



Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

Report Title: Understanding the Development of Culture From Behind The Iron Curtain **Name:** Maggie Flattery

Other Team Members:

Program: New York City Program

Trip Dates: 11/30/-0001 - 11/30/-0001 **Location Visited:** Warsaw, Zakopane, Krakow, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Konotop, and Kiev

Post Fellowship Reporting Template: PFR Template 02

Project Summary: This summer I spent a month in a number of former Soviet states. My trip began in Warsaw, the capital of Poland and over the following ten days I travelled to Zakopane, a remote town nestled in the heart of the Tatra mountain range, ending the Polish leg of the journey in Poland's second city; Krakow. Through the first ten days of the trip I noticed the toll communism took on Poland. From the miniscule central square, the only surviving structures from Hitler's decree to level the city, to the daunting concrete Palace of Science and Culture adorned with looming statues of men and women fulfilling their obligations to the state, it is clear the scars of communism have settled on the face of Poland, and perhaps on the entire eastern block. As the trip continued, and I experienced countries further and further east it became apparent they hold a common thread; a population willing to acknowledge the past as their history, but a history they didn't create, and an intense desire to find a cultural identity apart from that created by their oppressors. Through cross generational conversations with the locals, and visits to a number of cultural institutions I gained a new perspective on the effects of communism, and redevelopment in the post communist era- a perspective I'm excited to enhance through continued study, and most importantly one I'm excited to share with my students.

Career Impact: I entered into this journey with both excitement and trepidation. I was more than thrilled to experience new cultures, and gain insights into a society so closely guarded those who survived it continue to speak of it with a undertone of fear. However, I experienced some anxiety about traveling through countries where I had no grasp of the languages- languages rooted in rules and structures appearing entirely nonsensical to the untrained eye. More deeply I had a sense of anxiety around asking people to talk about communism and the challenges they faced from behind the Iron Curtain, understanding many of the stories they may recount would be wrought with pain and anger. It didn't take long for my fears to fall by the waste side. There was not one country I visited where I wasn't greeted with open arms and an overwhelming willingness to share experiences. Returning to the United States I have a deep sense of personal growth in understanding what it is to live under a wildly oppressive regime, the willingness of people to struggle against that which seems impossible to topple, and an intense desire to continue building relationships in Central and Eastern Europe.

Classroom/Community Impact: I began this fellowship with the daunting task with the intention of synthesizing the effects of communism on range of populations whose national identities pre-communism varied in a way I was unable to imagine. Upon traveling I discovered an incredible depth of culture in each country, and a diversity in perspective I hope to use to build cultural awareness and understanding in my students and in the greater school community. Furthermore, I'd like to use this experience as a springboard to remind my students when all seems unlivable, they always have a voice to speak out against injustice, to challenge the status quo, and to take risks even when hope seems lost.

Open Response: I feel my first trip to the eastern block is merely a starting point. Over the next few years I plan to learn Polish as a way of gaining better understanding of the struggles of Poland and rebuilding, as their relationship to the Soviet Union is particularly challenging to understand fully without a grasp of the language. Also as I narrow the scope of my research I will develop a series of interdisciplinary units on communism and censorship, beginning with a study of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. I am hopefully a study of both the history of Kafka's work, and a literary study of the story itself will lend itself to a deeper understanding of the effects of the communist state on culture, literature, and society.

Quote: I'd like to use this experience as a springboard to remind my students when all seems unlivable, they always have a voice to speak out against injustice, to challenge the status quo, and to take risks even when hope seems lost.

Photos:



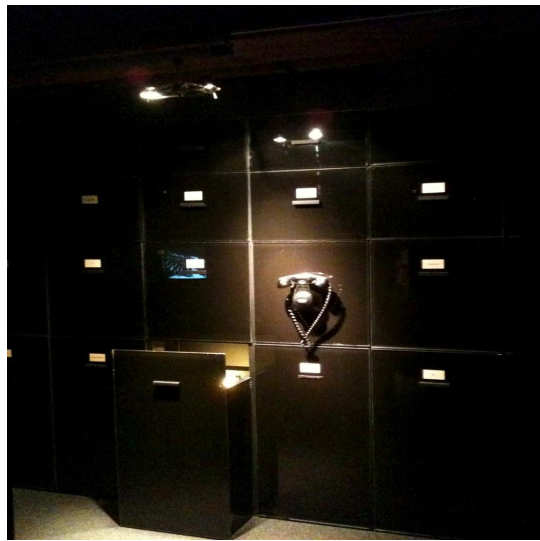
The entrance to Budapest's Memento Park-remembering the past so as not to repeat



The Great Leader- Memento Park, Budapest, Hungary



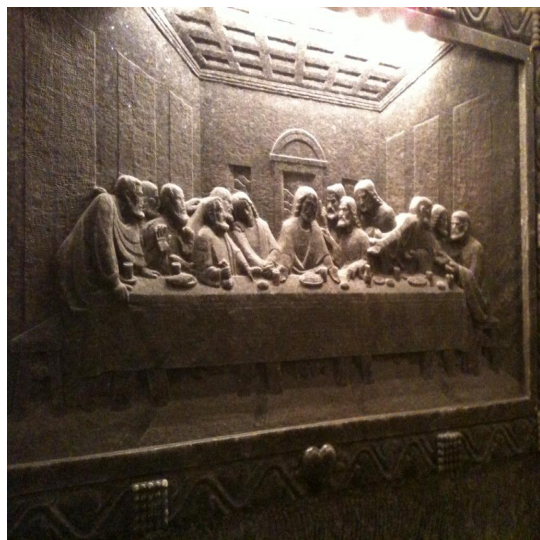
The communist leader shaking hands with his faithful farmer- Memento Park



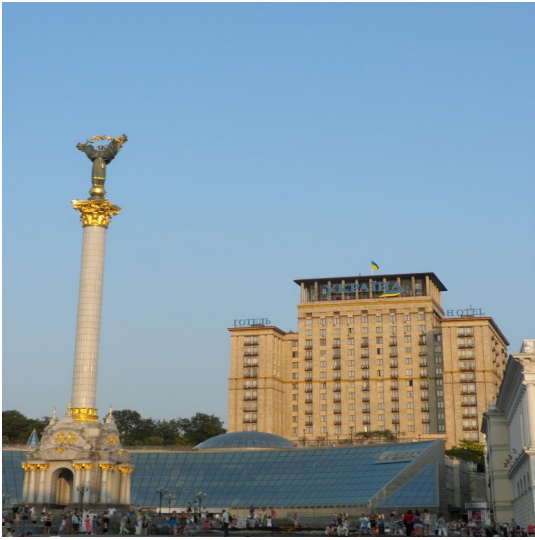
Kafka's files- Kafka Museum Prague, Czech Republic



The Metronome- Prague, Czech Republic



The Cathedral at the Krakow Salt Mines



Site of the Orange Revolution- Kiev, Ukraine



Monument to The Velvet Revolution- Prague, Czech Republic