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A Shared Environment: German-German Relations along the Border, 1945-1972

During the long warm summer of 1959, the local health authority in Hamburg banned people from swimming in the city's main artery, the Elbe. According to officials, the river was 'so dirty, that for most people even the thought of dipping one's toes in appears ghastly'.¹ A lot of the pollution was home grown, coming either from the city's antiquated sewage system or from ships docked in the harbour. Hamburg's near neighbour, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was also responsible for the river's decay.² After all, before reaching the Hanseatic city, the Elbe flowed for some 500 kilometres through East German territory, collecting waste, chemicals and other debris on its journey westwards. On a far smaller scale, pollution also headed in the other direction, from west to east. Residents of East Berlin, for example, not only suffered from their own state's environmental neglect, but also inherited damage from across the divide. Noise from jets landing at Tegel Airport as well as algae growth in the Teltow Canal caused by West Berlin's sewage drew the ire of many in the Eastern half of the city.³

Public anger at the pollution of the Elbe or the waterways of Berlin clearly demonstrated a nascent sense of environmental consciousness in both Germanys. However more importantly as far as this article is concerned, such incidents also highlighted, what Christoph Kleßmann has called 'asymmetrical entanglement'

¹ 'Baden in der Elbe wird niemals wieder erlaubt', *Hamburger Abendblatt* (28 July 1959).

² 'Gefahr! Die Elbe wird immer schmutziger', *Hamburger Abendblatt* (16 July 1962).

³ Abteilung Umweltschutz to Else Schmitt, 17 June 1977, Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BArch Berlin), DK5/4399; 'Information über wasserwirtschaftliche Probleme zwischen der DDR und Westberlin und Vorschläge für das weitere Vorgehen der DDR', 19 June 1975, BArch Berlin, DY3023/1415.

(*asymmetrische Verflechtung*), the idea that the two states remained connected while concurrently following different social, cultural and political policies.⁴ This was particularly true of the German environment. Although the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the GDR applied their own approaches to landscape management, centuries of land cultivation and farming had sewn the German environment inextricably together. Even after fences, landmines and watchtowers began to carve the region apart, the environment still remained very much entwined. Along the full length of the border, rivers and lakes, forests and meadows continued to straddle the divide. Indeed, 52 main waterways ran between the two states.⁵

Green campaigners, politicians and ordinary citizens in both East and West Germany were well aware of these environmental connections.⁶ Historical writing, however, has been far slower to recognise the extent of these entanglements. Instead, most histories of the German environment have followed a national paradigm and focused solely on either East or West Germany.⁷ In the few cases, where the two Germanys are considered together, the result has generally been a parallel history. As is the case with Sandra Chaney's thoughtful discussion of Germany's post-war

⁴ C. Kleßmann, 'Spaltung und Verflechtung – Ein Konzept zur integrierten Nachkriegsgeschichte 1945 bis 1990', in C. Kleßmann and P. Lautzas (eds), *Teilung und Integration: Die doppelte deutsche Nachkriegsgeschichte* (Bonn 2005), 20-37, 30.

⁵ Wasserwirtschaftsdirektion Werra-Gera-Unstrut to Amt für Wasserwirtschaft beim Ministerrat der DDR, 24 November 1966, BArch Berlin, DK5/1503b.

⁶ P. Mayer (ed.), *Die Luft hat keine Grenzen: internationale Umweltpolitik: Fakten und Trends* (Frankfurt 1986). On the GDR, see: P. Genath, "Es geht fast täglich auf den Brocken...!" *Der Arbeitsalltag der Ranger im Nationalpark Hochharz aus volkskundlicher Perspektive* (Münster 2005), 89.

⁷ Among the most important recent studies are: M. Cioc, *The Rhine: An Eco-Biography, 1815-2000* (Seattle 2002), 142-3; J. Engels, *Naturpolitik in der Bundesrepublik: Ideenwelt und politische Verhaltensstile in Naturschutz und Umweltbewegung 1950-1980* (Paderborn 2006); A. Nelson, *Cold War Ecology: Forests, Farms and People in the East German Landscape, 1945-1989* (New Haven 2005).

conservation movement, developments in one state tend to be sketched out before the parallel history across the border is added.⁸ The ‘other’ Germany, then, is left as a counterweight against which failures or successes can be measured. Astrid Eckert’s recent study of the polluted River Werra provides one notable exception to this model. Eckert demonstrates how ‘political circumstances’ on both sides of the border determined if and when politicians acted to protect the shared environment. For this reason, the focus of Eckert’s study is on the final two decades of division, during which time the two Germanys formally discussed the problems of cross-border pollution.⁹

Yet, as this article contends, the shared German environment also needs to be viewed as one whole during the earlier period of division: from the end of the Second World War through until the late 1960s. Nowhere was this truer than along the inner-German border, which also formed the dividing line in the Cold War. As is the case with most borderlands, the German border provided a space in which people, language and cultures ‘transcend[ed] the limits of the state’.¹⁰ People inhabiting the German border regions were only too aware of how connected their own environment

⁸ S. Chaney, ‘Protecting Nature in a Divided Nation: Conservation in the Two Germanys, 1945-1972’, in T. Zeller and T. Lekan (eds), *Germany’s Nature: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental History* (New Brunswick 2005), 207-243. See also: V. Grasnow, ‘The Greening of German-German Relations?’ in E. Kolinsky (ed.), *The Greens in West Germany: Organisation and Policy Making* (Oxford 1989), 141-158; J. Hamlin, ‘Environmentalism for the Atlantic Alliance: NATO’s Experiments for the Challenges of Modern Society’, *Environmental History*, 15, 1 (January 2010), 54-75; A. Humm, *Auf dem Weg zum sozialistischen Dorf? Zum Wandel der dörflichen Lebenswelt in der DDR von 1952-1969 mit vergleichenden Aspekten zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen 1999); W. Oberkrome, *“Deutsche Heimat”: Nationale Konzeption und regionale Praxis von Naturschutz, Landschaftsgestaltung und Kulturpolitik in Westfalen-Lippe und Thüringen (1990-1960)* (Paderborn 2004).

⁹ Astrid Eckert, ‘Geteilt, aber nicht unverbunden. Grenzgewässer als deutsch-deutsches Umweltproblem’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 62, 1 (January 2014), 69-99.

¹⁰ H. Donnan and T. Wilson, *Borders: Frontiers of Identity, Nation and State* (Oxford 1999), 11-12.

was with land across the divide. Small changes to streams or woods on one side of the border were often quickly felt by locals living on the other side. To effectively manage this environment, therefore, local people, rather than the state at this stage, often had to communicate with their neighbours living in the other Germany.

By exploring the environment of the German borderlands during the Cold War as one of ‘asymmetrical entanglement’, it is possible to see many interactions between the two Germanys. Indeed, as this article maintains, the German environment actually had an integrative function, ensuring that both East and West Germans were forced to maintain some form of relationship across the divide. Managing forests, unblocking weirs and securing dikes was in the interest of people living on both sides of the border. Although this shared need rarely translated into genuine attempts at environmental protection, it brought East and West Germans together on a local level even at the height of Cold War tensions. On numerous occasions, representatives from the two states had to correspond or even meet to discuss environmental problems.

In this sense, then, the article adds another layer to the complex history of informal inner-German relations. Work in this field has hitherto largely been confined to specific areas, such as trade, culture, the churches, cross-border transit and personal correspondence.¹¹ The environment, as this article argues, should also be seen as an arena of East and West German negotiation during the Cold War. Discussions

¹¹ P. Fäßler, *Durch den “Eisernen Vorhang”*: Die deutsch-deutschen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen 1949-1969 (Cologne 2006); A. Schildt, D. Siegfried and K. Lammers (eds), *Dynamische Zeiten: Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg 2000); C. Lepp, *Tabu der Einheit? Die Ost-West-Gemeinschaft der evangelischen Christen und die deutsche Teilung (1945-1969)* (Göttingen 2005); G. Nositschka, *Auf Wiedersehen in Leipzig: Deutsch-deutsche Freundschaften, 1961-1995* (Bonn 1995); I. Dietzsch, *Grenzen überschreiben? Deutsch-Deutsche Briefwechsel 1948-1989* (Cologne 2004).

between the two sides may not always have run smoothly. Indeed, by the early 1960s, there was considerable vitriol on both sides. Nonetheless, the closeness of neighbouring communities on a local level ensured that individuals and institutions across the divide had to find ways to accommodate themselves with one another. As recent work on German-Jewish history has suggested, negotiated forms of co-existence helped to shape relations even against a backdrop of ambivalence and tensions.¹² The article begins by exploring the two Germanys' ultimately futile attempts to separate the environment during the period of state formation, before moving on to consider the ways in which environmental entanglements encouraged some cross-border dialogue. It concludes with the run up to the Basic Treaty of 1972, when increasing environmental damage sustained during the 1960s finally forced both Germanys to the negotiating table.

The Allied occupation of Germany and concurrent division of the country into four zones was never supposed to be a permanent state of affairs, as the Potsdam Conference made clear. Despite these supposedly provisional arrangements, the Allies' occupation managed to leave a visible imprint on the rural landscape. Forests were clear-cut, farmland redistributed and new agricultural management schemes introduced. In all these areas, policies differed between the Allied powers, but in particular between the Soviet zone of occupation and the three western zones. This

¹² T. van Rahden, *Juden und andere Breslauer: Die Beziehungen zwischen Juden, Protestanten und Katholiken in einer deutschen Großstadt von 1860 bis 1925* (Göttingen 2000); U. Baumann, 'The Development and Destruction of a Social Institution: How Jews, Catholics and Protestants lived Together in Rural Baden, 1862-1940', in H. Walser Smith (ed.), *Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Germany, 1800-1914* (Oxford 2001), 297-315.

trajectory of environmental separation continued following the formation of the FRG and the GDR in 1949. Yet such was the entanglement of the border landscapes in particular that it proved impossible for either state to carve out a completely separate German environment.

When the victorious Allies first occupied their defeated foe in 1945, the land under their control carried many of the scars of war. A large number of dikes along the Elbe, for example, lay damaged either as a result of combat or a lack of general maintenance.¹³ In many cases, the Allied powers' own occupation policies served only to worsen these problems. Rather than repairing the damaged Elbe dikes, the Soviet forces often built observation posts and placed markers on them, causing more damage as a result.¹⁴ And in the Western part of the country, the Allies were similarly quick to clear trees and to build barriers along the zonal border.¹⁵

However, the Allied occupation of Germany was not just about taking physical control of the landscape. Each of the occupying powers also sought to exploit the natural resources that had come into their possession. One of the most visible signs of this policy of reparations occurred through the harvesting of Germany's still relatively well-stocked woodlands. Each of the occupying powers sought to repatriate timber, often in large quantities, so as to allow their own forests to recover from wartime depletion. The Soviets proved particularly rapacious in this respect felling

¹³ Landrat des Kreises Hagenow to Präsidenten des Landes Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 21 September 1945, Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin, 6.11-16, Nr.1387.

¹⁴ Landesregierung Mecklenburg, Ministerium für Landwirtschaft to Chef der Verwaltung der SMA für das Land Mecklenburg, 19 January 1948, Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin, 6.12-1/6, Nr.629/1.

¹⁵ E. Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford 2011), 37.

more timber for reparations and military use than had been originally agreed.¹⁶ In all zones, much of the clear-cut land was replanted with fast growing evergreen varieties rather than deciduous varieties that had made up much of the older forests.¹⁷ The period of Allied occupation, therefore, brought about significant changes to the environment as each of the occupying powers prioritised their own needs and values in their exploitation of Germany's natural resources.

Land reform was another early impulse that gradually shaped the structure of the environment on both sides of the border. The policy itself had first been discussed, albeit briefly, at the Potsdam Conference, mainly as a means to break the supposed power of the Junker class. As with the reparations strategy, though, the actual implementation of this policy differed from zone to zone. In 1945, the British began to plan land reform with some enthusiasm but in the end implemented little of substance. They feared rightly that deep intrusions into rural society would damage economic productivity and risked causing widespread resentment too.¹⁸ In the Soviet zone of occupation, meanwhile, land reform was pushed through in a much more ruthless fashion. Within a few months of the collapse of National Socialist Germany, the Soviet forces began to replace large landowners with small scale farmers. In

¹⁶ A. Milnik, *In Verantwortung für den Wald: Die Geschichte der Forstwirtschaft in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (2nd edn, Remagen 2013), 96.

¹⁷ Nelson, *Cold War Ecology*, 46.

¹⁸ J. Farquharson, 'Land Reform in the British Zone, 1945-1947', *German History*, 6, 1 (January 1988), 35-56, 36.

Mecklenburg-Vorpommern alone, 77,178 new farms were carved out of the existing land reserves.¹⁹

These two different approaches to land reform dramatically altered population structures in the border region, particularly along the Eastern side of the divide. Under the plans of the Soviet forces, which the SED (Socialist Unity Party) later continued, long-standing land owners were forced to make way for new farmers. Many of these had either little agricultural experience or were expellees from Eastern Europe. The new farmers may have been able to grow corn on the Baltic flatlands, but they had little understanding of how to rear livestock along the banks of the Elbe. One former East Prussian farmer, who had resettled in Horst, across the border from Lauenburg, bemoaned the quality of the fields allocated to him.²⁰ 'I will stop running this farm immediately', if things do not improve, he threatened. What compounded the problems of these population shifts was the SED's determination to secure its border with the FRG which saw several thousand people who had been deemed untrustworthy resettled further inland.²¹ These continual movements, both into and out of, the border regions left their mark on Germany's landscapes. Visible differences began to emerge between the East, where the population and agricultural methods were going through a period of sustained change, and the more stable West.

Yet along the border, the Allies' economic and political policies had less of an effect on the local landscape. What continued to shape attitudes to the environment in

¹⁹ S. Kuntsche, 'Bodenreform in einem Kernland des Großgrundbesitzes: Mecklenburg-Vorpommern', in A. Bauernkämper (ed.), *'Junkerland in Bauernhand?' Durchführung, Auswirkungen und Stellenwert der Bodenreform in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone* (Stuttgart 1996), 51-68, 55.

²⁰ Kaddig to Meckl. Ministerium für Landwirtschaft, 11 June 1950, Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin, 6.11-16, Nr.1707.

²¹ I. Bennewitz and R. Potratz, *Zwangsaussiedlungen an der innerdeutschen Grenze* (Berlin 1994), 7.

these regions was the existence of previous incarnations of the German nation, rather than the actions of either the FRG or the GDR.²² When the Allies first established the post-war demarcation line, they largely chose to follow the historic contours of the individual German states, from Prussia through to Bavaria. And as the so-called 'green border' between the FRG and the GDR was initially open, there appeared to be far more continuity than change. The landscape of the border regions did little to alter this impression. Along its entire length, there were few distinct geographical markers, such as mountain ranges or rivers, the Elbe excepted. As a result, geological and environmental features on one side of the border were generally replicated on the other. In short, the natural environment was not confined by the border, but stretched across the political divide.

In the northern uplands of Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg, the border between the GDR and the FRG ran through a wetland environment. As it tore through this region, it cut across streams, rivers and lakes. The large Schaalsee, for example, was split in two by the border, while the smaller Mechower See and Golden See were East German, apart from their Western shores which belonged to the FRG. Despite the separation of territory between East and West, these wetlands continued to function as one biological entity.²³ The same was true further south. The forests and dramatic hills of the Harz were cut apart by the border which ran for around 50 kilometres through the middle of the region. However, as with the lakes and rivers of

²² See: M. Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge 1999).

²³ The biological systems of these inland waters remained intact: M. Zettler, 'Zur Verbreitung der Malacostraca (Crustacea) in den Binnen- und Küstengewässern von Mecklenburg-Vorpommern', *Lauterbornia*, 32 (1998), 49-65; H. Klapper, 'Zu einigen Problemen der biologischen Wasseranalyse. Nach Untersuchungen im Einzugsgebiet Mittlere Elbe-Sude-Elde', *Internationale Revue der gesamten Hydrobiologie und Hydrographie*, 48, 1 (January 1963), 9-34.

Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg, the environment of the Harz remained entwined as one. Indeed, in the depths of this wooded landscape, it was hard for the casual visitor to distinguish where the two states even parted.²⁴

It was not just geographical features that sewed the environment of the border regions together. Over the centuries, human activity had helped to shape the forests, rivers and lakes that straddled the divide too. Fields had been carved from the landscape and paths formed that paid little attention to where the Allies later chose to place the dividing line between the four zones of occupation. In the Bavarian village of Ottendorf, for example, 16 farmers owned fields and woodlands just inside Thuringia. Previously the distribution of their land between Bavaria and Thuringia had caused few problems, but with the erection of the zonal border, the farmers could only access their fields by travelling to the nearest checkpoint. In some cases, this turned a twenty minute stroll into a three hour hike.²⁵ In other areas, man-made environmental features even signified the demarcation line. This was the case between Lauenburg and Witzeze in Schleswig-Holstein, where the medieval Stecknitz Canal served this purpose. Originally built to serve the salt industry, from 1945 this fourteenth century industrial relic marked the zonal border between East and West.²⁶

The historic development of the German environment, from its geological features through to its man-made additions, ensured that the border regions remained

²⁴ R. Schneider, 'Ein zerschnittenes Gebirge: Der Harz', in H. Rudolph (ed.), *Wo Deutschland geteilt ist: Beiderseits der innerdeutschen Grenze* (Bonn 1984), 54-7.

²⁵ Letter to Landwirtschaftsminister der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 12 July 1951, BArch Berlin, DK1/8729.

²⁶ G. Peinemann, 'Die Delvenau heute... Ein Bach mit Vergangenheit... und mit Zukunft?', in W. Boehart, C. Bornefeld and C. Lopau (eds), *Die Geschichte der Stecknitz-Fahrt, 1398-1998* (Schwarzenbek 1998), 142-4.

deeply entangled. Indeed, even as physical divisions between the GDR and the FRG grew, with the erection of an ever more secure border regime, the environment of these regions maintained a strong symbiosis. This was most evident from the continued flow of rivers and the spread of forests across the divide. Yet it also applied to man-made landscape features. All along the border, physical structures that had been built in earlier times to control or to harness the environment continued to work in tandem.

One of the most well-known examples of this phenomenon existed in the Eichsfeld where the West German town of Duderstadt received its drinking water from Kreis Worbis in the GDR. In the late 1920s, as water demand had increased in Duderstadt, the town council had managed to find an alternative supply from a new well, which was only eight kilometres to the east, but actually lay in Thuringia. All would have been fine with this system had the state boundary separating Lower Saxony from Thuringia not become the Cold War border. Nonetheless, during the first decade of separation, Duderstadt experienced few difficulties with this arrangement. The physical border that split the Eichsfeld in two may have hardened as the 1950s progressed, but at the same time the water pipes below the ground continued to transport water from one side to the other.²⁷

The Elbe offers a similar story of environmental interdependence. During the late nineteenth century, engineers had begun to develop a comprehensive system of dikes and barriers along the Middle and Lower Elbe. These schemes had a twin

²⁷ D. Denecke, 'Das Eichsfeld - Landschaftsräumliche Strukturen und Beziehungsgefüge eines Grenzraumes in historisch-geographischer Perspektive', in P. Aufgebauer et al. (eds), *Das Eichsfeld: Ein deutscher Grenzraum* (Duderstadt 2002), 7-46, 21.

purpose: to protect local inhabitants from flooding and to create more agricultural land alongside the river.²⁸ The interwar years saw further attempts at land and water management along the Elbe. The river itself was deepened and the height of dikes alongside low-lying areas increased. After 1945, and with the onset of the Cold War, the dikes and ditches that had been developed over the preceding half century continued to protect farmland and settlements. In short, although Germany's political constellation had shifted, pre-war environmental management schemes remained in situ. Thus, when high tides threatened the flood plains around Lauenburg, the Elbe dikes shepherded water upstream, where banks and ditches, which now lay in the GDR, dissipated the risk.²⁹

In 1955, the FRG adopted the policy of the Hallstein doctrine. This was effectively a means to keep the GDR isolated on the international stage. As Konrad Adenauer explained to the West German parliament, the BRD would view recognition of the GDR by a foreign state 'as an unfriendly act'.³⁰ Adenauer's announcement provided one of the clearest signs of Germany's deepening division. Yet while the two German states may have been gradually drifting apart, the shared environment, particularly along the border regions, remained largely intact. Working practices and the basic infrastructure for the management of the local environment, which had been put in place during previous eras of German history, could not simply be split apart.

²⁸ G. Häußler, 'Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Stromlaufveränderungen der mittleren Elbe', unpublished PhD thesis, University Halle-Wittenberg (1907), 14, 18.

²⁹ G. Kaufmann, 'Zur Kulturgeschichte am Unterlauf der Elbe', in G. Asmus (ed.), *Die Elbe: Ein Lebenslauf* (Berlin 1992), 100-7, 101.

³⁰ Konrad Adenauer, 22 September 1955, in *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages und des Bundesrates, 2. Wahlperiode (1953-1957)* (Munich 1953-1995), 5646.

Indeed, for flood defences to function or for drinking and waste water supplies to be maintained, the West and East German environments needed to work together.

The deep entanglement of the German environment demanded some form of cross-border communication. As a divided city, but also one built on a marshy plain, this was most obviously the case in Berlin. Yet it was the far less glamorous history of sewage that required the greatest levels of cooperation. During the first two decades of division, almost 80 percent of West Berlin's effluent was cleaned in the East, while at the same time 30 million cubic meters of the GDR's own wastewater passed through pipes that lay on the territory of West Berlin.³¹ With such a deeply enmeshed infrastructure, the authorities in the two Berlins had little option but to come together to ensure the system continued to function. A 1950 joint agreement provided the basis of this process, though it relied on a select group of Eastern and Western maintenance workers to keep the waste flowing.³²

Berlin may have provided the clearest example of the continued entanglement of Germany's environment, but similar developments occurred on a local level along the entire length of the border. As was the case in Berlin, environmental difficulties that necessitated joint discussion originated from both sides of the divide. Forest fires, rabid animals or flood waters could emerge anywhere along the border and then

³¹ 'Arbeitsgruppe zur Vorbereitung der Komplexberatung Berlin', 27 February 1969, BArch Berlin, DK5/1496. See further: G. Kunze, *Grenzerfahrungen: Kontakte zwischen dem Land Berlin und der DDR 1949-1989* (Berlin 1999), 233-4.

³² 'Bericht über Probleme auf dem Gebiet der Wasserwirtschaft, die das besondere Gebiet Westberlin betreffen', [undated], BArch Berlin, DK5/637.

quickly spread to the other side.³³ In an attempt to mitigate the potential danger of such occurrences, local officials in the two Germanys were often forced into contact with one another.³⁴ When a forest fire burned out of control on the Hessen border, for example, the authorities in Heiligenstadt contacted their opposite number in Eschwege to ask them to tackle the blaze from the other direction. Once the fire had been safely extinguished, the leader of Eschwege's District Council in the West heaped praise on the authorities in Heiligenstadt in the East. I hope 'that we will at the very least be able to maintain this form of good neighbourly help in the future should similar incidents occur', he concluded.³⁵

The Elbe, although a very different landscape from the forests of the Eichsfeld, also saw German-German discussions in times of environmental crisis. The biggest threat came in the depths of winter when the river occasionally froze over. Not only did this bring an important transport artery to a halt, but drifting ice also threatened bridges and raised water levels. To mitigate this risk, which was a danger for communities on both sides of the border, the local waterways office in the GDR allowed West German ice breakers to visit. From the late 1940s through until the 1970s, when the GDR acquired its own vessels, the West and East worked together to

³³ On the spread of diseases, see for example: Heinrich Beckmann to Wirtschaftsministerium des Landes Schleswig-Holstein, 15 August 1969, KA Nr. 8888. On fires, see: Stellv. d. Vorsitzenden für Inneres to Meyer, 20 October 1967, Kreisarchiv Heiligenstadt, EA-HIG, 723.

³⁴ However, there tended to be little urgency to such discussions: Sheffer, *Burned Bridge*, 210.

³⁵ Landrat Landkreis Eschwege to Vorsitzende des Rates des Kreises Heiligenstadt, 9 April 1963, Kreisarchiv Heiligenstadt, EA-HIG, 402.

keep the Elbe ice free.³⁶ Protecting the local environment, it seems, could at times take priority over Cold War tensions.

However, it was not just the threat of force majeure that led to direct discussions. Long-term landscape management plans also helped to foster the German-German relationship. During the 1950s, engineers in both the East and West worked on a variety of water management projects, designed to prevent local flooding, to regulate rivers and to drain wetlands for agricultural use. Where these proposals took place on, or near the border, then the local authorities across the divide often needed to be consulted too. As one East German engineer noted, every ‘river, including its tributaries has to be regarded as a whole’, rather than as two separate parts.³⁷ This was fine in principle. What it meant in reality, though, was that representatives from the two Germanys would have to meet to share their river management plans.

The GDR’s plans to reconfigure the flow of the River Jeeze near Salzwedel provided one early example of such cross-border environmental contact. The Jeeze, which feeds into the Elbe near Hitzacker had a long history of flooding. Not only farmland, but also major settlements, such as Dannenberg, Lüchow and Hitzacker itself were repeatedly left under water. To protect the historic town of Salzwedel, East German engineers planned to build new dikes south of the town and to redirect water into the Salzwedeler Dumme. Because these changes had the potential to raise water

³⁶ Hegen to Heß, 11 February 1954, BArch Berlin, DO1 / 3848; Wasserstrassenamt Wittenberge, ‘Überblick über den Zustand der Wasserstraße 1960-1973’, 15 July 1974, Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin, 7.13-5/4, Nr.198.

³⁷ VEB Wasserwirtschaft, Mittlere Elbe, ‘Bericht über gemeinsame Besprechungen betr. wasserwirtschaftlicher Maßnahmen entlang der Zonengrenze mit westdeutschen Stellen’, 28 October 1954, BArch Berlin, DO1/3951.

levels on the West German side of the border, the GDR suggested that the entire length of the Jeetze be expanded at the same time.³⁸

Cross-border environmental cooperation also took place in the reverse direction, from West to East. In late 1955, the West German state began work on a large barrage to dam the Elbe near Geesthacht. It was designed to stabilise the water level in Hamburg's harbour and to enable larger ships to travel upstream towards Lauenburg.³⁹ Although the scheme promised considerable economic benefits for West Germany, through improved transportation and trade, it looked destined to have the opposite effect on the GDR. As West German engineers calculated at the time, the new barrage would place large areas of low-lying land along the border and further into East German territory under water.⁴⁰

Despite Geesthacht lying fifteen kilometres downstream from the actual border, the East German authorities were well aware of the dangers that the new barrage posed. The SED's party organ, *Neues Deutschland*, even published a helpful map of the areas threatened by what it called the FRG's 'irresponsible actions'. This showed 17,000 hectares of land to be at risk, stretching from the border town of Boizenburg all the way across to Hagenow.⁴¹ Certainly, a set of very real fears over flooding and the maintenance of agricultural land underpinned the SED's complaints. Local farmers, for example, held a series of mass meetings in which they made their anger clear. As one person interviewed during these protests bemoaned, 'if the plans

³⁸ O. Puffahrt, *Hochwasserschutz und Vorflut für die Jeetzelniederung – 50 Jahre Jeetzeldeichverband 1950-2000* (Lüneburg 2000), 145.

³⁹ 'Startzeichen im Herbst', *Hamburger Abendblatt* (19 March 1954).

⁴⁰ Landesamt für Wasserwirtschaft, Schleswig-Holstein, 20 March 1956, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, 721, Nr.4908.

⁴¹ '17 000 ha Land gefährdet', *Neues Deutschland* (22 April 1958).

of the Bonn government are realised, we will never be free of water again'.⁴² Yet for local officials, the impending threat of environmental catastrophe also offered considerable propagandistic material. In local discourse, it was 'the government in Bonn' that had placed a dark cloud over the sanctity and economic productivity of the surrounding landscape. This 'fertile agricultural land' that helped to feed the citizens of the GDR was now set to be 'drowned' almost 'overnight'.⁴³

In a similar fashion, local officials in the West also sought to portray the GDR's environmental measures as a sign of vandalism on a grand scale. This was particularly evident when the GDR announced its plans for reconfiguring the Jeeze. West German residents living near the river argued that changes to the Jeeze would result in higher water levels and thus an increased risk of damage to property and land. Severe flooding along the Jeeze in 1954 only seemed to confirm locals' fears that the 'Eastern zone' (*Ostzone*) was determined to change the ecological balance in the West.⁴⁴ As a result, residents in the affected regions argued that their own politicians needed to work more closely with the East to develop joint proposals for the future of the river.⁴⁵

On one level, complaints about these two water management schemes highlighted growing differences in how Germans on both sides of the borders viewed their environment. No longer were local people viewing their regions as one small part of a much larger German landscape, but rather as something that had to be

⁴² 'Bonner Attentat auf 17 000 ha Bauernland an der Elbe', *Schweriner Volkszeitung* (5 May 1958).

⁴³ 'Bonn muß bezahlen', *Schweriner Volkszeitung* (30 April 1958).

⁴⁴ On the Jeeze in general, see: O. Puffahrt, *Bauernland in Not: 75 Jahre Wasser- und Bodenverband der Lüchower Landgraben – Niederung 1915-1990* (Lüchow 1990).

⁴⁵ 'Jeezelausbau Lüchow – Zonengrenze', *Elbe-Jeezel-Zeitung*, 22 August 1955 in Puffahrt, *Bauernland im Not*, 86.

protected from the machinations of the other Germany. Yet on quite another level disputes over the Geesthacht barrage and the Jeeze also forced the two sides to discuss solutions to shared environmental problems. Officials in both Germanys knew that if they were to realise their water improvement works, then they would have to reach across the divide. In both cases, the SED sought state-level discussion of these pressing environmental issues, presumably in the hope that this would force West German diplomatic recognition.

However, with the FRG wedded to the Hallstein doctrine, dialogue was restricted entirely to a local level. The Jeeze development plan in particular resulted in a series of joint site surveys. The first two visits in March and October 1954 saw an East German delegation meet with West German water engineers in Lüneburg.⁴⁶ The West Germans undertook a reciprocal visit to Stendal from where they undertook field trips to the Jeeze north of Salzwedel.⁴⁷ West Germany's construction of a barrage in Geesthacht also necessitated a number of joint meetings between local officials. Indeed as had been the case earlier in the decade with the Jeeze project, engineers from the East and West met numerous times to finalise their building plans.⁴⁸ In many respects, an even stronger spirit of collegiality underpinned these discussions. During one meeting, for example, the participants not only sat down for

⁴⁶ VEB Wasserwirtschaft, Mittlere Elbe, 'Bericht über gemeinsame Besprechungen betr. wasserwirtschaftlicher Maßnahmen entlang der Zonengrenze mit westdeutschen Stellen', 28 October 1954, BArch Berlin, DO1/3951.

⁴⁷ VEB Wasserwirtschaft Mittlere Elbe to Rat des Bezirkes Magdeburg, 5 November 1954, BArch Berlin, DO1/3951.

⁴⁸ Kreisbaamt Herzogtum Lauenburg to Landrat, 15 February 1957; Kreisbaamt Herzogtum Lauenburg to Landrat, 12 July 1957; Kreisbaamt Herzogtum Lauenburg to Landrat, 9 December 1957, all in KA Nr. 15994.

formal dialogue, but also undertook a spontaneous trip to examine the condition of local rivers.⁴⁹

When West German officials left the final cross border meeting of 1957, they were confident that they had sketched out a definitive plan for mitigating the effects of the barrage in Geesthacht. As one member of the FRG's delegation remarked, relations with the 'relevant authorities in the GDR can be described as good'.⁵⁰ The strength of this relationship stemmed from Germany's entangled environment. In the case of both the Geesthacht barrage and Jette schemes, complicated environmental problems required direct discussions. Besides actual meetings, local officials also regularly exchanged plans, drawings and reports on both projects.⁵¹ As this constant crisscrossing of information gathered pace, individuals across the divide started to form increasingly strong relations with their opposite numbers. In short, Germany's environment not only physically crossed the two states, but also brought East and West Germans together as they sought to resolve landscape problems.

The mid to late 1950s proved to be the high point in German-German environmental cooperation on a local level. From this point forward, relations between East and West German officials entered a period of sustained decline. They only started to pick up again in the early 1970s with the signing of the Basic Treaty in 1972. In the intervening period, direct meetings, discussions and planning about the management

⁴⁹ Kreisbaamt Herzogtum Lauenburg to Landrat, 30 July 1957, KA Nr. 15994.

⁵⁰ Niederschrift über die Bereisung des Ausschusses für Ernährung, Landwirtschaft und Forsten des Schleswig-Holsteinischen Landtages am 11. und 12. Dezember 1957, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, 721, Nr. 4908.

⁵¹ Landkreis Duderstadt to VEB Wasserwirtschaft Erfurt, 2 September 1964, BArch Berlin, DK1503a-b.

of the shared German environment took place less frequently. Instead, when environmental problems occurred, which they frequently did, local officials tended to pass the issue up to their superiors rather than initiating dialogue themselves. In 1964, for example, residents in the West German town of Duderstadt discovered a sharp drop in their domestic water pressure which was fed from a spring on the GDR's territory. When the town council demanded an explanation, the local East German authorities simply forwarded the issue on to a ministerial level.⁵² In less than a decade, the German environment had gone from being a point of German-German contact to another area of cross border tension.

A major reason for the demise of local relations was the heating up of the Cold War. During the late 1950s, Nikita Khrushchev and Dwight D. Eisenhower, the leaders of the Soviet Union and the USA respectively, raised tensions between the global superpowers with the threat of nuclear annihilation. The two Germanys played their own role in raising diplomatic tensions. The formation of separate West and East German armies in 1955 and 1956 placed the two states firmly at the centre of the ideological conflict. People were now called up to defend themselves against the other Germany. As a sign of growing separation, both states also finally started to introduce their own pieces of environmental legislation. These new measures replaced the Reich Nature Protection Law (*Reichsnaturschutzgesetz*, RNG), which the National Socialist regime had introduced in June 1935 as a means to protect local areas from

⁵² Wasserwirtschaftsdirektion Werra-Gera-Unstrut to Amt für Wasserwirtschaft beim Ministerrat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 17 September 1964, BArch Berlin, DK1503a-b.

development.⁵³ The decision to withdraw the RNG may have helped both states to distance themselves from the former Nazi regime, but it also allowed them to demonstrate a determination to cement the growing inner-German divide.

At the same time as these legal boundaries were hardening, the leaders of the GDR and the FRG also gradually began to stop speaking the language of reunification. For a long time, leading figures within the two states had spoken very publicly about the need to build a united Germany, but by the late 1950s Germans on both sides of the border spent more time on building up their own state than in trying to entice the other Germany. Against this backdrop of deteriorating international relations, contacts between local officials also started to dry up. The city council in Lübeck, for example, chose to ignore any letters from towns across the border and advised people to avoid all contact with the East.⁵⁴

Generational shifts also played a role in this process of separation.⁵⁵ The turn of the decade saw a generation of West and East Germans enter the workplace and administration whose education had taken place almost entirely within a divided Germany. Whereas the older generations had developed their knowledge of water management or forestry from interwar practices, younger Germans were educated in two very different ideological systems. Soviet policymakers' determination to create a

⁵³ C. Closmann, 'Legalizing a *Volksgemeinschaft*: Nazi Germany's Reich Nature Protection Law of 1935', in F. Brüggemeier, M. Cioc and T. Zeller (eds), *How Green Were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens 2005), 18-42, 20-1.

⁵⁴ K. Meyer-Rebentisch, *Grenzerfahrungen: Dokumentation zum Leben mit der innerdeutschen Grenze bei Lübeck von 1945 bis heute* (Lübeck 2009), 21-2.

⁵⁵ For recent reflections on generations in German history, see: M. Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford 2011).

new education model in their zone quickly resulted in the emergence of schools that were ‘distinguishable from those of the Western zones’.⁵⁶

Compounding this growing educational divide was the fact that engineers and scientists in the East involved in land management found it difficult to keep abreast of international developments. The SED often imposed travel bans, while also restricting access to journals and conferences.⁵⁷ During the first years of division, there had been a constant exchange of information and ideas between the two sides. In 1950, for example, representatives from the FRG and the GDR met first in Leipzig and then in Tübingen to discuss landscape and forestry cultivation techniques.⁵⁸ However, by the end of the decade these exchanges had become increasingly rare, as first the West German courts banned the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) and its associated bodies and then the SED began to restrict East German experts from travelling to the West.⁵⁹

Changes in personnel and methodology had a significant effect on working relations between local officials. This was the case with the barrage scheme in Geesthacht. Early discussions of the project involved a core group of engineers from the two Germanys who seemed to share many of the same ideas of design and approach. Indeed, after a meeting with their opposite numbers in Ludwigslust in 1957, West German officials reported back with some confidence that ‘agreement with the

⁵⁶ B. Blessing, *The Antifascist Classroom: Denazification in Soviet-occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (Basingstoke 2006), 189.

⁵⁷ J. Niederhut, *Wissenschaftsaustausch im Kalten Krieg: Die ostdeutschen Naturwissenschaftler und der Westen* (Cologne 2007), 26-43.

⁵⁸ Gesamtdeutscher Arbeitskreis der Land- u. Forstwirtschaft, 6 December 1950, BArch Berlin, DK1/1333

⁵⁹ P. Major, *The Death of the KPD: Communism and Anti-Communism in West Germany, 1945-1956* (Oxford 1997), 29; Stellungnahme des Kollegiums des Ministeriums für Land- und Forstwirtschaft zum Beschluss des Sekretariats des ZK der SED vom 12.3.1958, BArch Berlin, DK1/1403.

SBZ [Soviet Zone of Occupation] representatives was reached on all [...] points'.⁶⁰ However, in 1958 this relationship suddenly changed. West German engineers in Lauenburg were all set for further talks over the project. However, when they went down to the border to collect their East German partners, they were greeted not by the usual group, but instead by three gentlemen 'who were unknown to us'. The GDR's new representatives also brought with them a different concept for the barrage plan which involved altering dikes, canals and the size of a planned pumping station.⁶¹

Security concerns appear to have prompted this particular change in personnel as not only were the participants switched but even the new engineers were forbidden from crossing the border to the West. As a consequence, discussions about the barrage were conducted on the border itself. The meeting 'had to take place outside at the border gate', complained one West German representative. 'The large plans [for the project] were laid out on a table which had been set up in preparation alongside the gate', he added.⁶² A similar development occurred during discussions for the Jeeze project. When it seemed that the engineers from East and West were becoming too familiar, the Ministry of the Interior in the GDR began to introduce restrictions. The official in charge complained that engineers had become too lax with sensitive information and called for 'a tightening of checks which at the moment are missing'.⁶³

The change of personnel, either as a result of generational shifts or internal security pressures, led to the deterioration of local relations. Meetings and discussions

⁶⁰ Kreisbaamt Herzogtum Lauenburg to Landrat, 30 July 1957, KA Nr. 15994.

⁶¹ Kreisbaamt Herzogtum Lauenburg to Landrat, 13 February 1958, KA Nr. 15994.

⁶² Kreisbaamt Herzogtum Lauenburg to Landrat, 28 February 1958, KA Nr. 15994.

⁶³ Ministerium des Innern, Magdeburg to Staatssekretariat für Innere Angelegenheiten, 5 November 1954, BArch Berlin, DO1/3951.

between East and West German engineers became less frequent. And when they did occur, they lacked the collegiality of earlier encounters. Nonetheless works to manage cross-border landscapes continued. Neither the FRG nor the GDR could risk the environmental damage that could occur if they abandoned maintenance and improvement works entirely. Water improvement measures, such as along the Elbe near Lauenburg, though, were no longer instigated in close conjunction with one other, but often as almost separate schemes. As one West German engineer remarked laconically, we know ‘nothing about the condition [of dikes] in the SBZ’.⁶⁴

With less communication across the divide, Germans living along the border found it easier to portray their local landscapes in increasingly separate terms. This could be seen particularly clearly from the public presentation of the border regions. In the mid-1950s, for example, the tourist office of Herzogtum Lauenburg launched a new initiative to encourage visitors to this border region. Through posters, brochures and pamphlets, the office attempted to market the natural beauty of the area surrounding the medieval old salt route (*alte Salzstraße*) that ran from Lüneburg to Lübeck, practically in a line parallel to the border. The photographs in its literature of tranquil forests, shimmering lakes and historic buildings gave almost no indication that this region lay at the epicentre of the Cold War. As far as the tourist office was concerned this was now a firmly West German landscape, which had little connection to land in the East.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Letter to Wasser- und Schiffahrtsdirektion Hamburg, 12 July 1962, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, 721, Nr.4908.

⁶⁵ ‘Die alte Salzstraße’, 1955, Kreisarchiv Herzogtum Lauenburg (hereafter KA), Nr. 8565.

At first glance, the SED's decision to strengthen its border installations in August 1961 only seemed to harden the process of environmental separation. The building spree began with the construction of the Berlin Wall and then continued across the GDR's eastern border as the regime strengthened all its installations with the West. It built up the size of its militarised forces, approved the use of landmines and increased the number of watchtowers along the border.⁶⁶ The formation of a stricter border regime brought local discussions between East and West Germany almost to a complete impasse. With the two states firmly sealed from the other, Germans on both sides of the border began to concentrate on finding a place for themselves in their own ideological system. Yet at the very moment that relations across the divide began to fade, a new set of environmental problems caused by the border itself started to emerge. These called for more, not less, cross-border communication. Once again, therefore, the environment continued to pull the two Germanys more closely together.

The process of strengthening fortifications along the border had an immediate environmental impact in both the East and the West. In order to accommodate upgraded military installations, the East German regime had to turn the border regions into a militarised landscape. This meant clearing land of both natural and manmade obstructions. Around Geismar in Thuringia, 150 workers were employed to clear all trees from a new 100 meter border strip.⁶⁷ Similar actions took place along the length of the inner German border. Where rivers or streams interrupted the border, then these too had to be integrated into the new fortification system. This was the case in the

⁶⁶ H. Thoß, *Gesichert in den Untergang: Die Geschichte der DDR-Westgrenze* (Berlin 2004), 120-1.

⁶⁷ 'Niederschrift über die am 4.9.1962 in der Kompanie der Nationalen Volksarmee in Großtöpfer geführte Aussprache über den Fortgang der Grenzsicherungsarbeiten im Bereich des Bataillons in Geismar', Kreisarchiv Heiligenstadt, EA-HIB 305.

Eichsfeld where the security forces either blocked or altered a number of small watercourses, often to the detriment of the local population.

One farmer in the East German village of Glasehausen was so incensed by these changes to the existing environment that he penned a letter to the district authorities. Since the border had been strengthened, both his buildings and fields had suffered flooding. ‘This situation has come about’, he noted, ‘because surface water can no longer drain off to the West and instead accumulates on my low-lying land’.⁶⁸ The authorities denied all responsibility, suggesting instead that any flooding was caused by ‘an insufficient system of ditches’. Further north in Hötensleben, on the border with Lower Saxony, similar problems emerged. In this region, the authorities had to demolish a small sewage works to make room for the new fence. But instead of building an alternative, they simply pumped the village’s waste into a nearby stream.⁶⁹

During the 1960s, albeit on a much smaller scale, military installations were also enhanced in the West. As the GDR expanded its border controls, the FRG responded by increasing its patrols along the border, which carved their own path through the border landscape. ‘Events in Berlin’, noted one West German report, ‘have naturally led the BGS [Federal Border Guard], the Federal Customs Authority and to some extent the British occupation forces to strengthen their control and observation activity’.⁷⁰ However, as the West increased their motorised patrols, the

⁶⁸ Andreas Simon to Rat des Kreises Heiligenstadt, 17 December 1967, Kreisarchiv Heiligenstadt, EA-HIG, 5576.

⁶⁹ A. Walther, *Die eisige Naht: Die innerdeutsche Grenze bei Hötensleben, Offleben und Schöningen, 1952 bis 1990* (Halle 2010), 172.

⁷⁰ Landrat Dr. Stieler, 1961, KA Nr. 15994.

existing paths and tracks along the border tended to suffer from excessive use. Small tracks across fields and through forests had never been designed to handle the constant movement of military vehicles. Following protests from local landowners, the West German authorities had to build new roads or improve those already in place.⁷¹ On both sides of the border, therefore, the landscape was increasingly shaped to meet military demands.⁷²

The construction of an enhanced border regime also had a direct impact on the maintenance of the existing environment in these regions. As the border fortifications reached new heights, previously accessible land was suddenly placed out of reach. In the East, the biggest problem was the newly cleared border strip that became something of a no-man's land. With access restricted to this zone, weeds quickly took hold and spread onto neighbouring agricultural land, much to the annoyance of local farmers.⁷³ On the western side, similar problems also emerged. Where the strengthened border bisected waterways, people had difficulties in trying to access the banks or the water itself to undertake routine repairs. The western edge of the River Stecknitz, north of Lauenburg, for example, was in the FRG, whilst the eastern banks lay in the GDR. Without access to the opposite side of the river, it proved tricky for the local authorities in the FRG to clear growth from the water. They were forced to

⁷¹ Ausschuß für gesamtdeutscher und Berliner Fragen, 'Bericht über die Studienreise II in das Zonenrandgebiet vom 6. bis 9. Oktober 1964', 12 October 1964, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, 605, Nr.3109.

⁷² For recent interpretations of this relationship, see: T. Cole, P. Coates and C. Pearson (eds), *Militarized Landscapes: From Gettysburg to Salisbury Plain* (London 2010).

⁷³ Czaplà to Kommandeur der Grenzbrigade Erfurt, 25 August 1962, Kreisarchiv Heiligenstadt, EA-HIB 305.

utilise a floating digger and to take out special insurance for the workers due to the proximity of East German minefields.⁷⁴

The complexities of trying to maintain these hard to reach areas called for simpler solutions that avoided the need of running the gauntlet of border guards and minefields. Both the East and West German authorities saw a solution to this problem in the use of herbicides.⁷⁵ These could be sprayed along river banks from a safe distance and, as a West German letter noted, ideally ‘without fish and fry being destroyed’ at the same time.⁷⁶ For very different reasons, the authorities in the East also regularly sprayed the immediate border region. The aim here was to ensure that there was no chance of undergrowth providing hiding places for would be escapees.⁷⁷

The strengthening of the inner German border and the resultant propensity to use herbicides came at a particularly perilous time environmentally. By the 1960s, the environment of both states bore the scars of sustained post war economic growth. The Rhine, for example, home to petroleum giants, nuclear power plants and other industries had lost much of its biodiversity by the 1970s. The effects of rapid industrial growth in the two Germanys were also felt in the border regions.⁷⁸ The potash industry, which existed in both East and West, proved particularly damaging in the border regions. The GDR, far more so than the FRG, simply pumped salt water from the extraction process into neighbouring rivers. The tributaries of the Elbe,

⁷⁴ Kreisbauamt to Kreisrechtsamt, 23 May 1962, KA Nr. 15816.

⁷⁵ Zentrale Kommission für Staatliche Kontrolle, ‘2. Informationsbericht zum Stand der Durchführung des Beschlusses des Präsidiums des Ministerrates vom 8.9.1961 über weitere Maßnahmen zur Erhöhung der Sicherheit an der Staatsgrenze West’, 18 October 1961, BArch Berlin, DY3023/1434.

⁷⁶ Kreisbauamt to Bundesforschungsanstalt für Fischerei, 2 December 1960, KA Nr. 15722.

⁷⁷ Staatlicher Forstwirtschaftsbetrieb Heiligenstadt to Rat des Kreises Heiligenstadt, 12 December 1967, Kreisarchiv Heiligenstadt, EA-HIB 723.

⁷⁸ Cioc, *The Rhine*, 142-3.

Saale, and Werra, which ran between the two states, suffered badly from these arrangements. By the 1970s, salt levels in the Werra were higher than in the North Sea.⁷⁹

With limited discussion between the two Germanys, on either a local or state level, the shared German environment was left in a state of decay. If anything, this silence made it easier for residents of the border regions to place the blame for environmental damage on the other Germany. From the perspective of the FRG, which suffered the brunt of cross-border pollution, this was easy to do. On numerous occasions, people living along the border demanded that the GDR maintain the local environment where it impacted on the West. Landowners around Lauenburg, for example, repeatedly complained about the damage wild animals, particularly boar and deer, caused to their crops and livestock. They held the GDR responsible, complaining that its failure to maintain land along the fortified border had led the wild animal population to spread out of control.⁸⁰ At the same time, newspaper articles in the West were quick to highlight the environmental excesses of the neighbouring state. ‘“GDR” Effluent Polluting the Weser’, read one West German headline, while another stated simply, ‘Ostpolitik: Salt in the Werra’.⁸¹

Yet, while the West was busy berating the GDR, across the border a similar discourse of environmental blame occurred only in reverse. Prominent East German newspapers, such as *Neues Deutschland*, made it clear to their readers where

⁷⁹ Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Technik, ‘Wissenschaftlich-technische Konzeption für die Sicherung einer abproduktarmen Produktion und die volkswirtschaftliche Verwertung der Kaliabwässer’, 1 September 1977, BArch Berlin, DK5/1492.

⁸⁰ Rosebrock to Kreis Herzogtum Lauenburg, 12 June 1962, KA Nr. 8905.

⁸¹ ‘“DDR”-Abwässer verschmutzen die Weser’, *Hamburger Abendblatt* (1 June 1972); ‘Ostpolitik: Salz in der Werra’, *Der Spiegel* (1 December 1969).

culpability lay. 'Pollution of the Saale by Effluent from the FRG', exclaimed one caption.⁸² On a local level, people complained about West Germany's management of the border regions, but increasingly also acknowledged that some of the environmental damage was entirely home-grown. In Heiligenstadt, for example, the town council received numerous letters of complaint (*Eingaben*) bemoaning the woeful state of local rivers.⁸³ Even internal district reports recorded the extent of pollution. One described the River Leine, which flowed into West Germany, as a 'potent poisonous broth' that showed 'no signs of biological life'.⁸⁴

Ironically this low point in cross-border action on the environment also proved to be a prompt for greater discussions aimed at improving the shared German landscape. Public concern within the two Germanys, as well as growing international awareness of the fragility of the Earth's resources, ensured that the issue of environmental protection featured prominently during the thawing of East-West relations during the early 1970s.⁸⁵ When the final treaty between the GDR and FRG was eventually signed in 1972, the two sides agreed to work towards improving and promoting environmental cooperation.⁸⁶ In reality, this proved to be a long, drawn-out process necessitating a series of further detailed discussions through the German

⁸² 'Verschmutzung der Saale durch Abwässer aus BRD', *Neues Deutschland* (25 September 1971).

⁸³ Rat der Stadt Heilbad Heiligenstadt, 'Bericht über die Eingaben der Bürger und die Bearbeitung durch die Fachorgane des Rates der Stadt im Berichtszeitraum vom 5. Januar bis 15. Dezember 1970', 23 December 1970, Stadtarchiv Heiligenstadt, 17/5.

⁸⁴ Rat des Kreises Heiligenstadt, 'Bericht über die Situation auf dem Gebiet der Wasserwirtschaft im Kreis Heiligenstadt', 17 April 1963, Stadtarchiv Heiligenstadt, 58/2.

⁸⁵ D. Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape and the Making of Modern Germany* (London 2007), 324-30.

⁸⁶ 'Vertrag über die Grundlagen der Beziehungen zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', 21 December 1972, in *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, 8 November 1972, 1842-4.

Grenzkommision, which was charged with resolving boundary and border queries affecting the two states.⁸⁷

In many respects, the strengthening of border fortifications during the 1960s appeared to curtail the possibility of further environmental discussions between the two Germanys. It not only proved difficult to negotiate across a militarised divide, but political will was largely missing too. However as the border became more secure, environmental decay only increased. Wetland landscapes were made inaccessible and in many cases rivers were also diverted. The scale of these problems for the FRG in particular ensured that the shared German environment became a point of contact during negotiations for the Basic Treaty. Indeed, the final Treaty enabled the two sides to discuss a series of cross-border environmental issues during the mid to late 1970s.⁸⁸

In her work on nature protection in post-war Germany, Sandra Chaney examines the ways in which ‘two environments [gradually] emerged in the FRG and the GDR’.⁸⁹ In many respects, Chaney is correct to introduce this idea of separatism. After 1945, first the Eastern and Western occupation zones and then the two German states did begin to carve out their own set of environmental principles. Different approaches to reparations, land reform and environmental legislation all helped to give the impression of separation. By the 1970s, as the Federal Republic started to target the

⁸⁷ Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen (ed.), *Die Grenzkommision: eine Dokumentation über Grundlagen und Tätigkeit* (Bonn 1980).

⁸⁸ See: Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen (ed.), *Die Grenzkommision: eine Dokumentation über Grundlagen und Tätigkeit* (Bonn 1980).

⁸⁹ Chaney, ‘Protecting Nature’, 208.

problem of pollution with ever greater vigour, the environment of the two states grew even further apart. Political and civil restrictions on the GDR's citizens limited public discussion of environmental destruction at the same time that West Germans sought to protect nature.⁹⁰

Despite these very visible signs of separation, the environment of the two German states actually remained remarkably entwined. Nowhere was this more evident than in the spread of polluted water and air across the German-German border. West German holiday beaches along the Baltic Sea, for example, were badly damaged by East German industrial pollution. West German scientists discovered ten times the level of insecticide in seabirds along the Baltic than in the North Sea. This led the West German newsweekly, *Der Spiegel*, to label the Baltic the 'world's most polluted Inland Sea'.⁹¹ Such dramatic examples of cross-border pollution certainly helped to grab the public's imagination. Yet there was nothing fundamentally new about this environmental entanglement. The history of the two post war German states is in many ways one of the environment. From the moment of division in 1945 through to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the landscapes and infrastructure of the two states remained firmly entangled with the environment across the militarised border.

What was crucial about this long period of environmental entanglement was that it formed a small part of informal inner-German relations during the early years of the Cold War. Discussion between the two Germanys, as this case demonstrates,

⁹⁰ R. Dominick, 'Capitalism, Communism and Environmental Protection: Lessons from the German Experience', *Environmental History*, 3, 3 (July 1998), 311-32, 325.

⁹¹ 'Ein Meer voller Unrat und Häßlichkeit', *Der Spiegel* (2 July 1973).

did not just involve trade negotiations, cultural exchanges or the interactions of the Christian churches, it was also about fighting forest fires, managing border rivers and controlling the spread of animal diseases. On a local level, East and West Germans living close to the border were only too aware that their own wellbeing required some form of dialogue with the other Germany. As much as the leaders of the two states may have wished, it proved impossible to isolate one part of the German landscape from its neighbour across the border. Negotiations about the future of the shared environment reached a highpoint in the mid 1950s. Against the wishes of both sides, then, the German environment acted not so much as a point of division, but as a site of German-German interaction.