

Introduction

Beyond a city's borders, real or imagined, lies its frontier: a space of anticipated growth and confrontation with the untamed. Gustav Freytag's novel *Die verlorene Handschrift* (The lost manuscript), published in 1864, opens with a portrait of an urban frontier as a distinctively German space. Freytag leads his reader through a desolate moonlit forest at the edge of an unnamed city. The wood opens, and the city appears past a meadow and a pond. Two villas, recently constructed on the edge of the forest, are the first outposts of the city. Freytag introduces one of the villa owners, standing outside his new home, delighting in his conquest of a very particular and near-to-hand wilderness. "Surrounded by light and air and free nature," the villa owner imagines himself, "the foremost pillar of civilization against the primeval forest." This begins the story of the German burgher as a pioneer frontiersman settling a new land, but this frontier is neither the Wild West of the Americas nor the "Wild East" of Poland. Here the newly conquered space at the edge of the city was also that of Germany's own storied past. As Freytag describes them, the woods, fields, and rural villages beyond the unnamed city's edge are full of the ghosts of Goethe, the Grimms' tales, and the titular lost manuscript of Tacitus. How did this city's urban edge—ringed by long-settled suburbs and villages, the stuff of centuries of German tradition—

come to seem a frontier in the wilderness and an outpost of civilization in the "primeval forest," in the tongue-in-cheek telling of one of Germany's most popular nineteenth-century novelists?¹

The portrayal of the urban edge as a frontier is a powerful image that came, in different ways, to characterize nineteenth-century experiences of the German city and its place in a changing national and global landscape. By the end of the century, the urban edge had become a vital site for imagining the future shape of German society: a site of productivity and growth, of settlement, of confrontation with nature, of hopes and fears for the future. But the urban edge was also a site of history, tradition, and remembrance. The walls, gates, and ramparts of historic city centers embodied a vibrant past of urban self-governance, civic culture, and independence that was among the German Empire's proudest inheritances from a past shaped by regional diversity. The tensions around urbanization were often voiced as choices between city and nature, productivity and waste, ambition and nostalgia, the global and the local, choices that were confronted in the planning, design, and use of the urban edge. As examined in this book, these tensions played out in local decisions about changing urban borders as Germany's cities removed their fortifications, walls, and gates and looked for new ways to define and envision the collective horizons of urban community. Like Freytag, what Germans saw on the urban edge was both profoundly new and also tightly connected to the past.

GERMAN CITY WALLS AND THE EXPERIENCE OF HISTORY

Most German cities were once walled.² As both an architectural landmark and an institution, the city wall connected early modern towns large and small, giving them a common spatial structure. Medium-sized and larger cities often had elaborate fortifications built up over centuries. These included independent cities like Bremen, residences and capitals like Dresden, and military fortress cities like Ulm.³ Smaller cities, like Mack Walker's hometowns of 750 to 10,000 inhabitants and those in Prussia and Bavaria, were more likely to have instead a simple enceinte: a wall to distinguish town from "flat land," to control the coming and going of goods and people, but not meant for military defense. In spite of these differences, through the common structure of the wall, ideas of sovereignty, territorial fixity, and exclusivity all connected towns, large cities, fortresses, and states by spatial analogy across scale. Symbolically, the wall embodied the corporative worlds of trade guilds, communal citizenship, face-to-face economic and political relationships, and a distinctively German emphasis on civic concord that all helped preserve the insularity and durability of German towns.⁴

Most of these walls disappeared over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵ The nineteenth century brought visible and remarkable growth: at the beginning of the century, less than one-quarter of Germans lived in cities of five thousand inhabitants or more. By 1910 that number had risen to 60 percent. Contrary to earlier assumptions, however, it was not growth that led to the dismantlement of city walls and fortifications.⁶ Instead, this physical transformation had its roots in earlier changes that themselves prepared the way for nineteenth-century expansion, including demilitarization, new commercial systems, increased population mobility, and innovations in urban administration.⁷ In German urban worlds that were already changing, the Napoleonic Wars definitively unwound the protective skein in which the Holy Roman Empire had so long preserved its patchwork of weak states with a tangle of local institutional eccentricities. In his study of German defortification, Yair Mintzker argues that city walls came down in a “deluge” between 1791 and 1815, because it was then that the political structure represented by the walls fundamentally fractured, as territorial changes generalized the relationship between city and state. Cities turned away from older paternalist and particularist forms of government to new liberalized institutions. Napoleonic era reforms brought new legal structures and definitions of the city. In Prussia, Baron von Stein’s city code of 1808 guaranteed cities rights of self-government as part of a slate of reforms. Cities’ boundaries were defined legally rather than physically (though still in contrast to the open countryside). Overall, 350 German cities lost their military fortifications between the start of the French Revolution and the end of the Napoleonic Wars.⁸

Yet, in spite of these changes, old forms lived on. Under the German Confederation and later the German Empire, a number of federal and state fortresses were maintained or rebuilt, though they less and less resembled linear city walls. Even in cities without fortifications, defense remained fundamental to urban identity after the Napoleonic Wars. The experience of those wars ruptured old forms of patriotism and created new gendered forms of what Katherine Aaslestad terms “martial citizenship,” bolstered by associational life and memorialization of war that fostered a kind of community in self-defense, even after the city’s built defenses disappeared. Within this culture of martial citizenship, physical traces and remnants of walls remained significant to urban communities long after their fortifications became obsolete as defensive architecture.⁹

Once the walled city ceased to be the norm for the urban spaces of German central Europe, the traces of those old borders took on particular im-

portance in the development of Germans' collective historical consciousness. Even (or especially) in its absence, the city wall became the structure and institution that, at least ideationally, separated a fixed city center anchored in the past from the changeable peripheries of its present and future selves.¹⁰ The topography of vanished fortifications continued to structure how many German town dwellers experienced their urban communities into the twentieth century. Drawing on extensive oral interviews with the elderly residents of Hildesheim, a mid-sized city in Lower Saxony, Andrew Bergerson documents how significant the city's history was for the sense of community and belonging of individual residents during the period between the world wars. Bergerson recounts how his Hildesheim interviewees habitually conjured up the historical geography of their city through the convivial practice of walking "around" the city's walls, even though no circuit actually existed, and only a semicircle of parks had replaced a portion of the old fortifications land. Hildesheimers re-created the unity of the historic city through their practice of walking around walls that were no longer there. This practice connected them to a profound sense of place by making them members of a community that had learned to selectively view Hildesheim in the context of historical knowledge about its traditions and development. Taking a walk with friends or family "around the walls" was both an ordinary social ritual and a kind of historical reenactment, connecting contemporary Hildesheimers to a shared past.¹¹

In fact, Germans had long been walking imagined walls as a way of connecting to their city's past and community. In 1860 a schoolteacher wrote a loving description of the parks that had replaced Bremen's city fortifications over the previous decades, highlighting how one's enjoyment of the park's natural beauty was enhanced by knowing their historical origin: "Every landscape that it offers indicates the same thing for the informed eye; the bends in the water, the changes in elevation, the systematic pattern of its layout still show hints of the former fortifications." Such descriptions highlighted spatial continuities even as they described the physical transformation of the city—leaving in place old structures that then became available for reappropriation to new symbolic forms. Here, nature, history, and urban community come together as one, but in order to see the connections one must be an "informed" viewer—part of an educated urban community of citizens who have learned about the city's history. The old gave structure to the new. By shaping, seeing, walking, and narrating the changing borders of the city, Germans fostered a sense of place by connecting to a sense of time.¹²

Long before the late nineteenth-century formation of the institutions and

practices of historical preservation (the subject of valuable studies by Rudy Koshar, Joshua Hagen, and others), Germans already performed what Koshar calls “memory work” by seeing their cities in terms of historical development.¹³ In *Berlin’s Forgotten Future*, Matt Erlin argues that Germans recognized urban development as a historical phenomenon from the late eighteenth century onward. He outlines how everyday experiences of the city led to a more complex representation of historical time in literary texts. At issue, he writes, was “how to interpret the rapid growth of cities themselves, a quasi-natural process that seems to indicate growing prosperity even as it demonstrates the limited ability of humankind to shape its own destiny.”¹⁴ Once we think of historical awareness not only in terms of preservation but instead in terms of urban processes, we can see that it means more than remembering a vanished past; it also entails thinking about the pace and nature of change over time. In this sense, Germans learned to see evidence of processes of historical change in their urban landscapes over the course of the long nineteenth century. It was not only Erlin’s literary authors who connected the experience of urban space with an understanding of historical change and narratives of progress and decline. In the following chapters, we will see how city administrators and ordinary Germans did the same—appealing to history to explain why gate taxes should be abolished or why their suburb ought to have streetlights. They argued about whether the past ought to be visible in the city, and which parts of the urban past should be legible in its physical form. By thinking in terms of processes of change, they also saw evidence of the past even where it had not been preserved.

The development of historical consciousness around urban change is especially evident in discussions about the urban border, where the pace of historical change was a subject of almost universal anxiety. The city grew too slowly, or too quickly; the wall was inevitably delayed in its removal and then dearly missed after its disappearance. The wall was so fundamentally linked to German city dwellers’ sense of place and history that they used its persistence or disappearance by analogy to argue for a whole slate of other urban reforms. How city borders changed also provided an excellent way to compare cities and became a frequent venue for the kinds of interurban comparisons and competitiveness through which Germans processed the asynchronicity of urban change.¹⁵

Examining the transformation of urban borders in this way cuts across distinctions between place and space that have so dominated studies of city modernization. It is tempting to contrast what Mintzker calls the “vertical, corporative world of places,” represented by the historical walled town, with

the "horizontal, open" world of the modern city.¹⁶ Such schematic contrasts are not true to the experiences of nineteenth-century German city dwellers, who saw the modern city as it changed with a deep awareness of the past and visualized the open spaces of the present in relation to their historical processes of development. When we exaggerate the modern transformation of "place" into "space," we risk seeing the only access to history as a kind of calcified nostalgia that does not allow for dynamic connections among past, present, and future. Instead, Germans re-created a sense of place through communal understanding of the processes of urban change. As the city changed, identifying a common horizon for the shared space of the city allowed for both continuity and flexibility amid transformation.

Both fortifications and city walls left profound legacies in spatial organization, urban institutions, modes of thought, and forms of citizenship. To many nineteenth-century Germans, becoming a modern German city meant understanding urban growth as a continual breaking down of walls and boundaries. The growth of the city seemed to repeatedly reenact both conflicts and celebrations over the walls' fall. Like other founding moments common to growth narratives, this profound communal experience was not so much over and done with as relived again and again in the development of the city and re-created in the ways Germans inscribed remembered geographies onto the city's form. In tracking these narratives, in this book I seek to map out the ideational landscape of the spaces beyond those walls—the "urban frontier"—and the uneven ways in which these spaces were marked by memories of earlier city forms. In so doing, I hope to reveal how central the particular historical geography of the city is to the understanding of progress, history, and growth that is our own legacy of nineteenth-century urbanization.¹⁷

METROPOLITAN IDENTITIES AND GERMAN PARTICULARITIES

By the twentieth century, one common model of the modern big city was of a space that was disconnected from place, nature, and history, representative of modernity as universal in its aspirations and a radical break with all that came before it. Illustrating this view, a character in Joseph Roth's novella *Flucht ohne Ende* (Flight without end), published in 1927, describes Berlin after the First World War as a city that "exists outside Germany, outside Europe. It is its own capital. It does not draw its supplies from the land. It obtains nothing from the earth on which it is built."¹⁸ This view of the metropolis as a solipsistic world unto itself has captivated the modern imagination. Describing and understanding its spaces and cultures as they have seemed to dissolve

old place-based connections has produced an extraordinary body of multi-disciplinary literature. This research has given us a nuanced understanding of how urban spaces changed and, especially, of how individuals perceived and experienced those new spaces. Urbanites interpreted their streetscapes by and with new kinds of texts, from popular newspapers to films and photography.¹⁹ Urbanites used these words and images both to understand their own neighborhoods and also to compare and connect their home cities to metropolitan experiences across the globe. In his study of fin-de-siècle Cracow, Nathaniel Wood argues that the train, telegraph, telephone, and newspaper connected cities in an “interurban matrix of words and images describing the modern world.” Chad Bryant’s research on the early railroad in the Habsburg Empire reveals how, even before 1848, trains and newspapers together connected places in a common liberal urban culture celebrating progress even as the speed of change brought anxiety about an unknown future. This “interurban matrix” brought together not just the largest metropolises and capital cities but also the smaller cities: a continental and even global matrix of metropolitan spaces that was as important to the identities and experiences of urbanites as the physical hinterlands and regional and national contexts of any individual city.²⁰

Built urban landscapes throughout central Europe shared common features that helped foster this sense that cities everywhere were connected spaces. In his foundational study of fin-de-siècle Vienna, Carl Schorske argues that urban liberal professionals “reshape[d] the city in their own image,” fusing utility and aesthetics in a city rearranged to place their own wealth and culture on display, while opening the streets to the free circulation of traffic. The signature project of the city’s reorganization was the replacement of the massive and outmoded fortifications with the Ringstraße lined by museums, grand apartment buildings, and public institutions. A symbol of the ways in which the modern city was transformed, Schorske argues, the Ringstraße also effectively cut Vienna off from its suburbs and turned the city dweller’s gaze inward, “suppress[ing] the vistas in favor of stress on the circular flow.” Vienna’s Ringstraße became a model for cities large and small across Europe, a new architecture of urban life that furnished the habitat of the middle-class and well-to-do city dweller. Even where such ambitious projects of urban planning were not possible, the general principles that shaped the new Vienna found influence across central Europe.²¹

On the other hand, one of the most persistent themes in German historiography has been the inextricable link between German identity and its multiplicity of distinct local places: unity expressed in regional histories and

landscapes providing the vernacular, lived experiences of national identity.²² Though more familiarly associated with the provincial landscapes of *Heimat*, this was true of urban spaces as well.²³ A growing literature on cities throughout the Habsburg and German Empires details the ways in which the features of the spatial and aesthetic model of the modern city interacted with local cultures and histories to produce a rich variety of “provincial” modernities from Hamburg to Lemberg.²⁴ Although the focus on urban history has in some ways helped liberate nineteenth-century urban histories from too exclusive a focus on national identities and revealed the many “other modernities” of central Europe’s diverse urban places, in its emphasis on liberal culture and the “interurban matrix” this focus has also, like Vienna’s Ringstraße, turned its back on the most immediate contexts of urban spaces.²⁵ In the modern bourgeois city, nature, locality, and history are represented as decontextualized symbols, not as connected experiences. Focusing on the urban border, as in this book, also reveals that “interurban matrix” on its ragged edges. Here, on the urban frontier, the metropolitan German encountered other forms of spatial organization in terms of class, planning, and the use of natural resources.²⁶

THE STATE OF NATURE ON THE URBAN BORDER

Joseph Roth’s peripatetic narrator imagined the big city “obtain[ing] nothing from the earth on which it is built,” but the programmatic statement of urban environmental history has been William Cronon’s assertion that “Before the city, there was the land.” In other words, one cannot understand the city without understanding the features of the land on which it is built. The modern city poses a particular challenge to incorporating environment into its cultural and material histories. City dwellers themselves were often intent on erasing—or never seeing—the connections between city and land. Research on nineteenth-century German urban expansions, on the other hand, has focused on the technical and administrative perspectives of city planning and infrastructure. A growing city confronted nature on its borders in new and challenging ways involving resource use, leisure, and the physical conditions of settlement. Along the margins of the city, projects for urbanized green came into contact and often conflict with ideas of nonurbanized nature beyond the urban edge. Was nature to be part of the growing city, or its horizon?²⁷

The breaching of city walls from the late eighteenth through the nineteenth century brought with it the integration of new kinds of green space into the city, including promenades, gardens, parks, forests, and decorative water and

trees. In cities like Frankfurt, Münster, Leipzig, and Mainz, belts of promenades and parkland replaced the wall circuits.²⁸ The removal of city walls and opening of city gates responded to a perceived need for those most fundamental and pervasive elements of the natural world—the light and air (*Licht und Luft*) that dominated nineteenth-century German discussions of urban reform and expansion. Barry Jackisch shows us how available green space became “part of a larger solution to growing concerns about urban hygiene,” echoing earlier campaigns for urban beautification.²⁹ Constructing access to nature became one of the technical tools of urban planning, beginning with the planning of gardens in former fortifications lands at the beginning of the century and developing into schemes for urban health hygiene at its end.

The first proposals for systematically providing access to nature in the city, whether in the form of allotment gardening, urban forests, or parks, recalled traditional uses of the urban hinterland. The aim was to reconstruct an older urban—peripheral relationship perceived to have been lost in the process of too rapid urban growth. The best-known of these is Countess Adelheid von Dohna-Poninski’s proposal for a green belt of park space separating the city core from workers’ colonies on the other side, giving everyone easy access to green. As a number of observers noted at the time, the green belt project naturalized earlier urban planning patterns. They suggested that cities without a park belt from defortification needed to right this wrong by intervening in the city’s free development. Other urban planners and reformers resisted this suggestion—precisely because it recalled the ways fortifications hemmed cities in.³⁰

As city administrators and reformers found new ways of integrating green space into urban planning practices, contemporaries increasingly defined the modern city as being antithetical to all that was natural and wild. This changed definition brought with it a compulsion to identify a landscape beyond the city that could provide the kind of uncontrolled nature the city could not. Hence, in Berlin, urban peripheral settlers appeared as frontiersmen returning to a state of nature, and the Grunewald hunting preserve was transformed into a primeval forest. In his rambles through Berlin’s hinterland, with his notes published in 1861, Theodor Fontane invented the lost pre-reclamation Oderbruch as a wild space. As planning practices became more universal, Germans began imagining spaces beyond the reach of planners as spaces of not only disorder but also (lost) freedom.³¹

In many German cities, urbanites understood the premodern walls and boundaries themselves to reflect the physical preconditions for a given city’s economy and community—topography, access to water and resources, etc.—

that allowed urban flourishing in a particular spot. Walls and physical borders came to represent the historical relationship between urban and natural landscapes in the symbolic geography of the city. Changing city borders—in an era of urban expansion and modernization—also challenged historically rooted understandings of how urban communities shaped and depended on their physical regions. In this way, in the nineteenth century urban border systems, either built or unbuilt, became elements of landscape in the modern sense: as representations of spatial relationships they “act[ed] to ‘naturalize’ what [was] deeply cultural.”³²

METHOD AND ORGANIZATION IN THIS BOOK

Analysis of a detailed set of case studies from different geographical regions distinguishes this book from other works on the development of German urban spaces, which have most often focused on single cases or particular regions or have generalized across the German urban landscape. The wide range of sources for this project—from archival research in municipal and state archives to extensive periodical research and the published writings of German social thinkers, urban reformers, and planners—allows us to investigate the process of urban expansion both as a local story embedded in the politics and environments of particular cities and as an emerging discussion among urban experts in the German Empire and across the globe. Through the five chapters, an interconnected set of case studies provides a nuanced view of the relationship between local circumstances and shared notions of urban space and development. Cities such as Oldenburg, which have been the subject of less sustained study, highlight the regional diversity of German urbanism and the environmental aspects of urban growth and add nuance to the standard narrative of German urban development, which is dominated by a few urban centers. The case study method adopted here is an analytical choice based on the belief that environmental and historical cultural dynamics of urban development are best revealed through the specific topographies of individual cities.

Chapters 1 and 2 take Leipzig, the Saxon market and university city, and Oldenburg, the northwestern ducal residence, to lay out the political, social, and environmental stakes of urban border changes over the long nineteenth century, as these cities were embedded in distinctive local landscapes. Urban borders regulated the movements of people and goods and the visibility of social and political hierarchies on the one hand; they also arose from a constantly renegotiated balance of power between city and hinterland, nature and built environment. These first two chapters demonstrate that opening

urban borders was neither as simple nor as quick as leveling walls or unlocking city gates. Chapter 3 examines the persistence of the city wall through the middle decades of the nineteenth century, both as a physical feature of the urban landscape and as a potent symbol for the urban past. City and state negotiated a shifting balance of power and responsibility in the struggle over urban excise taxes and over who was to care for Prussia's many crumbling walls during their growing obsolescence from the 1830s through the 1880s. In both the capital city of Berlin and the small Catholic town of Paderborn in Westphalia, contemporaries projected anxieties about delayed modernization on the persistence of walls that came down "too late," but they deployed that narrative of delay in the service of different spatial stories—one of centrality and the other of marginality.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine how the urban border became a space for negotiating the relationship between the city's present form and an anticipated future and a historical past in the increasingly connected urban landscapes of the German Empire. Beyond Berlin's tax wall, which was removed in the 1860s, there emerged new visions of the urban future, horizons of future development that themselves became the (often imagined) visual border of the city. As Berlin took its place as a united Germany's new and not always very popular capital, these new images of the urban edge and urban growth carried national resonance. On the other hand, emerging movements for the preservation of built and natural landscapes invested historical border systems with new significance. City walls made for particularly vexed objects of historical preservation campaigns because they invoked competing narratives of continuity and rupture with the past that were themselves each a key to modern German and metropolitan identities. This tension played out in the national uproar over the planned destruction of Nuremberg's city walls in the 1870s and 1880s. Communal visions of the urban past and urban future competed on city borders.

In each chapter, a local case study is used to open up a thematic discussion that intersects with the other chapters. This method reflects the process of urban development itself as individual cities were increasingly netted together by national and global ideas of what it meant to be a modern urban space. In these new conversations and exchanges of urban expertise, local particularities of landscape and history that had once defined cities' urban identities became either challenges to be confronted by urban planners and administrators or treasured inheritances, the value of which were determined by translocal marketplaces of travel, historical preservation, and tourism.³³

If “history essentially begins with differentiation between the present and the past,” as Michel de Certeau has written, nineteenth-century urbanites often looked to the moment when the city burst through the shackles of its walls to mark this moment of differentiation—the origin story of the city as a modern community. The relation of the modern city to the walled city of the past had (and has) particular trenchancy, because the spatial development of the city models the fundamental structure of historical narration itself. The past is a closed space of experience, and the future opens up a horizon of expectation. As Arthur Danto has described it, the practice of history is that of accounting for a closed past at the same time maintaining the possibility of an open future. This could equally well describe the story nineteenth-century Germans came to tell, with pride and sometimes anxiety, about their cities. In understanding and narrating the spatial development of the city, nineteenth-century observers and planners sought to find continuities between the pre-modern and the modern city without foreclosing the possibility of unanticipated future development. This is perhaps also the most important meaning of the frontier: the boundary between what has been done in the past and what might be done in the future.³⁴

Telling the story of the city entailed describing the development of its frontiers but also the formation of bridges to the past. As in Freytag's novel, the growing city had to conquer not just space but the ghosts of German pasts in both literature and memory. The very struggle to manage and interpret the uneven and incongruent ways in which cities grew and overcame their historical boundaries reveals the developing importance of that moment of differentiation as a communal myth that persisted through the nineteenth century and beyond.