

Vorharz: Hornburg and Osterwieck

The former inner-German border – a “phantom border”?

A field trip concept developed for the international conference

“New rural geographies in Europe: actors, processes, policies”

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Thünen Institute of Rural Studies

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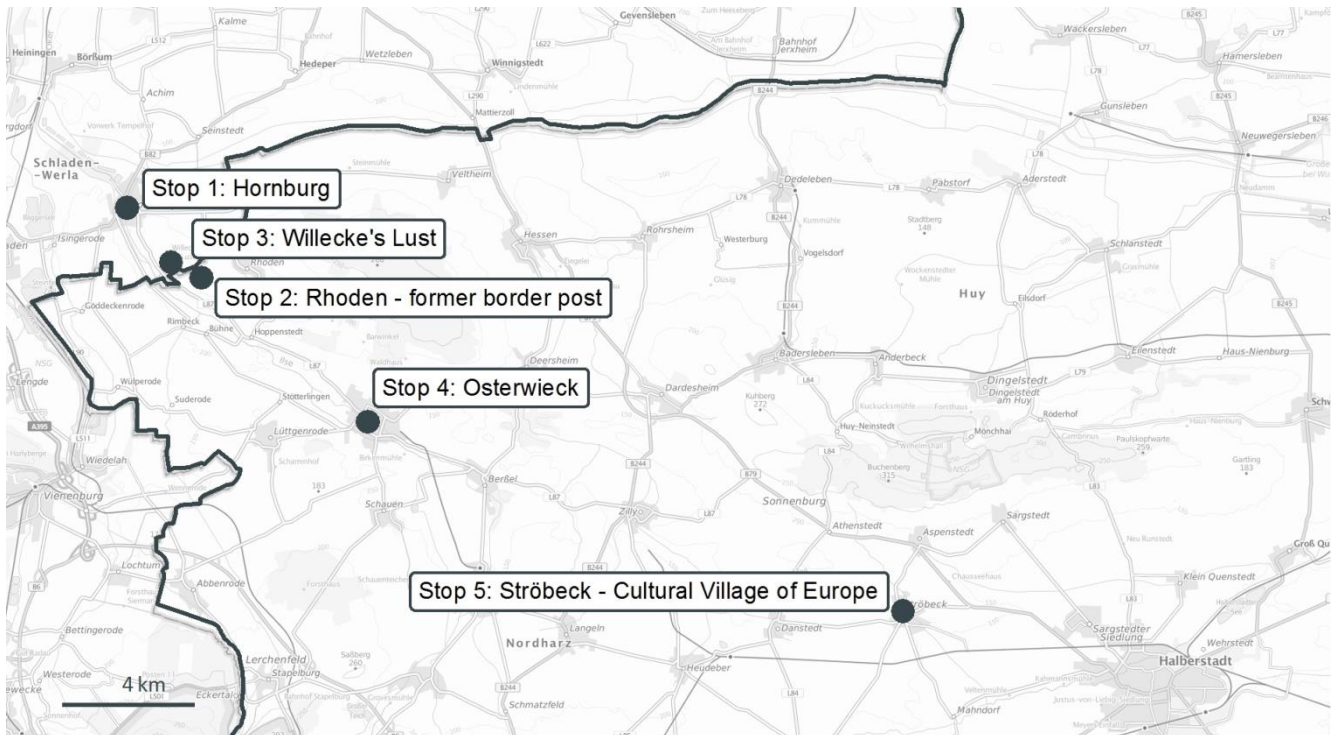
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1. Field trip stops



Map 1: Field trip route. Thünen-Institut 2017 based on GeoBasis-DE/BKG 2017.

- 9:30-10:30 Hornburg, a border town**
Field trip partner:
Andreas Memmert, mayor of Hornburg
- 11:00-11:30 Former border post Rhoden**
Field trip partner:
Gerhard Schmuck, tour guide and chronicler of Osterwieck
- 12:00-12:10 Former border observation point**
Field trip partner:
Gerhard Schmuck, tour guide and chronicler of Osterwieck
- 12:20-13:20 Lunch: Willeckes Lust – making use of the border**
- 13:45-14:45 Osterwieck - local development in the GDR**
Osterwieck and Hornburg – local development after reunification
Field trip partner:
Gerhard Schmuck, tour guide and chronicler of Osterwieck
- 15:30-16:30 European cultural village Ströbeck**
Field trip partners:
Ms Krosch
Kathrin Baltzer
Club of the European cultural village Ströbeck

2. Introduction: The Vorharz divided and reunified

Hornburg and Osterwieck are small towns located in the Vorharz, a rural area in central Germany adjacent to the Harz Mountains uplands. Both towns were closely integrated in economic and social terms until the German division in 1949, when two republics were formed on the post-war German territory. The subsequent construction of the border from 1952 on cut off the previous regional ties. The eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) established a 5 km wide “restricted zone” around its border to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), which heavily constrained activities in this area. The town of Osterwieck was located directly at the edge of this restricted zone, cutting off places west of Osterwieck, such as Hornburg.

On the western German Federal Republic’s side, the administration reacted to the sudden cut off the infrastructural and economic ties by issuing special zonal border area funding to the inner German border regions (cf. map 3). The area funding was to support the intensification of the border areas’ spatio-economic relations with the western part of Germany, which in some cases had hitherto not been very prevalent. Due to this lack of economic ties to the West, the economic potential of Hornburg, now located closely to a hardly permeable border, was rated as particularly poor in the 1960s (cf. MEIBEYER 1966). At the same time, the zonal border area funding had in general not been very successful in improving the economic situation at edge of the inner-German border (ERDMANN 2013).

After the German reunification in 1990 the zonal border area funding for the western German regions was cancelled; instead, the eastern German regions received financial help to “catch up” with the western German level of development. This shifting of financial allotments from the former western zonal area to the eastern regions of Germany seems to reproduce a *differentiation* of East and West, instead of working towards a levelling of disparities: Both border regions of East *and* West did and do not perform well in comparison to other western German regions, so that ERDMANN rates the cancellation of the zonal border area funding and the simultaneous allocation of financial means to the Eastern regions as a re-establishment of the inner-German border as a “funding border” (2013).

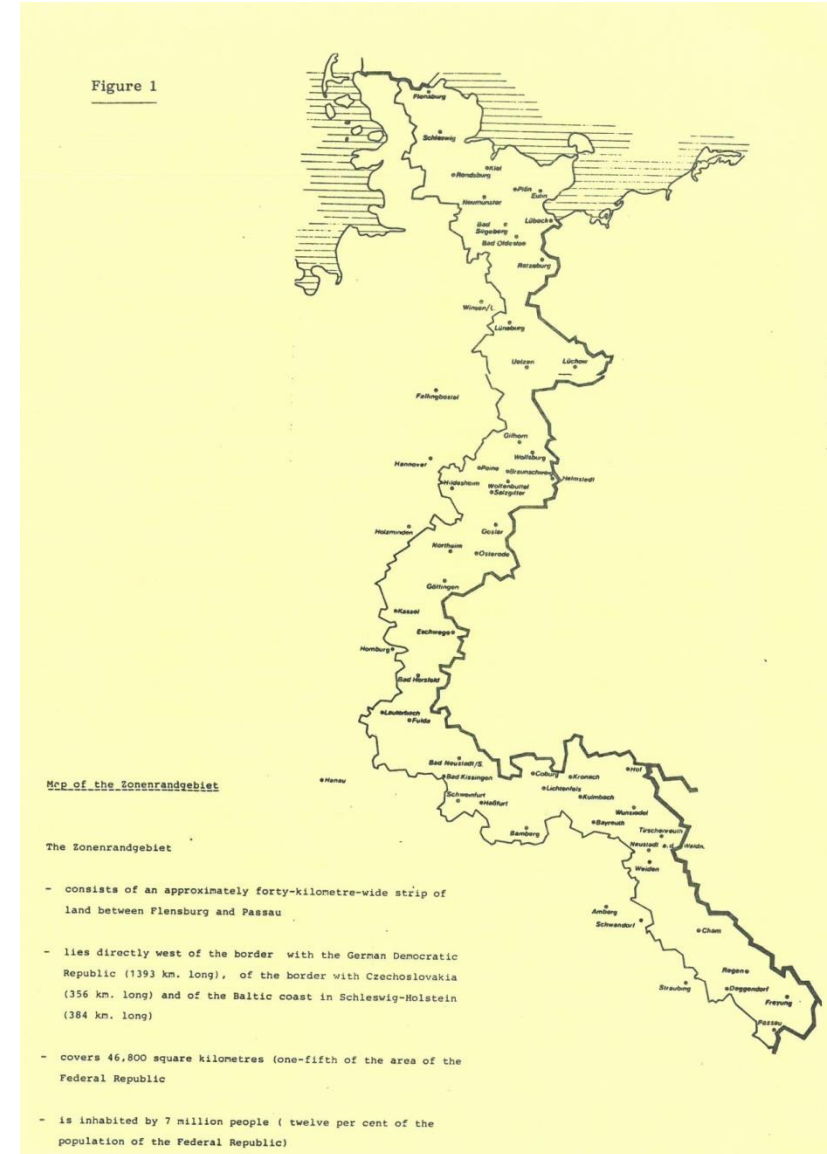
The field trip wants to critically follow this suggested persistence of an inner-German border and explore the extent to which it still influences social and economic formation processes in both the eastern and western former border areas of Osterwieck and Hornburg. HIRSCHHAUSEN et al. 2015 observe human practices influenced by spatial patterns, although their borders have long since been abolished. They develop a theory to explain the persistence of these so-called “phantom borders”, which continue to exist in practice. HIRSCHHAUSEN et al. approach borders in constructivist terms as a human-made spatial categorisation for the purpose of governing. Material borderlines thus enable the governance of people inside and partly outside their territory by regulating accessibility. HIRSCHHAUSEN et al., however, focus on the symbolic inscriptions that come along with the bordering of space: As borders *per se* cause a differentiation between the “in” and “out” they affect people in different manners – and necessarily cause different interpretations of their symbolic meaning. In this arena of multiple ascriptions, inscriptions and meanings, borders constantly need to be reproduced by human action in order to be affirmed and “made sense of”. HIRSCHHAUSEN et al., demonstrate that symbolic representations of particular borders can re-materialise in human practice, although their material borderline and political significance have long since been abolished. Referring to KOSELLECK,

HIRSCHHAUSEN et. al., introduce subconscious spatial experiences transmitted over generations into the constructivist geographical understanding. Thus they can explain that long-term spatial experiences are never completely replaced by contemporary discourses about space and places. Rather, these long-term experiences manage to create a “normality” that has the capacity to influence personal practices. They credit this contingent element of spatial experience with an own efficacy that helps explain the contemporary reproduction of spatial patterns from the past (HIRSCHHAUSEN et al. 2015: 46-47).

Following these theoretical elaborations, we might ask to which extent the inner-German border is today reproduced in current discourses and practices as a phantom border. However, so as not to essentialise historical spatial experiences and live up to the postulate of multiperspectivity, we also want to focus on alternative ways to imagine and produce the Vorharz as a former zonal border area.

We thus pose the following guiding questions for the field trip:

- Is the former inner-German border a recurrent topic in regional development?
- Does the former border today shape relations between the eastern and western part of the Vorharz?
- Which discourses and practices work against a “bordering” of West and East Germany?



3. Field trip

1 Hornburg – a border town

Hornburg was founded around 944 around the castle bearing the same name along two important trading routes. Due to these locational factors, Hornburg developed from a village into a town in the middle of the 16th century. The town grew through the integration of inhabitants of deserted villages who brought their arable land as first plots into the possession of Hornburg, which subsequently developed into a so-called farm town (BOCKHOLT 1987).

Farm towns are a medieval settlement type with a particular urban social and economic structure. In contrast to other towns where craftsmen and traders formed the citizenry, in farm towns, farmers were included into this social class. These urban farmers were thus free people who cultivated fields within the parish land of the town. Remarkable for the townscape of Hornburg as a farm town is the farmer citizens' success in hop cultivation: Around 1600 they constructed richly ornamented half-timbered houses, of which more than 100 are today protected as monuments (BRÜNING, SCHMIDT 1976: 244).

With the territorialisation of rule subsequent to the Treaty of Westphalia after the Thirty Year's War, the trading routes that had fostered Hornburg's locational advantage lost importance. It became increasingly difficult to keep up the trade between Hildesheim, resp. Braunschweig, and Halberstadt via Hornburg, because the new state borders between the Duchy of Braunschweig, the Bishopric of Hildesheim and the Principality of Anhalt hampered their economic integration (cf. map 4). The tolls coming along with the emergent state borders increased the prices for Hornburg's hops and caused an overall decline of Hornburg's economic performance as a farming town (MEIBEYER 1966: 58-61).

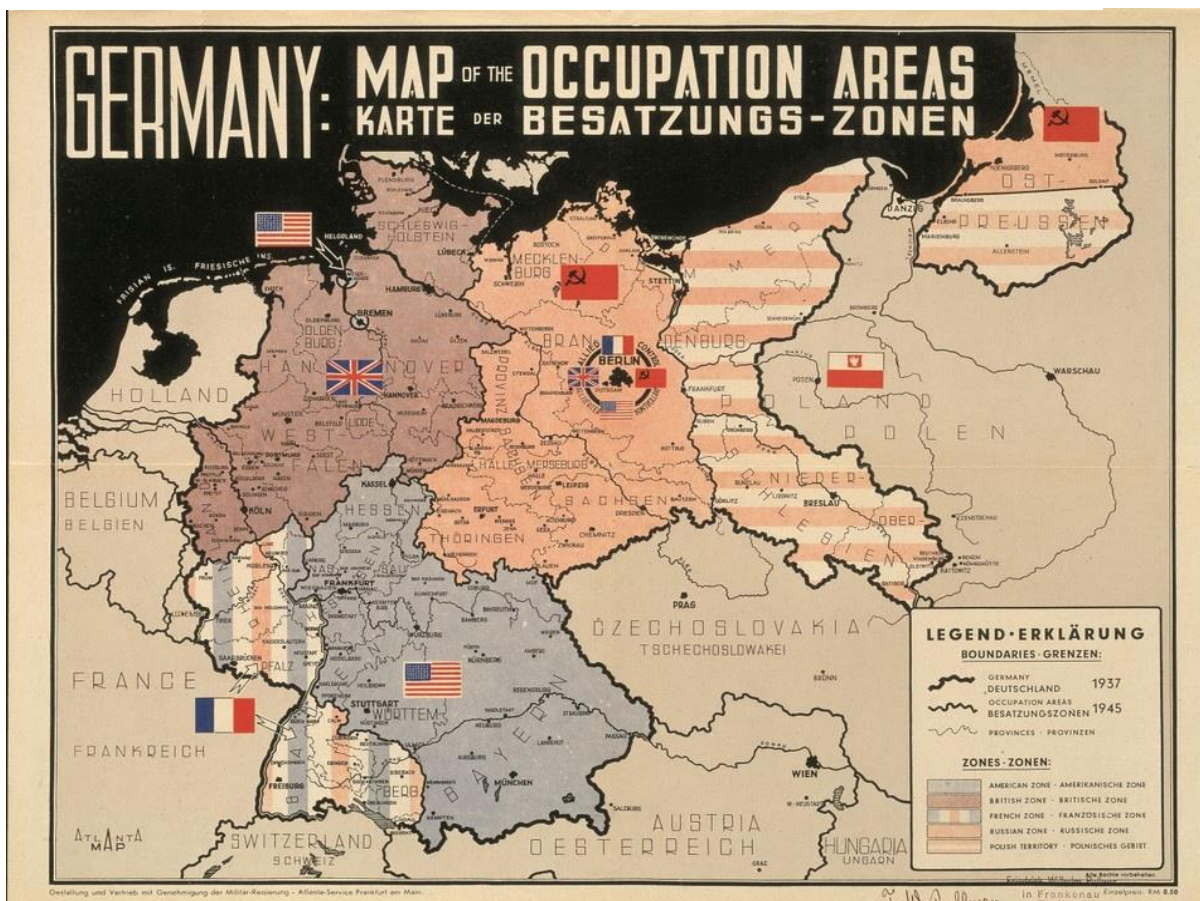
Only in the 19th century, did the creation of a sugar factory again promote the economic integration of Hornburg with its surroundings, where the later eastern German parts, such as Osterwieck, Magdeburg and Halberstadt formed an important catchment area. Until 1941, Osterwieck and Hornburg even belonged to the same district, Wernigerode. However, with the "Salzgitterverordnung" of 1942, a policy for the reorganisation of German territory in the course of economic promotion, Osterwieck and Hornburg were separated into different administrative territories. Consequently, in the course of the German division, Hornburg was assigned to western Germany, while Osterwieck was located on GDR territory (cf. Map 5).

In Hornburg the town's mayor will introduce us to the history of Hornburg as a border town and we will have an opportunity to explore border processes. We will ask in particular about contingencies in the development of Hornburg with regard to the former inner-German border.

The former inner-German border – a “phantom border“?



Map 4: Territorial domains after the Treaty of Westphalia 1648. Wikipedia.

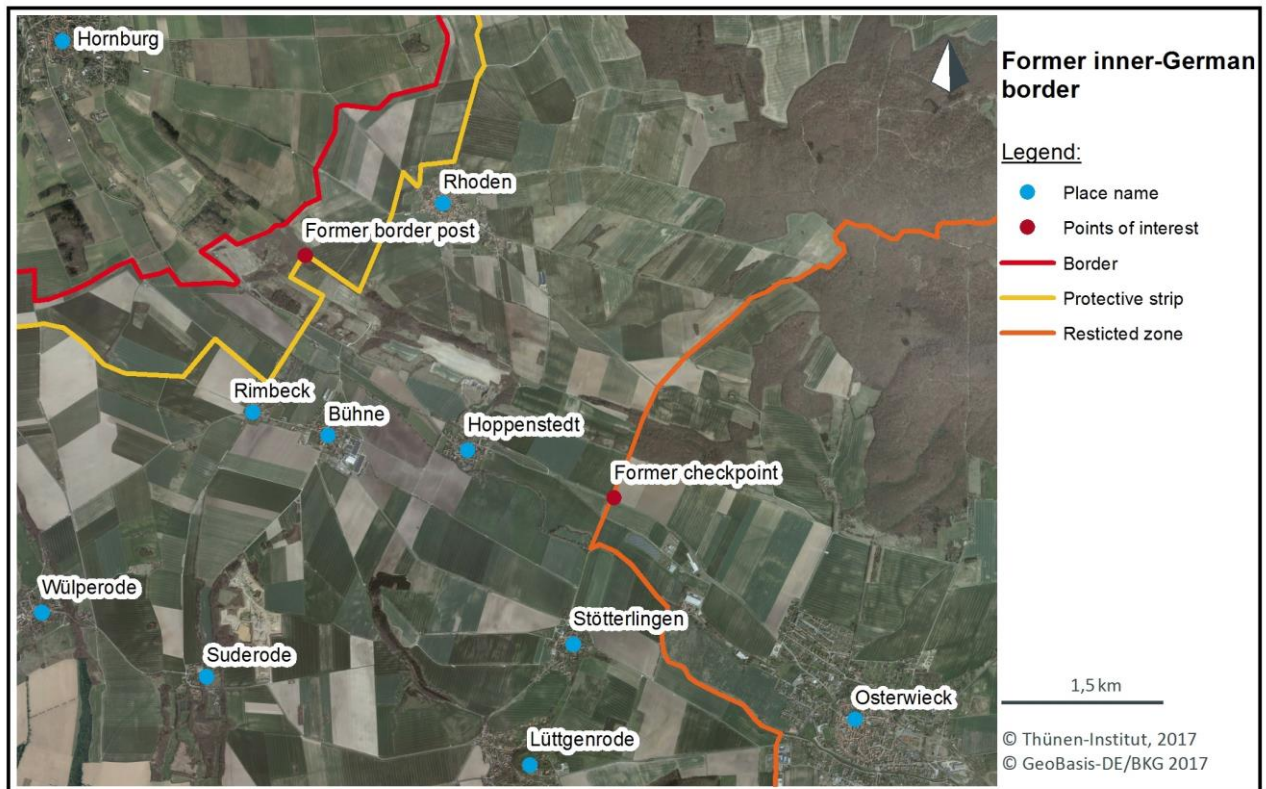


Map 5: Occupation areas after WW II 1945-1949. Atlanta Service.

2 Former border post Rhoden

With the development of the GDR as an oppressive regime in the early fifties, many “East Germans” started fleeing into the western Federal Republic. The hitherto permeable inner-German border was successively closed from 1952 on. In 1962, the border was impermeably reinforced with fences and border posts and a complex border post system: the physical borderline itself was located within the territory of the GDR, at a 10 m distance to the administrative border. Starting from the border posts, a 500 m “protective strip” was defined to keep people from getting close. A zone of 5 km width adjacent to this strip was declared the “restricted zone”, which imposed severe restrictions on people living in the 300 villages and towns within: People were only allowed to be in the open from sunrise to sunset, they needed a special passport, had to pass several controls before they were admitted to and let out of the restricted zone, were not allowed to assemble or to hold events and only relatives of first grade were allowed to visit after they had applied for a special permission; people were constantly observed and heavily restricted in their movements, since mines were spread all over the fields and border guards were constantly on patrol (MDR n. g.). The people living in the restricted zone were closest to the border and thus, in the eyes of the government, in the best position to flee the republic. Therefore, the government wanted only “reliable persons” to live in the restricted zone. Consequently, when establishing the border and its zones, the government evicted people labelled as “non-reliable” from the restricted zone and resettled them to central areas of the GDR (in a campaign called “Vermin”: *Aktion Ungeziefer*) (REICHE 2002: 7).

We will visit a former border post between Hornburg and Osterwieck, where a tour guide will introduce us to local stories of the inner-German division in the Vorharz.



Map 6: Border regime between Hornburg and Osterwieck. Thünen-Institut based on GeoBasis-DE/BKG 2017.

3 Willeckes Lust – making use of the border

The German border soon became an attraction for many people not only from West Germany, but also the western European states as a visible manifestation of the Iron Curtain. In 1978 alone, 1.84 million people visited the inner German border. In the course of the division, many touristic facilities were developed to host the border tourists, and so in Hornburg. In particular the restaurant “Willecke’s Lust”, located directly next to the border and a so-called “border observation point”, profited from the border tourism and the small border traffic, as Hornburg’s mayor states: “Hornburg lived quite well off the border”. Following the reunification, the restaurant consequently lost a high proportion of customers and had to close (HILDEBRANDT 2009: 50-51). Astrid ECKERT (2011) critically analyses this border tourism phenomenon in the FGR as a sensationalist tourism that was used by the FGR’s government to reproduce their legitimacy as a western type democracy ; the formerly loose border tourism was channelled into trips with an educational character by the provision of politically educative material in border information points, which arranged a reassurance of the West German democracy confronting the GDR’s autocratic regime. ECKERT criticises that this tourism fostered the “normalisation”, i.e., the acceptance of the border and thus caused a stabilisation of the two German republics, contradicting the West German aim of reunification (ibid).

Willeckes Lust was reopened the 2010s. We will take our lunch break at this restaurant and will learn more about the border tourism phenomenon and its implications for local development.



Figure 1: Border observation point close to Willeckes Lust. Photo: S. Neumeier.

4 a. Osterwieck – local development in the GDR

Just like Hornburg, Osterwieck is similarly rich in half-timbered houses that are nowadays kept under monument protection. Osterwieck is still working to restore many of its historical buildings, since such building structures were neglected for several reasons under GDR planning practices.

The spatial planning and regional development in the GDR was mainly focused on location specific urban planning, promoting mainly industrial sites instead of regions. Standardised and concentrated housing areas of a very high functional density constituted most of the new buildings in the GDR, not only for practical reasons, but also for their symbolic appeal of the reorganisation of civil society in the socialist GDR (SCHÖLLER 1986: 19-20). Simultaneously, the socialist urban planning neglected town and city centres, which led to their decay or destruction in the subsequent years (SCHAUER 1997: 101). Only at the end of the 1970s did the GDR see the need to preserve the urban cores and integrated their preservation bindingly into the aims of urban planning.

Osterwieck, as a small rural town of low interest to the central government, was thus on the one hand spared unattractive residential blocks in its surroundings (except for one street in the northwest, cf. map 7). Thus, Osterwieck preserved its long-time settlement structure (REICHE 1969: 81). On the other hand, Osterwieck did not receive any funding to preserve its historical buildings; Osterwieck was too far from the Harz as a vacation resort and too close to the border to be of interest to the socialist planning regime (cf. KERBS, SCHLEUßNER 1997: 52).

In Osterwieck we will more closely examine the history of the town's settlement structure and will be able to compare local development with that of Hornburg.



Map 7: Standardised housing block in Florian-Geyer-street, Osterwieck. Thünen-Institut 2017 based on GeoBasis-DE/BKG 2017

4 b. Osterwieck and Hornburg – local development after reunification

The border post at Rimbeck/ Bühne (Osterwieck) and Hornburg was opened on November 18, 1989. Three months later, on February 15, 1990, Hornburg and Osterwieck reworked their partnership agreement (SEGNER 1994: 277). However, the border between Hornburg and Osterwieck was not completely abolished with the reunification of the GDR and FRG – it was rather assigned a different status. While it was an impermeable state border from 1962-1989, it now became an administrative border between two federal states, Lower Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt (cf. Map 2). Although the borders between federal states in Germany do not restrict any movement or settlement nor the uptake of employment, the borders mark different legislations, which for instance regulate individual spatial planning and regional development. BAARS and SCHLOTTMANN apply the concept of phantom borders to show that Germany's federal state borders are still drawn upon into social practices, even where they are not supposed to have a regulative effect, e.g., hampering cross-border cooperation for regional development (ibid 2014: 93-95).

After the reunification of Germany, the zonal border area funding was abolished between 1991 and 1994. Instead, the funds were allocated to the “new” federal states to help them catch up with the economic performance and infrastructural status of the German west. This also caused a relocation of companies from the western to the eastern Vorharz (EISEMANN, MEMMERT), since massive investment supplements in eastern regions were attractive, especially for companies close to the border. An interviewee in STEINFÜHRER's study on the close-by Harz 2012 reports that this “funding border” still exists today, 26 years after the reunification.

On the other hand, Osterwieck and Hornburg have managed to cooperate in regional development projects since the German reunification. Both towns identify their development potential in tourism, and so they cooperate in projects that aim at upvaluing both regions for tourism. Therein, the former inner-German border seems to have been a motivational element to set up projects that enact and symbolise the German reunification. The mayor of Hornburg reports that both towns work together in their most important planning projects, the urban planning for monument protection, as both towns are rich in attractive half-timbered houses and are part of the “German Half-Timbered House Road” (*Deutsche Fachwerkstraße*).

In Osterwieck we will further ask which changes the reunification induced for Osterwieck's development as well as for its relations with Hornburg.



Figure 2: Half-timbered house in need of renovation, Osterwieck.
Photo: S. Neumeier.

5 European cultural village Ströbeck

The reunification of both Germanies was not an isolated phenomenon – rather, the whole block confrontation ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its satellite states. The reunification thus did not only open up Eastern Germany to Western Germany, but also allowed for a European-wide networking that had previously seemed impossible. Ströbeck in the administrative district Halberstadt in Saxony-Anhalt, close to the former inner-German border, became part of an international network of “European Cultural Villages”. Founded in 1999, this network of 11 villages in Europe aims to promote the merits of rural settlements in Europe and calls particular attention to villages and their development.

The initiative was founded by Wiik aan Zee, Netherlands, which proclaimed itself in 1999 a “Cultural Village of Europe”, challenging the general focus of culture and politics on urban spaces. Ströbeck became part of the network since it exhibits a particular cultural heritage that is now acknowledged as an “immaterial heritage” in Germany: Ströbeck looks back to a long tradition of chess-playing. The village is richly ornamented with chess symbols and provides an “alive chess board” as their central square.

The board of the Ströbeck Cultural Village Association reports that the cultural village initiative indeed works as a lobby for rural development, however differently pronounced this is in the different countries. The cultural exchange that the initiative organises every second year has successfully called the attention of political bodies; representatives were already invited to speak about their concerns in the European Parliament.

In Ströbeck we will have the opportunity to learn about the self-conception of a village in the former GDR. We will further ask about the motivation and needs to proclaim “Cultural Villages of Europe” and how this is related to regional development.



Figure 3: „Chess village Ströbeck“. Photo: S. Neumeier.

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