

The Turn to Local Communities in Early Post-war West Germany: The Case of Hamburg, Lübeck and Bremen, 1945-1965

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In 1945, Arthur Dickens, a Yorkshireman in the British Royal Artillery, took up a post as press supervisor in the Baltic town of Lübeck—a city for which he developed an odd local enthusiasm.¹ Taking regular nightly walks through the town ruins, he recorded his nocturnal ruminations on the local landscape, writing in his diary in July 1945 of his deep affection for Lübeck.² His position as press supervisor exposed him to the writings of local enthusiasts that proliferated in ruined German cities, which reminded him of the Yorkshire regionalists he knew from his youth. Dickens reacted positively to the turn to the local that took place in the ruins and saw it as anything but narrow, close-minded, or reminiscent of Nazism, recording in his diary:

No man whose heart lies truly in his local history can, I like to hope, be utterly lost, and whatever one thinks of political regionalism in Germany, these local cults must at all cost be encouraged; apart from their intrinsic mental worth, they are the basis of a truer and better patriotism, as opposed to a state-engineered Chauvinism...³

Dickens' argument is stunning not in terms of its uniqueness, but in how it reflected popular German discourses on the crucial role of local communities in building a new post-war order.

While Nazi Germany promoted a vision of messianic national community as the ultimate guarantor of future life, in the ruins of early post-war cities, a broad localist turn occurred. Localism is typified by an emphasis on the locality as a site of meaning, community, cultural particularity, and decentralization, while its political context can be ideologically variant. The early postwar localist turn, I argue, reshaped the spatial imaginary in ways that deeply influenced both culture and politics and ultimately redounded to the benefit of postwar democratization. Instead of looking for redemption from the national community, local citizens imagined restored civilian lives within their local communities—a development crucial to post-war cultural demobilization. The turn to local community can be seen above all in the profuse appeal to Heimat sentiment in the rubble years. Heimat— a unique German term— refers to a sense of belonging in local and regional places of home.⁴ Desires for Heimat reached unprecedented heights amidst the ruins. Facing trauma, pervasive destruction, dislocation and loss of locally-situated personal pasts, local Heimat emerged as a site of imagined protection, restored community and a geography in which citizens could bridge across rupture and build new civilian lives.

While the national idea was burdened, citizens further took advantage of localities as sources of alternative identities and reshaped ideas of local tradition to forge identification with a new democratic system and *rapprochement* with former enemies. Though historians have overlooked

the phenomenon, localists and regionalists throughout the Federal Republic reconfigured local historical memory and reinvented traditions to fashion notions of ‘democracy,’ ‘republicanism,’ ‘world-openness,’ and/or ‘tolerance’ as local values. In the German Southwest, for example, regionalists fashioned ideas such as ‘Swabian democracy’ and ‘Badenese world-openness,’ while citizens in places like Cologne underscored ‘democracy,’ ‘world-openness,’ and national reconciliation as values rooted in local community. Citizens throughout West Germany further articulated the importance of orientation to local community in establishing a decentralized democracy. Though such identifications did not suddenly turn Germans into adept practitioners of democracy, nor did it contribute to coming to grips with crimes of the recent past, it proved crucial in forging conceptual identifications with a new democratic system and post-war order.

While these developments can be found in scores of localities and regions, this study will focus on the cases of the coastal Hanseatic cities of Lübeck, Hamburg and Bremen, which well illustrate both the use of flexible local identities and emphasis on reconstructed home towns as geographies of life after death. It will trace particularly the reformulation and growing popular advocacy of ideas of Hanseatic ‘world-openness,’ ‘democracy’ and ‘tolerance’ as local values. Of course, Hanseaten had long identified with the position of their cities within a global network of trade. They also had long pre-war histories of local independence. But while these cities had very unique profiles and histories, what proves most interesting is not their deviation from other localities in West Germany, but rather how they marshalled unique cultures and histories to fashion similar local value claims.

In focusing on the role of local communities and identities in post-war reconstruction, this work addresses an area in much need of further scholarly attention. Significant work has been done on the cultural history of *physical* reconstruction and on desires to maintain local identities and memory in the landscapes of rebuilt cities.⁵ But local identities were more than just objects of reconstruction and bore much significance beyond questions of physical rebuilding. They represented vital tools, particularly in the German case, through which citizens imagined new post-war private lives and forged crucial identification with a new post-war order. The rubble world was filled with discussions on how re-establishing ‘Heimat’ was essential both to repairing torn life narratives and establishing a new political system. In spite of the prevalence of such popular discussions, histories of post-war West Germany have neglected the extent to which local places of home and local communities acted as centre points of cultural-political reconstruction. Historians have likewise overlooked the extent of early democratic identifications and the role of localities in facilitating them.⁶ Admittedly, histories of federalism have noted the role of localism and regionalism in post-war Germany.⁷ Celia Applegate’s study of the Heimat concept has also pointed out how it was one of the few community concepts not tainted after 1945.⁸ Such findings, however, have not prevented scores of subsequent scholars from repeating the myth of Heimat and localism as tainted after 1945. Much work, in short, remains to be done to uncover the role of the local communities as vital tools in the broader project of post-war reconstruction—particularly in its identificational, personal and cultural aspects.

Local communities were, in contrast to the nation, embedded within more personally experienced spaces. At the same time, they were also imagined communities that were shaped

discursively. This chapter therefore probes local community as a discursive proscriptive construction super-imposed onto diverse networks of social solidarities and fragmentations. In turn, rather than seeing emergent ideas such as 'Hanseatic democracy,' 'Hanseatic world-openness,' and 'Hanseatic tolerance' as broadly descriptive and corresponding to experience, it views them as discursive tools used to influence the cultural and political terms of community and its mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Behind these ideals remained ongoing pitfalls, divisions and exclusions. These ideas about local community, however, had broad resonance and were not simply the project of a small elite. They were promoted interchangeably by a range of actors including lay localists, Heimat societies, writers and intellectuals, as well as local politicians.

This chapter will first examine the cognitive and emotional turn to home towns and local communities as manifested in the local cultural reawakening and efforts to patch together dislocated and shattered communities. It will then turn to articulations of local community as essential to democracy and parallel discourses on 'world-openness,' 'democracy' and 'tolerance' as local values. *Hanseaten* used ideas of world-openness to reject former nationalist narratives of their cities as nodes of German power, propagating instead a notion of their harbour communities as internationalist, peaceful intermediaries between Germany and the world. Progressive local enthusiasts further used notions of world-openness and tolerance to encourage embrace of outsiders.

While representative of phenomenon in West Germany, the turn to local community in the three cities at least partly reflected broader European trends. Of course, the combination of burdened national identity, the challenge of identifying with a very different political system and the free availability of alternative sources of identity certainly made West German cities unique. While cities in the Eastern bloc witnessed the imposition of official socialist narratives of place, other Western countries like Britain, France, Belgium, or the Netherlands had neither significantly burdened national identities nor the same pressing need to construct radically new political identifications.⁹ While the German context may be more unique in the sheer extent to which locals reformulated local identities to adjust to a very different political system, war-torn citizens across Europe shared the belief that reconstruction of local community proved vital to establishing new post-war orders. Countries across Western and Eastern Europe experienced many of the same conditions that informed preoccupation with local communities, including the destruction of home towns, the shattering of local communities through dislocation and death, and experiences of rupture most deeply felt in lost local places of home. Much evidence suggests a similar preoccupation with reconstructing local communities throughout war-torn Europe.

Rebuilding Local Communities from the Ashes

The post-war turn to local communities can scarcely be understood without reference to its feared loss. Unlike after World War I, home towns had become sites of utter devastation. As Hanseatic citizens returned to purvey the rubble of their home towns, they had to first convince themselves that their 'Heimat' was not on its deathbed. As citizens experienced rubble

landscapes, disappeared sites of past lives and ruptured communities, they turned to the local community idea in response to its perceived loss. Hamburg was the hardest hit, with bombings in 1943 leading nine hundred thousand of its 1.7 million inhabitants to flee, with forty-one thousand locals perishing in the raids and forty-four thousand Hamburg soldiers dying on the front (see figure 1).¹⁰ Bremen, nestled on the Weser river, lost thirty-six per cent of its population and fifty to sixty per cent of its inhabitable structures, with the cities buried in 8.7 million cubic meters of rubble (see figure 2).¹¹ Finally, Lübeck, after a large bombing raid in 1942, had been twenty per cent destroyed, with sixteen per cent of buildings completely destroyed and 41.4 per cent lightly damaged, leaving ten per cent of the city homeless (see figure 3). Lübeck was spared from later bombings by becoming a Red Cross hub.¹² Its position near the Soviet zone, however, brought its own challenges. East German expellees, driven from their native regions, sought to push beyond the Soviet zone, many arriving in the new border city. In the early years, ninety thousand expellees flooded Lübeck, nearly doubling its population.¹³ All the Hanseatic cities faced widespread death, dislocation and straining circumstances, with citizens living on a daily diet of around one thousand calories. Their inhabitants all expressed fears that local community and Heimat had been permanently lost.

But the cities soon witnessed an astonishing cascade of returning citizens, often defying the materially irrational nature of premature return. The sheer volume of return sparked a crisis in Hamburg. Of the nine hundred thousand Hamburger who evacuated in 1943, 615,000 returned within only a few years to a city still covered in forty-three million square meters of rubble, with the British quickly culblocking further entry.¹⁴ Returning citizens recounted not national slogans

and the redemption of national community. Instead, they expressed their desires for local community and home town. In April 1946, the *Hamburger Echo* reported on how the ‘storm to the Heimat’ crashed into allied relocation restrictions. The article cited a representative letter from a female evacuee who wrote: ‘I must, as a Hamburger, be allowed to again live in Hamburg...I have spent my entire life there until 1943... I want to, and must go back to my Heimat.’ The newspaper reported that thousands of Hamburger felt the same.¹⁵ Local newspapers continually reported that evacuees wrote to them in droves of their desires to return to their Heimat. When locals did return, they faced the daunting task of finding a place to live and found their sense of lost Heimat all the more heightened.¹⁶ In 1946, a citizen who lived in the rubble for years recounted how a Hamburg soldier returned home after six years to find a former personal landscape turned into a ‘city of ruins’ that left him grasping for familiar places.¹⁷ Another local wrote how, prior to seeing the rubble, he was not aware that local landscapes held such personal significance for him.¹⁸ Rather than reflecting on abstract national community, returning citizens were faced with the destroyed local places of past personal life and how to address their loss.

In Lübeck and Bremen, the same spectre of lost local community was apparent. Lübecker, whose city suffered less destruction, noted a turn to local Heimat sentiment in response to its feared loss. In 1948, the head of the Lübeck Society for *Heimatschutz* wrote that widespread belief that Lübeck was on its deathbed triggered a surge of interest in local Heimat and reconstruction.¹⁹ The city witnessed a wave of foundings and re-foundings of localist Heimat societies and publications. These included the *Verein für Heimatschutz*, *Natur und Heimat*, the very Heimat-engaged *Gesellschaft zur Beförderung Gemeinnütziger Tätigkeit*, the *Plattdütsche*

Volksgill to Lübeck and the *Vaterstädtische Vereinigung* founded in 1949, which included Thomas and Heinrich Mann among its members.²⁰ New or re-established Heimat periodicals included the *Lübeckische Blätter*, *Vaterstädtische Blätter*, *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Lübeckische Geschichte* and *Der Wagen*. Heimat associations did not hold monopoly on local culture, but did much to jump-start a local cultural renaissance that helped compensate for destroyed local landscapes. Lübecker noted how the war's destruction of *Heimatgut*, (material anchors of Heimat), informed the subsequent local cultural revival. Re-awakening traditions like the Lübeck city festival, they argued, would help make up for losses in the familiar built environment of Heimat.²¹ Heimat societies and publications proliferated in Hamburg and Bremen to an equal degree. By 1946, the Hamburg mayor, Max Brauer, addressing the sad state of their 'Heimat,' noted that their 'glowing love' of Hamburg had reached greater heights than in times of the city's 'blossoming.' Hamburg, he believed, 'bleeding from a thousand wounds,' needed this local sentiment to rebuild, strengthen community and fight for their local independence.²² Eighty miles to the West, Brauer's fellow mayor in Bremen, Theodor Spitta, similarly recounted a growing localist spirit amidst the rubble, where Bremen's 'Polis spirit' fuelled rebuilding.²³ Spitta's description conveyed a notion of their localism as emerging from local "democracy," while equating their tradition with the ancient Greek Polis. City quarters also emerged as strong sites of Heimat sentiment— achieving a prominence that surpassed city quarter feeling prior to the bombings.²⁴ On an even more intimate level, small groups of localists regularly met in 'Heimat evenings' to foster community and face the challenges of the rubble world together.²⁵

Though all three Hanseatic cities had strong pre-war local traditions, parallel turns to local geographies of home can be found throughout the ruins of post-war Germany. Whether it be a Konstanz archivist noting how Heimat feeling had become ‘all the more valuable’ in the ruins than it had been in peace time or a Cologne city report from 1945/46 recording the ‘wild growing’ Heimat enthusiasm that gripped the rubble, home towns emerged as crucial sites of reconstructing torn communities.²⁶ As the South Baden state president argued in 1946, after the disaster of war, they could begin anew by ‘holding together’ within the smaller circle of their ‘Heimat.’²⁷ Hanseatic citizens, though having very different traditions and living hundreds of kilometres to the north, very much shared these sentiments.

‘It is our will to exist:’ Local Heimat as a site of Life-affirmation

Singular focus on an abstract national community hardly seemed to offer the promise of a new beginning. While Nazism valorised sacrifice of individual life for abstract national glory, in the ruins, citizens associated emphasis on grandiose national community with death like never before. The nation had been eliminated as an actor and could no longer redeem exhausted citizens. As Mark Roseman argues, nationalist politics made little sense as the ‘realities of power were against it.’²⁸ Reconstructing local communities, by contrast appeared to offer visions of peaceful civilian lives. Like many other Germans, *Hanseaten* increasingly described their *local* places of home as ‘life-affirming.’ Richard Bessel and other historians have raised the question of how war-torn citizens after 1945 created a sense of ‘life after death.’²⁹ Local communities and local Heimat, I argue, were the primary geographies in which life after death was pursued.

Reconstructing the local world was, to use the words of Hamburg mayor Paul Nevermann, doing away with ‘mountains of death!’³⁰ Wilhelm Kaisen recalled Bremen’s reconstruction in the same vein, asserting that local rebuilding represented the ‘triumph of life over destruction.’³¹ As the Hamburg author, Wolfgang Borchert, wrote in 1948, for him and Hamburg citizens, their rubble city was more than a ‘pile of stones.’ It represented their ‘will to exist;’ not just their desire to live, ‘anywhere or somehow,’ – ‘but to live here’. Borchert’s prose recounts tableaux of Hamburg civilian life which may strike the contemporary ear as mundane: screeching street cars, ship sirens and seeing factory chimneys, the Alster Lake, and gray-red roof-tops, and feeling sea winds.³² The prospect of such everyday life on a local stage resonated deeply with the early post-war psyche. Lines like Borchert’s, in turn, found public resonance. Mayor Brauer repeated them, insisting that Hamburg was more than a harbour, economy, or place of work. It was a ‘life community’ and a ‘humanitarian community.’ By clearing the rubble and maintaining local community, he believed Hamburger demonstrated their ‘will to live.’³³

Given its association with life-affirmation, local Heimat sentiment fuelled popular reconstruction fervour. The Bremer citizen Hans Kasten, in a poem on Bremen’s reconstruction recounted with intensity how a ‘life stream’ still flowed the city, which he argued, demonstrated throughout its history the ability to pull itself out of the ashes. He ardently called on the community to rebuild, inspired by local tradition.³⁴ By evoking historical memories of his city rising from past disasters, Kasten reflected broader trends in historical memory in the rubble. Convincing themselves that their local community was a source of life after death required not simply idealistic memories of better times; it entailed drudging up the cities’ worst historical moments.

In Hamburg, locals emphasized historic destructions, plagues and disasters, including the 1842 Hamburg fire, and how their ‘Hanseatic spirit’ pulled them through.³⁵ The same can be seen in Lübeck. An article in the *Vaterstädtische Blätter*, for example, emphasized ‘the six historic destructions of Lübeck’ from 1149 to 1945. After 1945, they undertook the ‘sixth rebuilding.’³⁶ Beyond the Hanseatic cities, in rubble cities from Magdeburg to Cologne, locals similarly evoked destructive local histories—from the Thirty Years War to the black plague—to insist on reconstruction as a local tradition.³⁷ These historical memories transfigured reconstruction into a local tradition in the Hanseatic cities as they did elsewhere. Moreover, just as Hamburger viewed their city as their ‘will to exist,’ local enthusiasts in places like Cologne reflected on how citizens in the rubble were filled with ‘Heimat love’ and a ‘life-affirming optimism’ that fuelled local reconstruction.³⁸ Hanseatic citizens’ view of home town as a life-affirming geography, in short, followed a broader trend.

Hanseatic Democracy, World-Openness and Tolerance

In turning to local worlds to imagine new civilian lives, Hanseaten were not simply sticking their heads into local sands. Reflecting on broader issues, many citizens from both above and below re-shaped local identities to forge identification with a new democracy and international *rapprochement*. They further elucidated how rootedness in local communities was vital to democracy. While vast geographic spaces and communities are often viewed as those with the greatest potential to be progressive and modern, localists in the Hanseatic cities articulated how local rootedness was both harmonious with modernity and essential for democracy. Indeed, they

often saw absence of local community as the essence of dictatorships, which, rather than respecting local rootedness, uprooted peoples for purposes of mass geo-politics. Comprehensible realms of community, early post-war localists frequently argued, were further needed as forums of democratic participation.

Articulations of a locally-rooted democratic modernism can be found in all three cities and in localities throughout the Federal Republic, but let us consider in detail the example of Lübeck and its largest localist society, the *Vaterstädtische Vereinigung* (1949). Their society publication was filled with elaborations on the importance of local community to democracy, with their society emphasizing both devotion to Heimat and promoting democratic governance.³⁹ By tending to local traditions, forging local unity and strengthening neighbourly connections, they believed they could promote a ‘new understanding of the world.’ This meant fighting forces they claimed threatened democracy: ‘massification,’ ‘technocracy,’ and ‘nihilism’—presumably by-products of a dark strain of modernity.⁴⁰ Society members continually re-iterated that comprehensible community was a *sine qua non* for democracy. Localities, they argued, acted as schools of democratic participation that gave everyday citizens political responsibilities.⁴¹ They further wrote of how emphasis on their local world contributed to federalized, de-centred ideas of nationhood. The society president, for example, drew on Hanseatic history to argue for a federalized ‘German future from a Hanseatic spirit’ instead of a Prussian-Nazi tradition that he argued subverted individualism. ‘Connection to Heimat’ in a ‘Hanseatic-Lübeck disposition’ seemingly provided the antidote.⁴² Identical theories of local rootedness as essential for democracy can be found throughout West Germany. Localists from the Southwest to the

Rhineland argued that democracy was best realized within the reach of the 'Heimat-like parliament' with absence of local rootedness creating 'helplessness and passivity' which resulted in dictatorship.⁴³

Beyond emphasizing local communities as essential for democracy, citizens further promoted notions of democracy as a specifically Hanseatic value. Historians continue to debate the extent of the cities' 'democratic' histories.⁴⁴ Whatever the historical matter contained, reconfigured historical memory facilitated new identifications. Discourses in the rubble cities contained prolific considerations of how their local tradition could be useful for democratization and European unification. Already in 1947, one newspaper approvingly wrote of how locals in the Hanseatic cities were talking incessantly about the 'Hanseatic spirit' and its force in reconstruction.⁴⁵ Localists like the Lübecker, Hans Wittmack, were representative of this phenomenon in arguing for the use of local traditions to prop up a German and European federalism:

It is the Hanseatic spirit which once encompassed all of Europe that must be reawakened. Hanseatic spirit is more than simply the spirit of a single city, whether it be as large and world-open and bold as Hamburg. Hanseatic spirit was a federalist spirit that filled an entire league of cities. It could, today, act as a model...⁴⁶

Lay localists like Wittmack were hardly alone in this view. In 1948, mayor Brauer addressed the *Hamburger Bürgerschaft*, calling for a federalist nation in which Hamburg would ‘interweave’ their local democratic traditions and encouraging Hamburger to profess their allegiance to their city’s ‘healthful republican and democratic traditions.’⁴⁷ Brauer’s colleague on the Weser, Wilhelm Kaisen also marshalled local history to forge identities rooted in Hanseatic republicanism, democracy and federalism. During his twenty-year tenure, the SPD mayor argued for local democratic decentralization and Bremer independence.⁴⁸ Bremen, he believed, must remain a Free Hanseatic city for the sake of its republican principles, position in world trade and importance to having a federalist nation and a ‘federalist Europe.’⁴⁹ Such narratives of Hanseatic democracy proved useful in efforts to maintain their local independence, with the Nazis having eliminated hundreds of years of local independence in Bremen and Lübeck. While the American occupiers restored Bremen’s federal statehood, Lübecker pressed for a popular vote on the issue throughout the 1950s. While ideas of Hanseatic democracy proved useful in the independence issue, it hardly explains the idea’s emergence, particularly given that West German localists not facing the same issue fashioned similar local identity tenets—from ‘Swabian-Alemannic democracy’ to ‘Colognian democracy.’⁵⁰ The phenomenon was ultimately more about attempts to affiliate local identities with a new post-war order.

Along with reformulation of local historical memories, citizens further re-invented local traditions to promote democracy and internationalism as local values. A range of traditions prove illustrative, including Hamburg’s re-invention of its harbour birthday, used after 1945 to promote locally-rooted ideas of world-openness and international *rapprochement*. Beyond the Hanseatic

cities, locals in cities like Cologne similarly re-invented local ritual traditions and depicted them as embodying local values of democracy, tolerance and world-openness.⁵¹ One of the most telling examples in the Hanseatic cities, however, was the re-awakening and re-invention of Lübeck's *Volks- und Erinnerungsfest*. The tradition was first celebrated in Lübeck by the 1848 revolutionaries and, until 1870, was rooted in desire for German unity and enthusiasm for the local constitution. Between 1870 and 1914, the tradition morphed into a nationalist and militarist celebration, shedding democratic undertones, with the Nazis later seeking to obliterate memory of 1848 altogether, depicting it as 'ancient Germanic' festival.⁵² Amidst the post-war local cultural renaissance, both lay Heimat societies and the city government cooperated in reviving the tradition, which they stripped of nationalist elements, reawakening instead remembrance of 1848 and constitutional democracy. Perhaps due to fears that sharp-shooting events, held since 1848, would counter the message of local democracy and anti-militarism, they were not revived.⁵³ At the peak of the tradition's revival, its organizing committee couched the festival as an opportunity to build solidarity with expellees and as a tradition that memorialized the democratic 1848 revolutions and their democratic constitution.⁵⁴ In the ensuing years, diverse interpretations of the tradition were dominated by ideas of it as a deeply democratic tradition that honoured Lübeck's constitution and the freedom seeking of 1848.⁵⁵

Advocation of democracy as a local value paralleled promotion of Hanseatic world-openness as assisting in international *rapprochement*. Ideals of localist world-openness highlighted the transnational significance of local identificational reconstruction. Almost immediately after 1945, local enthusiasts and politicians jointly articulated the international ameliorating influence

of Hanseatic world-openness. In May 1945, Rudolf Petersen, a Hamburg tradesman who had just become mayor, addressed war-torn citizens by drawing on their Hanseatic history of trade and international contact. While the Nazis defined the city as a hub of expansionary German power, Petersen defined it as one of ‘connection of international peoples’ and as a door of reconciliation between Germany and the outside world. Their history, he further argued, made them a ‘mediator’ between Germany and the Anglo-Saxon world and notions of freedom.⁵⁶ These principles would be enshrined in the city constitution, which cited Hamburg’s duty to be ‘in the spirit of peace, a mediator between all people and lands of the globe.’⁵⁷ Such a narrative of local community overwrote nationalist and national socialist spatial narratives of the cities as exit points of expansionary German power.

A *continuous* trope of local identity rather than a new one best illustrates post-war changes in ideas of localness: the representation of their cities (particularly Hamburg) as being ‘gates to the world.’ The term existed since at least the nineteenth century. Yet, being a ‘gate to the world’ bore different meanings in different times. Was the gate for exit, entrance, or both? In Nazi propaganda, it was the gate through which national power exited onto a global stage. After 1945, the concept, as used in popular Heimat publications like the *Hamburger Journal*, was a gate of ‘openness,’ and ‘breadth’ rooted in international mutuality, cooperation and a ‘willingness to give and to receive.’⁵⁸ The popular appeal of such local self-definitions is reflected in the deluge of early post-war Heimat publications. In Bernard Meyer-Marwitz *Hamburg, Heimat am Strom* from 1947, for example, he wrote that the city knew ‘no boundaries’ and stood ‘at the gate of infinity, open to all five continents and the seven seas.’⁵⁹ The local author Ernst Schnabel

described Hamburg as the world contained within a local nutshell, while his fellow Heimat enthusiast in Bremen, Hermann Tardel, cited two components of the Bremer: the first revolving around house, family, city and state, and the second looking into the distance of foreign countries.⁶⁰ The Hamburg philosopher, Hans Driesch, similarly wrote that being a Hamburger combined both ‘particularism and world citizenship.’⁶¹ This re-definition of localities in border and maritime regions had parallels elsewhere. Just as Hanseatic citizens inverted nationalist narratives, so too did Rhinelanders abandon notions of themselves as ‘watches on the Rhine,’ defining themselves instead as a world-open ‘bridge’ to the West.⁶² Similarly, in the Southwest, regionalists abandoned notions of their region as a fortress of Germanness. In advocating for the creation of differently bordered federal states, regionalists competed over which particular regional state vision would act as the better ‘bridge’ to the West.⁶³

Appealing to Hanseatic world-openness to identify with international reconciliation was largely a cognitive task. Applying such local values to outsiders on the local stage took practising tolerance and openness to a different level entirely. Ideas of local world-openness and tolerance hardly transformed their local communities into utopias of acceptance. Nor did democratic identities make them adept practitioners of democracy. Rather, these tenets of local identity represented tools that more inclusively-inclined localists wielded to both promote conceptual identification with democracy and to mitigate select exclusionary mechanisms of community formation. The most prominent group of outsiders that early post-war locals faced was East German expellees, whose arrival in large numbers shocked Hanseatic citizens. Hamburg became home to 327,000, making up 18.8 per cent of the population, with 8.6 per cent of Bremen’s

population made up of expellees.⁶⁴ Neither witnessed the tidal wave that hit Lübeck which had a population of 240,000 residents, ninety thousand of whom were expellees.⁶⁵ Lübecker feared that the outsider influx would extinguish their local community. A Heimat society which later became a strident voice of expellee inclusion, the *Vaterstädtische Vereinigung*, cited both physical destruction and expellee influx as motivating their founding. Years later an expellee himself would sit at the head of the localist society.⁶⁶

So what of 'Hanseatic tolerance' vis-à-vis such outsiders? How, after an era defined by exclusionary community formation practices did locals seek to fashion more permeable and inclusive reconstructed communities? Research for Hamburg and Bremen has illustrated the many challenges and exclusions that expellees faced during the early years when competition for resources was most pervasive.⁶⁷ After the shock of expellee influx subsided and competition for scant resources relented, however, many progressive localists countered local rejection of newcomers by depicting expellee embrace and integration as a performance of Hanseatic world-openness and tolerance. At expellee gatherings in the Hanseatic cities, many native Hanseaten drew on local historical memories of outsider influx into their cities to argue for integration as a tenet of local identity.⁶⁸ The *Vaterstädtische Vereinigung*, after brief fears over expellee influx, quickly emphasized integration, inclusion of expellees in local traditions, and giving expellees a new sense of Heimat. By the early 1950s, the society re-iterated how it aimed to tend to the Heimat sentiment of both old and new residents and how all could become members.⁶⁹ Some Heimat society members even bragged about the viability of their city by pointing to expellee influx.⁷⁰

Amidst the challenges of integration, good will toward the expellees also came from other localist societies, such as the *Verein für Heimatschutz in Lübeck*. The expellees, the society president argued in 1946, ‘will bear their loss much easier when they have a feeling of belonging in Lübeck’. The primary goal of his society, he argued, was to promote attachment to Heimat, which for many was a ‘new Heimat’.⁷¹ The Lübeck Senator Hans Ewers similarly held up as a Lübecker tradition the capability to make outsiders feel as ‘eager Lübecker’ shortly after they set foot in the city. Lübeck, he believed, had a secret ‘power of attraction.’⁷² Other Lübecker localists argued for use of their city’s revived ritual traditions to integrate outsiders and give them a ‘connection to their new Heimat.’⁷³

Such examples should not be equated with a rosy and smooth path to integration, nor should they lead us to overlook strong Western hostilities vis-à-vis the expellees. Counter examples could be readily found and conceptual identification with world-openness and tolerance did not equate to adept practice of inclusion. Localist groups, like the ‘Society of Born Hamburger’ continued exclusionary practices—allowing neither native women nor men born outside of Hamburg to join.⁷⁴ Women’s exclusion reflected a misogynist and classist strain of Hanseatic tradition which viewed the successful businessman as the truest Hanseat. The society lexicon was filled not with words like world-openness, but rather with terms like *Quidjes*, local dialect for ‘the non-Hamburger.’ The society, founded amidst outsider influx amidst late nineteenth century urbanization, saw itself in the post-war period as again protecting local culture against outsiders.⁷⁵

Despite the persistence of exclusionary practices, popular identification with local tolerance and world-openness encouraged more inclusive ideas of community. The resonance of such ideas can be seen throughout the deluge of early post-war localist publications, which included reflections like those of a 1955 *Bremer Heimatchronik*, which argued:

It is a an essential criteria of all true living communities with promising futures that they attract into their orbit those people who have come from the outside and impress and instil in them their natures without completely divesting them of the unique characteristics that they bring with them.⁷⁶

Localists like the author of the *Heimatchronik* did not see the turn to Heimat as incompatible with embracing outsiders and internationalist orientations; they saw them instead as mutually reinforcing. Localists beyond the Hanseatic cities did the same, including Rhinelander who evoked Roman histories and histories of outsider influx to argue for embrace of Italian immigrants as harmonious with local tradition.⁷⁷

Such attempts to reconstruct community along more inclusive lines extended beyond the early post-war years. In the late 1960s and afterwards, figures like the Jewish SPD mayor, Herbert Weichmann, frequently promoted ideas of Hamburger tolerance, freedom, republicanism and liberalism.⁷⁸ Such tropes could also be used to argue for integration of new foreign immigrants,

who often faced significant exclusion. One contemporary Hamburg philosopher has emphasized Hamburg's localness as defined by its embrace of other nationalities.⁷⁹ Other outsider groups have insisted that local openness should mean acceptance of their group. Hamburg's gay population in the early years of gay liberation, for example, appealed to ideas of Hamburg's world-openness.⁸⁰ While the strength of exclusionary community formation practices should not be underestimated, in the contemporary cities, ideas of Hanseatic tolerance and world-openness remain useful tools in the progressive arsenal. The tropes of local identity that emerged from early post-war reconstruction, in short, had dynamic afterlives and their subsequent reformulations are worthy of continued attention.

Conclusion

In the wake of destruction, dislocation, the submersion of everyday private life into global struggle and the discrediting of nationalism, local communities came to the fore as crucial sites of reconstruction in the early West Germany. This process proved central to the abandonment of a grandiose vision of national community as a redemptive force—a shift that informed cultural demobilization and had important ramifications for culture and politics. Local places of home represented geographies where citizens imagined 'life-affirming' civilian existences and found flexible sources of identity that facilitated identification with a new system. Emphasis on 'Hanseatic democracy' and 'Hanseatic republicanism' strengthened identification with both the post-war search for democracy and western *rapprochement*. Following an era defined by exclusionary practices of community formation, many citizens further reformulated local

identities to encourage more permeable notions of community. Of course, claims to democracy, world-openness and tolerance as local traditions should not be mistaken as descriptive. They neither helped Germans come to grips with their complicity in the crimes of the recent past, nor did they do away with exclusionary and undemocratic practices. Rather, they represented proscriptive utterances, significant in how they facilitated conceptual identifications with democracy and more open forms of community formation and in how they could be reformulated by subsequent generations.

The cities offer but one example of how alternative sources of identity beyond the nation could prove useful in post-war eras of reconstruction. We see a similar phenomenon in Kühner-Wielach's chapter on interwar Transylvania and in Vahtikari's chapter on post-war Helsinki. Much evidence, moreover, suggests a similar preoccupation throughout war-torn Europe with reconstructing local communities and saving local culture and uniqueness. Experiences, however, still differed along national and state lines, as Mark Mazower has pointed out.⁸¹ West Germany's defeated and occupied status, the burdens of national identities and the requirement to rapidly adapt to a new system made localities uniquely suited as sites of identificational reformulations. In Britain, France, the Netherlands, or Belgium, by contrast, the nation stood out more prominently as a community of reconstruction.⁸² At the same time, as we see in Stefan Couperus's chapter, urban planners, governors and citizens in both Britain and the Netherlands strongly emphasized the need to reconstruct local communities as sites of belonging and bearers of urban citizenship and democracy. Looking at ravaged eastern German cities, we see a similar obsession with local communities, though citizens were limited in their ability to publically

articulate and re-shape local identities.⁸³ Even in Soviet cities, we find local efforts to saving local traditions in a way that could thwart centralized national reconstruction plans.⁸⁴

Though those beyond Germany rarely faced the same identificational challenges, war-torn Europeans broadly shared experiences of local communities ripped apart through destruction, dislocation and death. Many Europeans faced flattened local landscapes that represented not only material monuments of local culture, history and identity, but also deeply meaningful sites of personal life narratives. The resulting feared loss of local community, tradition and personal geographies of home together formed a common thread that transcended state and national borders, with many post-war citizens deeply preoccupied with repairing local communities as a crucial task of post-war reconstruction.

Endnotes

¹ The author would like to thank Helmut Walser Smith and Celia Applegate for their feedback on this project, as well as participants of the Greifswald conference on *Hansische Identitäten* and the Nijmegen conference on Reconstructing Communities.

This article understands localism as defined by emphasis on locality as a site of meaning, community, cultural particularity, and decentralization. Its political context can and has been ideologically variant.

² Arthur Dickens, diary entry, 31 July 1945, in Dickens, *Lübeck*, 30-32.

³ Dickens, diary entry, 9 July 1945, in *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴ Much previous work on the Heimat concept has depicted its post-war history as simply about repressing the past. See Knoch, *Das Erbe*, and Confino, *Germany*. Alon Confino, whose approach reduces Heimat to a mere strategy of imagining nation, neglects how Heimat after 1945 centred around a ruptured relationship between individual and lost local places of home. Looking at tourism to get at post-war Heimat, he argues that it was simply about depicting the nation as “victim.”

⁵ See Wagner-Kyora, *Wiederaufbau*; Clapson and Larkham, *Blitz*; Diefendorf, *Wake of the War*; Durth and Gutschow, *Träume in Trümmern*; Gutschow and Düwel, *Fortgewischt*.

⁶ Much work on post-war cultural-political reconstruction, by contrast, has focused on the national and state levels and on elite actors. See Moeller, *West Germany*; Jackson, *Civilizing the Enemy*; Niethammer, *Deutschland danach*. For works on German democratization that downplay early democratic identifications, see Jarausch, *Die Umkehr*; Herbert, *Wandlungsprozesse*; Benz, *Auftrag Demokratie*.

⁷ For contrasting interpretations of localist contributions to post-war federalism as democratic versus ‘anti-modern’ see Heil, *Gemeinden* and Huhn, *Lernen aus der Geschichte?*

⁸ Applegate, *Nation of Provincials*.

⁹ This is not to say that locals throughout Western Europe did not reformulate local identities for other purposes—particularly amidst radical changes in the local built environment.

¹⁰ Heitmann, *Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, 22; Tormin, *Schwere Weg*, 39-41.

¹¹ Wedermeier, “Vorwort,” 7; Schwarzwälder, *Geschichte*, 599.

¹² Meyer, “Vom Ersten Weltkrieg,” 724-728.

¹³ Luise Klinsmann, ‘Kulturpolitik und Kulturpflege Lübecks,’ *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 9, no.5 (May 1958): 3.

¹⁴ Tormin, *Schwere Weg*, 39-41.

¹⁵ Drang zur Heimat,’ *Hamburger Echo*, 10 April 1946. All translations are by the author unless indicated otherwise.

¹⁶ ‘Heimatlos in der eigenen Heimat,’ *Hamburger Echo*, 30 October 1946.

¹⁷ ‘Zwischen Schutt und Ruinen,’ *Hamburger Echo*, 20 April 1946.

¹⁸ ‘Im Grimm,’ *Hamburger Echo*, 4 February 1947.

¹⁹ Jahresbericht 1948/49, Verein für Heimatschutz, nr. 9, Archiv der Hansestadt Lübeck, (hereafter AHL) 05.4-085.

²⁰ ‘30 Jahre Vaterstädtische,’ Vaterstädtische Vereinigung, nr. 5, AHL 05.4-81.

²¹ ‘Um unser altes traditionelles Lübecker Volksfest,’ *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 4, no.7 (July 1953): 1.

²² Max Brauer, “Rede in der Sitzung der Hamburger Bürgerschaft am 22. November 1946,” in *Nüchternen Sinnes*, Brauer, 24-25.

²³ Theodor Spitta, “Ansprache an Professor Carl Jacob Burckhardt am 1 Februar 1952,” in *Keine andere Rücksicht*, Spitta, 121.

²⁴ Thiessen, *Eingebrannt*, 223.

²⁵ ‘Stimmen der Heimat,’ *Hamburger Echo* 17 April 1946.

²⁶ Feger, *Konstanz*, 11; Statistischen Amt der Stadt Köln, *Verwaltungsbericht*, 50-55.

²⁷ Leo Wohleb, ‘Rede vor den Delegierten der Landestagung der Badischen Christlich-Sozialen Volkspartei,’ 24 February 1946, in: *Humanist*, eds. Ludwig-Weinacht and Maier, 171.

²⁸ Roseman, “Defeat and Stability,” 263.

²⁹ Bessel and Schumann, *Life after Death*.

³⁰ Paul Nevermann, ‘Ein Eigenes Gedicht,’ in *Metaller*, Nevermann, 48.

- ³¹ 'Grundsteinlegung der Synagoge am Freitag, den 29 Janr. 1960.' Staatsarchiv der Hansestadt Bremen. (Hereafter StAHB) 7,97/0 - Kaisen, Wilhelm, Nr. 11, vol.11 (1960).
- ³² Wolfgang Borchert, 'In Hamburg,' in *Lieder*, ed. Neumann, 77.
- ³³ Max Brauer, 'Ansprache zum Überseetag auf dem Werftgelände von Blohm & Voß am 7. Mai 1952,' in Brauer, *Nüchternen Sinnes*, 243.
- ³⁴ Hans Kasten, 'An Bremen: Mai 1945,' in *Bremen*, ed. Kasten, 30.
- ³⁵ Thiessen, *Eingebrannt*.
- ³⁶ 'Lübecks dunkle Tage,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 5, no.6 (June 1954): 5-6.
- ³⁷ Arnold, *Allied Air War*, 61-67; Hoßdorf and Firmenich-Richartz, 'Et Gespens om SchötzeFebß,' in *Rheinische Puppenspiele*, ed. Amt für kölnisches Volkstum, 64.
- ³⁸ Klersch, *Volkstum*, 26-28.
- ³⁹ Gerhard Boldt, Speech, 24 April 1969, *Vaterstädtische Vereinigung*, nr.1, AHL, 05.4-81.
- ⁴⁰ 'Eine Doppelaufgabe der "Vaterstädtischen,"' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 6, no.10 (October 1955): 2; Hans Wittmack, '-unter uns,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 7, no.3 (March 1956): 2.
- ⁴¹ 'Gemeindefreiheit-Schlüssel zur wahren Demokratie,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 8, no.4 (April 1957): 1-2.
- ⁴² Hans Wittmack, 'Deutsche Zukunft aus hansischem Geist,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 6 (June 1965): 1.
- ⁴³ Joseph Klersch, "Volkstum und Volkstumspflege," in *Heimatchronik*, ed., Klersch, 82; Bundesarchiv B 144 Nr.253, Walter von Cube, 'Um die Selbständigkeit es Landes Baden,' in Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Badener, 'Vom See bis an des Maines Strand.'
- ⁴⁴ See Schramm, *Hamburg*; Evans, *Death in Hamburg*; Hohendahl, *Patriotism*; and Jenkins, *Provincial Modernity*.
- ⁴⁵ 'Geschichte als Lehrmeisterin,' *Westfalenpost*, 7.6.1947, Hansischer Geschichtsverein 05.4-30, nr. 438, AHL.
- ⁴⁶ Hans Wittmack, 'Hat Lübeck noch genug geistige Substanz?,' *Lübeckische Blätter* 92/116, no.4 (18 February 1956): 42-43.
- ⁴⁷ Max Brauer, 'Zur Verfassung der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg,' in Brauer, *Nüchternen Sinnes*, 57-63.
- ⁴⁸ Wilhelm Kaisen, 'Gefahren für Bremen,' *Weser-Kurier*, 12 January 1946, reprinted in *Occupation*, ed. Staatsarchiv Bremen, 30-31.
- ⁴⁹ 'Wesen und Geist einer Hansestadt,' 7 March 1953, 1-4, StAHB, 7,97/0 Kaisen, Wilhelm, Nr.4, vol.4, (1953).
- ⁵⁰ Feger, *Schwäbisch-Alemannische Demokratie*; DeWaal, "The Reinvention of Tradition."
- ⁵¹ DeWaal, "The Reinvention of Tradition."
- ⁵² Jaacks, *Lübecker Volks- und Erinnerungsfest*, 15-26, 37-38, 47-69, 137-139, 158-164.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 82-90, 128-131, 166.
- ⁵⁴ Volksfestkomitee Lübeck, *Lübecker Volksfest 1957*, 'Zum Geleit,' and Conrad Neckels, "'Hurra, Schiebenscheeten!'" Das Lübecker Volksfest entsteht wieder im alten Glanz,' *Vaterstädtische Vereinigung von 1949*, nr.45AHL, 05.4-81.
- ⁵⁵ Jaacks, 10 - 11.
- ⁵⁶ 'Antrittsrede des Hamburger Bürgermeisters Rudolf Petersen, 16 Mai 1945,' StAHH, 131-1 II Senatskanzlei I, nr.2798.
- ⁵⁷ Drexlius and Weber, *Verfassung*, 1.
- ⁵⁸ Untitled, *Hamburger Journal* 1, no.1 (December 1953): I.
- ⁵⁹ Meyer-Marwitz, *Hamburg*, 5.
- ⁶⁰ Tardel, *Bremen*, 8.
- ⁶¹ Hans Driesch, "Lebenserinnerungen," in *Hamburg*, ed. Thomsen, 159.
- ⁶² Pünder, *Rhein und Europa*; Jürgen Brügger, "Das Kölner Domjubiläum 1948," in *Köln*, ed. Dülffer, 219-223; Karl Arnold, "Heimat und Jugend," *Alt-Köln* 8, no.9 (September 1954): 33.
- ⁶³ Among other examples, see Heimatbund Badenerland, *Baden*.
- ⁶⁴ 'Bevölkerungsbewegung 1956 in Hamburg,' *Monatschrift: Verein geborener Hamburger* 60, no.1 (February 1957): 2; Aschenbeck, *Bremen hat Zuzugssperre*, 11.
- ⁶⁵ 'Das neue Gesicht der alten Stadt,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 1, (June 1950): 2; 'Lübeck 1967 - moderne Großstadt mit hansischer Tradition,' *Lübeckische Blätter*, 1 January 1967.
- ⁶⁶ '30 Jahre der "Vaterstädtischen,"' 'Die "Vaterstädtische" am Scheidewege,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter*, 17, no.4/5 (April/May 1966): 1, *Vaterstädtische Vereinigung* 05.4-81, AHL .
- ⁶⁷ Esenwein-Rothe, *Eingliederung*, 108-140.

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- ⁶⁸ Edgar Engelhard, 'Tag der Deutschen Heimat,' 12 September 1953, 131-1 II, Nr. 1243, StAHH; 'Ansprache von Bürgermeister Max Brauer anlässlich der Eröffnung der Ostdeutschen Heimatwoche,' 135-1 VI, Staatliche Pressestelle VI. nr. 341, StAHH; 'Begrüßung zum Tag der Heimat;' 'Tag der Heimat Hamburg 1966;' 'Heimat, Vaterland, Europa;' 'Tag der Heimat im Jahr der Menschenrechte;' 'Wahrer Friede wurzelt in Gerechtigkeit,' 131-1 II, Nr. 1243, StAHH; Schier, *Aufnahme und Eingliederung*, 11, 258-265.
- ⁶⁹ 'Wie hören wir des Volkes Stimme?,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 2, no.10 (October 1951): 3; 'Zum Geleit,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 1, no.1 (June 1950): 1.
- ⁷⁰ '...durch künstliche Atmung erhalten,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 5, no.10 (October, 1954): 1.
- ⁷¹ 'Heimatschutz vor neuen Aufgaben,' 31 July 1946, 05.4-085, Verein für Heimatschutz, Nr.16, AHL.
- ⁷² Hans Ewers, 'Stadtgemeinde oder Stadtstaat?,' *Lübeckische Blätter* 15 (April 1956): 85-87.
- ⁷³ 'Fangen wir an!,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 3, no.8 (August 1952): 1. 'Um unser altes traditionelles Lübecker Volksfest,' *Vaterstädtische Blätter* 7, no.4 (July 1953): 2; Paul Brockhaus, 'Ein Neues Lübecker Volksfest,' *Lübeckische Blätter* 88, no.8 (27 April 1952): 77-79.
- ⁷⁴ 'Hamburg-Tor zur Welt,' *Viin Düt un Dat un Allerwat ut Hamborg* 68, no.7 (July 1965): 11; 'Tradition und Gegenwart,' *Monatschrift: Verein geborener Hamburger* 60, no.3 (April 1957): 1; 'Unser 70 jähriges Vereins,' *Viin Düt un Dat un Allerwat ut Hamborg* (February 1967): 4.
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- ⁷⁶ Prüser, *Heimatchronik*, 247.
- ⁷⁷ Adam Wrede, 'Um die Erhaltung Kölner Eigenart,' *Alt-Köln* 2, no.3 (March 1948): 9-10. Flecken, *Gestaltung der Heimat*, 15-16.
- ⁷⁸ Herbert Weichmann, 'Erklärung vor der Bürgerschaft am 16 Juni 1965,' 'Zur Eröffnung des Hamburg Centrums am 20. September 1966,' 'Zur Matthiae-Mahlzeit im Rathaus am 23 Februar 1968,' 'Das Liberale Hamburg,' and 'Auf dem Boden der Demokratie,' in Weichmann, *Freiheit und Pflicht*, ed. Vogel, 7, 82, 98, 112-113, 123, 154, 181.
- ⁷⁹ Hans-Dieter Loose, "Vor der Geschichte besser dastehen," in Italiaander, *Vielvölkerstadt*, 7-12.
- ⁸⁰ Voigt and Weinrich, *Hamburg ahoi*, 3, 6.
- ⁸¹ Mazower, "Reconstruction," 28.
- ⁸² Edgerton, "War, Reconstruction," 29-46; Conway, "The Making," 303. For differences in the meaning and terms of reconstructing in East-Central Europe, see Case, "Reconstruction in East-Central Europe," 71-102.
- ⁸³ Arnold, *The Allied Air War*.
- ⁸⁴ Qualls, *Ruins to Reconstruction*.

Figures



Figure 1. Aerial view of Hamburg-Eilbek following bombing raids in June 1943. Source: Imperial War Museums, CL 3400.



Figure 2. British in war-torn Bremen in April 1945. Source: Imperial War Museums, BU 4434.



Figure 3. Lübeck after allied bombing in March 1942. Source: Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1977-047-16.

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