

THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES ON THE PRESERVATION OF
SORBIAN COMMUNITIES IN GERMANY (1945-2001)

by

RACHEL ELIZABETH HILDEBRANDT

(Under the direction of Professor Mark Reinberger)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence exerted by public policy on the preservation of Sorbian communities and historic sites in the states of Brandenburg and Saxony, Germany, from 1945 to 2001. Although the network of interconnected policies is complex, only three policy categories were studied for the purposes of this inquiry: historic preservation, land and agricultural reform, and coal mining. The pertinent policies are described within the political contexts of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) and of the now reunified Germany. A brief history of the Sorbs is provided to help explain the complicated nature of German-Sorbian relations in the past as well as in the present. The official promotion of Sorbian culture within the GDR is also discussed because of its direct connection to the preservation of Sorbian ethnicity in post-World War II Europe. In closing, several suggestions for future preservation policy and private initiative directions are included.

INDEX WORDS: SORBS history, SORBS cultural preservation, GERMANY, EAST historic preservation, GERMANY, EAST energy policies, GERMANY, EAST agricultural policies, GERMANY, WEST historic preservation

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RACHEL ELIZABETH HILDEBRANDT

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Approved:

Major Professor: Mark Reinberger

Committee: Catherine Howett
Peter Jorgensen
Richard Westmacott

Electronic Version Approved:

Gordhan L. Patel
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2002

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the following individuals: my grandfather, Leonard Groeschel, the first Wend I ever knew and loved; my parents and siblings, whose unlimited emotional and spiritual support has never faltered or failed; and to the Sorbian people, whose tenacity and spirit have won my heart forever.

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INTRODUCTION

Not far from the highway that runs between Houston and Austin, Texas, are the remnants of a small town called Serbin. The post office has long since closed and moved to Giddings, and collapsing wooden structures are what are left of the few shops that once existed in the town. All that remains of the once vibrant community life are St. Paul's Lutheran church and school, which are still important cultural and spiritual symbols for the people who live here. This seems appropriate, since spiritual and cultural concerns were what inspired a group of over 500 Wends (or Sorbs) to leave Germany in search of a new communal life in Texas. Serbin was the first of several Wendish settlements in Texas, and the congregation founded here is still seen as the mother congregation for those of Wendish extraction.

My grandfather grew up in Serbin, and I cannot recall a time when I did not know who the Wends were. This knowledge was made more personal by the fact that my first childhood memories are of another small town near Serbin, where my father served as a Lutheran minister. My family was thus integrated into the familial and spiritual network of German-Wendish communities that spread across several counties in the region. Even as a child I was aware that the Wends were not Germans, although their families had intermingled for several generations. Somehow I knew that the Kieschnicks and Boriacks were inexplicably distinct from the Birnbaums and Marburgers. They were friends, neighbors, and often cousins, yet a difference existed despite shared language and relations.

Familial and childhood influences profoundly shape the adult psyche; therefore it should have come as no surprise when I began to once again think about the Wends while an undergraduate student. For the first time, I began to wonder who they really were. Conversations with relatives and a little research on the Internet revealed that they were a tiny Slavic minority in eastern Germany, whose language and ethnic ties were much closer to the Czechs and Poles than to the Germans. From this point, I became curious about what happened to the Wends who did not immigrate to Texas in 1854. I knew nothing about them, but through familial connections I made contact with a researcher at the Sorbian¹ Institute in Bautzen, who kindly offered to help bring me to Germany to learn more. Through the generous financial support of the Tonya Foundation, I was able to spend three months at this institute in autumn 1998. Not only was this a time to grow intellectually, it was a time to learn about my own past and heritage. I was intrigued with this struggling and unknown culture and touched by the warmth shown to me because I was a Texas Wend.

My thesis topic grew out of my personal interest in and connection to the Sorbs. The specific focus on preservation issues within the context of Sorbian culture was the natural result of my program of study in the United States and my links to both Texas and Germany. In order to pursue this international topic, I applied for grants from both Rotary International and the Fulbright Commission. Unexpectedly I was awarded both grants and was able to use parts of both of them to achieve my goals. I lived in Dresden during the 2000-2001 academic year, while participating in a post-graduate program in historic preservation at the Technische Universität Dresden and researching my thesis topic. Since Bautzen is located only 50 miles east of Dresden, I was able to accomplish this double purpose with relative ease.

¹ As will be explained below, the Wends and Sorbs are the same people under different names. In Texas, the word "Wend" is still commonly used, while in Germany the word "Sorb" was adopted after World War II.

As I delved into my thesis topic, I ran across several obstacles that required me to re-conceptualize the direction of my research. First of all, the Sorbs have not possessed political autonomy in over a thousand years, and therefore must be studied as a culture acted upon and not as an independent entity. Furthermore, Lusatia, the region in which the Sorbs live, is also the home of many Germans, who actually make up the majority of the regional populace. The line between the two cultures is blurred at best, and sometimes it is necessary to write in regional terms, not ethnic ones. For example, although vernacular architectural forms exist in Lusatia, current scholarship does not recognize a distinct Sorbian style. Thus, I have chosen to address the impact of policy and actions on regional, district, and state levels, instead of on ethnic ones.

Since the focus of my thesis is on the years 1945 to 2001, the majority of this text deals with the policies of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Although multiple policies affected the success and failure of cultural and monument preservation among the Sorbs, I selected the ones that most directly influenced the rural life of Sorbian communities: historic preservation legislation, land reform and agricultural collectivization, and brown coal mining policy. When possible I have incorporated statistics and information that clearly reflect the impact of these policies on Sorbian culture. This has not been completely successful though, since I was unable to find figures for such things as the number of dispossessed Sorbian farmers in the 1950s or the magnitude of Sorbian architectural loss in World War II. The statistics from these periods are often not broken apart into ethnic subsets, making such comparative distinctions impossible.

Another determining factor was the amount of scholarly literature on the Sorbs, which is relatively limited due to the small size of the minority. Much of the literature on Sorbian culture focuses on language vitality and customs with little attention given to the

built environment. No comprehensive studies of historic sites of cultural significance have been written as of yet, although a survey of heritage sites is currently being compiled at the Sorbian Institute. Therefore, I had to examine larger-scale policies and trends in order to explain what factors were affecting Sorbian communities during my 56-year time span. Some of the information provided in the subsequent chapters is general in scope, because more specific information could not be attained at the time of my research.

I chose to deal with the issue of bias in secondary source material by relying heavily on studies and articles published after 1990. This decision was made because of the ideological slant and falsification present in works published and censored during the GDR period. I recognize the problem presented in current literature insofar as it is often prejudiced against the policies and accomplishments of the socialist era. Nevertheless, the statistics are more trustworthy, and the approach toward discussing the negative aspects of the GDR, such as demolition and assimilation practices, is more honest.

This study is by no means complete or exhaustive. Many other policies played a role in the preservation of Sorbian communities and community life, and other primary resources, such as Sorbian language newspapers, would have been informative if I had had the language skills to go through them. Subsequent researchers will hopefully be able to build upon the resource study nearing completion at the Sorbian Institute, as well as the general information provided in this thesis. My hope is that this thesis will contribute a little to the burgeoning interest in and dialogue about architectural and landscape preservation among the Sorbian people.

CHAPTER 1

AN ALMOST FORGOTTEN FOLK: AN INTRODUCTION TO SORBIAN CULTURE (COLONIZATION TO WORLD WAR II)

“We Sorbs, the smallest Slavic nation, have something unique, unmistakable, irreplaceable to bring to European culture – in Lusatia, the seam where Slavic and Germanic cultures meet.”
- Jan-Paul Nagel (1989)²

Once upon a time, long ago... It is all too easy to begin any introduction to the Sorbs with such a phrase. This is because their story is almost as unbelievable and heroic as any fairy tale. Americans are not the only ones who are ignorant as to the existence of this small Slavic folk; most Germans have never even heard of the Sorbs, although they have shared the same cultural space with them for the past millennium. The history of the regions known as Upper and Lower Lusatia³ (Figure 1) has been shaped by the relatively peaceful co-existence of these two ethnically unrelated groups of people.

In order to understand the historical development of Lusatia, one must look back into the early Middle Ages and examine the migration patterns of both the Germanic and the Slavic tribes⁴ at this time. Until ca.375 AD various Germanic tribes occupied the area now

² “Wir Sorben, das kleinste slawische Volk, haben Einmaliges, Unverwechselbares, Unersetzbares einzubringen in die Kultur Europas – in der Lausitz, an der Nahtstelle der slawischen und der germanischen Kultur.” Jan-Paul Nagel. “Überflug: 500 Jahre sorbische Kulturgeschichte in der sächsischen Oberlausitz.” *900-Jahr-Feier des Hauses Wettin: Festschrift*. Hans Assa v. Polenz and Gabriele v. Seydewitz. Bamberg: St. Otto-Verlag, 1989. 161-170. 161.

³ Upper Lusatia lies roughly within the eastern reaches of the state of Saxony, while Lower Lusatia falls within the state of Brandenburg. The term “Lusatia” will be employed throughout this document as a collective name for the entire region. Because of the bicultural nature of the region, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to separate German cultural influences and forms from Sorbian ones.

⁴ Since the modern-day Sorbs are the descendants of certain Slavic tribes that settled in Lusatia, a general history of the Slavic presence in Germanic lands will be described in this chapter.



Figure 1. Lusatia falls roughly within the rectangular box

known as eastern Germany.⁵ In the late fourth century, the tribes vacated this settlement area and headed west. They left empty a substantial area of land that was subsequently filled by Slavic⁶ tribes heading westward from the steppes of Russia during the fifth century. Because the land had already been abandoned, the ancestors of the Sorbs settled the area peacefully without having to resort to war. By the sixth century, several dozen Slavic tribes had settled in the former Germanic region, covering the territory between the Saale and Elbe Rivers in the west and the Quies, Neisse and Oder Rivers in the east.

During the early Middle Ages (sixth to eighth centuries AD), approximately fifty tribes dwelled in the region known as Lusatia (Figure 2). Among these tribes were the direct ancestors of the present-day Sorbs, the Milzeni and the Lusizi.⁷ Numerous castle mounds, in addition to ancient legends, attest to the power that the Slavs exerted at this time. Shortly after their arrival, fortresses sprang up across Lusatia, of which 200 have been documented.⁸ The Milzeni chose to build their main fortress, a so-called *Stammesburg*, in Budissin (the original name for the city of Bautzen), while the Lusizi constructed their stronghold in Liubusua, reputedly situated near the town of Lübben in the Spreewald. Each of the tribes was made up of approximately 8,000 tribal members, who were divided into thirty *Burgbezirke* (fortress districts). Each *Burgbezirk* was composed of several villages and was ruled by a chief. The oldest governmental system was based on blood lineage, but the collapse of this system already began in the eighth century when a shift in power resulted in village communities coming under the control of several large powerful families. Over this

⁵ Schulrat Scholtz (Ed.), *Heimatsbuch der Krises Hoyerswerda*, C. Zielke: Bad Liebeswerde, 1925. 26.

⁶ The Slavs are a particular branch of the Indo-European language family, which includes such ethnic groups and languages as Polish, Russian, Bulgarian, and Slovene, as well as Sorbian. Like the Romance languages, these languages have a common linguistic root base but are unique to themselves.

⁷ Peter Kunze, *Kurze Geschichte der Sorben*, Domowin-Verlag: Bautzen, 1995. 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.



Figure 2. Settlement areas of Slavic tribes between the Oder and Elbe Rivers

village network reigned a king, such as Miliduch, the famed Milzener king who fell in battle in 806 AD while defending his land against Charlemagne.⁹

As can be found in many, if not all, other societies, Slavic tribal culture underwent a maturing and expanding process. The Slavs not only traded among themselves and their neighbors, they established contacts as far away as Scandinavia, Arabia, and Byzantium.¹⁰ The Milzeni had wisely settled near the intersection between the Spree River and the ancient trade route between Cologne and Kiev. The proximity to already established transportation routes was conducive to developing long distance trade networks.¹¹ The Slavs were obviously well on their way to creating a strong, stable society with significant trade partners in other parts of the world, when this development came to a premature end.

Large-scale migratory patterns once again reconfigured the social constellation that had taken root in Lusatia and beyond. The unavoidable end of self-determined social progress came in the form of the returning Germanic tribes, with the first military conflicts between the Slavs and the Germans beginning in the late eighth century. In 805 AD, Charlemagne started an eight-year campaign against the Slavs, during which period he defeated many of the tribes. It took two hundred years for the last Slavic tribe to lose its independence, but eventually the Germanic tribes won the campaign and gained unchallenged control of the area.¹² The battles that raged in the ninth and tenth centuries wreaked havoc on the cultural fabric of the Sorbs and resulted in the destruction of hundreds of Sorbian fortresses and villages. Many Sorbian nobles were killed, while others were pressed into service to work for the new Germanic overlords. According to legend,

⁹ Martin Salowski, *An der Via Benmonis: Bilder aus der sorbischen katholischen Lausitz*, Domowina-Verlag: Bautzen, 1993. 11.

¹⁰ Kunze, 10.

¹¹ *A little Guide to the Sorbs/Wends of Germany*, (informational brochure), 1.

¹² Kunze, 12.

one of the bloodiest battles between the Franks and the Slavs occurred near Koschenburg, a Slavic burial and sacrificial site. Here in 923 AD the Franks routed the Slavs, killing their king and putting the enemy troops to flight. Initially, the Slavs were only tribute bound to the Franks, but soon they became the subjects and serfs of the new overlords.¹³

With their subjugation, the Sorbs¹⁴ ceased to exert any economic or political power. They became the serf class and experienced the gradual devaluation of their language and culture in the hands of the Germans¹⁵. As the Germanic landholdings and population expanded, the Sorbian language territory shrank substantially (Figures 3 & 4). No language prohibition was enforced in Lusatia, but more than one city outside of the region effectively banned the use of the language within its city walls. For example, the use of Sorbian in Meissen was declared punishable by death in the fifteenth century.¹⁶ Other cities such as Dresden, Leipzig and Halle soon followed suit. Although the Sorbs were relegated to outcasts in German urban culture, they continued to constitute the majority in the Lusatian countryside until the mid-nineteenth century. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, the Germans founded numerous new towns, including Wittichenau, Hoyerswerda and Bad Muskau, which were predominantly occupied by Sorbs.

The Sorbs may have found themselves living as a subjugated people, yet they managed to preserve their culture, thanks in part to their ability to remain in Lusatia in relatively coherent groups. Bautzen, the former Milzeni capital, continued to be the home of

¹³ Scholtz, 31.

¹⁴ For the remainder of this paper, the term “Sorbs” will be used to refer to the descendants of the Milzeni and Lusizi, who maintained their ethnic and linguistic independence after the conquest.

¹⁵ The word “Germans” is used loosely here as a general designation for the various Germanic tribes. No centralized German state existed prior to 1871.

¹⁶ Kunze, 19.



Figure 3. Sorbian language territory in the early seventeenth century



Figure 4. Current boundaries of the Sorbian language territory

many Sorbs. According to a census from the fifteenth century, of the 800 properties listed in Bautzen, 260 of them belonged to Sorbs.¹⁷ Street names, such as Wendische Straße and Wendischer Grabe, indicate neighborhoods which were predominantly Sorbian in composition.¹⁸

The fact that some Sorbs were property owners does not mean that they held positions of influence within society. By the fourteenth century, the owners of all large estates in Lusatia were exclusively German. Most Sorbs were involved in agriculture, village handicrafts, beekeeping or forestry cultivation and management.¹⁹ As the Germans transformed themselves into an urban culture, the Sorbs remained predominantly rural in their customs and traditions. The whims of European politics ignored the presence of the Sorbs in Lusatia, and by 1815, the Sorbs were divided by the boundaries of two opposing German states. 80% of the Sorbian populace fell under Prussian rule, while 20% were located within Saxony.²⁰ The Prussians proved to be the harsher rulers, imposing stringent Germanization measures in schoolroom and sanctuary. The goal was to assimilate the Sorbs into the larger German culture as quickly as possible, using the community institutions of church and school. The fact that the 80% / 20% split between Prussia²¹ and Saxony is currently reversed, with Saxony now holding 80% of the present-day Sorbian population within its borders, reflects the success of Prussia's measures.

The nineteenth century in Europe was characterized by romanticism and nationalism, both of which significantly altered Sorbian culture. Although the Sorbian

¹⁷ Salowski, 28.

¹⁸ Prior to World War II, the Sorbs were known as "Wends" among the Germans. The German word "Wenden" was taken from Latin and was specifically applied to the Lusatian Slavs and their language. The reason that "Sorb" eventually replaced "Wend" will be explained in the context of the Third Reich.

¹⁹ Joachim Herrmann (Ed.), *Die Slaven in Deutschland: Geschichte und Kultur der slawischen Stämme westlich von der Oder und Neisse von 6. bis 12. Jahrhundert*, Akademie-Verlag: Berlin, 1985. 455.

²⁰ Nagel, 161.

²¹ The state of Brandenburg is, in this case, used as the geographic inheritor of Prussian land.

educated class had its roots in the Enlightenment, it was not until the 1800s that its numbers burgeoned. Along with the rise of an intelligentsia came the founding of Sorbian newspapers, publishing houses, choral societies, and theaters, which flourished during the mid-nineteenth century under the more lenient rule of the Saxons and to a lesser extent in Prussia. It is from this period that one can actually speak of a Sorbian ethnic consciousness, which owed much to the other pan-Slavic national awakenings that were simultaneously occurring in parts of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and in Poland.

A wave of national pride swept through Lusatia and made many Sorbs aware of the worth of their language and ethnicity for the first time. The Domowina, an umbrella organization and forum for Sorbian cultural activities, was founded to provide a forum and official voice for Sorbian cultural concerns. In 1904 the *Wendisches Haus* (Wendish House) was constructed in Bautzen to accommodate various cultural societies, the Domowina publishing and printing house, the Sorbian library and archives, the Sorbian National Museum, and a café. This building became the center of Sorbian cultural life and a symbol of new ethnic identity. The trend toward cultural re-assessment continued through World War I, at the end of which the Sorbian intelligentsia sought to gain the attention of Woodrow Wilson and other world leaders in an effort to secede from Germany. As their relations with their “cousins”, the Czechs, had always been better than those with the Germans, they hoped to annex Lusatia to the new country of Czechoslovakia.²² These efforts failed, and as had long been the case, Lusatia remained within the German sphere.

With the rise of Hitler’s Third Reich, the Sorbs experienced the harshest persecution and intolerance yet. They were not slated for annihilation, like the Jews or Poles, but they

²² Lusatia once belonged to the Czech kingdom of Bohemia during the Middle Ages. Relations with the Czechs continued to blossom even after Lusatia returned to German hands. In 1706 the Wendish Seminary for Catholic priests was established in Prague, thus strengthening the bonds between the Sorbs and the Czechs even more.

were put under extreme pressure to give up their cultural independence. This had begun as early as 1920, when the so-called *Wendenabteilung* (Wendish Department) was established by the county authorities in Bautzen to monitor the activities of the Sorbs, whose nationalistic movement was declared to be an enemy of the state.²³ The Wendish Department was responsible for completing the assimilation process among the intransigent Sorbs. In 1937 the Nazis prohibited all uses of the Sorbian language and the observance of Sorbian customs in public. All Sorbian institutions were closed, and the Domowina was forbidden. Many Sorbian teachers and pastors from both Lutheran and Roman Catholic confessions were replaced with German colleagues, who were instructed not to tolerate any deviation from the use of German.

In 1945, the Sorbs once again hoped for a major change in the handling of their affairs. By the end of World War II, approximately 100,000 individuals declared themselves Sorbian.²⁴ Roughly 50% of these were employed as independent farmers, while few could actually be described as “workers” in the industrial sense of the word. Sorbian culture in the early twentieth century remained primarily agricultural and rural in nature, and the Sorbs comprised 15% of the total population in Lusatia.²⁵ Recent history had reinforced the conviction of some members of the intelligentsia that they could expect little good from the German authorities. They once again approached the Allied Powers and requested annexation to Czechoslovakia. As will be examined more closely in the next chapter, the Soviet occupation authorities had a very different agenda in mind. With uncertain hope in the new order and age-old distrust of German authority, the Sorbs found themselves once again the pawns of world politics as the Cold War dawned across Europe.

²³ *Die Sorben in Bautzen* (informational brochure), 2000. 8.

²⁴ Unlike the Germans, the Sorbs do not base ethnicity on blood, but on self-declaration and language ability.

²⁵ Wolf Oschlies, *Die Sorben – Slawisches Volk im Osten Deutschlands*. Forum Deutsche Einheit: Perspektiven und Argumente, Nr.5, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung: Bonn, 1991. 32.

CHAPTER 2

MIXED BLESSINGS: THE SORBS IN THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC²⁶ (1945-1990)

“Our heart, the Sorbian family, is threatened! It is our holy duty to heal it before our entire Sorbian nation sickens and dies. The hour that strikes today requires that all conscientious Sorbs focus their energy on this.” - Josef Nowak (1956)²⁷

Lusatia and with it the entire Sorbian folk awoke one morning and realized that they no longer belonged to a united Germany but instead to the Soviet Occupation Zone (SOZ). As a means of preventing Germany from rising again as it had after World War I, the country had been divided into four zones, each of which was administered by a different Allied power. Berlin, the city that most clearly symbolized German culture in microcosm, was also partitioned into four districts. Boundaries were reconfigured, and the once powerful German nation was downgraded from being the Third Reich to being a conquered, occupied country. Soon relations between the Allies deteriorated and the border between the Soviet Zone and that of the other three zones became part of Winston Churchill’s “Iron Curtain.” What emerged from this development was a divided German state and two related yet divergent cultures.

In the late 1940s, all of the zones focused on rebuilding and reconstruction. For the Sorbs, the years 1945 and 1946 did not reflect any substantial alteration to the official

²⁶ This is the official name for the country that was known as East Germany in the United States. Technically the GDR did not come into existence until 1949. Between 1945 and 1949, the area was known as the Soviet Occupation Zone and was not autonomously governed until 1949. For ease of explanation, the heading of “GDR” is used as a designation for the geographic area that would eventually become the GDR.

²⁷ “Unser Herz, die sorbische Familie ist bedroht! Es zu heilen, bevor unser ganzes sorbisches Volk erkrankt und stirbt, ist unsere heilige Pflicht! Alle Kräfte anspannen, das erfordert heute die Stunde von allen bewußten Sorben.” Josef Nowak, “Die Sorbische Familie – das Herz des Volkes”, *Nova Doba* Nr. 243, October 17, 1956.

regulation of their cultural concerns. The police often disrupted Sorbian gatherings; the distribution of Sorbian fliers and posters were hindered; Sorbs were arbitrarily arrested on trumped-up charges; and the press was decidedly anti-Sorbian in its reporting.²⁸ The result of this behavior was renewed efforts among the Sorbian intelligentsia for political autonomy or annexation to Czechoslovakia. The Czechs offered both moral and financial support for these endeavors. Although letters were sent to the United Nations and to the occupation authorities, the demands can only be described as unrealistic in the light of increasing Cold War tensions. Joseph Stalin was not interested in altering power structures more than was necessary. In addition, it must be remembered that only one in five of the residents in Lusatia was actually Sorbian.²⁹ Most of the people were German and had no desire to find themselves attached to their Czechoslovak neighbors.

An added element in this conglomeration was the distrust with which the communist leaders initially viewed the Sorbs and the Domowina. Following its re-establishment in 1945 the Domowina was accused of pursuing a “harmful and dangerous political course” with “nationalistic, separatist goals.”³⁰ These goals were perceived as being at odds with the socialist goals of a united workers’ culture. The Domowina subsequently came under the increasing dominance of the Socialist Unity Party (SUP), the main political party in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), and was firmly under party control by 1948.³¹

Despite the initial distrust and harsh treatment of the Sorbs, the SUP authorities began to institute positive measures in the late 1940s. The Sorbian language was once again allowed in schools, the newspapers *Nova Doba* and *Nowy Casnik* were re-licensed for

²⁸ Kunze, 66.

²⁹ In 1945 Lusatia was divided into eleven counties. Saxony included Bautzen-Land, Bautzen-City, Kamenz, Löbau and Weißwasser. The counties in Mark Brandenburg were Calau, Cottbus-Land, Cottbus-City, Guben-Land, and Spremberg.

³⁰ Quoted in Oschlies, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 51

circulation, book publication and production were permitted, the Sorbian *Volkstheater* was founded, and Sorbian radio programs began to be aired. The decision by the Sorbs to abandon the word “Wend” and to be henceforth known as the “Sorbs” was also inextricably linked to the hopeful post-war period. For generations the Germans had consistently used “Wend” in a derogatory manner, and thus the Sorbs asked to be called “Sorbs”, a word more closely related to what the people call themselves in their own language (“serb”).

The legal rights of the Sorbs to cultural independence and development were guaranteed in the *Law for the Protection of the Rights of the Sorbian People*³², which was passed in Saxony in 1948 and in Brandenburg in 1950. These laws proved to be the strongest legal guarantees to equal rights that had yet been passed by a German state. The GDR Constitutions of 1949, 1968 and 1974 also assured the equal rights of the Sorbs.³³ With these laws in hand and the substantial financial resources offered to them by the SUP, the Sorbs received the first-ever official governmental support for their social endeavors.

Many cultural, educational and research opportunities were made possible in the 1950s, resulting in an unprecedented upswing in Sorbian culture. 1956 witnessed the construction of the *Haus der Sorben* (Sorbian House) in Bautzen to replace the Wendish House that had been destroyed the previous decade. Over the years, Bautzen (Figure 5) won increasing importance as the Sorbian cultural “capital city.” The city was not only the location of the Sorbian Research Institute, the Domowina and the Sorbian National Theater, but it also hosted annual music and dance folk festivals and accommodated various choral societies. Sorbian costumes and holidays – such as the Corpus Christi procession (Figure 6) and the Birds’ Wedding (Figure 7) – could once again be celebrated without fear of

³² *Gesetz zur Wahrung der Rechte der sorbischen Bevölkerung*

³³ The GDR was officially founded on October 7, 1949.



Figure 5. Bautzen



Figure 6. Corpus Christi procession



Figure 7. Children dressed for the Birds' Wedding

persecution. Official recognition of the uniqueness and value of Sorbian culture was also reflected in GDR-wide symbols such as postage stamps (Figure 8). The re-opening of the Sorbian Museum (Figure 9) was yet another hard-won victory in the legitimization of Sorbian culture.

The generous support from the SUP seemed too good to be true, and in some ways it was. Widespread local opinion held that the Sorbs were being used by the state as a “puppet” minority. This belief reflected mounting awareness of how the socialist party functioned and cynicism as to the purpose of its generosity. The SUP had its own agenda and used the Sorbs in a none-too-subtle manner as a means to reach it. The Domowina and other Sorbian institutions were tightly bound to the political structure and were not allowed to deviate far from the party line. Under this pressure, the Domowina’s new ideological goal was not to preserve Sorbian culture, but to produce “true socialist patriots and an international proletariat.”³⁴ Even the relatively innocuous Sorbian music festivals were increasingly used as opportunities to demonstrate the political prowess and generosity of the SUP.³⁵ The plan was to show the Sorbs how much more important it was to be good, contributing members of GDR society than it was to be a separate ethnic group. The rigid dogmas of Marxist-Leninism demanded that ethnic / national interests be abandoned to build a strong, united workers’ class.³⁶

³⁴ “wahrhaften sozialistischen Patrioten und proletarischen Internationalisten.” Quoted in Klaus J. Schiller and Manfred Thiemann. *Geschichte der Sorben. Band 4: von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, Bautzen: Domowina-Verlag, 1979. 254.

³⁵ Oschlies’ criticism of the Festivals of Sorbian Culture, which began in 1966, is particularly biting: “In reality they were doubly detrimental to Sorbian culture: because they confirmed the GDR-wide belief that limitless money was made available to the Sorbs and because the image of the Sorbs as a continuously dancing, singing, Easter egg painting and bagpipe playing folk, that did not need to be taken seriously by the solid German, was reinforced.” 62.

³⁶ Kunze, 69.



Figure 8. GDR stamps with images of Sorbian customs



Figure 9. Sorbian Museum, Bautzen

Few Sorbs spoke up in protest against the misuse of their culture. Although the devastating years of the Third Reich were over, the Sorbs were still subjects under a totalitarian regime that tolerated little dissidence. The communists were an acknowledged improvement over the Nazis, yet both groups shared a mutual distrust of dissent and non-conformity.

Pastor Josef Nowak was one Sorb who did not quietly accept the state of affairs as far as the preservation of Sorbian culture was concerned. From his pulpit and in the newspaper *Nova Doba*, he eloquently encouraged his fellow Sorbs not to blindly follow the dictates of their leaders.

Some will dispute me: “But we have our Sorbian elementary schools, our Sorbian high schools, we have our Domowina groups, which should care for the education of the children and adults.” Of course, we have them and we need them. However my concrete question is: “What has happened to the Sorbian substance today? Is our culture thriving? Do more people speak Sorbian today than they did in 1945? Have the Sorbs increased in numbers since 1945?” I think that for the most part we must sink our heads and beat our breasts while acknowledging that despite the progressiveness, we are not advancing. Instead, we are retreating.³⁷

Nowak did not get off lightly for making such an impassioned plea. He was sharply criticized by the socialists, who called his published statement a “defense of fascism” and “an aid for West German militarism.”³⁸ Until the 1980’s, Nowak remained relatively alone in his pessimistic opinion about the end results of SUP policy.

As time passed the true goals of the SUP revealed themselves. During the 1960’s, the efforts to promote Sorbian culture no longer received the attention they had ten years

³⁷ “Mancher wird mir entgegenhalten: ‘Aber wir haben unsere sorbischen Grundschulen, unsere sorbischen Oberschulen, wir haben unsere Domowina-Gruppen, welche die Kinder und Erwachsenen bilden sollen.’ Freilich haben wir sie und wir brauchen sie. Doch meine Frage lautet konkret: ‘Was ist heute mit der sorbischen Substanz, nimmt unser Volkstum zu, sprechen heute mehr Leute sorbisch als 1945, haben die Sorben seit 1945 zugenommen?’ Ich glaube, da werden wir heute zu einem großen Teil den Kopf senken müssen und ans Herz schlagend bekennen: Bei aller Fortschrittlichkeit schreiten wir nicht vorwärts, sondern wir gehen zurück.”

³⁸ Quoted in Kunze, 70.

before. Consideration and money were openly channeled into efforts to produce good socialists, and the media began to treat all cultural efforts on the part of the Sorbs as reactionary. Mercin Nowak-Njehornski, the most famous Sorbian artist of the twentieth century, bemoaned the alternating negativism and silence that was adopted by the media:

It hurts us..., when we see, how they distrust our honest striving for the power to develop our homeland, to contribute something to our fatherland, when they do not report a single word about our activities and successes to the public.³⁹

The Domowina, which supposedly represented the interests of the Sorbian people, assigned responsibility for many cultural activities directly to the SUP. In 1970 Kurt Krjenc, the head of the Domowina, succinctly encapsulated the purposeful inactivity of the Domowina:

The Domowina will not support the assimilation, but it will also not stand in its way. Naturally we ourselves have supported the industrialization process und we will continue to support it without paying any attention to the fact that this undeniably threatens the Sorbian national substance.⁴⁰

Krjenc obviously placed his good standing as a socialist above his position as a Sorb. The author Jurij Brezan recorded his own recollection of seeing this official leader of the Sorbian people:

Even today I can still see him before me, as full of pride he presented his newest realization. We Sorbs are not a real nation because we do not bear all of the characteristics that, according to Stalin, we have to have in order to be one. We are instead an ethnic remnant and have no claim to the rights that are allowed “real” peoples.⁴¹

³⁹ “Uns schmerzt es..., wenn wir sehen, wie sie unser ehrliches Mühen nach Kräften zur Entwicklung unserer Heimat, unseres Vaterlandes beizutragen, mißachten, wenn sie von unseren Taten und Erfolgen nicht mit einem Wort in die Öffentlichkeit Notiz nehmen.” Quoted in Oschlies, 61.

⁴⁰ “Die Domowina wird die Assimilierung nicht unterstützen, aber sie wird sich ihr auch nicht entgegenstellen. Wir haben selbstverständlich den Prozeß der Industrialisierung selbst unterstützt und wir werden ihn auch weiterhin unterstützen, ohne Rücksicht darauf, daß er objektiv die sorbische nationale Substanz bedroht.” Quoted in Kunze, 69-70.

⁴¹ “Noch heute sehe ich ihn vor mir, wie er...voller Stolz seine neuste Erkenntnis darlegte, daß wir Sorben kein Volk seien, weil nicht alle Merkmale, die laut Stalin ein solches ausmachten, auf uns zuträfen, sondern ein Restvolk, und also keinen Anspruch hätten auf die Rechte, die jener einem Volk zubilligte.” Quoted in Oschlies, 52.

Although SUP support for Sorbian cultural institutions continued during the 1970's and 1980's, the significance and effectiveness of this support was obviously compromised by the conflicting goals presented by party politics.

With the dawning of Gorbachov's *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the mid-1980's, the GDR also experienced a thawing period. The Domowina recognized the existence of unresolved conflicts and unsatisfactory solutions and engaged itself more intently in Sorbian cultural matters. The organization even began a dialogue with representatives of the Catholic and Lutheran churches, something that had been unthinkable in the chilly midst of socialist-enforced atheism.⁴² Thus, on the eve of the collapse of the GDR, the Sorbs were witnessing a loosening of old boundaries. Even though this was the case, no one predicted the collapse of the Berlin Wall or the profound cultural changes that that event would create.

⁴² The Catholic area in Upper Lusatia remained staunchly religious despite efforts to break the influence of the church. Today the Catholic region around Panschwitz-Kuckau remains the most solid stronghold of Sorbian culture in Lusatia.

CHAPTER 3

MEMORIES OF A TROUBLED PAST: HISTORIC PRESERVATION LEGISLATION IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC

“The history of monument conservation in Germany in the period of post-war reconstruction still has to be written. If it is ever done, it will be a tale of a collective nervous breakdown, an identity crisis that remains unsolved to the present day.”
- Wim Denslagen (1994)⁴³

In order to more fully understand the forces that influenced the preservation of Sorbian culture, one must examine the governmental policies that affected land use planning in Germany.⁴⁴ The most pertinent legislation was that which set the parameters for preservation activities.

The history of *Denkmalschutz* (monument preservation) in Germany is a divided one, shaped by both the Iron Curtain and the collapse of Communism in the dramatic events of 1989. As a result, when analyzing the development of preservation legislation in the post-World War II era, one must examine the evolution of *Denkmalschutz* in the two separate German states. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the history of preservation law in both countries, concluding with a description of current preservation legislation.

The history of German preservation philosophy and activity begins in the nineteenth century and was propelled by the same Romantic impulse that drove preservation

⁴³ Wim Denslagen, *Architectural Restoration in Western Europe* 146 (Architecture and Natura Press 1994).

⁴⁴ Since the current preservation laws in the eastern states are modeled on those that were established in the FRG during the 1970's, both sets of laws will be discussed in this chapter.

movements in other European countries. An anti-scrape school of thought emerged in the late 1800's, and conservation, not restoration, became the preferred mode of treatment for historic structures.⁴⁵ Unlike England and France, no federal preservation law was drafted in Germany during this period. Despite this fact, popular interest in preservation grew, and societies were founded for the sole purpose of promoting architectural and heritage preservation. The first *Denkmalpflege*tag (Monument Preservation Day) was held in 1900 and was hosted annually until 1925 by the *Gesamtverein der deutschen Geschichts- und Altertumsvereine* (the Collective Society of German History and Heritage Organizations).⁴⁶ The major turning point in preservation came with the mass destruction of World War II. "Conserve" could no longer be the motto of preservationists in the face of the extensive devastation of the German cultural landscape. Out of the rubble emerged two German states, each of which dealt with the issue of rebuilding and reconstruction in different ways.

A. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG)

In the aftermath of World War II, which had been brought about by a powerful centralized dictatorship, the government of the FRG favored the diffuse delegation of many legislative duties to the federal states over the enactment of sweeping federal legislation.⁴⁷ This official decentralization of power dates from 1949, when the FRG Constitution was

⁴⁵ The so-called "anti-scrape" philosophy advocated preserving historic buildings in their entirety and not removing the "layers" of the past (alterations, additions, etc.). The "scrape" position promoted the restoration of buildings to their appearance at a particular point in time (Colonial Williamsburg). For more information, see Stephan Tschudi-Madsen, *Restoration and Anti-Restoration: A Study in English Restoration Philosophy*, 2nd Edition, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1976.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴⁷ All information on the preservation laws of the FRG is taken from Margaret Thomas Will, *Historic Preservation in Foreign Countries: Federal Republic of Germany, Switzerland and Austria*, Robert Stipe, Ed. (United States Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites 1984) and Council of Europe, *Monument Preservation in Europe* (Kluwer-Deventer 1979).

written.⁴⁸ Article 70 of the *Kulturrecht* (Cultural Law) specifically allotted the power to draft preservation legislation to the states. As a result of this autonomy, states and municipalities directly guided the rebuilding of cities and towns during the 1950's and 1960's. However, it was not until after the West German economy stabilized and grew (the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* [Economic Miracle]) that the ten states plus West Berlin passed *Denkmalschutz* legislation. Although each state drafted its own laws, there is remarkable similarity in the regulations, partly due to the fact that they were all written in the brief span of years between 1971 and 1980. These laws with relatively minor revisions continue to function as the defining legislation in the western states to the present day.

One similarity between the state laws is the definition ascribed to the word “monument.” A monument is defined as “a manmade (or cultural) object, group of objects or piece of an object that is of such historical, scientific or artistic value that its preservation is within the interests of the general public.”⁴⁹ All the states use a variation of this definition as a standard to determine which sites and artifacts fall under the law. Within this definition, three types of monuments are distinguished:

1. built monuments and gardens;
2. ground sites⁵⁰; and
3. moveable artifacts (art works, books, documents, etc.)

⁴⁸ The unification of the German state did not occur until 1871. Prior to this time, Germany was composed of numerous principalities and duchies. Therefore one can interpret the decentralization policies of the FRG after World War II as not merely a reaction to the Third Reich, but as an expression of Germany's long history of autonomous principalities. All preservation laws prior to 1945 had been administered on the state and local levels, thus the decentralized approach also represented a continuation of the older, more traditional legislative framework. Will, 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁰ *Bodendenkmäler* include artifacts buried in the ground and archaeological sites, as well as walls, graves, mounds, etc.

The land surrounding monuments is also covered by the state laws, although the exact definition of “surroundings”⁵¹ is often not clear or specific. In addition, ensembles, such as plazas, parks and streetscapes, are incorporated into the legislation.

Variation in the state laws can be seen in the context of age limitations and monument registration. In some states, a specific standard, such as thirty or fifty years, sets the age parameters for monuments that are protected. On the other hand, Bavaria, Schleswig-Holstein and Rhineland-Palatinate assert that a site must belong to a “closed epoch” before it can be considered a monument. Each of these states defines “closed epoch” differently.⁵²

As for monument registration, most laws only offer protection to sites registered on an official public list, often kept by the State Preservation Office. Objects and sites are registered by the preservation authorities or by application from property owners. Prior to the actual listing, the owners of the nominated monuments must be notified. After the official notification of listing, a period of one month is set aside as a discussion period, so that owners can express their views and file protests if desired. Local and regional authorities are also allowed to submit observations during this period. While this consultation process is underway, most states allow temporary listing, which carries the same legal weight as regular listing. In many states, listing places certain restrictions and expectations on the property owners. The laws of Lower Saxony, Bavaria and Saarland are somewhat different in that their protection covers all monuments that meet the definition of “monument” without regard to designation. As a result, listing in these states bears no regulatory weight but serves merely an honorary purpose. Besides the issue of protection,

⁵¹ The definition of *Umgebung* corresponds with the U.S. National Park Service’s concept of “setting”.

⁵² For example, in Bavaria, the end of World War II is considered the boundary date for historical significance.

the composition of the lists differs from state to state. For example, natural monuments (caves, waterfalls, etc.) are included on some lists and not on others.

The responsibilities of the owners or administrative bodies of listed and/or protected sites are rather extensive and require consultation with preservation authorities on various occasions. Every state law contains a provision whereby the owners of monuments are obligated to notify authorities and to apply for permits before:

- demolishing, repairing, restoring, or otherwise altering a built monument or a structure within a protected ensemble;
- removing a built monument from its original site; or
- substantially altering the surroundings of a monument.⁵³

Alterations done without a permit may result in the owners being required to pay for the restoration of the site to its previous condition. The discovery of an archaeological site, as well as any alteration or excavation of such a site, must also be reported to the public authorities.

Site maintenance is covered by the state laws as well. Owners of public and private monuments are required to maintain and repair their structures. The specific kind of maintenance is spelled out clearly in all the laws and the particular measures must be “reasonable”.⁵⁴ If a property owner is unable to pay for the maintenance work, each state is authorized to commission the work and to assume the corresponding costs. In addition to maintenance, property owners are usually obligated to comply with periodic site inspections performed by state preservation authorities. Any damage to a site or structure must be reported immediately. Some states also compel owners to report the sale of listed

⁵³ Will, 22.

⁵⁴ If a property owner interprets the required maintenance measures as unreasonable, he/she may file suit against the preservation authorities. The courts then decide whether or not the complaint is valid and who should pay for the maintenance.

properties. Of the ten FRG states, three of them reserve the right of first refusal on the sale of privately owned monuments. Refusal to adhere to the *Denkmalschutz* requirements results in fines ranging from DM 20,000 to 1,000,000 (approximately \$8,000 – \$400,000).

Expropriation is another issue addressed in the state laws. Each state reserves the right to expropriate historic properties after the payment of adequate compensation. Expropriation is considered justified if it is the only means of maintaining the exterior of a monument, of preserving the object, or of pursuing scholarly research or excavation of the site. Despite this right, expropriation can only take place when public interests are served by such an action. The state courts hear disputed cases and determine whether an action is the state's "social and legal responsibility" or if it has resulted in an actual taking without just reason.

Under the auspices of state legislation, the administrative structure of preservation practice is set up in one of two ways. The first type of system is a three-tiered administrative framework: the lower authority is composed of communities and counties; the higher authority is headquartered in a regional office; the supervising authority is administered through a state ministry. Other states have a two-level system in which the middle (regional) authority does not exist. The authorities are responsible for two distinct categories of preservation activities. *Denkmalpflege* entails the continuing care, use and guardianship of monuments. This is dealt with by the *Landesdenkmalamt* (State Conservation Office), which also acts as the professional advisory board to other government agencies and entities.⁵⁵ The state office also supervises the registration of monuments on official state lists, the inspection of restoration work in progress, the dispensation of technical advice, the distribution of loans and grants, and the promotion of research and publications.

⁵⁵ The State Conservation Office often, but not always, falls under the jurisdiction of the State Ministries of Culture.

Denkmalschutz covers the actual protection of monuments and the related administrative matters. This includes the implementation of legislative and authoritative prohibitions and regulations. *Denkmalschutz* falls under the auspices of the government offices that deal with building matters. Margaret Thomas Will explains the marked distinction between *Denkmalschutz* and *Denkmalpflege* in the following way: “The separation of monument preservation from monument care in Germany is based on the principle that building authorities are more suited than the State Conservation Office to make an objective decision concerning the extent to which conservation of a historic monument is in the best interests of the general public.”⁵⁶

State laws include further provisions for property use, design guidelines and public funding. Although not covered in every state law, uses of a monument that could potentially damage it are forbidden by certain states. As for design guidelines, the power to establish such restrictions is granted to communities and local governments. The exact nature and extent of these restrictions is not spelled out in the legislation. The State Conservation Offices administer grant programs with widely varying budgets. Prior to Reunification in 1990, the FRG offered additional financial aid to property owners who lived in economically depressed areas located within 40 kilometers of the GDR or Czechoslovakia to help defray the costs of maintenance and preservation work.

Despite the fact that no federal *Denkmalschutz* law exists, other federal laws deal indirectly with the issue of monument preservation. The 1960 *Bundesbaugesetz* (Federal Building Law) permits local authorities to restrict development in such a way that it benefits the townscape. Communities are also obliged to take preservation into consideration and to consult with State Conservation Offices when planning for future change and development.

⁵⁶ Will, 28.

In 1971 the *Städtebauförderungsgesetz* (Urban Development Law) was passed, which provides the basis for joint federal, state and local revitalization programs. Plans for designated renewal areas must take into account the “preservation of buildings, streets, squares or districts of historic, artistic or urban design value.”⁵⁷ The 1977 Amendment to this law allowed for:

- modernization, through which owners could be required to make property improvements;
- designation of preservation areas (*Erhaltungsbereiche*) that were not necessarily ensembles of monument quality, but in which demolition, construction or alteration of properties could be regulated; and
- specification of uses allowed in buildings under private ownership.

Lastly the *Gesetz zur Besichtigung des Denkmalschutzes im Bundesrecht* (Law for the Consideration of Monument Preservation by Federal Agencies) was passed in 1980 and requires that federal agencies give preservation special consideration in their projects.

Tax legislation provides incentives for private preservation work. The 1977 *Gesetz zur Erhaltung und Modernisierung kulturhistorisch und städtebaulich wertvolle Gebäude* (Law for the Maintenance and Modernization of Buildings of Cultural and Urban Worth) set the guidelines for this tax program. Rehabilitation and restoration costs can be deducted over a ten-year period. The amount of deduction cannot exceed 10% of the total amount of income taxes per year. Maintenance costs may be deducted over a period of two to five years. Monuments whose preservation is deemed to be of public interest are taxed at 40% of their market value. Total exemption may be claimed if the monument is accessible to the public, if the owner agrees to abide by all decisions made by the State Conservation Office, and if the monument has been in the owner’s family for at least twenty years. Inheritance

⁵⁷ Ibid., 42.

tax provisions also provided incentive, since they can be reduced by as much as 60% for owners of accessible monuments.

Most of the above-mentioned provisions and regulations apply to churches, as well as to other sites, although certain exemptions do exist. For example, the State cannot expropriate church property under any circumstance. The public authorities are also obligated to take liturgical needs into consideration whenever dealing with churches.

In general one can characterize the German preservation movement in the FRG as being solely a matter of the public sector. Citizen initiatives are usually organized around specific threats or aims and are then quickly disbanded upon the achievement of agreed-upon goals. Grass-roots organizations, such as those in the United States, Britain or Switzerland, have contributed very little to the shaping of preservation trends in the FRG.

B. The German Democratic Republic (GDR)

The main difference between the legislation in the FRG and that in the GDR was the fact that the latter developed an over-arching federal preservation law (*Zur Erhaltung der Denkmale in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik – Denkmalschutzgesetz*) in 1975. This coincided with the strongly centralized nature of the GDR's political structure, in which the SUP controlled all aspects of society through multiple organizations and affiliated political parties. Like the FRG, the GDR was faced with the need for widespread reconstruction in the years immediately following World War II. During the 1950's, preservation projects progressed from concentrating on individual landmarks to addressing the needs of integrated urban ensembles. The goal was to develop sites that would improve the spiritual and cultural lives of the East German people. Projects during the 1950's and 1960's were guided

by two provisional regulations: the *Vorordnung zur Erhaltung und Pflege der nationalen Kulturdenkmale* (Provisionary Regulation for the Maintenance and Care of National Cultural Monuments) (1952) and the *Vorordnung über die Pflege und das Schutz der Denkmale* (Provisionary Regulation for the Care and Protection of Monuments) (1961). In September 1954, the Institute for Monument Preservation was founded in East Berlin to supervise and guide preservation projects in the GDR.

In the GDR, preservation, like most other cultural activities, was inseparably linked to the Socialist party and its ideology. The GDR Constitution (Article 18) ascribed all responsibility for guiding and nurturing art and culture to the central governing body. These responsibilities included: the leadership and planning of spiritual and cultural life; the encouragement of citizen involvement in cultural activities; the implementation of cultural activities; the promotion of art; the administration of cultural institutions (museums, theaters, etc.); and the protection of the cultural heritage and preservation of cultural and artistic treasures.⁵⁸ An emphasis on scientific principles came to dominate the way preservation was implemented.⁵⁹ Even the Institute for Monument Preservation was described as being “scientifically directed.” Preservation was persistently interpreted as a tool whereby socialist consciousness could be shaped among the populace. An article published in the GDR law journal *Staat und Recht* included the following statement: “The existence of all cultural treasures of national and international importance serve the development of the national socialist culture and the enrichment of world culture, which is not insignificantly threatened in our age by subversive capitalist production activities.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Henry Huetschenreuter / Bernd Klemann, „Zur rechtlichen Regelung von Kultur und kulturell-künstlerischer Tätigkeit“, 35 *Staat und Recht* 375 (1986).

⁵⁹ The promotion of “scientific methods” was characteristic of the way the SUP described and promoted its methodology.

⁶⁰ Hans Pagodda, „Die Bedeutung des Kulturschutzgesetzes für die Ausgestaltung der subjektiven Urheberrechte“ 29 *Staat und Recht* 1006 (1980).

Particularly significant for the justification of a uniquely socialist interpretation of preservation was Karl Marx's statement that the workers' movements should appropriate the "entire wealth of the previous periods and human endeavors."⁶¹

It was within this political and cultural climate that the *Denkmalpflegegesetz* was passed on June 19, 1975. The main purpose of this law was expressed in Part I of the text.

It is the aim of monument preservation to maintain the monuments in the German Democratic Republic and to open them up in such a way that they serve the development of socialist consciousness and aesthetic, technical and moral education. This requires corresponding research, as well as the interpretation and popularization of the monuments, their registration and protection, and their planned preservation or restoration by scientific methods.⁶²

The main administrative body was the Ministry of Culture, which functioned as an organ of the Council of Ministers. Under the Ministry, local people's representations and councils were responsible for preservation projects. According to the law "they will solve this task with the active co-operation of the people, the leading authorities of economy, the enterprises and institutions, the National Front of the GDR, the social organizations, especially the Free German Trade Society, the Free German Youth, the Culture Band of the GDR, the Society of Architects of the GDR, the Organization of Fine Artists of the GDR, and the Chamber of Technology."⁶³ All of these organizations were linked to the SUP and were thus held responsible for these activities as quasi-governmental entities. Groups, such as the Society for the Preservation of Monuments founded in 1977 by the League of Culture, focused specifically on inciting support for the preservation of socially significant sites. Also in 1977, the Advisory Council on Monument Preservation was established under the Ministry of Culture in order to offer guidance to governmental bodies.

⁶¹ Quoted in Institut für Denkmalpflege, *Denkmale der Geschichte und Kultur* 5 (Henschelverlag 1969).

⁶² Quoted in *ICOMOS-Bulletin: GDR* 9 (ICOMOS-Nationalkomitee 1978).

⁶³ *Denkmalschutzgesetz*, § 1.2 (1975) (GDR).

County councils administered preservation on the local level and supervised all work done on monuments deemed nationally significant. The counties worked together with town and parish committees to direct the protection of the monuments within their jurisdictions. The regulations and agenda of the Ministry of Culture were implemented by the county councils. Within this administrative configuration, the Institute for Monument Preservation was given charge of practical concerns (i.e., technical assistance). Local authorities were required to consult with the Institute concerning the documentation and registration of culturally significant sites. In addition, the Institute handled the approval process for maintenance procedures, proposed restoration projects, adaptive use plans, etc. To better offer assistance, the Institute opened branch offices in Halle, Schwerin, Erfurt and Dresden.

Under the *Denkmalpflegegesetz*, monuments were divided into specific categories:

- sites of historic interest;
- historic production sites;
- historic settlements;
- city centers;
- gardens and parks; and
- works of the figural or applied arts.

Once a site was placed into one of these six classifications, a rating system was then applied to determine the extent of attention it warranted:

- A sites: particularly compact and significant sites;
- B sites: areas with important monuments;

- C sites: areas with single monuments surrounded by new buildings.⁶⁴

The law required that all classified and rated sites be registered on one of three lists: the central monument list, the regional monument list, or the county monument list.

As in the FRG, property owners were responsible for keeping their monuments in good repair.⁶⁵ If possible, the sites were to be open to the public. Owners were obligated to work together with the public authorities and to abide by the “scientific” guidance offered by said authorities. All procedures that changed the condition, the location, the use, or the appearance of the monument had to be approved by the preservation authorities.⁶⁶ In order to facilitate the maintenance of monuments, specially designated state funds were made available to property owners. When the use or treatment of a monument was called into question, the state was given the right to expropriate the property. The type and amount of compensation due to the property owner was determined by the county councils. Plaintiffs had the right to take their complaints to court, after which the council was given a four-week time frame in which to respond.

Despite the strict obligations placed on property owners by the *Denkmalpflegegesetz*, the government often deemed other public interests to be more important than preservation goals. The brown-coal area south of Berlin provides a tragic example of the willingness of the government to pursue single-mindedly an energy agenda, while ignoring the physical and emotional impact of such a course.⁶⁷ Brown coal became the sole energy source during the

⁶⁴ The introduction of new architecture was supposedly discouraged in all of these areas, but, if deemed necessary, was to be designed in harmony with the historic architecture and streetscape.

⁶⁵ Private property continued to exist under the socialist regime. The restrictions on property were much more stringent than those in the FRG, and in many cases the possession of private property was burdensome. For example, large villas in cities like Dresden could be divided into apartments but the rents were mandated at low rates, resulting in the owners often being unable to cover the basic maintenance expenses and losing money on their property.

⁶⁶ *Denkmalpflegegesetz*, § III.3. (1975) (GDR).

⁶⁷ The problem of coal mining and the subsequent destruction of cultural landscapes in Saxony will be examined in more detail in a later chapter.

GDR period, and thus state-run mining companies were given a free hand to strip-mine straight through villages that had stood for many centuries. This practice continued until 1990, when an effort to close most of the mines commenced. The *Denkmalpflegegesetz* offered little, if any, recourse for the displaced residents, since the SUP-affiliated county councils determined the nature and the amount of compensation.

In addition to the *Denkmalpflegegesetz*, preservation was also addressed in the *Kulturrecht* (cultural laws). The first attempt at formulating a comprehensive cultural law took place in the early 1980's.⁶⁸ Once it was drafted, monument preservation fell under the category of the most significant cultural processes. The issue of active citizen participation in cultural activities appears time and time again in both legislation and law articles. Although public engagement was the avowed goal of cultural authorities, it was abandoned when the public will did not correspond with the political agenda.

Not only the war, but also the flawed building and economic policies of the GDR, led to the systematic abandonment and loss of historic building material, predominantly in city and town centers.⁶⁹ By the late 1980s, the catastrophic condition of the historic architectural monuments was interpreted by many East Germans as a visible sign of the political and economic abuses of the former GDR.⁷⁰ A more detailed discussion of the reality of preservation in the GDR is included in chapter 4.

⁶⁸ Artur Wandtke, "Einige Überlegungen zum Kulturrecht" 37 *Staat und Recht* 292 (1988).

⁶⁹ Lusatia did not lose a large percentage of its historic buildings because of the fact little industry was located there during the war. Individual buildings were destroyed either by retreating German troops trying to hinder the advance of Allied troops or by Allied forces acting willfully in anger and revenge.

⁷⁰ *Entwurf eines Gesetzes über den Schutz und die Pflege der Denkmale und Bodendenkmale im Land Brandenburg*, § 1.

C. Unified Germany (1990 – present)

Now that the nature of preservation law and practice in the former GDR has been discussed, the current preservation laws deserve attention. As mentioned above, all of the western states retain the laws that were drafted in the 1970's. With political re-unification in 1990, the so-called "new" states in eastern Germany have all written and passed new laws. This was done in a short period of time between 1991 and 1993. These laws were closely modeled on those of the western states and bear no marked differences from them.

All current monument preservation laws bear the following similarities. First of all, each monument protected under state law must meet three independent criteria.

1. It must fit into one of three site classifications (*denkmalgeeignet*).
2. It must be worthy of preservation (*denkmalfähig*).
3. Its preservation must lie within the scope of public interest (*denkmalwürdig*).⁷¹

A *denkmalgeeignet* object or site falls into one of the following categories: moveable objects, plots of land, or structures built on such plots.⁷² The land surrounding a monument is always protected as well, because of the important historic or archaeological information it may contain.

Once a site has been deemed *denkmalgeeignet*, it must then pass the test of being *denkmalfähig*. An object or site is *denkmalfähig* when it embodies historic, artistic or scientific value. Such sites cannot be designated merely because of their importance to specialists and researchers; they must be found to benefit the general public. The determination of public

⁷¹ Felix Hammer, "Das Schutzsystem der deutschen Denkmalschutzgesetze" 11 *Juristische Schulung* 972 (1997). Other legal scholars, such as Prof. Dr. Christoph Monch, argue that there are only two criteria (*Denkmalfähigkeit* and *Denkmalwürdigkeit*).

⁷² These parameters correspond with older European legal traditions, which German preservation law never abandoned.

interest lies with the State Preservation Offices and, in some cases, the State Offices of Archaeology.

Lastly the *Denkmalwürdigkeit* of a site or object must be ascertained. A broad range of experts, as well as citizens, must desire the preservation of a monument. Because of the emphasis on public interest, the rarity of an object or its role as a typical example of an historic epoch rarely qualifies it for listing. At the same time, the will of the majority is not alone decisive, since the cultural agencies have the responsibility to protect the cultural heritage for future generations. As a result, a variety of issues must be weighed as the lists are amended over time.

All state laws place certain responsibilities on monument owners or administrative bodies. Alterations, especially destruction, removal, changes to exteriors and incursions into archaeological sites, require a permit. Owners are obligated to refrain from measures that would substantially affect the historic appearance or substance of a monument. They are also not allowed to reconstruct missing architectural elements. The permit process attempts to coordinate the interests of the general public, the preservationist, and the property owners. Minimal alterations easily receive permits, while projects compromising the overall appearance of a building or its building materials are often denied approval.

“Reasonableness” is the standard against which individual property rights are measured against monument preservation interests. The constitutional guarantee of artistic freedom must also be considered when deciding how stringent preservation regulations should be.⁷³ In accordance with the guarantee of religious freedom⁷⁴, interior spaces used in religious services cannot be regulated by the preservation authorities. The issue of

⁷³ *Grundgesetz* (Constitution) [GG] Art. 5 III (FRG).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Art. 4 II.

unreasonableness also plays a role in the private sector. Preservation is deemed unreasonable when a building or site can no longer be reasonably used or when the costs of maintenance cannot be ameliorated by tax or financial support from the state.

Although no federal preservation law exists at the present time, acts such as the *Raumordnungsgesetz* (Federal Regional Planning Act) (1998), reflect the endorsement of preservation efforts by the national government. For example, this particular act asserts that “the re-use of derelict settlement areas shall be given priority over the use of open spaces”⁷⁵ and that “historic and cultural relationships and regional affiliations shall be maintained; the characteristic features and the cultural and natural monuments of evolved cultural landscapes shall be preserved.”⁷⁶ Such support only further strengthens the aid and protection offered by the state preservation laws.

The history of monument preservation in Germany is characterized by two differing interpretations of the role of the federal government in cultural matters. Since Re-unification, the German states have achieved a general consensus in their laws, which divide the burden of monument preservation between the states and private property owners. The twenty-first century truly is the dawn of a new era for Germany. Monument preservation, with its goal to shape and guide memory of the past, will continue to play an important role in this new period.

⁷⁵ *Raumordnungsgesetz*, §2.2 (1998) (FRG).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, § 2.13.

CHAPTER 4

TAMING THE PHANTOMS OF THE PAST: THE REALITY OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION POLICY IN THE GDR

“There are still sites that are understood and loved by the people as historic alternatives to the ideological claims of the solitary controlling power and its apparatus.”
- Heinrich Magirius (1990)⁷⁷

In the previous chapter, the history of historic preservation legislation in the two German states was discussed, yet laws alone do not tell the whole story of the success or failure of preservation efforts in either country. Therefore, it is necessary to dedicate some attention to the “real” history of historic preservation in the GDR.⁷⁸

Heinrich Magirius, a well-respected preservationist and scholar from Dresden, has described the GDR period as one of profound economic mismanagement, which resulted in the degradation and complete loss of many historic buildings and ensembles.⁷⁹ Other specialists, such as Gerhard Glaser, the state preservationist for Saxony, have made similar comments. “If Reunification had occurred even one year later, much of what could still be salvaged would have been lost.”⁸⁰ From the preservation laws that look so good on paper,

⁷⁷ “Es sind Monumente geblieben, eine historische Alternative zu dem ideologischen Alleinherrschaftsanspruch des Regimes und seiner Apparatus, von breiten Schichten des Volkes so verstanden und geliebt.” Magirius, 237.

⁷⁸ The effectiveness of FRG policies is not included in the scope of this study because this topic does not directly relate to either Lusatia or the Sorbs. The legal framework of preservation in the FRG was discussed in the previous chapter since it was basically adopted by the eastern states after Reunification in 1990 and thus affects the preservation of Sorbian sites today.

⁷⁹ Magirius, 237.

⁸⁰ “Wäre die Wende hier auch nur ein Jahr später herbeigeführt worden, wäre vieles verloren, das gerade noch gerettet werden konnte.” Gerhard Glaser, “Kontinuität und Wandel in der Denkmalspflege – eine Bilanz”, *Denkmalspflege in Sachsen – Mitteilungen des Landesamtes für Denkmalspflege*, Nr. 1/1994, 13.

one must make a mental adjustment in order to more thoroughly understand the damage that was inflicted on the architectural heritage in the GDR.

In Saxony, the legal basis for preservation legislation was the Saxon Law for the Protection of Artistic, Cultural and Natural Monuments (January 13, 1934).⁸¹ This law was not immediately rewritten after the war but continued to be used by the occupation authorities until 1952. The State Preservation Office (*Landesamt*) of Saxony had its roots in the pre-war era and survived intact well into the immediate post-war period. Together with the State Office for High-Rise Building (*Hochbaudirektion der Landesverwaltung Sachsen*), the State Preservation Office worked on the restoration of Saxony's war torn cities and towns.⁸²

In 1950, the Saxon Office for Folklore and Historic Preservation was founded. All institutes that had previously dealt with the preservation of monuments of natural, artistic and historic significance were now put under one roof. This institute only lasted for two years, at which time the former German states in eastern Germany (i.e., Saxony, Brandenburg, etc.) were dissolved and replaced with a new regional configuration.⁸³ After the institution of the *Bezirk* structure, preservation was administered on the regional level with leadership coming from the newly founded Institute for Historic Preservation in East Berlin. Although some of the new regional boundaries corresponded to old cultural landscapes, this was not the case in Lusatia. Once again the Upper and Lower Sorbs were separated, with Lower Lusatia being given to *Bezirk Cottbus* and Upper Lusatia going to *Bezirk Dresden*.

Little activity took place outside of the boundaries of the official state offices. Prior to World War II, there had been great public interest in joining private societies that

⁸¹ Hans Nadler, "Von den Anfängen der Denkmalpflege in Sachsen nach dem Kriege", *Deutsche Kunst und Denkmalpflege*, Nr. 49 (1991), 54.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 58.

furthered the goals of cultural and historic preservation. All of this was tainted by the extreme nationalism of the Third Reich. In 1948, the large-scale *Landesverein sächsischer Heimatschutz* (the State Society for the Protection of the Saxon Homeland) and other historical societies were banned.⁸⁴ The older generation of history teachers was replaced with new ones who were not linked to the Nazi past and who were supporters of the new regime. Independent architects and planners who had previously been involved in preservation projects were pulled into state-controlled offices. Privately owned, small and mid-scale construction companies, the traditional partners of preservationists, were disbanded and merged into large state cooperatives.⁸⁵ The physical labor of re-construction and repair was undertaken by the often-unwieldy apparatus of large state companies.

The historic sites that survived the long years of war were faced with a new constellation of problems in the early years of the GDR. The sheer task of financially funding the re-building of the infrastructure was daunting. By the end of the war, there were approximately 75 million cubic meters of rubble to be removed.⁸⁶ Besides the demands of physical conditions, new societal circumstances came into play. The transformation from private ownership to communal holdings, in addition to the development of industrialized construction methods, presented another threat. With the dissolution of the states, local governments suddenly found themselves in charge of making re-construction decisions. Small villages were especially affected by this in a negative way, since they had neither the financial nor informational resources to maintain their structures or to find compatible secondary uses. Efforts to mimic the practices of Soviet Russia resulted in an impulse toward ideologically determined representation at the expense of local building traditions.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Deutsche Bauakademie Berlin (Ed.), *Architektur und Städtebau in der DDR*, Leipzig: E.A. Seemann Verlag, 1969. 10.

“[Buildings] were interpreted as symbols of the ideological conflict that had already been settled... At best they served as affirmation of a specific system of class domination.”⁸⁷

The ideological campaign against the built environment manifested itself in various ways and was avidly pursued until approximately 1970. Churches, for example, were targeted for demolition because religion was anathema to the communists. The Universitätskirche in Leipzig is one of the most famous cases. Johann Sebastian Bach’s favorite organ was located inside this building, and he had played here numerous times during his years in Leipzig. Although the church had come through the war with little damage, it was slated for demolition in the 1960s. Many citizens engaged in demonstrations, protesting the destruction of one of their most famous historic sites. As one would guess, the authorities did not tolerate this outbreak of protest. Numerous young people ended up in jail or were persecuted for their protests, and in 1968 the church, along with its organ, was razed according to plan.⁸⁸

This early public interest and dissatisfaction reflect the spirit of independence that was not completely lost in the morass of a planned society. The people were interested in restoring their damaged monuments and in re-connecting with the past. The only problem was that this wish did not always correspond with the official goals of the SUP, which had its own ideas about the appearance of socialist cities. A manifestation of Stalinist historicism, which was expressed in selected national architectural forms, was utilized during the early years of re-construction. This style proved to be economically unfeasible, and attention was re-focused on overcoming the problem of insufficient living quarters by constructing much

⁸⁷ “Sie wurden als Zeichen für den auch ideell ausgetragenen Kampf überwundener Klassengegensätze verstanden... Sie hatten zumeist zur Affirmation einer bestimmten Klassenherrschaft gedient.” Hütter and Magirius, 292. These historians also make note of an interesting link between the *damnatio memoriae* practices of the Communists and the Nazis, both of which attempted to destroy the sites of *Andersdenkenden*.

⁸⁸ Magirius, 240.

cheaper and plainer high-rise complexes around the city centers.⁸⁹ The high-rise building was the main element used in the re-shaping of the townscape. When old buildings were deemed to be too dominant in the streetscape, high rises were built nearby with the goal of dwarfing the relicts of the past. The “capitalist” buildings from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were considered expendable as structures from the feudal period: “They destroy the harmony of their surrounding cityscapes through their massive scale and architectural details.”⁹⁰ This selective demolition did not only occur in large cities, but in small cities as well.

Even though communities had some say in development issues, the ultimate decisions were handed down from East Berlin. This centralized planning process resulted in what Hütter and Magirius dub “widespread monotony”.⁹¹ Many areas lost their uniqueness, and cities were re-planned and given a specific socialist aesthetic. In addition to the new high-rises, huge open spaces for parades and other state celebrations were given locations of prominence in downtown areas, a policy which effectively obliterated the ground plan of many historic cities. Hans Nadler, the chief preservationist for *Bezirke* Dresden after the war, bemoaned the single-mindedness of the SUP: “They want to destroy our old cities and towns.”⁹² These were severe words from a man whose position was subject to political whim.

The animosity toward the built environment did not end with the 1950’s. After the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, buildings associated with the feudal past were once again targeted for destruction. When buildings were left standing, they were often little more

⁸⁹ Gottfried Kiesow, “Altstadtprobleme aktuell”, *Denkmalpflege heute: Akten des Berner Denkmalpflege Kongresses Oktober 1993*, Volker Hoffmann and Hans Peter Autenrieth (Ed.), Bern: Peter Lang, 1996. 185.

⁹⁰ “Die sprengten die Maßstäbe ihrer städtebaulichen Umgebung durch ihren Massenaufbau und ihre architektonischen Details.” *Denkmale der Geschichte und Kultur: Ihre Erhaltung und Pflege in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Institut für Denkmalpflege (Ed.), Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1969. 16.

⁹¹ Hütter and Magirius, 295.

⁹² “Sie wollen unsere Altstädte und Dörfer vernichten.” Quoted in Hütter and Magirius, 298.

than a veneer. “Among the architects, it was understood that an ‘old city’ was only a backdrop of a marketplace and two or three streets, other than that all the rest was new filler buildings.”⁹³

Walter Ulbricht articulated succinctly the goals of city planning during the 1950’s: “The main issue is to support the efforts of the citizens for a culturally rich existence in lovely cities and villages, to deepen their pride in their socialist homeland, and to increase the growing international reputation of our republic through the means of architecture.”⁹⁴ The latest technology and construction methods were advocated as the way of the future.⁹⁵ In addition to the ideological problem presented by historic buildings and ensembles, the old ground plan of the historic cities was not viewed as being flexible enough to meet the new needs of the socialist society.⁹⁶

A prime example of the socialist top-down approach toward city planning can be found in Bautzen. In 1969, the Institute for Monument Preservation released a book in which the following expression of the socialist preservation vision was written: “The compositional design of all new accents in the cityscape must always be brought into harmony with the cultural-historical building features in the city.”⁹⁷ Despite this supposedly sympathetic approach to historic cities, the local chapter of the National Front (a SUP-affiliated organization) and the city government of Bautzen set forth ambitious plans for the

⁹³ “In Architektenkreisen verstand man unter historischer Altstadt längst nur noch die Kulisse von Marktplatz und zwei oder drei Straßenzügen, im übrigen aber Ersatzbau.” Magirius, 247.

⁹⁴ “Es geht jetzt vor allem darum, mit den Mitteln der Baukunst dazu beizutragen, das Streben der Bürger unseres Staates nach einem kulturreichen Leben in schönen Städten und Dörfern zu fördern, den Stolz auf ihre sozialistische Heimat zu vertiefen und das gewachsene internationale Ansehen unserer Republik zu erhöhen.” Quoted in *Architektur und Städtebau in der DDR*, 9.

⁹⁵ The concept of technological progress was not only present in the GDR but was prevalent in most industrialized countries. Many societies, including the United States, embraced the complexities of the technological age with great optimism.

⁹⁶ “It was often necessary to overcome old ideas of space and scale... the narrow and winding character of the medieval city and even that of the capitalist city is not able to meet the diverse new needs of the socialist society.” *Architektur und Städtebau in der DDR*, 20.

⁹⁷ *Denkmale der Geschichte und Kultur*, 15.

city center in 1969, in honor of the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the GDR. “Not only should there be new residential areas on the edge of the city, but the city should be reshaped from the inside out... Dominant features of socialist city planning should improve the cityscape.”⁹⁸

In accordance with this idea, a new city plan set forward a complete re-configuration of the still extant seventeenth-century *Altstadt*. Soon afterwards a large blue high-rise building was erected directly on the edge of the market square. Widespread dislike of the building made it the object of ridicule and derision among Bautzen residents. Fortunately the idea that socialist city planning should “improve” the historic city through demolition and new design never came to fruition, and the so-called “Blue Giant” was demolished in January 2000 to the great joy of many local residents. Similar scenarios occurred in other cities in the GDR, although there seems to have been a conscious effort to relegate most new construction into areas that had suffered substantial destruction during the war.

The preservation profession became increasingly politicized during the 1960’s. The 1961 Provisionary Ordinance for Historic Preservation made very clear that the importance of a “historic site” was restricted by the “interests of state and society.”⁹⁹ Because of the chilly relations between East and West at this time, contacts between German preservationists divided by the Iron Curtain became fewer and fewer over time.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, links to other professionals in the Eastern Bloc were encouraged. Positions of importance were delegated to comrades and party members, thus creating a system based on nepotism, not ability. Co-operation between the various regional preservation offices was

⁹⁸ “Das Ende eines Bau-Experimentes”, *Oberlausitzer Kurier*, 15. Januar 2000.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Hermann Heckmann, “Die Denkmalpflege in der DDR”, *Die DDR und die Tradition*, Jens Hacker and Horst Rögner- Francke (Ed.), Gesellschaft für Deutschlandforschung, 1981 Edition, Heidelberg: Edition Meyer, 1981. 193.

¹⁰⁰ Not all East-West ties were broken. West German churches collected donations to help their brethren in the East. This silent support from the “other” Germans was never publicly acknowledged.

never actively supported. The last official meeting of all the regional preservation offices took place in 1962, after which time the separate offices concentrated exclusively on the tasks that came up in their particular region. This created a major problem, as there was no inter-regional information or support network to help promote the goals and vision of preservation professionals.

An official central monument list was put together by the Institute for Historic Preservation in East Berlin, but it was both sketchy and primarily determined by ideological concerns. 48,000 objects and sites were eventually included on this list. Approximately 20,000 of these were located in the area that had been Saxony.¹⁰¹ Fortunately, the Institute for Historic Preservation never turned into the rigidly centralized instrument that many preservationists feared it would. Like other state offices, the Dresden office functioned much as the former *Landesamt* had, maintaining a degree of quasi-independence despite formal integration into the Institute for Historic Preservation.

Official preservation efforts remained (and still remain) an issue that was primarily administered by the bureaucrats and politicians. Despite this top-down orientation, an activist preservationist movement swept through the “masses” during the 1970’s. This development corresponded with the increased enthusiasm for folklore and folk culture that gained ground at the same time.¹⁰² Sadly this new advocacy movement came too late. The dilapidation brought about by years of abandonment and disuse was so far advanced that many areas were cleared and used for new construction projects.¹⁰³ As the 1970’s turned into the 1980’s, the preservationists were faced with a built environment that was both

¹⁰¹ Gerhard Glaser, “Kontinuität und Wandel in der Denkmalpflege – eine Bilanz. 100 Jahre Denkmalpflege in Sachsen, 4 Jahre Denkmalpflege im vereinten Deutschland”, *Denkmalpflege in Sachsen*. Heft 1/1994. 11.

¹⁰² Other countries, including the United States, also experienced “get back to your roots” movements in the 1970’s.

¹⁰³ Long years of poor economic conditions and the lack of public and private funds were the cause of this severe state of deterioration.

compromised and on the verge of collapse from neglect. “The preservationists suffered under the polar differences between efforts to conform to the state mandated tasks and the reality of the hopelessly deteriorating condition of the historic substance. Not only the cities, but almost all monuments, were affected by this.”¹⁰⁴

Although the 1980’s gradually became more critical in tone, one cannot recognize this from the official literature that was published during this time.¹⁰⁵ An article printed in a catalogue of papers from the seventh ICOMOS convention includes the following quote: “To an increasing degree, monuments are artifacts and occasions to focus on the achievements of past generations, on the past, on the battles for the German and international workers’ movements, as well as on the development of the GDR.”¹⁰⁶ The internal collapse of the GDR in 1989 is separated by only two years from this statement, which reflects continuing adherence to the socialist interpretation of history. The widespread involvement of citizens in cultural activities is given considerable prominence in this paper and other contemporary publications. The 350 preservation collectives with their 5,000+ members are heralded for their engagement in preservation issues.¹⁰⁷ The 12,000

¹⁰⁴ “Die Denkmalpfleger litten unter diesem Auseinanderklaffen von Bemühung um Anpassung an die staatlich gestellten Aufgaben und dem tatsächlich immer hoffnungslosen werdenden Zustand der historischen Substanz, von dem keineswegs nur die Städte, sondern fast all Monumente...betroffen sind.” Hütter and Magirus, 305.

¹⁰⁵ The author of this study purposefully used post-reunification sources for the majority of information for this section. The problem with all books published before 1989 is that they are so ideologically charged that they must be used with great care and cannot be blindly trusted for the accuracy of their content. The literature in the immediate post-Reunification years also has a theoretical slant against the former GDR, but it seems to be less biased than the earlier studies.

¹⁰⁶ “In zunehmendem Maße sind Denkmale Gegenstand und Anlaß, um sich mit den Leistungen vergangener Generationen, mit der Geschichte, den Kämpfen der deutschen und internationalen Arbeiterbewegung sowie der Entwicklung der DDR zu beschäftigen.” Harri Olschewski, “Zur Kulturpolitik in der DDR und den Aufgaben der Denkmalpflege bei der gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung unseres Landes”, *Denkmale und kulturelle Identität: Beiträge zum Internationalen Symposium der VII. Generalversammlung des ICOMOS*, ICOMOS-Nationalkomitee der DDR, Peter Goralczyk (Ed.), Berlin: VEB Verlag für Bauwesen, 1987. 157.

¹⁰⁷ Harri Olschewski, “Der Beitrag der Gesellschaft für Denkmalpflege im Kulturbund der DDR zur Herausbildung der kulturellen Identität”, *Denkmale und kulturelle Identität: Beiträge zum Internationalen Symposium der VII. Generalversammlung des ICOMOS*, ICOMOS-Nationalkomitee der DDR, Peter Goralczyk (Ed.), Berlin: VEB Verlag für Bauwesen, 1987. 137.

hours invested in the restoration of Schloß Völkerhausen are commended, but no mention is made of the much disputed demolition of the Berliner Schloß or of the other castles and churches that gradually disappeared from the East German countryside.

The language employed in the official literature from the 1980's was a continuation of the heroic rhetoric that had its roots in the early years of the GDR, but this perspective was not embraced by everyone. Although the toeing of party line persisted in the highly censored world of publishing and printing, something else was going on in the realm of restoration and preservation projects. Preservation authorities in cities across the GDR set out to improve their building stock by expending time and effort on sites that had been unpopular for many years. New pride in the uniqueness and beauty of specific cities and towns inspired efforts to restore crumbling buildings.

This positive development in preservation circles first came about during the mid-1980's, at a time when the situation was almost beyond rescue. At the time of Reunification, the GDR faced restoration costs that practically equaled the cost that would have been incurred if the neglected cities and their infrastructure had been completely rebuilt.¹⁰⁸ Gottfried Kiesow estimates that if another five or ten years had passed until the fall of the Berlin Wall, the cities would have been so dilapidated that it would have been economically impossible for even the financially stable FRG to subsidize the wide-scale restoration that would have been needed.¹⁰⁹ Even with the end of the GDR being over a decade old, experts still cannot hazard an estimate as to the architectural and cultural loss incurred during the forty years of socialist rule.

¹⁰⁸ Jürgen Paul, "Der Wiederaufbau der historischen Städte in Deutschland nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg", *Die alte Stadt: Denkmal oder Lebensraum?*, C. Meckspeper and H. Siebenmorgen (Ed.), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1985. 150.

¹⁰⁹ Kiesow, 186.

CHAPTER 5

CONTROL AND RE-DEFINITION: LAND REFORM IN THE GDR AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

“The totalitarian state tried to manipulate everything: the people and their culture, the economy and even nature. In this way, Sorbian culture was also to be manipulated. Culture was predominantly downgraded to folklore.” - Martin Salowski (1993)¹¹⁰

In addition to preservation policy, other issues and trends affected the preservation of significant sites not only in Lusatia, but in other areas of the GDR as well. State-implemented land reform played an important role in this process and influenced the foundations and direction of historic preservation in the GDR.¹¹¹

According to Siegfried Kuntsche, the history of agricultural collectivization can be easily divided into three phases:

1. 1945-46 – Land Reform
2. 1952-60 – Collectivization of Rural Agriculture
3. Late 1960's-70's – Establishment of large Agricultural Collectives¹¹²

The land reform that took place immediately after the war was neither haphazard nor random. It was based on several models that had already been developed in other

¹¹⁰ “Der totalitäre Staat hat alles zu manipulieren versucht: die Menschen und deren Kultur, die Ökonomie und sogar die Natur. So sollte auch die sorbische Kultur manipuliert werden. Kultur wurde weitgehend zur Folklore abgewertet.” Salowski, 144.

¹¹¹ A second factor was the state energy policy, specifically its emphasis on brown-coal mining ventures. This topic will be discussed in a later chapter devoted exclusively to the landscape problems and destruction cause by the mining industry.

¹¹² Siegfried Kuntsche, “Die Umgestaltung der Eigentumsverhältnisse und der Produktionsstruktur in der Landwirtschaft” *Ansichten zur Geschichte der DDR: Band 1*. Dietmar Keller, Hans Modrow and Herbert Wolf (Ed.), Berlin: PDS, 1993. 191.

communist nations: Russia (1917-18), the Baltic States (1940-41), southern and eastern Europe (1944-45). Agricultural reform was one of the fundamental principles for the transition from a capitalist into a communist system. The old property ownership relations had to be broken apart and re-configured to meet the goals of a socialist society. The agricultural changes were conceived of as a “politically enforced break with continuity.”¹¹³

Beyond the goals of the politicians in Moscow, land reform was perceived as necessary to meet the economic needs of Germans and refugees in the SOZ.¹¹⁴ Land was a valuable commodity and was perceived as a means of employing large numbers of homeless people, as well as to meet the needs of the country’s hungry. The goal of land reform was to confiscate land, which could then be divided among small farmers (*Kleinbauern*). The specific goals were manifold:

1. To increase the land holdings of farms with fewer than five hectares;
2. To create new farms for landless farmers, agricultural workers, and small leaseholders;
3. To provide land for refugees;
4. To feed the cities and to provide garden plots for city dwellers; and
5. To organized and maintain research and experimental farms.¹¹⁵

This reform did not affect all of the land within the SOZ. Only 1/3 of the arable land and forestland was ultimately involved, but the ramifications of this break in agricultural relationships and tradition were far-reaching.

¹¹³ “politisch erzwungener Kontinuitätsbruch.” Edmund Pech, *Die Sorbenpolitik der DDR*, Bautzen: Domowina Verlag, 1999. 195.

¹¹⁴ Refugees from Silesia (now part of Poland), Bohemia and other eastern countries fled their war-torn homelands and headed west. Many were of German extraction and could find shelter in no other place than Germany.

¹¹⁵List taken from Klaus J. Schiller, *Die Sorben in der antifaschistisch-demokratischen Ummwälzung (1945-1949)*, Bautzen: Domowina-Verlag, 1976. 53.

Between September 3 and 10, 1945, all five eastern states opted for a “democratic” land reform. The preamble to the Saxon Agricultural Regulations states that the reform was approved in accordance with “the demands of the working farmers for the fair distribution of land and the liquidation of feudal and Junker estates.”¹¹⁶ Books that were published during the GDR period paint this period of reform in rosy colors, claiming that this decision “corresponded with the will of the large mass of German and Sorbian people.”¹¹⁷ One must read these documents critically because of their unapologetic political agenda, but one can also assume that in the aftermath of widespread destruction and war, the small farmers and the refugees probably were grateful and eager for the opportunity to gain access to cheap land. The land reform was carried out differently from state to state. Two-thirds of the reformed land fell within the two states of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburg, yet the impact of the land reform was extensive and changed the make-up of approximately two-thirds of all rural communities in the GDR.¹¹⁸

The initial step of the land reform required the acquisition of parcels that could then be divided accordingly. First, expropriation laws (*Enteignungsgesetze*) had to be passed in each state.¹¹⁹ In Saxony, the law was pushed through with a resounding majority of 77.6%.¹²⁰ It is with the passage of these laws that one can date the demise of the large private estates in the SOZ. The battle cry of the expropriation measures was “*Junkerland in Bauernhand!*” (“Junker land in farmers’ hands!”). All estates of more than 100 hectares, in addition to the property of all active Nazis, Nazi sympathizers, war criminals, war profiteers, and former leaders in

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Klaus J. Schiller and Manfred Thiemann. *Geschichte der Sorben. Band 4: von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, Bautzen: Domowina-Verlag, 1979. 36.

¹¹⁷ “ensprachen dem Willen der breiten Massen der deutschen and sorbischen Bevölkerung.” Schiller, 47.

¹¹⁸ Kuntsche, 192.

¹¹⁹ Similar laws were proposed for the western zones, but none were implemented.

¹²⁰ Joerg Roesler, “Enteignung, Verdrängung, Integration. Die Entwicklung des kapitalistischen und werktätigen Privateigentums in der DDR außerhalb der Landwirtschaft”, *Ansichten zur Geschichte der DDR: Band 1*. Dietmar Keller, Hans Modrow and Herber Wolf (Ed.). Berlin: PDS, 1993. 173.

the Hitler state,¹²¹ and 14,000 businesses were seized without any kind of compensation to the owners.¹²² Along with the land, all buildings, “living and dead” inventory, secondary businesses, and adjacent agricultural property were confiscated.

Although the re-parceling of land was the proclaimed goal of the land reform, a second element also came into play.

The land reform must guarantee the liquidation of the feudal Junker estates and bring about the end of Junker and large estate owner rule in villages. This leadership has always represented a bastion of reactionism and fascism in our land and was one of the main sources of aggression and of the wars waged against other nations.¹²³

It was believed that the seizure of the estates would result in the breaking of the foundations of militarism and National Socialism, since the landowners and aristocrats were held to be the guilty parties in the rise of the Third Reich. It cannot be denied that this social class contributed to the war efforts, but at the same time this interpretation of events can also be understood as an attempt at self-exoneration on the part of the working and agricultural classes, which were seeking a scapegoat for the war.

Despite the “will of the people”, the period of land reform was not completely calm. There were individuals who resisted the taking of their property. Reform opponents were rightly or wrongly maligned in the press as “incorrigible fascists and militarists”.¹²⁴ Former landholders accused of trying to hinder the reform process were frequently menaced with

¹²¹ The seizures totaled 3.2 million hectares.

¹²² Joachim Herrmann, *Deutsche Geschichte in 10 Kapiteln*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1988. 410.

¹²³ “Die Bodenreform muß die Liquidierung des feudalen junkerlichen Großgrundbesitzes gewährleisten und der Herrschaft der Junker und Großgrundbesitzer im Dorfe ein Ende bereiten, weil diese Herrschaft immer eine Bastion der Reaktion und des Fascismus in unserem Lande darstellt und eine der Hauptquellen der Aggression und der Eroberungskriege gegen andere Völker war.” Schiller, 51.

¹²⁴ “unbelehrbare Faschisten und Militaristen” Quoted in Herrmann, 411.

death threats, attacks, sabotage, and libel. Many property owners took this opportunity to flee into the western zones, abandoning centuries-old estates and holdings.¹²⁵

The land reform also affected the Sorbs, although once again there are differences in interpretation, depending on whether one consults pre- or post-1990 studies. In their definitive cultural study from the 1970's, Schiller and Thiemann assert that because the Sorbs belonged to the agricultural and working class, they were not influenced negatively by the land reform. To the contrary, it was an unmitigated success insofar as they were some of the people to profit from the opening up of land. This was only just, according to Schiller and Thiemann, since the Sorbs were not members of "the leading class of imperialistic Germany."¹²⁶

According to more recent critical studies, the story of the land reform and the Sorbs was more complex than the official GDR history had revealed.¹²⁷ In 1950, 27.9% of the GDR population worked in agriculture. This percentage is much higher when only the Sorbs are taken into consideration. Over 50% of them were involved in farming at the end of World War II, while the overwhelming majority of the populace lived in rural areas.¹²⁸ Between 1950 and 1952, approximately 5,000 Lusatian *Großbauern* (large-scale farmers) with property ranging in size from twenty to one-hundred hectares were compelled to give up their holdings.¹²⁹ Others besides aristocrats and Nazis were suddenly ruined financially. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, numerous Sorbian families had joined the economically secure classes of *Mittel-* and *Großbauern*, especially in the areas around

¹²⁵ Before the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, it was relatively easy to flee the SOZ. Beginning in the 1960's, the border between the GDR and the FRG became highly patrolled and escape was much more difficult.

¹²⁶ "herrschende Schichten des imperialistischen Deutschlands", Schiller and Thiemann, 37.

¹²⁷ None of the statistics consulted for this chapter were broken down according to impact on specific ethnic groups (Germans and Sorbs). The statistics are either regional (if specified) or national in scope.

¹²⁸ Pech, 196.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 198.

Panschwitz-Kuckau, Kamenz and Bautzen.¹³⁰ At the apex of the Sorbian national awakening stood both intellectuals and representatives of the large and mid-sized farming classes. To do Schiller and Thiemann justice, it should be pointed out that the majority of farmers in other regions were not as prosperous. The Lusatian Heath and the Upper Lusatian highlands were known for their poor soil. The farms there remained small, and farmers were often compelled to supplement their farming income by taking part-time jobs in industry (glass, coal, clay). Nonetheless, Sorbs, as well as Germans, were faced with potential land seizure during the late 1940's and early 1950's. In Lusatia alone, 1,000 pieces of property (estates, large and small farms, businesses, etc.) totaling 300,000 hectares were taken at this time.

The total shift to state-controlled industry and agriculture based on the Soviet model did not occur immediately. Until the late 1940's, a relatively large private sector continued to exist. By 1950, two-thirds of the large industry sector and one-half of the private industry sector lay in state hands.¹³¹ Agriculture was also kept in line with the industrial developments. The land reform was brought to a close in the early 1950's with land parcels ranging in size from five to ten hectares being divided between 120,000 agricultural workers and landless farmers, 126,000 "land-poor" (*landarm*) farmers and small leaseholders, and 91,000 refugees.¹³² Once this task was accomplished, the next hurdle was that of collectivization. At the Second Party Conference of the SUP in 1952, the party decided to implement the so-called "voluntary collectivization."¹³³

¹³⁰ Ibid., 202.

¹³¹ Roesler, 175.

¹³² Herrmann, 410.

¹³³ Kunstsche, 198.

The Domowina, already fulfilling its task as party organ, sent out an appeal for all Sorbs to support the “development of Socialism.”¹³⁴ As a report from the meeting of the Domowina in December 1952, makes clear, party loyalty was already taking root. “We, as the Domowina, are exactly the ones who need to help our working farmers find the way forward, the way to socialist agricultural methods.”¹³⁵ By 1953, strong political and economic pressure was placed on the “old farmers”¹³⁶ to go into the collectives. Strategies, such as increased taxes and even imprisonment, were employed to encourage “voluntary” collectivization. This pressure was too much for many farmers. 47,000 property owners, including 16,000 *Großbauern*, gave up their property, and many left the GDR.

Not all farmers passively accepted the forced collectivization, and the Domowina was shaken by the intransigence of some of its members. In 1953, numerous *Großbauern*, who also happened to be Domowina members, openly and publicly protested against collectivization. In Chrostwitz, the local Domowina branch was dissolved in an act of protest. Some Sorbs abandoned their farms, while others stubbornly prevented the establishment of collective farms in their communities.¹³⁷ Dissatisfaction was expressed through a decline in Domowina membership in certain areas. Subscription to the Sorbian newspaper *Nova Doba* also sank.¹³⁸ In Bautzen the forces of opposition began to coalesce into a group, prepared to fight against the increasing expressions of state control.

¹³⁴ “Aufbau des Sozialismus”, Quoted in Pech, 203.

¹³⁵ “Gerade auch als Domowina haben wie unseren werktätigen Bauern zu helfen, den Weg vorwärts, den Weg zur sozialistischen Wirtschaftsweise zu finden.” Ibid. Collective farming in the GDR entailed the sharing of machinery and land; although a much-reduced number of private farms continued to exist until Reunification, the collective farms were communally or state owned. The farms were cultivated by groups of farmers who were under the leadership of a foreman.

¹³⁶ The “new farmers” were those who first received land because of the land reform. The “old farmers” were those who owned land prior to World War II.

¹³⁷ The first collective in Lusatia was established in the summer of 1952. Within a year’s time, there were already 25 collectives in Bautzen County alone, attesting to the persuasiveness of the “voluntary” collectivization practices.

¹³⁸ In Kamenz County, for example, subscriptions sank from 2,150 in 1952 to 1,792 in 1953.

These rumblings were enough to trouble the SUP. The party recognized that the Bezirk Dresden¹³⁹ was becoming a center of resistance, as reflected in the high number of collectives that were founded and quickly dissolved. Despite a shared dissatisfaction for rural collectivization, the rural opposition never developed into a sustained cohesive unit. The pressure to collectivize was lessened in an effort to appease the rural population. By 1956, over half of the land that had been collectivized stood empty and untilled. At this point, the percentage of Sorbs involved in agriculture and forestry was still high at 40.7%, the decrease resulting from more people going to work in the industrial sector.

The reasons that socialist collectivization was rejected by many families are varied. A peculiarly Sorbian issue was that of language. On the small family farm, Sorbian was still used as the language of communication among family and friends. There had been talk of founding Sorbian collectives, but this never became a reality. Instead, the collectives were always guided by German foremen, who naturally had no desire to learn or use Sorbian. The collectives were also cultivated by Germans and Sorbs together, the latter of who could speak German as well as Sorbian. German therefore gained more importance under these circumstances, and it was precisely this development that many Sorbs feared.

Although it had decided to tread softly in the context of rural resistance, the SUP was not about to give up its goal of socialist collectivization in the countryside. In 1957 and 1958, pressure to form or join collectives was heightened once again. The number of farmers in Bezirk Dresden and Bezirk Cottbus (where most of the Lower Sorbs lived) who had voluntarily attached themselves to collectives was far under the average for the rest of

¹³⁹ A *Bezirk*, or district, was composed of several counties. Bautzen County belonged to the district of Dresden. The district structure is what replaced the state structure after the administrative reform of 1952 that basically dissolved the five states in the SOZ.

the country.¹⁴⁰ This fact was particularly embarrassing to the Domowina, which had pledged to support the socialist cause among the Sorbs. Dissident opinions were decried as “nationalistic” and “pessimistic”, and the Domowina declared the socialist reshaping of agricultural relationships to be one of its main goals. With the backing of the SUP, the Domowina and other Sorbian institutions exerted pressure on their members. This time their strategies succeeded.

Widespread collectivization was achieved by 1960. This was brought about through an energetic propaganda campaign and tens of thousands of agitators who were sent into the villages to change the minds of the stubborn farmers.¹⁴¹ By May 1960, 85% of all cultivated rural land in Lusatia was collectivized. Even though this form of collectivization was also touted as voluntary, it was brought about through such tactics as land seizure and imprisonment. The Lusatian farmers still did not take kindly to this exercise of state power. Between 1959 and 1960, there was a threefold increase in instances of *Republiksflucht* (fleeing of the Republic) in Bautzen County.¹⁴² The county was carefully watched as one of the “hot spots” in Bezirk Dresden. For those who stayed behind, their greatest fear became a reality: German gradually replaced Sorbian as the language of daily use.

The harsh realities of agricultural life in a mechanized era caused many Sorbs to join the collectives during the 1960's and 1970's. As in the United States and other industrialized countries, the small family farm became economically unviable. By the 1970's, over 90% of the farmers in Bezirk Dresden were affiliated with the collectives. A shift in rural mentality and identity accompanied the changes in agricultural practices. “But even here, the current reality cannot tally with our idea of ‘rural folk’. It is mainly composed of specialized

¹⁴⁰ Schiller and Thiemann, 168.

¹⁴¹ Pech, 218.

¹⁴² Ibid.

workers, along with technicians and members of the agricultural intelligentsia.”¹⁴³ The age-old image of the family farm with its extended family structure vanished in the face of creeping industrialism and agribusiness. Historic social networks and relationships were intentionally destroyed in favor of a new social order, in which the family played a significantly reduced role. In reality, collectivization spelled the end for rural traditions in many areas.

Beyond the threat collectivization presented to Sorbian culture, it inadvertently caused a societal restructuring that had a profound impact on historic preservation. Traditionally landed families had personally cared for their residences and estates, many of which were hundreds of years old. With collectivization this connection between family and land was effectively severed. Large estates were divided into smaller parcels with hardly an effort given to preserving the old estate structure. Parks and gardens were quickly turned into farmland. Many villas and castles were razed in an ideological attempt to annihilate symbols of the previous feudal and capitalist eras. During the 1950’s and 1960’s, 129 of the 397 castles and manors that were officially protected in Saxony were demolished.¹⁴⁴ This dismantling of historically significant estates was condoned from early on by the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD):

New farmers, who have not been provided with houses or secondary buildings, but who have been living in apartments in former manors or communal housing... are authorized to unrestrictedly demolish the buildings on their land and to use the material for the construction of new houses.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ “Aber auch hier deckt sich die heutige Wirklichkeit nicht mit unserer Vorstellung vom ‘bäuerlichen Volk’. Das sind in der großen Mehrzahl spezialisierte Facharbeiter und dazu Techniker und Angehörige der landwirtschaftlichen Intelligenz.” Quoted in Schiller and Thiemann, 249.

¹⁴⁴ Heinrich Magirus, “Denkmalpflege: Zum Schicksal der Bau- und Kunstdenkmäler in der DDR”, *Kunstchronik* Heft 6. June 1990. 239.

¹⁴⁵ “Neubauern, die keine Häuser und Wirtschaftsgebäude zum Eigentum erhalten haben, sondern Wohnungen in früheren Gutshäusern und Gemeinschaftswohnungen einnehmen... berechtigt sind, ungehindert die Gebäude des Gutes abzubrechen und das Abbruchmaterial zum Bau ihrer neuen Häuser zu verwenden.” Quoted in Alexander von Plato and Almut Leh, *“Ein Unglaublicher Frühling”: Erfabrene Geschichte im*

Even when the buildings were left standing, their treasures and decoration were often plundered or destroyed haphazardly by the new residents. “As far as what was subsequently plundered, destroyed and scattered, the measure of the cultural damage cannot even once be roughly estimated.”¹⁴⁶ Other buildings were simply demolished through neglect, since the State had neither the funding nor the interest in preserving the old aristocratic sites that they now held. No documentation of the doomed estates was made, therefore it is difficult to hazard guesses as to the extent of the loss of buildings and landscape features.

As can be seen, this period of fundamental change in rural areas caused the loss of cultural and architectural heritage. The historic architectural fabric was irreparably damaged by the sudden annihilation of traditional links to the land, which resulted in both willful and passive destruction. As a predominantly rural folk group, the Sorbs were also adversely affected by these changes. The Sorbian language continued to decrease in significance, and the assimilation process accelerated in Lusatia.

Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945-1948, Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997. 265. This communiqué dates from December 15, 1947.

¹⁴⁶ “Was dennoch damals geplündert, vernichtet und zerstreut wurde, ist im Ausmaß an kulturellen Schaden noch nicht einmal annähernd abzusehen.” Heinrich Magirius and Elisabeth Hütter, “Zum Verständnis der Dnkmalpflege in der DDR”, *Denkmal-Werte Gesellschaft: Zur Pluralität des Denkmalbegriffs*, Wilfried Lipp (Ed.), Frankfurt: Campus-Verlag, 1993. 296.

CHAPTER 6

WHEN YOU CANNOT GO HOME AGAIN: THE SORBS AND THE BROWN COAL MINING INDUSTRY

“We want to make the politicians and the public aware that with each piece of earth that is mined away, a piece of homeland disappears. And no one can tell us what a cubic meter of homeland is worth. And in addition to each village or farmstead, a piece of ethnicity is also mined away... What is hunted down here in Lusatia by industrial chimneys cannot be re-cultivated – specifically, ethnicity, culture and language.” - Jurij Koch (1987)¹⁴⁷

The unfortunate history of mining in Lusatia stretches back into the mid-nineteenth century and is the history of the development of one of the largest brown coal areas in all of Europe. As a Sorbian student song laments: “God created Lusatia, but the devil buried the brown coal there.”¹⁴⁸ In terms of production, this industrial sector was highly successful. Prior to Reunification, Lusatia met 75% of the GDR’s gas demands.¹⁴⁹ The factory complex in the town of Schwarze Pumpe was the largest and most productive briquette factory in the world by the mid-1980’s.¹⁵⁰ As is inevitably the case, one must look beyond the figures and ask the difficult question of at what price all of this came. The price was extremely high and led to the destruction of numerous villages and buildings. Měrcín Nowak-Njehorński, a

¹⁴⁷ “Wir wollen die Politik und Öffentlichkeit darauf aufmerksam machen, daß mit jedem abgebaggerten Stückchen Erde ein Stückchen Heimat verschwindet, und keiner kann uns sagen, was ein Quadratmeter Heimat kostet. Und mit jedem Dorf oder Gehöft wird auch ein Stückchen Ethnikum abgebaggert... Was da in der Lausitz durch Schornsteine gejagt wird, das ist eben nicht mehr rekultivierbar – nämlich das Ethnische, die Kultur und die Sprache.” Quoted in Oschlies, 77.

¹⁴⁸ “Der Gott hat die Lausitz erschaffen,
aber der Teufel hat dort die Braunkohle vergraben.” Quoted in Pastor, 52.

¹⁴⁹ Waltraut Skaddow (Ed.), *ESPAG Geschichte eines Unternehmens: vom Gaskombinat zur Aktiengesellschaft*, Bautzen: Lusatia Verlag, 1993. 9.

¹⁵⁰ The factory was constructed in 1956.

renowned Sorbian artist, depicted poignantly the contradictory juxtaposition of traditional rural lifeways and heavy industry (Figure 10). The Sorbs are still reeling from the impact of industrialization on their cultural fabric and may never fully recover from it.

More than Upper Lusatia, Lower Lusatia was the region that was tragically suited for the development of the brown coal industry. This was directly linked to the area's good geologic and hydrologic qualities. The textile industry first took root here in the 1840's and brought with it a need for increased amounts of energy materials, especially coal.¹⁵¹ Most of the early miners at this time were Sorbs, who lived in the vicinity. After 1871, the coal industry grew significantly, encouraged by the construction of a new rail system through the area. This upswing caused a shift in agricultural patterns. To increase their yearly income, many *Halbbauer* (half-time farmers) and *Kleinbauer* (small-scale farmers) began to work part-time in coal-related industries or mines. Farming in Lower Lusatia had never been a lucrative enterprise because of poor, sandy soil; therefore many impoverished farmers were grateful for the opportunity to make a better living in the industrial sector. By the turn-of-the-century, a large working class was established in the region. The first modern coal plant opened in 1911 and pointed the way into the future.

Between 1924 and 1928, the Lusatian brown coal region doubled in size, created an unprecedented need to hired labor.¹⁵² This demand could not be met by local workers alone, especially since most of the local residents were still involved in agriculture. As time passed this need would be met by the "importation" of workers, but prior to World War II the coal industry still remained relatively small-scale.

¹⁵¹ Frank Förster, *Verschundene Dörfer: Die Ortsabbrüche des Lausitzer Braunkohlenreviers bis 1993*, Bautzen: Domowina-Verlag, 1996. 10.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.



Figure 10. Lithograph by Měrcin Nowak-Njechorński

The transition from underground- to surface-mining methods during the 1920s resulted in the need to impact larger tracts of land, including those upon which villages sat. In 1924, the first Lusatian town was removed to make room for mining expansion. During the next twenty years, three more villages were destroyed with a total of 785 residents being displaced.¹⁵³ The main reason that these numbers are so small when compared to what occurred after the war is the injunction presented by a Kursaxon Mandate from 1743, which obligated mining enterprises to purchase mining rights from landowners. Thus, cost alone was reason enough for mining companies to think twice before trying to buy out each resident in a town or village.

This mandate did not carry any weight in the post-war era. The Soviet Military Administration confiscated the mining firms and consolidated them into a state monopoly in 1945.¹⁵⁴ Lusatia eventually became the coal and energy center of the GDR. The area around Leipzig also contained coal, but the Lusatian coal was judged to be of higher quality, which is why Lusatia was the focus of the GDR's *Energiepolitik*.¹⁵⁵ During the 1950's and 1960's, one-quarter of the yearly industry investments of the GDR was channeled into the coal enterprises in Lower Lusatia.¹⁵⁶ New power plants were constructed in the region, although there was a degree of secrecy about the decision-making processes. For example, the preliminary plans for the huge plant in Schwarze Pumpe were not announced to the locals, who first learned of the project as construction crews began to arrive.¹⁵⁷ With the coal industry completely controlled by the state, few limits existed that could curb the rapid industrialization of Lusatia.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵⁴ Most western European countries, including Britain and France, also nationalized their mining industries.

¹⁵⁵ Pastor, 52.

¹⁵⁶ Pech, 161.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 174.

As the coal industry grew, more and more workers were brought in to work the mines. Until this point, many local towns had been predominantly Sorbian, but with the influx of new German workers, the town structure changed drastically. In the area around Schwarze Pumpe alone, the number of workers increased by 34,000 between 1955 and 1960.¹⁵⁸ The Sorbs were soon greatly outnumbered, and the German language quickly came to dominate all business and personal contacts. Dissatisfaction and latent violence among the new German miners often resulted in the Sorbs being ridiculed for their costumes and customs. Sorbian gatherings were periodically disrupted by whistles and catcalls from individuals who obviously still had not learned to be tolerant.¹⁵⁹ This transformation of cultural paradigms only took place in villages that were not deemed to be hindrances to the expansion of mining operations. The story of what happened to towns lying on top of valuable coal deposits was quite different from those whose main problem was shifting population demographics.

New laws and mandates were passed to smooth the way for further mining ventures, and the obstacles to land acquisition and mining rights were removed. For example, in 1951, the *Volkskammer* ruled that towns that were slated to be demolished for mining expansion were to be seriously limited as to the new building projects that could be undertaken.¹⁶⁰ Once a town had been targeted for demolition, it was as if its very life was already over, even if the date for demolition was indefinite. Families began to slowly trickle out of towns, which seemed to be doomed to stagnation until their ultimate destruction. In the countryside, rural roads and paths were damaged and made impassable by heavy mining equipment. Few, if any, new community projects could be started. The regime

¹⁵⁸ Schiller and Thiemann, 156.

¹⁵⁹ Pech, 177.

¹⁶⁰ These areas were called *Bergbauschutzgebiete* (protected mining areas).

euphemistically labeled the removal of towns *Orts-* or *Teilortsverlegungen* (town or partial town transfers).¹⁶¹ The implication in bureaucratic German was that the towns would simply be shifted somewhere else, where life could continue as before. That never happened and was a pointless consolation, since severed ties and broken traditions could never be reconstructed. The numerous books and websites dedicated to demolished communities, such as Gross Partwitz (Figures 11 & 12), reveal the yet unresolved emotions and pain created by the forced displacements.

All Lusatians, German and Sorbian, were affected by these state-condoned displacements, but for the Sorbs this blow was doubly hard. “The displacement not only brought about a loss of homeland for the Sorbs, it destroyed the village community. Because of this, the displaced Sorbs were placed under heavy assimilation pressure.”¹⁶² Between 1945 and 1989, 71 towns were completely destroyed and 13,453 residents were displaced.¹⁶³ During this same time span, 42 partial town removals were executed, affecting 8,823 individuals.¹⁶⁴ The high point of the displacements occurred between 1974 and 1989 as the result of the “Oil Shock” of 1973, which brought about a return to heavy industry methods. Figure 13 shows the ultimate extent of mining-related devastation in Lusatia.

Most of the displaced residents were relocated to cities or towns in the region but lost forever the rural character of their lives. Because of the high cost of construction, the regime did not build single-family dwellings or establish any new villages. Instead the majority of families had to make do with apartments in newly constructed high-rise

¹⁶¹ Förster, 19.

¹⁶² “Die Umsiedlung brachte für die Sorben neben dem Verlust der unmittelbarer Heimat vor allem auch den Verlust der Dorfgemeinschaft mit sich, was zur Folge hatte, daß sorbische Umsiedler einem starken Assimilierungsdruck ausgesetzt waren.” Pastor, 52.

¹⁶³ Förster, 18.

¹⁶⁴ Förster notes that these are only minimum figures for the displacements, since the residents who had moved prior to the forced removals were not counted. Many families did not wait to be evicted their homes but left their hometowns when they realized the hopelessness of the situation.



Figure 11. Gross Partwitz



Figure 12. Gross Partwitz

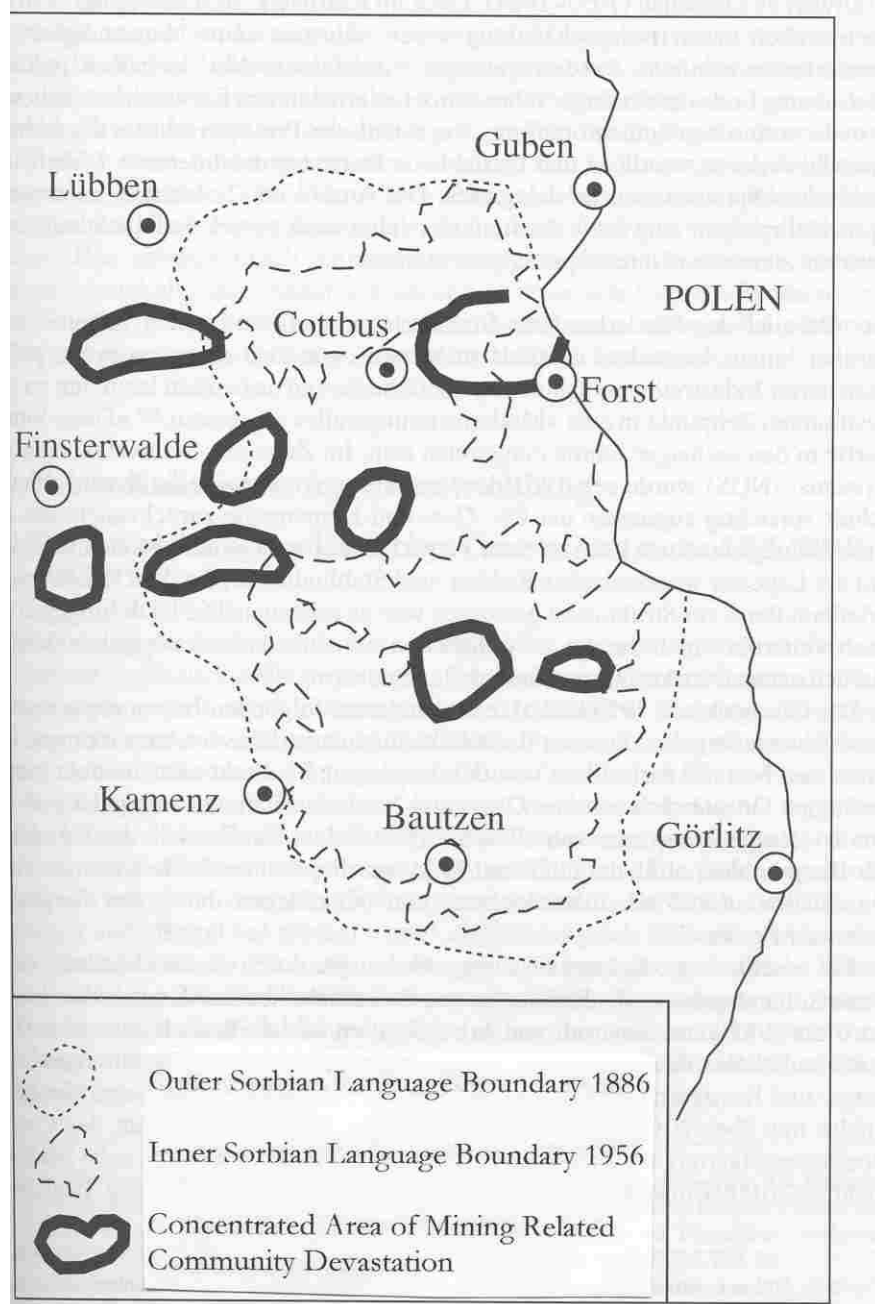


Figure 13. Areas in Lusatia affected by brown coal mining

complexes in urban ensembles. Many of these buildings were built on the edges of moderately sized cities such as Weißwasser and Hoyerswerda. In 1955, the cornerstone was laid in the Hoyerswerda *Neustadt* (New City). This was the first use of large high-rise apartment complexes on a community scale.¹⁶⁵ Until the 1950's, 50% of the residents in Hoyerswerda were Sorbian. The original, unrealized concept for Hoyerswerda was to have the bilingual character of the city expressed in the cityscape.¹⁶⁶ Buildings were to be decorated with Sorbian motifs and to be based on Sorbian vernacular building traditions.¹⁶⁷ These plans were quickly dropped, and the city developed along the lines of other socialist cities.

In Sorbian circles, actual resistance to the rural devastation came relatively late, but there were murmurs of concern already in the 1950's and 1960's. Feelings of cultural despair spread at this time and were condemned by the SUP as manifestations of "national pessimism."¹⁶⁸ The coal authorities made periodic overtures to the Sorbs, but they usually came to naught. In Schwarze Pumpe, the planners made promises that the Sorbian language would be promoted in the factory.¹⁶⁹ Once the factory was in place however, German was the only language used by the foremen and workers. Neither the anti-Sorbian sentiment of the workers nor the disappointment of the Sorbs changed the positivist position of the SUP. The politicians euphorically hailed Hoyerswerda and the new factories as models for their new society and as proof of the generous minority policy of the socialist state.

As the handmaiden of the SUP, the Domowina did what it could to still the discontent among the Sorbs. Kurt Krjenc, the head of the Domowina in the 1960's, greeted

¹⁶⁵ *Architektur und Städtebau in der DDR*, 24.

¹⁶⁶ Pech, 187.

¹⁶⁷ No discrete Sorbian vernacular building tradition exists, thus these plans were rather far-fetched.

¹⁶⁸ Pech, 179.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

the industrialization as a great moment in the development of Sorbian culture.¹⁷⁰ The “official” Sorbian history as depicted by Schiller and Thiemann in 1979 makes only brief mention of the damage inflicted on the Sorbian cultural landscape. The despair generated by and the criticism focused against the GDR energy policies were attributed to insufficient information among the rural population.¹⁷¹ The following excerpt from Schiller and Thiemann’s study reveals much about the veiled assimilation goals of the SUP:

On a much larger scale, the leaders of society must make their personal contribution so that the industrialization in the socialist state can contribute to a stronger development of the Sorbian language and culture.’ In this manner, the speaker [Wilhelm Koener, the secretary of the National Front] referred to the connection of four tasks that are essential for the national organization of the Sorbs: winning of Sorbian workers for the power plants; a concentration of workers in the plants; aid for the farmers who must be relocated; explanation to the Sorbian populace that the socialist industry is also the material basis for socialist Sorbian culture.¹⁷²

Obviously the SUP functionaries believed that the only good Sorb was one who would submissively sacrifice his cultural interests for those of the state.

The soothing words that were handed down by the SUP and the Domowina did not succeed in soothing the troubled breasts of many Sorbs, who felt betrayed and interpreted the industrialization of their homeland as the death knell for their culture. One Sorb expressed his feelings in the following way: “Until recently we were farmers and spoke Sorbian to each other. Now here, where the factory is going to be built, it is necessary for our children to learn to speak better German, because the industrialization is going to

¹⁷⁰ Schiller and Thiemann, 159.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 156.

¹⁷² “Vielmehr müßten alle gesellschaftlichen Kräfte ihren Beitrag dafür leisten, damit die Industrialisierung im sozialistischen Staat einer noch stärkeren Entfaltung der sorbischen Sprache und Kultur dienlich würde.’ Der Redner verwies in diesem Zusammenhang auf vier vordringliche Aufgaben für die nationale Organisation der Sorben: die Gewinnung sorbischer Arbeiter für das Kombinat; deren Konzentration im Kombinat; die Hilfe für die Bauern, welche umgesiedelt werden müssen; die Aufklärung der sorbischen Bevölkerung darüber, daß die sozialistische Industrie die materielle Grundlage auch für die sozialistische sorbische Kultur darstellte.” Schiller and Thiemann, 157.

Germanize our village soon enough.”¹⁷³ Neither the recurring colorful dance festivals nor the Sorbian chorale groups could hinder the irreversible, cultural erosion that happened in the brown coal areas.

As mentioned above, no effective resistance effort was organized among the Sorbs until much of the damage was already done. The most famous spokesman and critic for the cause was the journalist and author Jurij Koch. In November 1987, he gave a speech at the tenth *Schriftstellerkongreß* (Congress of Authors) in which he decried the negative impact of the GDR energy policy.¹⁷⁴ Two years later he presented a resolution of protest against the mining enterprises before the board of directors for the official state society of authors. This text eventually made its way into West Germany and was read over the *Deutschlandfunk* radio station in Cologne.¹⁷⁵ Koch’s words were straight and to the point, as he gave a collective voice to the tragedy that had occurred: “transplanted mountains and hills, blocked rivers, filled-in hollows in ancient river valleys, vanished villages, nibbled-away peripheries of cities, air polluted by dust and carbon dioxide.”¹⁷⁶ It had been a long time in coming, but here was finally the criticism that was needed. The fact that Koch could actually get away with laying the guilt of this devastation on the doorstep of the government reflects how much more relaxed the 1980’s were. Koch was neither imprisoned nor banished for his boldness. Nonetheless neither he nor other interested writers and environmentalists could topple the monolithic mining industry. Between the early 1980’s and 1989, 36 state-run mining

¹⁷³ “Bisher waren wir Bauern und hatten unter uns sorbisch gesprochen, jetzt, wo hier die Fabrik gebaut wird, ist es notwendig, daß unsere Kinder besser deutsch lernen, da die Industrialisierung unser Dorf sowieso germanisieren wird.” Quote from a resident in the town of Kühnicht. Quoted in Pech, 180.

¹⁷⁴ Pastor, 53.

¹⁷⁵ Oschlies, 65.

¹⁷⁶ “Versetzte Berge und Hügel, verlegte Flüsse, verfüllte Senken des Urstromtals, verschwundene Dörfer, angefressene Peripherien der Städte, durch Staub und Schwefeldioxyd verunreinigte Luft.” Quoted in Oschlies, 65.

companies removed 300 million tons of coal a year.¹⁷⁷ No reclamation policy was ever developed for the strip mines, and the region soon took on the appearance of a wasteland full of huge craters (Figure 14). “Ecological, cultural and ethnic losses had no weight in this calculation.”¹⁷⁸

Reunification and the return to a market economy caused a fundamental change in the energy business. West German and European Union pollution and reclamation standards resulted in a decreased demand for brown coal. Only seventeen mines were in operation at the time of official reunification in 1990. Within three years, ten of these were still active, of which only five had long-term possibilities.¹⁷⁹ The Saxon Constitution from February 1992 places greater worth on the preservation of landscape than its predecessor: “The state has the special responsibility to protect the ground, the air and water, animals and plants, as well as the entire landscape, including its long-established settlement areas” (Article 10, Paragraph 1).¹⁸⁰ Because of unified Germany’s stringent environmental regulations, brown coal has lost its eminence as an energy source. By 1993, coal production had dropped to 87 million tons, a number that is a considerably less than the 300 million tons that had been mined only five years before.¹⁸¹ The state governments of Brandenburg and Saxony also ruled that the local mining concern LAUBAG¹⁸² is required to draw up socially acceptable re-location and environmental clean-up policies. Thus, LAUBAG is considerably more limited than its precursor in the destruction it can cause.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 77.

¹⁷⁸ “Ökologische, kulturelle oder gar ethnische Einwände hatten in diesem Kalkül kein Gewicht.” Förster, 15.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 19.

¹⁸⁰ “Das Land hat insbesondere den Boden, die Luft und das Wasser, Tiere und Pflanzen sowie die Landschaft als Ganzes einschließlich ihrer gewachsenen Siedlungsräume zu schützen.” Quoted in Pastor, 96.

¹⁸¹ Pastor, 183.

¹⁸² LAUsitzer Braunkohle AktienGesellschaft. This is the name of the mining corporation that has replaced the state mining enterprise in Lusatia.



Figure 14. Nochten Mine

Today, brown coal is needed less than ever. The overproduction of power continues to be a major point of discussion in German society. The cost of electricity has sunk substantially, and many power companies are having trouble covering their costs. With this in mind, it is no surprise that the electricity produced by brown coal is not needed in the open market today. Despite this fact, LAUBAG receives major governmental subsidies to support its precarious financial position. The reason for this is directly linked to unemployment concerns.¹⁸³

The issue of unemployment and the mines is a controversial one that continues to be problematic today. LAUBAG and its plants are the largest employers in Lusatia, a fact that cannot be lightly overlooked because of the high unemployment rate in eastern Germany. Saxony's energy program was created in 1993 and has set the brown coal industry as a political goal well into the twenty-first century.¹⁸⁴ Although Reunification has brought an end to the widespread and willful destruction of Lusatian towns, some villages are still slated for demolition.¹⁸⁵ The reason for this is that the power plants have not been closed down as of yet, although their production demands have greatly decreased. The plant in Boxberg (Figure 15), the largest in the former GDR, continues to function with fewer and fewer employees.¹⁸⁶ For the dwindling numbers of people who work in the mines, the decision between home and job is a heart-breaking one.

The question of how to settle the conflict between the mines and the cultural landscape has not yet been answered. During the GDR period, the argument was that the

¹⁸³ Pastor, 183.

¹⁸⁴ Franziska Becker and Elka Tschernokoshewa (Ed.), *Skizzen aus der Lausitz: Region und Lebenswelt im Umbruch*, Berlin: Böhlau Verlag, 1997. 11.

¹⁸⁵ Trebendorf (partial town destruction in 2017), Rohne and Mulchwitz (anticipated destruction but no date), Horno (2002), and Hinterberg (2017). The long-term Brown Coal Plan calls for the re-settlement of approximately 10,000 individuals.

¹⁸⁶ In 1989, 4,900 people worked in the Boxberg plant. By 1996, this number had been reduced to 1,764. Becker and Tschernokoshewa, 55.



Figure 15. The power plant in Boxberg

country needed energy. Today the pivotal issue is job security in an economically strapped area. In order for employees to keep their jobs, they must be willing to sacrifice either their own homes or those of their neighbors. The handling of re-location has also not necessarily improved since 1990. In 1993, the residents of Kausche agreed to a re-settlement contract. LAUBAG offered job security to its employees and promised to help find vocational and educational positions for their children. Neither of these promises has been kept. The new living quarters are not up to standards either. As one disgruntled individual noted: “Here [they have] stuck us in a real cage.”¹⁸⁷ The old sense of community was also effectively destroyed through the re-location: “...we have been dispersed like a stack of papers through which the wind has blown.”¹⁸⁸ One cannot escape the deep melancholy that characterizes the statements of re-settled individuals whose cultural roots have been torn up.

After Reunification, the new opportunities for protest and criticism manifested themselves in the form of private local initiatives that sprang up in rural areas. Many villages witnessed the coalescing of resident initiatives to fight against the imminent destruction of their towns. Although these played a role in the re-conceptualizing of the coal industry, they were not as important as changing energy and economic conditions. The town of Klitten (Figures 16 & 17) is an example of the successful employment of grassroots protests in self-determination. In April 1986, the Klitteners were informed that their village would be demolished in the next few years.¹⁸⁹ From the very beginning of their struggle, German and Sorbian residents banded together to defend their town. They met with success in February 1990 when Klitten was struck from the list of endangered towns. Approximately 50% of the

¹⁸⁷ “Da habt ihr uns ja so richtig in den Käfig gesteckt.” Quoted in Jochen Fetzer, “Schönes altes Dorf – schönes neues Dorf?”, *Skizzen aus der Lausitz*, Franziska Becker and Elka Tschernokoshewa (Ed.), Berlin: Böhlau Verlag, 1997. 89.

¹⁸⁸ “...wir sind auseinandergewürfelt, wie so ein Stapel Papier, wenn der Wind dort reinblast.” Quoted in Fetzer, 106.

¹⁸⁹ Förster, 7.

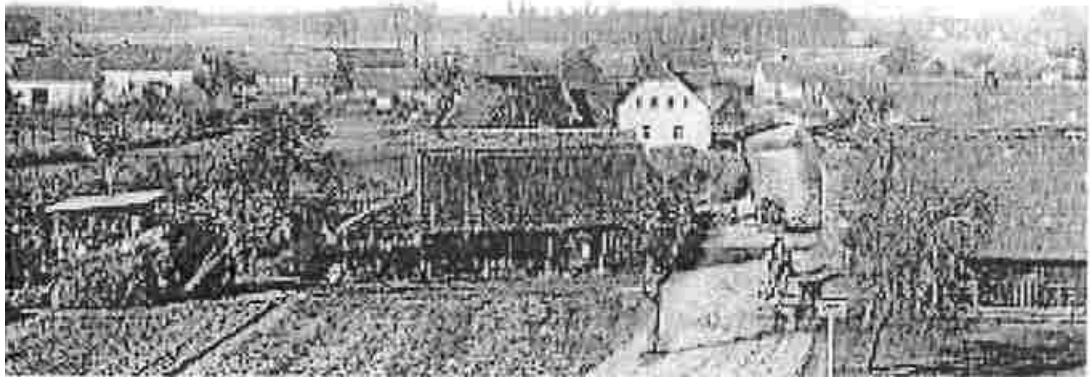


Figure 16. Klitten



Figure 17. Postcard from Klitten

residents worked in the mines, which led to a regrettable conflict of interests, but this did not prevent the Klitterners from coming together in a time of crisis. Klitten was the first town that actually escaped destruction through protest, something that was only made possible through the collapse of the GDR regime.

The struggles of communities against their pending demise are painful to examine. In Hinterberg, the locals live with a sense of perennial hopelessness. The presence of a hunting palace and three “protected” nature reserves has not made a difference in the approval for the town’s removal in 2017.¹⁹⁰ The Ministry for the Environment and Land Development in Saxony has approved the master plan for the Nochten Mine, which will eventually expand its boundaries through Hinterberg. The state mining office in Hoyerswerda has the power to block the granting of new building permits for projects in Hinterberg and other doomed towns, proving that some things have not changed much with the new government. The building planning office in the county seat of Weißwasser must answer to the mining office for all projects that come through its doors. In one last desperate maneuver, the residents of Hinterberg are trying to construct a brick factory as a stopgap measure that might prolong the town’s life. Otherwise, twenty years is a long time to wait for the inevitable ax to fall and to watch all life and activity die out.

The most well-known and current example of the democratic tool of peaceful protest is that of Horno (Figures 18 & 19), a Sorbian town located in southern Brandenburg.¹⁹¹ Franziska Becker and Elka Tschernokoshewa have described the debate

¹⁹⁰ Sebastian Panwitz, “Hinterberg – verschwunden in zwanzig Jahren?“, *Skizzen aus der Lausitz*, Franziska Becker and Elka Tschernokoshewa (Ed.), Berlin: Böhlau Verlag, 1997. 128.

¹⁹¹ The author selected this town for a more detailed case study because of the recentness of the events. Although this town is in Brandenburg, it can still be used as an example of how citizen engagement has changed in the eastern states in the past few years. The laws regarding brown coal mining, historic preservation, and minority preservation do not differ greatly between Saxony and Brandenburg.



Figure 18. Horno



Figure 19. Horno

between Horno and the Jänschwalde Mine¹⁹² as the result of tensions created by “the social argument of job security and the political necessity of the ‘Coal’” within which “ethnicity [is used] as a political resource.”¹⁹³ In plainer terms, this is a contest between the preservation of a town and the guarantee of several thousand jobs for an uncertain number of years. The common belief is that communities will continue to lose whenever they challenge the larger political superstructure: “Officially the irreversible destruction of a cultural landscape will be justified in the name of ‘greater interests.’”¹⁹⁴ Despite the gloomy forecast, the Hornoers are not taking the politically condoned destruction of their town quietly and have pushed their cause into the front pages of German newspapers and into the courts of the European Union. Their story is one from which even American activists could learn a thing or two.¹⁹⁵

The players in this David and Goliath story are diverse. First, there are the Hornoers themselves, who are no longer officially recognized as residents of an independent township. The Domowina, slowly shaking off its long tradition of conformity, is also involved.¹⁹⁶ The Partei Deutsche Sozialisten (PDS) political party has taken up the call as well.¹⁹⁷ Other neighboring communities have chosen to show their solidarity by getting involved in the complicated legal proceedings that the Hornoers keep initiating.

Before a clear understanding of this complex constellation of interested parties can be gained, a brief history of Horno is in order. The town was founded in the thirteenth century and first appears in written documents in 1346. It is not clear whether the town was

¹⁹² The Jänschwalde plant is the most inefficient plant in Germany and the oldest in the eastern states. It produces more carbon dioxide (22 million tons) than any other industry in the country.

¹⁹³ “das soziale Argument der Arbeitsplatzversicherung und die energiepolitische Notwendigkeit der ‘Kohle’...Ethnizität als politische Resource”, Becker and Tschernokoshewa, 15.

¹⁹⁴ “Offiziell wird die unwiderrufliche Zerstörung einer Kulturlandschaft jedoch mit ‘übergeordneten Interessen’ gerechtfertigt.” Fetzner, 82.

¹⁹⁵ All information for this section was taken from the official Horno website (www.horno.de).

¹⁹⁶ The Domowina is allowed to select one voting member to the Brown Coal Commission in Brandenburg.

¹⁹⁷ The PDS is actually the reformed communist party, which still has some clout because of a mixture of nostalgia and dissatisfaction in the eastern states.

established by German or Slavic settlers, but during the course of time, families from both ethnic groups took up residence here. In 1883, the ethnographer Ernst Mucka reported that the vast majority of the Hornoers were Sorbian and that classes were still given in the Sorbian language, although this was officially prohibited by Prussia. The Sorbian cultural presence remained visible for several more decades. A visitor during the years of the Weimar Republic described Horno in the following fashion:

Horno is the easternmost point of Lower Lusatian Wendish culture. The dress and language here are still strongly Wendish. Almost everything that can be held as typical for Lower Lusatian village and farmstead forms can still be found here: block houses with uncapped corner joints, straw roofs, eaves shaped like chicken heads, the broad village green planted with trees and a neighboring pond and church, the gatehouses on the street side of the farmsteads, the separate bake oven, the elevated gallery on barns, the Wendish blue, etc.¹⁹⁸

Unfortunately the town was badly damaged in World War II, and many of these village characteristics no longer exist. Nazi persecution and industrialization had a negative influence on Sorbian culture, but even as late as 1955, 12% of the residents could still speak Sorbian.¹⁹⁹

Horno has a history of determined resistance. In 1960, the Horno farmers protested against agricultural collectivization and were subjected to intimidation tactics, which resulted in the first local collective farm being founded in the same year. The first threat from the mines came in 1977. Resistance to displacement was organized immediately, and citizens started to pay visits to the SUP county office and the power plant.²⁰⁰ All of these meetings

¹⁹⁸ "Horno ist der östliche Punkt des Niederlausitzer Wendentums. Tracht und Sprache sind hier noch vielfach wendisch. Fast alles, was für die Niederlausitzer Dorf- und Hofanlage bezeichnend ist, findet sich hier noch: Blockhäuser mit unbekappten Balkenenden, Strohdächer, Windlatten mit dem Hahnenkopf, die breite baumbepflanzte Dorfau mit dem Dorfteich und der Kirche, Torhäuser an der Straßenseite der Gehöfte, der alleinstehende Backofen, der überragende Gang bei Stallgebäuden, das wendische Blau, usw." Quoted on Horno website.

¹⁹⁹ In the so-called Guben region in which the town lies, the Sorbian language survived the longest in Horno.

²⁰⁰ One of the key issues to the united front in Horno was the fact that few of the residents were employed in the mines, which removed the division of loyalties that played a role in other communities.

were kept under Stasi surveillance.²⁰¹ This agitation must have been irritating to the authorities, but they did not lift the 1977 ban on the construction of new houses in Horno. Twelve years after the first decision, the Hornoers were still fighting for the preservation of their town. They sent a petition to Erich Honecker in September 1989, demanding a change to the mine plans.²⁰² When one considers that the Berlin Wall fell in October 1989, it comes as no surprise that this document was lost in the final crumbling of the GDR regime.

After Reunification, the protesting citizens came together in a formal manner and established themselves as an official body. In the first free election in Horno, the members of this group were elected to positions in the local government. The new mayor and general assembly promised to do all they could to release Horno from the noose that had been put around its neck over fourteen years earlier. This goal was greeted enthusiastically by neighboring towns, which were also threatened by an expanding coal industry. On June 1, 1995, Horno received its first victory in eighteen years when the Brandenburg Supreme Court declared the Jänschwalde plan to be unconstitutional.

Hopes for further cooperation with the state government were raised among the Hornoers, but these were not fulfilled. Instead, the government re-cleared the path for demolition. It paid for the research and planning that would result in the re-settlement of Horno under a modified Jänschwalde plan. In protest, the town government and the Domowina purposefully did not participate in the planning process. A hearing was held for the Hornoers in which 91% of the citizens refused to voluntarily agree to their displacement. In solidarity, the four other towns that were being considered as potential new “homes” for the Hornoers stated that they would only agree to taking in the people on the condition that the residents themselves agreed to the re-settlement.

²⁰¹ The Stasi was the East German secret police, modeled on the KGB.

²⁰² This document was signed by almost all voting age Hornoers.

Despite this open challenge, the state of Brandenburg continued to shore up its support for LAUBAG. In 1996, the draft of a new Brown Coal Law was sent to various organizations deemed to have vested interest in it. The Domowina, the Organization of Local Governments in Brandenburg, the *Naturschutzbund Deutschland* (German Environmental Protection Society), and the *Grüne Liga* (Green League) were especially critical of the draft and refused to support the document unless significant changes were made to it. The state government did not make the recommended changes and unanimously passed the law in June 1997. Undaunted Horno Mayor Bernd Siegert persisted in investing funds in village improvements, such as new sidewalks, a new bus stop, and renovations of the community center and the village church.

The Brown Coal Law was soon contested by the PDS (unconstitutionality²⁰³), the Domowina (infringement of the rights of the Sorbian people), and Horno (infringement of the guarantee of self-determination on the community level). The case went to court in December 1997, and in June 1998, the court ruled that the Brown Coal Law was compatible with the state constitution. Horno officially lost its status as an independent community yet again in September of the same year. In December, the town of Jänschwalde, the local government that now was responsible for Horno, filed a complaint in the European Human Rights Court in Strasbourg on the grounds that the German government had violated the European Human Rights Convention. The federal government was required to re-examine the case, and a representative from the Federal Justice Department was sent to Horno. The Strasbourg court handed down a ruling against Horno in May 2000. The court acknowledged that an infringement of human rights would occur if the town were removed,

²⁰³ The Brandenburg Constitution assures the right of the Sorbs to protect and maintain their culture (Article 98, Paragraph 2, Sentence 2).

but accepted the claim from the German government that this was a necessary evil to ensure “economic well-being.” 2003 was set as the date for final removal.

This blow did not deter the Hornoers who continued to pursue proceedings in the local courts in Cottbus. In one case, the expropriation of a particular plot of land was declared illegal, because the Jänschwalde Mine plan did not meet the requirements for environmental impact surveys. This decision was overruled by a higher court in Brandenburg in September 2000, and as it now stands LAUBAG will be able to bulldoze Horno in the next few years.

The Hornoers do not seem to have lost any of their gumption in the face of stark opposition. The few who work for LAUBAG often find themselves as targets for ridicule or threats. Jutta Knetschk, one such employee, revealed the conditions of persecution that she faces: “At work I experience psycho-terror in the highest degree. I often hear things like “Well, is Horno still standing?” or “Soon we are going to come and beat up you and your family!”²⁰⁴ Many miners share the perspective expressed by one LAUBAG employee: “The people will not lose their homeland when they receive new houses twenty kilometers away in Forst.”²⁰⁵ The value of sense of place and historical continuity is completely absent in this attitude. As can be seen, extreme pressure is being exerted on the Hornoers who are anything but *Mitmacher* (conformists).

Horno has attracted attention from some unusual sectors. In 1999, two members of a Native American tribe in Arizona visited the tiny Lusatian village. Kee Watchman and

²⁰⁴ “Ich erlebe auf die Arbeit Psychoterror in höchster Potenz. Naa, steht Horno immer noch? heißt es, oder: Bald kommen wir und knüppeln dich mit deiner Familie raus.” Quoted in “Zerquestscht der wirtschaftliche Druck den Rechtsstaat?”, www.horno.de/deutsch/Medienecho/wirtdruck.html

²⁰⁵ “Die Menschen verlieren doch nicht ihre Heimat, wenn sie 20 Kilometer entfernt in Forst neue Häuser bekommen.”

Daniel Zapata, who also belong to an ethnic minority²⁰⁶, could empathize with the plight of the Sorbs. Another parallel exists insofar as mining endeavors also pose a threat to the land and villages of their tribe in Arizona.²⁰⁷ Closer to home, a group of fifty of Germany's most renowned artists, publishers and writers, including Günter Grass, the Noble Prize Winner for Literature in 2000, drew up a petition for Horno's preservation:

According to the plans of the Brandenburg state government and the LAUBAG Brown Coal corporation, the town of Horno in the Sorbian settlement area of Lower Lusatia is supposed be re-settled and then razed by the end of 2002. For more than fifteen years, the town's unyielding resistance and the inflexible adherence to imported energy plans have led to conflicts in which groups of people have met in dispute. It is necessary to find a compromise that will lead to a conciliation of interests. The mining machines and equipment should make a detour around this village, which stands under the protection of historic preservation legislation. This way both jobs and Horno could both be preserved. With such a decision at the last minute, the state politicians and LAUBAG's board of directors would show human generosity and environmental responsibility suitable to the present era.²⁰⁸

This very broadminded plea for understanding and compassion reveals how sympathy for Horno has been awakened.

The Hornoers are still trying to bring their plight to the attention of other Germans, but unfortunately gatherings of peaceful protest do not seem to have much of a place even in the modern German state. In January 2001, a group of Hornoers went to Berlin to hand out flyers and brochures at a celebration and parade organized for the 300th

²⁰⁶ Their unspecified tribe has between 10,000 and 20,000 member.

²⁰⁷ Watchman and Zapata were in Europe to present their problems with American mining companies before the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

²⁰⁸ "Das Dorf Horno im sorbischen Siedlungsgebiet der Niederlausitz soll nach Plänen der Brandenburgischen Landesregierung und des Braunkohleunternehmens LAUBAG bis Ende 2002 umgesiedelt und überbaggert werden. Der zähe, mehr als fünfzehnjährige Widerstand der Dorfgemeinschaft und das starre Festhalten an hergebrachten Energiekonzepten haben zu einer Konfliktlage geführt, in der Menschengruppen gegeneinander aufgebracht werden. Nötig ist ein Kompromiss, der zum Ausgleich der Interessen führt. Die unter Denkmalschutz stehende Siedlung sollte von den Tagebaugeräten umfahren werden. Damit könnten sowohl Arbeitsplätze als auch Horno erhalten bleiben. Die Politik des Landes sowie der Vorstand der LAUBAG würden mit einer solchen Entscheidung in letzter Minute menschliche Größe und zeitgemäße Verantwortlichkeit gegenüber der Umwelt beweisen." www.horno.de

anniversary of the crowning of the first Prussian king. The demonstrators were driven back and ordered to leave by policemen, although they were not causing any disruption. The journalist who chronicled the event criticized this action in poetic terms: “The weathervane definitely shows whence the wind blows. At any rate, it is not blowing from the direction of tolerance.”²⁰⁹ Ironically, the states of Brandenburg and Berlin were honoring the kingdom of Prussia, whose motto had been: “Tolerance, Lawfulness, Strength.”

The ultimate fate of Horno and its 350 residents has yet to be decided. Much could still happen between now and the end of 2003. The Hornoers maintain an updated and comprehensive website that presents their story and the issues that are involved. If Horno eventually falls victim to an outmoded energy plan, disillusionment in the new democratic system will be great. In closing, the words of Wolfgang Nitsche, Hornoer and Sorb, summarize the feelings of the people who would just like to hold on to their small corner of the planet: “If Horno dies, her defenders will learn that one can bend the laws, break the Constitution, and denounce independent courts as job killers – almost like it was during the communist period, when the regional ‘prince’ of the SUP, his economic powerhouse, and the compliant press formed a holy trinity.”²¹⁰ The despondency of these words is stirring. All one can do is pray that the Hornoers will not have additional reasons in the future for doubting the merits of a democratic system.

²⁰⁹ “Doch zeigt jetzt der Strohalm, woher der Wind weht. Aus der Richtung der Toleranz weht er jedenfalls nicht.”

²¹⁰ “Falls Horno stirbt, erfahren dessen Verteidiger, daß man Gesetze biegen kann, die Verfassung brechen und unabhängige Gerichte als Jobkiller denunzieren – fast wie zu Kommunistenzeiten, als der SED-Bezirkfürst, sein Wirtschaftskombinat und seine willfährige Presse in heiliger Trinität walteten.”
www.horno.de/deutsch/Medieecho/wirtdruck.de

CHAPTER 7

AFTER THE FALL: THE IMPACT OF REUNIFICATION ON PRESERVATION ISSUES IN THE FORMER GDR

“The new preservation laws for the states will be a help. But is there not a problem when preservation work is limited to the legal arena? Is there not a lack of vision in understanding historic sites?...Has the preservationist not failed in his task, if he has not succeeded at explaining why a site is a monument?” - Elisabeth Hütter and Heinrich Magirius (1993)²¹¹

Eleven years have passed since the FRG and the GDR were formally reunified, and during that time new policies and perspectives have been developed. Reunification not only brought about a change in the legal framework in the so-called “new” states, it also provided a chance to completely re-assess the meaning of preservation in modern society. The first main task for preservationists in the early 1990’s was the stabilization of many towns and cities in eastern Germany. Financial programs through the Ministry of the Interior were established to provide the money that was desperately needed for this task. The first of these programs went into effect in 1991 and made approximately 1.55 billion Marks available for restoration projects. 180 million Marks came directly from the national government, while 500 million Marks were earmarked for 21 model cities with the remainder being pulled from individual communities’ city planning coffers.²¹² By 1994, this kind of

²¹¹ “Die neuen Denkmalschutzgesetze der Länder werden eine Hilfe sein. Aber fehlt es nicht, wenn die Arbeit der Denkmalpflege auf juristische Spielräume beschränkt bleibt, an einer Vision vom Denkmal?... Hat [der Denkmalpfleger] nicht, wenn es ihm nicht gelungen ist, das Denkmal als Monument zu erklären, sein Auftrag verfehlt?” Hütter and Magirius, 309.

²¹² Kiesow, 187.

generous financial support was no longer feasible. The restoration funding was restricted, and the matching grants were discontinued.

The issue of money is an uncomfortable one for Germans on both sides of the old border. Most of the money that has been invested in updating the infrastructure in the new states has been provided through increased taxes (4%). Many of the already heavily taxed citizens in western Germany are somewhat resentful of the higher taxes. On the other hand, the eastern Germans, who are comparatively poorer, are of the opinion that their wealthier western cousins have the responsibility to support them in their time of need. With each passing year the question of money becomes more and more pressing, since it is clear to all that the government cannot continue its generous support of preservation activities. It is still unclear how the Germans will deal with this problem.

One of the major improvements brought about by Reunification is the re-establishment of professional contacts with colleagues in Western Europe and beyond. On March 1, 1990, all of the state conservationists in unified Germany met for the first time in Eisenach. Since that time, the preservationists have been able to pool their knowledge and increase the scope of their pursuits. This has been important, especially since the new states now have preservation laws modeled on those in the western states.²¹³ Changes in mentality and legal administration have been made smoother by the new links in the West.

The *Freistaat Sachsen* (Free State of Saxony) has been the site of many preservation endeavors. This is partly due to the fact that the economic conditions here are somewhat better than those in the other states, but one must also give due credit to professionals and individuals who provide guidance for various projects. During the past few years, a cursory

²¹³ All of the new states now have *ipso-iure* systems, which means that it is the law itself that carries weight, not the monument list. Sites are thus protected without being registered on any kind of central site list. Christoph Moench and Olaf Otting, "Die Entwicklung des Denkmalschutzrechts (Teil 1) – Voraussetzungen der Denkmaleigenschaft", *Neue Verwaltungszeitschrift*, Nr. 2, 2000. 152.

survey of significant historic sites was executed. 100,000-110,000 objects were inventoried and declared to be of cultural importance.²¹⁴

As far as the Sorbs are concerned, Bautzen has fortunately received much attention in recent years. Between 1990 and 1997, 56 million Marks were invested in preservation projects in the city.²¹⁵ Even before 1989, Bautzen had a particularly good master plan, which provided the groundwork for implementing quick and responsive preservation work in the early 1990's. Today Bautzen markets itself to the world as *sächsisch, sorbisch, sehenswert* (Saxon, Sorbian, worth seeing). Surrounding villages are also being restored slowly, but towns of Sorbian significance are not given preferential treatment in preservation planning decisions.

The role of the public has also been re-defined in the past few years. Gerhard Glaser, the state conservationist of Saxony, expressed the relationship between preservationists and the public succinctly: "Of course, the ultimate decision does not lie with the preservationist. The cultural consciousness of the public is what can actually affect many things."²¹⁶ Despite this statement, one seldom comes across private initiative projects that are comparable to those in the United States, but that is true for the western states as well as for the eastern ones. There is simply no entrenched tradition of citizen engagement on the activist level. The German Foundation for Historic Preservation (*Deutsche Stiftung Denkmalschutz*) is one example of a private organization that has a broad influence on

²¹⁴ According to one planner in Dresden, this survey was poorly done. In his opinion, too many sites were pronounced "significant." Today planners have many problems in explaining to property owners why they must spend money on maintaining unused secondary buildings, while collapsing manor houses are allowed to fall to pieces. This is a critical issue, since many Saxons earn considerably less than their western colleagues and are therefore more sensitive to financial matters. There are also differences between what the residents believe to be appropriate re-uses of structures and the interests of the preservationists.

²¹⁵ 1/3 provided for infrastructure stabilization, 1/3 for private homeowners, and 1/3 for local, community-based projects.

²¹⁶ "Natürlich entscheidet der Denkmalpfleger letztlich nicht. Das öffentliche Bewußtsein ist es, das vieles bewirken kann." Glaser, 7.

preservation matters. The organization was founded in 1985 and is financed through donations. Between 1991 and 1995, the Foundation provided 200 million Marks for projects in the new states.²¹⁷ In some ways, the Foundation resembles the U.S. National Trust for Historic Preservation, insofar as it serves as a national umbrella organization, which provides funding for various projects.²¹⁸

One danger that some eastern German preservationists seem to fear is that of increasing legalism in the field of cultural heritage. They are concerned that the philosophical and symbolic reason for preservation efforts may be forgotten in the rush to exercise the new regulatory laws. “In the face of the law, we cannot forget about the sites themselves or the people who find in them their connection to the past, their homeland - the people who live in and among them.”²¹⁹ One potential weakness in German preservation philosophy is that of elevating the conservation of physical historic substance above that of providing contact points between the public and its culture.²²⁰ This is a peril that preservationists in the new states are anxious to avoid.

The past eleven years have been a period of sweeping change in Germany. The preservation field has also been forced to adapt with the times. The fundamental differences between preservation theories and goals that existed for forty years have essentially vanished, although divergent opinions continue to exist. After all, four decades of separation do not

²¹⁷ Gottfried Kiesow, “Denkmalpflege in Deutschland”, *Denkmalpflege im neuen Europa*, Erika Richter and Hans-Dieter Dyroff, Bonn: Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission, 1996. 75.

²¹⁸ The author did not specifically research the breadth of programs sponsored by the Foundation and therefore cannot offer any conclusions on this topic.

²¹⁹ “Aber über das Gesetz dürfen wir die Denkmale nicht vergessen, die Menschen, die in ihnen ihren historischen Bezug finden, ihre Heimat erkennen, die Menschen, die zwischen ihnen und in ihnen leben.” Glaser, 13.

²²⁰ This “worship” of physical substance is directly connected to the theories of Georg Dehio and Alfred Riegl, two late nineteenth-century preservationists who advocated conservation over restoration. Dankwart Guratzsch defines this as the deification of material as a “new god over the monument.” For more information on this topic, please consult the following article. Dankwart Guratzsch, “Stoff-Idee-Symbol. Zum Wandel des Denkmalbegriffs vor und nach Dehio”, *Denkmalkunde und Denkmalpflege: Wissen und Wirken. Festschrift für Heinrich Magirius zum 60. Geburtstag am 1. Februar 1994*, Dresden: Karl M. Lipp Verlag, 1995. 511-540.

simply vanish overnight or even after a decade. Basically a more standardized form of preservation has taken root in Germany. Preservation has become less politicized in eastern Germany and is no longer as vulnerable to ideological revisionism as it was during the GDR period. The new opportunity to raise private money for projects is also a step forward in the further development of the culture resources field. Much still needs to be done, but the prospects for the future look promising.

CHAPTER 8

A LOSING BATTLE?: THE SORBS TODAY

“We are the only minority that is documenting its own demise.” - Jan Malink (1991)²²¹

On a cultural level, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 represented yet another turning point in the history of the Sorbian people. This unexpected event took the entire world, including Lusatia, by surprise. No one saw it coming – no one that is except for a few select politicians who knew the reality behind falsified production quotas, incomes, and elections. As mentioned above, the 1980’s witnessed a general relaxation of ideological demands and constructs, yet the GDR never had to grapple with a grass-roots challenge to the established system, as occurred in the Prague Spring of 1968 or the Solidarity movement in Poland during the 1970’s and 1980’s. Nonetheless, the effect of these other ways of thinking trickled through the closely guarded borders.

In the late 1980’s, the Sorbian-German settlement area in Lusatia included 158 rural communities and 11 cities.²²² Official GDR publications between 1945 and 1989 consistently touted the population of the Sorbs as approximately 100,000. Surveys executed by the Sorbian Institute in the 1980’s revealed a very different reality. A 1987 survey concluded that approximately 50,000 individuals claimed to be Sorbian (Upper and

²²¹ “Wir sind die einzige Minderheit, die ihren eigenen Untergang dokumentiert.” Quoted in Oschlies, 78.

²²² Frank Förster, “Siedlungsgebiet, Kriterium und Struktur der Sorben ausgangs der 80er Jahre,” *Lžtopis C*, Nr. 34 (1991), 36-42.

Lower).²²³ This meant that the Sorbs comprised merely 10% of the population in Lusatia.²²⁴ Gradual assimilation and the “importation” of German and foreign workers had taken their toll on the use and vitality of the Sorbian language. And since language comprehension was (and still is) a key factor in determining “Sorbianness”, the minority had decreased substantially over the decades.

Twelve years have passed since the collapse of the GDR, and painful changes have come with the new times. As is the case in all parts of the former GDR, Lusatia is a region of high unemployment and uneasy concern for the future. Nostalgia for the cradle-to-grave care of the socialist state surfaces on a regular basis. The Sorbs themselves are faced with a completely new set of obstacles; as a traditionally rural society, ongoing industrialization and new globalization trends threaten their cultural foundation.²²⁵ Many feel continuing pressure to fully immerse themselves into the German mainstream. Ethnic traditionalism and conservatism are perceived as the means by which the Sorbs can protect themselves against further cultural loss.²²⁶ Bilingual signs and advertisements reflect the tenacious determination of the Sorbs to preserve the bicultural character of Lusatia (Figures 20 & 21).

The legal protection of minority groups has been reassessed and redefined by the federal government. Unlike the GDR constitution, the FRG constitution does not include a minority protection clause. The vote against such a clause came in 1994 and was justified by the argument that this guarantee already fell under the constitutional protection of individual

²²³ Sorbian ethnicity was determined by two factors: language comprehension and willingness to say that one was Sorbian. Förster, 36.

²²⁴ The official census of 1981 recorded 489,000 residents in this area.

²²⁵ This threat is not unique to the Sorbs but is shared by numerous other traditionally agrarian folk groups around the world.

²²⁶ Martin Walde, “Die Wende – Hoffnung für die katholische Lausitz?“, *Letopis*, Nr. 40 (1993), 38-48.



Figure 20. Sign on the District Administration Building, Bautzen



Figure 21. Grocery store in Ralbitz

rights and that all other rights should be addressed in the state constitutions.²²⁷ The civil rights of the Sorbs are covered in the Saxon and Brandenburg constitutions accordingly. The Saxon constitution guarantees the right of the Sorbs to the protection and development of their “native language, culture, and traditions.”²²⁸

Other Saxon laws also affect the preservation of the Sorbian area. The Regional and State Planning Law (*Regional- und Landesplanungsgesetz*) states that the uniqueness of the Sorbian-German region must be taken into consideration during all planning activities and procedures. The State Development Plan (*Landesentwicklungsplan*) maintains that the brown coal industry must be “environmentally friendly” and “socially responsible” and that the devastation of villages must be kept to an absolute minimum.²²⁹ In coal mining matters, the Domowina has the right to elect one voting member to the Brown Coal Commission (*Braunkohleausschuß*).

Two laws in particular address the issue of historic preservation in Lusatia. The Cultural Landscape Law (*Kulturräumgesetz*) recognizes the region of Upper Lusatia as a cultural landscape. Through this law, funding is provided for the preservation of the region. The Historic Preservation Law (*Gesetz zum Schutz und zur Pflege der Kulturdenkmale*) also includes a special reference to the Sorbs. As a recognized ethnic group, the Sorbs are allowed one voting representative on the Preservation Board for the state of Saxony.

Over the past several years, Sorbian institutions have undergone a transformation as well. In 1991, the “red” Domowina was reorganized and re-founded on democratic principles. The organization is gradually winning back some of its former members who distanced themselves from active involvement during the GDR period. The Foundation for

²²⁷ Kunze, 73.

²²⁸ “angestammten Sprache, Kultur und Überlieferung”, quoted in Pastor, 155.

²²⁹ “umweltschonend” and “sozialverträglich”, quoted in Pastor, 125.

the Sorbian People (*Stiftung für das sorbische Volk*) was also founded in 1991. This foundation is responsible for the allocation of state and national monies that are earmarked for the minority group. Every year millions of Marks flow into Bautzen for the support of various Sorbian cultural and educational projects. At the present time, the Sorbs rely almost completely on this state money, but in the future this inevitably will change. The FRG is facing the financial necessity of shrinking its complex social net, and many organizations and entities will be forced to learn how to raise financial support from the private sector. In the GDR, corporate sponsors and private foundations did not exist, so it will take a major readjustment in thinking for the former East Germans to adapt to changing economic realities.

Despite ever-present assimilation pressure, many Sorbs are actively cultivating their cultural lives and passing their heritage on to the next generation. This is particularly true of the Upper Sorbs in Saxony. Unfortunately this does not hold true for the Lower Sorbs. Fewer and fewer children are learning the language, and if this trend continues, the language there is likely to die out in the next generation. On the other hand, Upper Sorbian culture will not vanish as quickly. School societies, church groups, theater and choir societies, filmmakers, and songwriters all reflect the vitality that still lies within Upper Sorbian culture.

For the first time ever, an inventory of Sorbian monuments and sites is being compiled at the Sorbian Institute in Bautzen. A part-time position was established for this very purpose in 2000 and will continue in existence for an indefinite period of time. A map from 1886, which documented the then extant Sorbian language area, is being used as the basis for the study. All artifacts of possible significance to the Sorbian people are being included on this list; everything from churches to gravestones to communion chalices is being documented. An interview with Trudla Malinkowa, the woman responsible for the

list, provided insight into the methods she is using while making the survey.²³⁰ After arriving in a community, she goes straight to the church, which always counts as a significant cultural site. She then searches for all items that could possibly bear Sorbian inscriptions, such as stained glass windows, paraments, bells, and flags. From here she moves on to the cemetery and locates all tombstones that have Sorbian inscriptions and that belong to important Sorbian personalities. Then, she documents the houses and workplaces of significant Sorbian individuals. Lastly, she surveys all memorials and any other inscriptions that may hang on houses in the village. This inventory will be very rich indeed, since it does not limit itself to architectural exponents but includes smaller items of cultural importance as well (Figures 22 & 23).

The main complication faced by Sorbian preservationists is the blurring of cultural lines in Lusatia. Certain housing types, such as the *Umgebendehaus* (Figures 24 & 25), can be described as typically Lusatian, but no visual distinction exists between German and Sorbian houses. Other sites, such as Kloster Marienstern (Figure 26), the church in Rosenthal (Figure 27), the home of Měrcin Nowak-Njechorński (Figure 28), and the cemetery in Ralbitz (Figure 29), are carefully maintained Sorbian landmarks. With the drafting of cultural resources survey, it is likely that the direction and nature of preservation issues in Sorbian Lusatia will change significantly in the ensuing years.

As can be seen, the Sorbs have not yet given up the fight for their cultural autonomy and identity. The twenty-first century will present its own set of unique challenges, but one has reason to hope that the Sorbs will be able find ways to adapt and to face the difficulties of the new age bravely.

²³⁰ This interview occurred on December 6, 2000, at the Sorbian Institute in Bautzen.

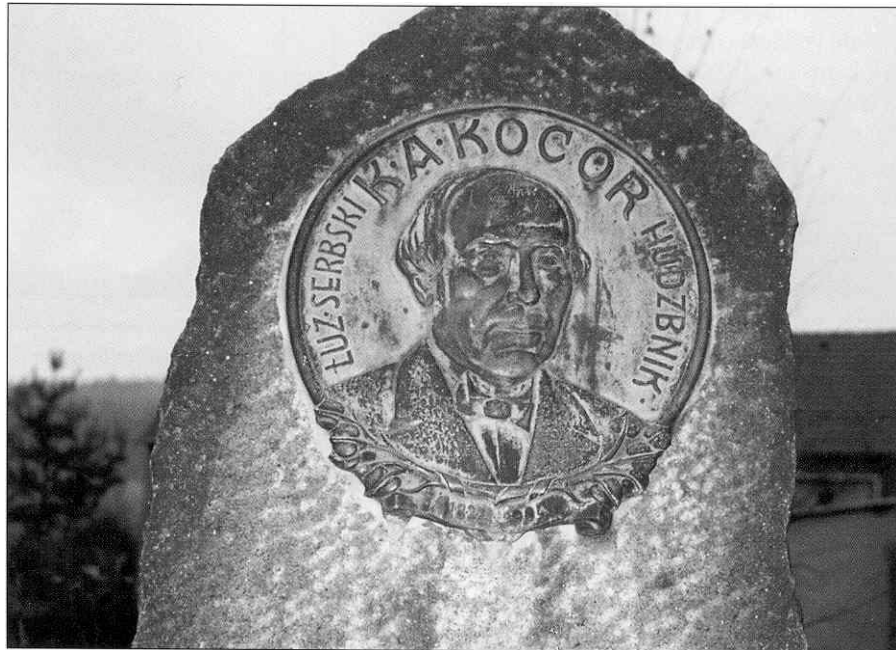


Figure 22. Memorial stone for the composer Korla Awgust Kocor near Großpostwitz



Figure 23. Memorial stone for the philanthropist Jan Michal Budar



Figure 24. Umgebäudehaus in Arnsdorf



Figure 25. Pre- and post-restoration pictures of an Umgebäudehaus in Meschwitz



Figure 26. Kloster Mariestern, Panschwitz-Kuckau



Figure 27. Church in Rosenthal



Figure 28. House of Měrcin Nowak-Njehorníski in Nechern



Figure 29. Cemetery in Ralbitz

CHAPTER 9

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE: NEW DIRECTIONS AND IDEAS FOR FUTURE CULTURAL PRESERVATION ACTIVITIES

“We are only ever temporarily at home. Here we do not have an eternal city, as it is called in *Hebrews*. Of course, everything else is an illusion. But this side of the illusion, here in the temporal, here on Earth, we are all searching for Home, for people, for a place, where we can feel secure.” - Jürgen Israel (1996)²³¹

The vast majority of this study has been dedicated to the history of cultural preservation, official and otherwise, among the Sorbs. As a historical study, a relatively objective position can be taken in the documentation of past events and developments. Yet when one turns to the assessment of current trends, such objectivity must be abandoned in order to effectively formulate opinions and to offer constructive criticism and advice.

The most glaring and direct problem that Sorbian villages in Brandenburg and northern Saxony face is the current brown coal policy.²³² Despite the undeniable proof that brown coal is neither needed nor competitive in the open market, the federal and state governments continue to subsidize the coal industry, primarily to offer some degree of job security for the few thousand people who still work in coal-related positions. No one denies that in the next twenty years there will be no more coal mining, yet if things continue to move in the direction they are going, Horno and other villages will fall victim to huge earth

²³¹ “Wir sind stets nur provisorisch beheimatet. Wir haben hier keine bleibende Stadt, wie es im Hebräerbrief heißt. Natürlich ist alles andere eine Illusion. Aber diesseits dieser Illusion, hier im Irdischen, hier auf Erden, sind wir alle auf der Suche nach Heimat, nach Menschen, nach einem Ort, wo wir uns sicher fühlen können.” Jürgen Israel, “Kein schöner Land in dieser Zeit. Heimat durch Sprache”, *Deutsches Neuland: Beiträge aus Religion und Gesellschaft*, Thomas Brose (Ed.), Leipzig: Benno-Verlag, 1996. 143-155. 150.

²³² This is the most obvious threat to the physical fabric of Sorbian cultural landscapes. The mechanization of agriculture and the demise of agriculture as a way of life are the main dangers to the preservation of traditional Sorbian folkways.

moving machines. The federal government and the state governments need to seriously re-examine their policies which allow yet more of their history to be removed. World War II and the GDR period wreaked havoc on the historic substance in Germany, and now another little piece of history is being threatened by an outmoded industry. This is the kind of loss that the already ravaged region in Lower Lusatia can hardly bear.

Another problem area lies in the way that the Saxon preservation law is formulated. Perhaps in reaction to the personality cult that existed during the GDR period, the current law does not allow buildings or sites to be listed because of association with particular individuals. This is unfortunate since in many cases, sites or objects of Sorbian importance have little if any architectural or artistic value, but are instead important because of who lived and worked there. If associative value could be added to the law, the number of sites associated with Sorbian culture would increase substantially.

Although an amendment to the law would be a worthy achievement, the manner in which preservation laws are interpreted and used in Germany should be reassessed. Too often it seems as if the preservationists use the power of the law to implement their will, even when this goes against the understanding or will of the people. If the field of historic preservation in the United States sometimes tends to elitism, then this danger is much greater in Germany. Public relations work is still a foreign concept, and many sites and projects lack public educational programs, which would increase both the visibility of and the understanding for preservation endeavors.

The previous criticisms address problems on the state and federal levels, but there are also issues that need to be examined within the Sorbian culture itself. First of all, the dependency on state and federal money is becoming increasingly complicated. In 2000, a great outcry resulted from the federal government's threat to reduce the subsidies to the

Foundation for the Sorbian People. Eventually this money was once again secured to everyone's relief. In the author's circle of Sorbian acquaintances, only one person expressed regret that this was the dénouement. This individual expressed her opinion that it is high time for the Sorbs assume the sole responsibility of caring for their own culture, which would mean that they would no longer be exclusively dependent on government monies. Although the Sorbs care for and cultivate their culture in numerous ways, a silent fear pervades among those in charge of cultural promotion. The belief is that the financial framework for the Sorbian people is only provisionally in place and will collapse as soon as the federal government decides it needs to make budget cuts. In the near future, the Sorbs should move beyond passive acceptance of the current framework and start examining alternative techniques for the protection and promotion of their culture. The time is not far off when the political and economic climate will deliver the final push into the free market with its mixture of public and private funds. The sooner the Sorbs prepare themselves for this, the less unpleasant the shock will be when it comes. Although it is not the only country that could serve as a model, the United States and its complex network of private foundations and corporate giving could provide valuable examples of successful public-private partnerships.

The issue of "culture" is a concept which the Sorbs need to contemplate and possibly re-define. As things now stand, language competency is the main criterion for gauging the health of the culture. This is why Lower Sorbian culture is considered to be in such danger. Although the health of their language is important, the Sorbs should move beyond language as THE defining element in their cultural life. In this way, loss of language does not automatically translate into death of culture. The Lower Sorbs have always viewed their relationship with Germans in a different way than the Upper Sorbs. Thus, what the

Upper Sorbs call “assimilation” may just be “adaptation” or “change” in the eyes of the Lower Sorbs. The United States and other emigrant nations can serve as case studies in how “culture” and “society” are not static concepts. For example, although the Sorbian language vanished from the Texas prairie over eighty years ago, the descendents of these immigrants have preserved the memory of their distinct cultural roots. These people would say that they are Americans, but at the same time they would say that they are ethnically Wendish, not German or Polish or Italian. As a nation of emigrants, the United States is a country in which locality and language have ceased to be the cornerstones of cultural definition. All the same, this does not mean that there is no culture in America; it means that the old definition is no longer valid and has been replaced with another. Once the Sorbs adopt a more flexible definition of culture, they can also reach out to those people whose roots are Sorbian but who no longer speak the language.

The issue of “culture” should be analyzed on yet another level. As the article on the two Native Americans who visited Horno emphasizes, common ground exists between the Sorbs and the Native Americans, both of which are fighting to maintain some essence of their native culture in the face of a larger social superstructure. In both cases, the question of what is real and what is for show surfaces. The rain and harvest dances put on by certain Native American tribes are often criticized for being put on for tourists alone and for not being a truly vibrant tradition. The same could be said for the Sorbian dance festivals and choirs. In essence, they too are staged for their entertainment value. Is this “real” culture? A similar question can be raised in connection with the Sorbian costumes. Only elderly women wear the Sunday and weekday attire, and upon occasion young girls don special costumes for religious holidays and festivals. The Sorbs now dress like everyone else in German society, as is the case with many smaller sub-groups of people in industrialized

societies. The old costumes have no place in the modern classroom or office building. This makes the emphasis placed on the Sorbian costume a little suspect. Can one speak of a “living” clothing tradition, when these costumes are taken out only three or four times a year? Instead of discussing what the costume is like, one should refer to this costume in the past tense. It too is linked to entertainment value, much like Native American moccasins and jerkins.

This comparison to Native American culture is something that has received little if any attention in Sorbian circles. Due to the ties of communist brotherhood and Slavic languages, the Sorbs have almost always looked east for support. Their links to Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Ukraine are well polished and grounded. Ten years after suddenly becoming part of the European Union (EU), the Sorbs have slowly expanded their network to include other groups, such as the Welsh in Britain, the Bretons in France, and the Basques in Spain. Although the contacts between the various minorities in Europe have improved, this cannot be said of the transatlantic connections. If anything, the EU is bringing about a different kind of exclusionism, in which member countries focus on promoting their welfare and agenda against those of the rest of the world. The Sorbs should try to avoid a continental elitism and establish contacts with other countries outside of Europe.

One encouraging development is the active role that is being taken by Concordia University in Austin, Texas, the only university in the western hemisphere founded predominantly by Wendish immigrants. The president of the college has increased the institutional support of the Domowina and has established academic ties with a school in Hoyerswerda. Every year Wendish-Americans travel to Lusatia, while young Sorbs retrace the immigration route to Texas. Such small personal exchanges provide reason for great hope in the value of international connections. These contacts need to be taken to the

scholarly level eventually, where they can serve as a source for academic studies and projects. These studies could include such topics as examining the role of culture and memory in the United States and of analyzing the heritage preservation efforts of the Native Americans.

Within Germany itself, increased emphasis on public relations and public education programs could help the Sorbs. During the author's year in Germany, she was required to give brief talks about her studies for Rotary clubs around the country. She gave several of these in western Germany and was particularly struck when club members shook their heads over the fact that it took an American student to inform them about their own national minority. The main thrust of the Sorbian cultural activities is understandably concentrated in Lusatia, but it is also important to reach out and educate the individuals who live hundreds of miles away. Just as the preservationists are almost too complacent in the security of their laws, the Sorbs are content to focus on their own region. This is dangerous since ignorance is one of the main reasons that cultural sites are lost or abandoned. Besides, there is no reason to believe that the western Germans and others would be any less interested in Sorbian culture than their eastern relations. The Sorbs should try to get their message beyond the Saxon social studies books and so help bridge the gaping hole that still yawns between the two halves of the country. It should not take a visiting American student to provide information about the Sorbs to anyone. If the Sorbs are truly interested in saving and cultivating their culture, then they should expand their horizons past the boundaries of Saxony. The issue of public relations and outreach is something that could be studied from the British and American models and then adapted to the unique demands of the German situation.

As for historic preservation itself, in the face of an already decimated number of historic sites and ensembles, the Sorbs should turn to folklore as a possible source of

information. Legends are a rich resource since they are often full of references of places that have long vanished. For example, Sorbian tales recount the splendor of castles that once stood in Lusatia.²³³ Near the town of Burg (Spreewald), legend has it that there was once a castle that was destroyed by lightning when its king tried to kidnap two children to be his heirs. The so-called *Katharinen-schloß* in Schleife is supposed to have stood until the Thirty Years War. Near Wittichenau, a castle reputedly sank into the moor because its owner was cold-hearted and cruel. Such legends always have a fanciful element to them, but this does not negate the worth of their information. It is quite likely that there were once castles in Burg, Schleife and Wittichenau, but all that remains of them are these stories.

In some cases, actual artifacts reveal the veracity of the legends. For example, an eight-meter high wall is what survives of the fortress Liubusua in Lower Lusatia. This was the central castle complex for the entire area and was destroyed in 929 by Heinrich I during the Frankish campaigns against the Sorbs. Other sites also bear evidence of past importance. A hill near Koschenberg is rumored to have been a Slavic sacrificial and burial site.²³⁴ It was here that one of the fiercest battles between the Slavs and the Germans occurred in 923 AD. In the 1840s, a miller claimed to have found a golden headband on this site. Further archaeological excavation might corroborate his tale.

In addition to battlefields, there are also sites of ancient religious sites. The two hills *Czornebób* (Black God) and *Bele Bób* (White God) are located near Bautzen. These were supposedly the residences of two Wendish gods. Another hill near Hoyerswerda is called *Jungferstein* (Virgins' Stone), upon which many human sacrifices were allegedly made. For many years a long rectangular stone was located on this hill, and bones and pottery shards

²³³ Castle legends taken from Erich Schneider (Ed.), *Sagen aus Heide und Spreewald: eine Auswahl*, Domowina: Bautzen, 1991.

²³⁴ Schulrat Scholz (Ed.), *Heimathbuch des Kreises Hoyerswerda*, C. Ziehlke: Bad Liebenswerda, 1925. 27.

were among the things found up there. Such sites are fundamental to the interpretation of Sorbian culture and history.

One useful project at the Sorbian Institute would be to analyze all of the legends and to map out the locations of the old fortresses (Figure 30), battlegrounds and religious sites. Whenever it is financially possible, archaeological excavations should be made of these locations to determine if something had actually once stood there. It would also be beneficial to undertake a plaquing campaign, along the lines of the American highway signage program. The legendary significance of a site could be clarified in a few sentences and would be immediately accessible to everyone driving along the road or hiking through the countryside. This could also be done for sites and buildings of more recent history. For example, in 1896, a Wendish village exhibit was set up for the Exhibition of Saxon Arts and Crafts in Dresden. This was the first major official recognition of the achievements of the Sorbian people that reached a broad spectrum of people, and the artifacts collected for this exhibit later became the basis for the Sorbian Museum in Bautzen.²³⁵ Many of these artifacts lay either in the museum or in private hands, but are not recognized or interpreted for the role that they played in this significant exhibition. Plaquing and effective, interactive interpretation programs are relatively unknown in Germany. American and British museums and parks could serve as valuable examples for innovative work in Lusatia.

According to Trudla Malinkowa, preservation consciousness is just now reaching the Sorbs. The first step is to try to reach the people with the message that what they possess is

²³⁵ Hans Mirtschin, "Das Wendische Dorf auf der Ausstellung der Sächsischen Handwerks und Kunstgewerbes in Dresden 1896", *Letopis* 41 (1994) 1, 74-89. 77.



Figure 30. Embankment walls of an ancient Slavic fortress near Cannowitz

of cultural importance and should be preserved for future generations. The next one is to develop an effective plaquing and interpretation program that can be made accessible to as many people – Sorbs, Germans and others – as possible. Children must not be forgotten in these efforts. Educational materials should be written for schoolchildren, and field trips to sites of cultural importance should be promoted within the context of social studies classes. The basic approach of placing everything under legal protection is significant, but it is not enough. It alone can never relay an active historic or cultural consciousness in connection to the cultural landscape. This is where outreach to the general public plays a crucial role. After all, without their interest preservation is a lost cause.

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