structures developed. Left collectives organised book distribution themselves, and pamphlets, leaflets and small political magazines were distributed en masse at universities and demonstrations. In some cases, left-wing bookshops produced pirated copies only on demand, after receiving orders from universities. The '68 generation had a lasting effect on the German book trade. Some left-wing bookshops still exist today, although they face challenges such as the general crisis in the book market, rising costs and changes in buying behaviour. Smaller, alternative bookshops in particular are under pressure. Nevertheless, left-wing bookshops remain an important part of Germany's cultural diversity, offering space for critical discourse and alternative perspectives. One example of adapting to the current situation is the Berlin online bookshop Links Lesen, which has been offering left-wing literature online since 2018 as a self-managed collective organisation. The company uses its surpluses to support left-wing projects and initiatives and emphasises collective, self-determined and solidary working and living conditions. The lecture will analyse the influence of the left book trade from a diachronic perspective and situate it in the current discussion about the importance of books and reading for democratic processes. The question will be answered to what extent the (left) book trade can still be a platform for counter-publicity today.

Hauptautor: Dr. VOGEL, Anke (JGU Mainz)

Vortragende(r): Dr. VOGEL, Anke (JGU Mainz)

Sitzung Einordnung: Panel