

Military Landscapes

Ulrich Mählert /

Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in
Eastern Germany

Relics of the Cold War in Germany was the subject of a conference held on 27-28 February in Fulda. The DFG project on "[Military Landscapes](#)," directed by Prof. Dr. Florian Dünckmann and edited by Dr. Gunnar Maus at Christian-Albrechts-University in Kiel, organized the event. For two days in the vhs-Forum Kanzlerpalais, preservationists, local initiatives and individuals presented their efforts not only to inventory the military and civilian infrastructure of the Cold War, but also to preserve and, if possible, make it publicly accessible. The tangible objects are bunkers for military and civilian use, defensive systems meant to delay an advance of Warsaw Pact troops, emergency landing strips for NATO aircraft, and special military edifices such as radar stations, radio towers and missile depots. While in Britain and Denmark the legacies of the Cold War have since been registered as part of the culture of remembrance and in some cases protected as memorials, in Germany the sensitivity for this chapter of recent history is still lacking. For years the German Armed Forces, the Federal Real Estate Administration as well as regional and municipal authorities have been systematically removing the infrastructure that until 1989-90 served to both deter and prepare for a possible war. The dimensions of this



infrastructure were made clear in the presentations of many speakers who, partly in their free time, mapped and visualized these constructions. What they shared was the sole focus on the remaining vestiges of the Cold War in West Germany and West Berlin. The division of the world that was overcome in the greater sense in 1989 lives on in a small way in our memorial cultures.

To gain public or private funding for the preservation and accessibility of these constructions and for a pertinent historical and political education, still is quite difficult. This may also be due to the circumstance that many activists are interested mainly in the technological and military aspects of the sites and regard the historical framework as a mere context. The disinterest of the federal, regional and municipal governments is, however, primarily an expression of the historical amnesia that was seen for example in Berlin during the 1990s in the treatment of the Berlin Wall. It would have practically vanished without a trace from the cityscape, had it not been for the commitment of a handful of activists. Reunification rendered the structural legacies of the Cold War an anachronism to which significance was no longer accorded. Perhaps the current tensions between the West and Russia, the war in Ukraine and chatter of a new Cold War will retrain attention to the relics of the actual Cold War, in which divided Germany became the planned theater of nuclear exchange.



Dr. Ulrich Mählert heads the Office of Science and International Cooperation of the [Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Eastern Germany](#).

Recommended Citation:

Ulrich Mählert, Military Landscapes, 04/15/2016,
<http://www.berlinerkolleg.com/en/blog/military-landscapes> (please add the date of the last call to this page in brackets).