



Deutschland Germany L'Allemagne

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A Modern Forum

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Constitutionally, North Rhine-Westphalia is a relatively new federal state, barely half a century old, and its name shows it to have been a merger of different constituent parts. Its structure testifies to a German peculiarity: the small states that were its historical past. North Rhine-Westphalia combined the duchies of Kleve, Jülich, Berg and Geldern, the principality of Lippe, the electoral principalities – and church lands – of Münster and Cologne, including the duchy of Westphalia, several other smaller units and the free imperial cities of Aachen, Cologne and Dortmund.

Eleven different regions, yet after the greatest of catastrophes something strange happened. In 1946 this odd federal state comprising so many different parts took shape as the most liberal and tolerant large region.

Civic pride and rural self-assurance

Lippe, to the east, used to be the smallest German state. It was small because it exercised total restraint where expansion was concerned. There is a well-known folk song about the beautiful princely town of Detmold which has only one soldier, and when he eventually reaches the battlefield the war is over. This criticism of the military makes the point that survival in peace is more important than dubious glory.

The background was a civic culture which had no desire for catastrophes. Tolerated for centuries by enlightened petty princes, the towns stood for relative independence, self-administration, manufacturing and trading, and converting wealth into culture. All are readily apparent in Bad Salzuflen, Lage, Lemgo, Detmold, Blomberg, Barntrup, one of the historically most interesting strings of German cities.

Similarly arranged in a row and linked economically are Minden, Bad Oeynhausen, Herford, Bielefeld, Rheda and Wiedenbrück in Eastern Westphalia. Embedded in rich agricultural surroundings with many freemen farmers, who were a historic rarity, industrialisation here early took on a specific form.

Bielefeld, for instance, boasts as its centrepiece from the town planner's viewpoint the Ravensberger Spinnerei, a factory built to look like a castle. With its Victorian exterior it was Germany's first large Aktiengesellschaft, or public limited company, in 1855. In 1972 a spectacular civic campaign saved the complex from demolition. It now houses what is arguably the world's most interesting adult education centre, plus the municipal museum and cultural institutes.

Paderborn is on the military highway used by Charlemagne in about 800 AD to conquer and open up the East. It is now Germany's Route No. 1, running from Aachen in the West to the Polish border and on to what used to be Königsberg in the East. Charlemagne set up one of his many imperial encampments here.

The political and socio-cultural setup here was different to the one which prevailed in Eastern Westphalia. This area was long ruled by its bishop. An age-old, well-preserved farming culture took shape on the fertile loess soil along the Hellweg.

Münsterland was similar in being ruled by a bishop and boasting a largely farming community. There were reasons for the self-assurance of these farmers with their well-nigh legendary stubbornness. They farmed at a distance from each other, with the village as something of a putative centre, and they were prosperous, albeit within a system of farm labourers with cottages and gardens of their own.

The Protestant regions of Westphalia, Bergisches Land and Sauerland, came up with their own interpretation of these rural foundations. No church region acknowledges the independence of its parishes more strongly than this.

Until the 19th century Sauerland was a poor hill area. Industry was late to arrive on the scene, but did so in varied ways. The altitude attracted holidaymakers. The main towns are small: the skiing and bobsleigh resort of Winterberg, industrial Meschede and attractive Brilon.

Bergisches Land, which now boasts several nature reserves, is one of Germany's foremost centres of trade and industry. The soil was so poor that people were forced to develop and exploit the resources of the hills: water as a source of power and natural resources as raw materials.

Hydroelectric power marked the beginning of the industrial era, powering mills used by many trades and industries. To this day the region, and especially the area around Remscheid, Solingen, Velbert and Lennep, retains a varied and imaginative ironworking industry. It was concentrated along the Wupper in industrial villages which merged in 1929 to form the city of Wuppertal. The sociologist Max Weber drew attention to the socio-cultural roots of these manufacturers and traders. The hard workers felt that theirs was the kingdom of heaven. It was a kind of magic which promoted realism.

Between 1898 and 1903 Wuppertal built the suspension railway which is its landmark. It is a permanent way on pylons, a steel track from which trams are suspended, safe and sure not to crash. They quietly glide through the valley, 13.3 kilometres in all, in a mere half hour. On first seeing the suspension railway Jean Cocteau said: "Behold, an angel." The idea was that of Eugen Langen, a co-inventor of the internal combustion engine.

In 1896, when the young Karl Ernst Osthaus inherited the fortune of his Wuppertal grandfather, a banker, he set an excellent example of how wealth can be converted into culture. He

organised and financed reform projects, hiring leading modern designers such as Henry van de Velde, Peter Behrens, Johannes Lauweriks, Walter Gropius, Richard Riemerschmidt, Bruno Taut and others. In 1901 the world's first museum of modern art was opened in Hagen, moving to Essen in 1923, and the world's first museum of arts and crafts. Osthaus's projects are a unique, concrete utopia, reconciling industry, culture and art.

Siegerland is the southernmost area of the state, with old Lutheran ruling families who were converted to Calvinism in 1578. An abundance of raw materials (ore) led to the early development of large-scale industry.

The Ruhr is, of course, the epitome and product of the industrial era. Coal was mined to provide the second source of industrial energy, steam (the first having been water). Coal was also fired to provide the third source of industrial energy, electricity.

The founding fathers of this largest industrial region in continental Europe came from Holland. The Haniels, a Dutch family, manufactured iron and steel for the Dutch market in Oberhausen and went on to set up a group, Gutehoffnungshütte (GHH). Gutehoffnungshütte gave birth to the first of several industrial cities that might as well have borne the names of the works. Krupp created Essen, Klöckner Duisburg, Thyssen Hamborn (now a part of Duisburg) and Mülheim on the Ruhr, while Hibernia created Herne and Hoesch Dortmund.

The Krupp legend was based not just on guns but on complex town planning. Nowhere was the British garden city reform concept implemented as successfully as in the Ruhr.

When large-scale industry shrank, it left behind a magnificent historical legacy. On the 60-kilometre-long Emscher industrial heritage site, set up by the International Building Exhibition and the Ruhr Local Authorities' Association, there is a succession of industrial monuments the survival of which was often ensured by the founders' great-grandchildren. They include an entire 1902 foundry with a landscaped industrial park in Meiderich, Duisburg, a gigantic 1894 boatlift in Waltrop, a veritable Versailles of a colliery, built in 1898, with a 1902 plate-glass machine hall in Bövinghausen, Dortmund, and the 1928 "Bauhaus-designed" Zollverein colliery in Essen. The largest enclosed space in the world without supports, Oberhausen's 1928 gasometer, is now an exhibition centre and theatre.

They are accompanied by a network of hundreds of small garden cities: workmen's estates such as Eisenheim, 1846, in Oberhausen, Rheinpreussen, 1899, in Duisburg-Homberg, Schüngelberg, 1905, in Gelsenkirchen-Buer or the 1920 "Neger-Dorf" in Lünen. 50 campaigns by residents in the 1970s successfully fought property speculators and averted demolition.

As a result of structural change "poetic places" have emerged like the work of art around a sundial at the Schwerin slag heap, 1994, and the Irish tree circle, 1994, in Castrop-Rauxel. Unique keynotes in a chain of museums of social and cultural history are struck by the two decentralised industrial museums in Dortmund-Bövinghausen, set up in 1976, and Oberhausen, 1980.

The Lower Rhine is a rural area with little old towns like Kleve, Kalkar, Xanten and Wesel which for centuries was a hinterland for the Netherlands.

In the Eifel the idyllic Hohes Venn nature reserve conceals the Westwall, one of the largest military areas in the world. After 1945 the military expanded further still, setting up manoeuvre areas, airfields, bunkers and storage facilities. Now there is no longer an enemy to be brought to a halt here, everything is rusting away. As in the Bergisches Land, industry put in an early appearance, as is most excitingly to be seen in the half-timbered town of Monschau.

Aachen, on the border with Belgium and the Netherlands, is a turntable facing in all directions and across several borders. The palace, forum and court church of Charlemagne, king of the Franks and the only true European ruler, have survived to this day.

Rhine journey

The Rhine is Europe's major axis and has been an important waterway since the days of the Ancient World. A journey along the Rhine has always been an experience. Upstream it takes you by ship past the Siebengebirge and into Hesse and the Rhineland-Palatinate and the classic Rhine valley. A journey downstream is no less interesting and richer in contrasts. It takes you past primeval-style flood plain woodland, industrial landscape, towns and the parklands of the Lower Rhine.

By rail Bonn is the departure point for the most scenic railway route in the world along the beautiful Rhine valley.

Prussia inherited core areas of the Rhineland in 1614, but the hallmark it bears is that of the Rhine and not of Prussia. Prussia totally misunderstood the Rhine, seeing it as a border. But the Rhine, as the leading historians of the mind, Lucien Le Febvre and Marc Bloch point out, is not a border but the open core of Europe.

In 1945 the Allies abolished Prussia because it was felt to be the stronghold of German militarism, which it undoubtedly was. Before 1850 this militarism did not exist in Germany with its many states. In 1945 France called for the internationalisation of the Ruhr and a separate status for the areas on the left bank of the Rhine. Although it did not prevail with these demands it accomplished something excellent: it prevented the restoration of a centralised state. By a process of historical dialectics federalism, a most promising gift, resulted. The Allies, above all the British, determined the size and shape of the federal state. They also decided on Düsseldorf as its capital city.

There are few traces of the former imperial court in the state capital, Düsseldorf, where in about 1180 Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa built an imperial palace on the bank of the Rhine in what is now the suburb of Kaiserswerth. Apart from the 1549 Renaissance tower, it no longer exists, and its excellent collection of paintings is now housed in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich. But the 1755 summer palace in Benrath is still a designer's delight. In about 1900 the disused city ramparts were transformed into Königsallee, or Kö for short, Germany's best-known high-class shopping street.

Outwardly, Düsseldorf stands for the state government and for big business, but it is also, no less than Cologne, a city of good living. The entire Altstadt, or old city centre, appears to be a continuous bar counter. It owes this to a long-standing tradition. Electoral Prince Jan Wellem, 1679–1716, was fond of drinking with artists here, and students at the art college later established a bohemian sub-culture of their own.

Heinrich Heine always a controversial figure in his native Düsseldorf, trained his intelligent, crystal-clear love of satire there. Düsseldorf artist Joseph Beuys achieved world fame too, deriving from Rhenish surroundings his contemplation, self-assurance ("everyone is an artist") and wit, processing them in his art.

In 1993/94 Niklaus Fritschi designed the most beautiful embankment on the entire Rhine. In the river's narrowest bend he has incorporated the water into a square, combining beauty and utility.

Cologne, with its mixture of peoples since Roman days, is the city with the greatest variety in North Rhine-Westphalia. Its facility for assimilation has created both flair and originals: the atmosphere of the Veedel, Köbes in the brewery and the wits Tünnies, the artful city slicker, and Schäl, the slow country lad. The rebellious, alternative Carnival is part of the picture too.

Rhenish Catholicism has always stood for opposition to the powers that be, and for ironic tolerance of archbishops who themselves alternated between liberal views and fundamentalism. As one of the world's major cities of museums Cologne provides an insight into millennia: from the Ancient World (Römisch-Germanisches Museum) via the Middle Ages (Schnütgen-Museum, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum) to twentieth-century art, excellently documented in the

Ludwig-Museum and the Kunstgewerbe-Museum.

Cologne is not just a centre of international art but also Germany's media city, with several broadcasting stations, the media college and a new Media Park.

The federal capital, Bonn, has been seat of government for centuries, and not just since the days of Konrad Adenauer. The archbishops of Cologne ruled from Bonn after they were expelled from Cologne in 1288, not returning until after the French Revolution.

Alongside the mediaeval town a Baroque town took shape. It includes the Italianate town palace, built in 1697 by Enrico Zuccalli and now the university building, and the French-style Schloss Poppelsdorf, built in 1715 by Robert de Cotte. The archbishops' summer residence was at Brühl, built from 1701 by Johann Conrad Schlaun, Balthasar Neumann and Dominique Girard, with Falkenlust, built in 1729 by François Cuvillies.

Bonn was the ideal capital city for a state based on the principle of federalism. The unassuming character of the provisional capital gave the federal states opportunities, and while many other states are kept in a virtual stranglehold by their centralism, Germany has no problems on that score, thanks to federalism and to its capital, Bonn.

This unassuming nature may have been the reason why Bonn lost out to Berlin, soon to be Germany's capital once more. Yet Bonn is part of the Rhine-Ruhr conurbation with a population of roughly 12 million, making it part of Europe's largest metropolitan area. Federal city is what Bonn is now to be called, and in return for handing over to Berlin as the seat of government it is to house European and international agencies and much more – a token of the openness of the state on the Rhine.

Towards the end of the twentieth Century no one doubts any longer that they can get along well with the new federal state. North Rhine-Westphalia today, with a population of 17 million, is Germany's most populous and, despite problems in the Ruhr, its most important federal state in economic terms. North Rhine-Westphalia is a marketplace of many people: a modern forum.