

RESEARCH

A Deal over Dirt

From a German-German Bargain to the Creation of an Environmental Problem in the 1980s

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In the 1970s, West Berlin started to transport its waste to East-German dumpsites. By the 1980s, Hamburg and other West German municipalities had followed suit, depositing their waste in Schönberg landfill, a waste disposal site situated in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) barely five kilometers from the German-German border. What began as an inner-German agreement with benefits for both sides soon developed into an environmental problem for the West German government. This article focuses on the strategies with which the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) tried to assuage critical voters and cope with a dumping ground at its border. It is argued that because of the demands for political action by the people living close to the dump the 'greening' of politics, which means the inclusion of environmental concerns on the political agenda, produced ambiguous results.

Keywords: environment; waste export; Germany; Cold War; politics; globalization

Introduction

In March 1986, *The Economist* published a commentary entitled 'Rubbish between Germans', which concluded that West German ecologists were hard to satisfy (1 March 1986: 46). It referred to a group of Green Party members who had placed two oil barrels labeled 'dioxin' and 'Schönberg—toxic zone A' ('Schönberg—Giftzone A') directly on the inner-German border in protest (*Der Spiegel* 8/1986: 52–53). They were protesting against the export of toxic waste from the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) to Schönberg, a deposit site in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) close to the West German border. Yet the waste export which the Greens were demonstrating against had been put into place long before this protest begun. Established in the 1970s, this practice was ostensibly a win-win situation for both German states. The GDR's flagging economy received payment in hard currency and the FRG was able to offload some of their growing waste problems.

Although research on German-German environmental history (Kirchhof 2015; Uekötter 2018; Eckert 2019) and on the inner-German waste deal¹ is currently in vogue, the literature has thus far interpreted the deal between the two states as mainly an economic transaction (Judt 2013; Krewer 2008). Previously, Matthias Baerens and Ulrich von Arnswald uncovered a history of corruption by politicians, waste companies and the Ministry of State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, Stasi) in regards to the

Schönberg dump (1993). But what is there beyond the economic trade? Generally speaking, dumpsites emerge in locations, both regional and global, in which the economy is weak.² Thus, as Melanie Arndt (2012) has argued, any environmental history must also consider the question of power relations, the quest for resources and supremacy, at play. Scrutinizing the power relations of the actors involved—between the GDR and the FRG, but also within the FRG itself—offers a promising approach for analyzing the Schönberg dump at its border.

Furthermore, the example of Schönberg raises much larger questions concerning the handling of (toxic) waste generally, the problems of industrial modernity, and the interconnections between globalization and the Cold War. In the latter case for example, given that the waste deal between the two German states served the idea of *détente* within a bipolar Cold War world (Hünemörder 2010), it might also be representative of a different process, namely globalization (Iriye 2013). If we presume that the rise of globalization is rooted in the Cold War, then the efforts by the two German states to come to an agreement over the regulation of West German waste exports to Schönberg might also be an example of how these powerful forces often overlapped and presumably reinforced each other.

Equally important, by the late twentieth century, the continuing dynamics of the industrial revolution had created a growing environmental problem, which included both air and water pollution, but also a growing amount of waste, especially hazardous waste produced beginning with the chemical-industrial revolution of the 1930s (Müller 2016: 355). The production of unwanted, mostly chemical, byproducts which could be harmful to the

health of both people and the environment ballooned after World War II and the West German 'economic miracle' (Wirtschaftswunder) of the 1950s. They formed part of the general rapid increase of both consumption and waste in Western countries at that period (Kupper 2003; Pfister 1995). Between 1954 and 1962, sheet metal packaging grew by 84 per cent, hollow glass packaging by 120 per cent and plastic packaging by 3780 per cent in West Germany (Park 2004: 36). Despite this, these issues only came to the forefront of public discourse with the creation of environmental movements in several Western countries and the emergence of environmental politics at the beginning of the 1970s (Radkau 2011: 134–137).

However, waste had been regulated in the GDR since 1970 through the *Landeskulturgesetz* (Huff 2015: 172–173) and in West Germany through the 1971 environmental program (Köster 2017: 13, 217; Müller 2016: 355). Since the GDR regarded waste, including toxic waste, as a secondary resource, to be stored for future rather than dumped (Möller 2014: 64), it took until 1978 for the country to establish the *Giftgesetz* (a regulation of toxins). The FRG followed in 1980 with a law regulating the use and disposal of chemicals.³ As such, it took both countries nearly a decade to frame hazardous waste as an environmental problem (Gille 2007: 139) and it took even longer for them to regulate the problem in relation to each other. By the end of the 1970s, the international waste trade flourished in response to a lack of international regulations or a clear definition of what constituted hazardous waste (Müller 2016: 357). Consequently, states were forced to cope with the problem bilaterally.

The question therefore remains, what kind of impact did the waste deal have on environmental decision making in the Federal Republic? Which strategies were used in West Germany to bring order to this economic bargain, which was likely to be perceived as an environmental risk?⁴ In line with Peter Itzen and Simone Müller's definition of 'risk' (2016) as 'potential future events and developments caused by human actions and that are potentially harmful to human actors and their environment' (p. 10), two more questions arise. First, who perceived Schönberg as a risk? And second, what were the consequences of this viewpoint? The situation at the border should therefore be given special consideration, as it forced both states to communicate and exchange information with each other. The 'risk' category therefore links not only the economy, but also technology with cultural, political and social aspects of human everyday life (Itzen & Müller 2016: 9). It is thus worthwhile to explore how West German legislation was 'made green' in regard to the Schönberg dumpsite. Stephen Milder has previously argued that the nuclear protest movement triggered a 'greening of democracy' in West Germany (2017); the following example surveys the efforts by West German government officials as they undertook the regulation of a controversial waste deal whose success remains ambiguous. Hence, the article interrogates both how societies perceived and anticipated risk and which strategies West German politicians used to cope with that risk, i.e. the waste export.

The 'VEB Deponie Schönberg'—The Rise of the Deal with Dirt and its Doubters

The issue started with a long-term contract (1975–1994) on hazardous waste (Sondermüll), wherein the GDR would receive about 25.7 marks (approximately \$10.45) per ton of West Berlin's municipal refuse, hazardous waste, demolition waste and excavation waste, deposited at East German dumpsites in Schöneiche, Vorketzin, and Deetz. Municipal waste as well as special, nonliquid toxic waste were both included in a fixed charge with an annual fee correction according to the rate of price increases in the Federal Republic. The West Berlin Senate was to provide the technical equipment for the East German dumpsites. In fact, it had been standard practice since the 1950s to transport West Berlin's excavation waste (left over from the destructions of World War II) to the GDR (Park 2003). What had changed was the payment with valuta marks.⁵ Valuta mark was West Germany's hard currency, which could only be exchanged into GDR marks (and not vice-versa). Had the GDR survived long enough to see the end of the contract in 1994, it would have received approximately 1.25 billion valuta marks, which translates to about 0.5 billion US dollars (Judt 2013: 71). As such, the externalization of its waste seemed to be the best solution for West Berlin. Considering the particular political situation, and thus the question of the status of the divided city of Berlin, it was necessary for the West Berlin senate to conclude a purely commercial (and not at all political) agreement. This allowed for the circumvention of the so-called 'Berlin question', which was part of all bilateral agreements between the FRG and the GDR: Was West Berlin a part of the Federal Republic or was it a separate, third German unit (as the GDR believed) (Alisch 2004: 389)? As such, the contract was ultimately signed between two companies, 'Berlin Consult' in West Berlin and the 'Bergbauhandel GmbH' in the East (Park 2004: 78–87).

With this example from the mid-1970s in mind, the East German Politburo decided in favor of a further dumpsite project later that decade. Founded in 1979, the 'Volkseigener Betrieb (VEB) Deponie Schönberg' (publicly owned enterprise Schönberg dump) was located about 5 km from the inner-German border on the eastern side, but only 14 km away from the next West German city, Lübeck. The soil was composed mostly of boulder clay and provided space for about 168 hectares of waste. The East German state took financial advantage of the calamitous waste situation in the Federal Republic, which was coping with a looming 'waste crisis' (Köster 2017: 175, 294–295; Der Spiegel 29/1983: 47).⁶ 'Waste' in this case meant both toxic, industrial waste and household waste, which were dumped for the same price: 50 marks (approximately \$20) per ton. Thus, household waste was slightly more expensive to dump in the East, compared to West German home charges, whereas toxic waste became extremely cheap for West German waste exporters to dispose of. In comparison, the disposal of chemical waste in the Federal Republic cost about 200 marks (approximately \$117) per ton.⁷ This pricing policy thus made the Schönberg dumpsite considerably more attractive than its Western equivalents, which also led to the export of a growing amount of particularly

toxic waste. The Schönberg deposit site began accepting toxic waste in 1982. Although dangerous substances such as highly toxic liquid chemicals, pesticides, and radioactive waste had been excluded by the East German government, hazardous waste in form of sewage sludge, oil-contaminated soil or slag and ash from incineration was allowed.⁸

The first transport trucks started to bring non-toxic waste to the dumping ground in 1980, sparking almost instantaneous protest on the Western side of the border. The protest against Schönberg must be understood in the broader context of West German apprehension of landfills and waste incineration plants in general. At the beginning of the 1970s, the news magazine *Der Spiegel* published evidence of the inappropriate handling of toxic waste, sparking awareness of dangers lurking nearby. In 1971, the discovery of toxic sodium cyanide on a municipal solid waste dump in Gerthe, a neighborhood in the town of Bochum (FRG), ignited public outrage (34/1971: 59). Similarly, in 1973, *Spiegel* reporters uncovered a large network of special waste entrepreneurs in Hanau (FRG) who were illegally disposing toxic materials in the countryside, in various rivers and the sewage system (40/1973: 24–32; 41/1973: 104). In parallel, public environmental consciousness was also on the rise (Köster 2017: 208). Akin to the responses by West Berliners (Judt 2013: 68), West German citizens did not want to live near dumping grounds and began to protest against initiatives to build them in their neighborhoods. These NIMBY-protests—‘not in my backyard’—impeded the construction of new regional dumping grounds and thereby inadvertently encouraged the export of waste.

West German Protest and Concern

Schönberg was more problematic due to its location near the inner-German border. For its administration, the internal waste problem was solved by outsourcing it to another country (though this categorization was not totally in line with the official West German position with regard to the GDR as a sovereign state). Yet what looked like a pragmatic, economically sound solution for the federal government became an environmental problem on the regional level. As Schönberg was located so close to Lübeck, West German activists transferred the perceived dangers and anticipated risks of dumpsites in the Federal Republic to the East German dumping ground, thereby creating a situation where the externalization of waste and NIMBY-style protests overlapped.

Furthermore, the knowledge about and attention to toxic materials on landfills and in waste incineration plants spread very quickly during this period, as scientific studies about dumpsites and hazardous waste began to be published. Experts realized that the combination of waste on dumpsites caused massive problems: The—sometimes new—materials reacted with each other, causing fires to break out, toxic gases to escape or polluted water to seep out (Köster 2017: 174, 188). Another important example, which became crucial for the global environmental movement was the toxic waste scandal in Love Canal (USA), when people discovered that their homes and a school had been built on a former toxic waste facility

in 1978 (Colten & Skinner 1996). The protagonists were constantly confronted with new problems to respond to (Weber 2014: 119–120). Beyond the scandals, citizens increasingly criticized the state and dumpsite managers for their inability to control toxic emissions from dumpsites and waste incineration plants through technical and chemical means since the mid-1970s.

By the mid-1980s, waste engineers and politicians admitted that they lacked sufficient knowledge about the dumpsites, and demanded that more research to be done.⁹ By 1982, for example, dumping grounds like the one in Schönberg—with layers of different stone, toxic waste and household waste, but no additional sealing—was no longer considered suitable by West German experts.¹⁰ The critics of the Schönberg dump did not consider that the Western safety standard was changing rapidly at the time and had not been the standard, particularly in the East, when the negotiating process began in 1979/1980 (Köster 2017: 277). As it became clear that even experts did not understand the dynamics inside dumping grounds, citizens began to perceive them as risks, and thus refused to live near them (Köster 2017: 208, 237, 243–245; Gille 2007: 159). The danger of a future catastrophic event determined social expectations and actions which finally coalesced into political action as including citizens in the political processes for decision making through, for instance, public hearings (Beck 2007: 29; Weber 2014: 121).

This state of knowledge forms the backdrop for the protests against the dumping ground in the GDR by West Germans, in particular by the inhabitants of Lübeck. The Schleswig-Holstein Minister for Nutrition, Agriculture and Forests Günter Flessner, conveyed the doubts of his constituents in a letter to the Federal Minister of Inner-German Relations Egon Franke on 12 August 1982: He wrote that the inhabitants of Schleswig-Holstein were concerned that the bottom of the dump was not thick enough to contain all contamination, allowing toxins to eventually seep beneath the border and poison their ground water. In so doing, the contaminated water would ultimately seep into the Mulde river, which flows into the Pahlinger Mühlenbach creek, which itself flows into the Wakenitz, a small river that provides Lübeck with its drinking water (Federal Archives, BArch, B 137, Vol. 10375).

Similarly, the city of Hamburg also received severe criticism from environmentalists because it deposited toxic, dredged sludge from the harbor basin in the GDR landfill. Moreover, Lübeck (in the state of Schleswig-Holstein) sent about 600 tons of industrial waste to Hamburg’s waste incineration plant each year, the end product of which was about 10–20 tons of toxic scoria (bad ash), which Hamburg (a city-state) would deliver to Schönberg—causing outrage in the city of Lübeck (*Der Spiegel* 18/1988: 16). Hence, these issues exposed the divisions between West German *Länder* (states) on how to handle the waste problem.

Local residents in West Germany were also frustrated by the rising number of trucks transiting through Lübeck and the small border town of Schlutup, and the concurrent rise in noise pollution. Since members of the West

German Green Party and other environmental groups in the West could hardly protest the dumpsite itself, they focused on the border and the export of waste—by blocking the roads to Schönberg. Moreover, about 10,000 people signed a petition calling for a referendum in Lübeck to block the export of this waste. About 800 protesters demanded access to the administration's files, and the local newspaper, the *Lübecker Nachrichten*, published a series of articles on 'The Schönberg landfill—a ticking timebomb?' (6 March 1983 in BArch, B 295, Vol. 37001). The protest never lost its NIMBY-character: Protesters were mainly from the area in and around Lübeck. There was no larger national nor cross-border protest movement as seen, for example, in the contemporaneous anti-nuclear protests (Milder 2017, Tompkins 2016).

While West Germans feared the pollution of Lübeck's drinking water, East Germans were concerned that the countryside up to the Baltic Sea spa facilities would be contaminated by toxic water at the dumpsite—a worry so acute that the permanent deputy of the FRG in the GDR, Hans Otto Bräutigam, caught wind of it and reported it to his superiors in Bonn in March 1985 (BArch, B 136, Vol. 21547, Part 8). This concern was also articulated by GDR environmentalists at a seminar in Schwerin in 1985, in petitions (Eingaben) to GDR officials,¹¹ and in letters written by East German environmentalists to West German politicians, in which they protested the import of toxic and municipal waste from Western countries into the GDR. However, they also wanted the GDR to deposit its own toxic waste on this dumpsite, as it was the best equipped in the country.¹² In addition, since 1982, any information about the environment had been classified in the GDR (Huff 2015: 241–242). But, unlike cases from East and West Berlin (Kirchhof 2015), contacts between environmentalists from Schönberg (GDR) and Lübeck (FRG) remained rare in this case, which does not mean that no information was exchanged at all, though this might be worth further exploration in the future. Nevertheless, receiving information about the Schönberg dump seemed to be a common goal by environmentalists in East and West, the future existence of this dumping ground remained all the same different.

Schönberg's location also reveals another facet of West Germany's border policy: Since the Federal Republic refused to accept the GDR as a sovereign country, it encouraged relations between the GDR and the various neighboring Länder (states), rather than with the federal government itself, in an attempt to frame the GDR as just another state, thus signaling the ties between East and West Germany (Wentker 2007: 410). However, the Schönberg case became too politically sensitive to leave the issue to the Minister President and Environmental Minister of Schleswig-Holstein alone. Furthermore, the border situation sheds light on another the issue: in taking the externalized, toxic waste from the FRG, the GDR also outsourced at least half their risk in depositing it in the borderland to the Federal Republic rather than in the middle of its territory. Thus, the border between East and West Germany also shaped the transboundary problem of the waste export. Instead of protesting directly

against the dumpsite the environmental movement had to work through their political representatives to initiate diplomatic steps to fulfill their demands (Kajiser & Meyer 2018: 10–11).

'Political Waste Tourism'

Between 1980 and 1986, at least eight Western delegations visited the Schönberg dumpsite (**Table 1**). GDR officials spoke of 'political tourism' in response to the high number of local West German politicians, who, for their own political reasons, wanted to personally inspect the deposit site most likely to receive their municipalities' (toxic) waste.¹³ The frequency of their visits was in direct contrast to the experience of East Germans, who were forced to watch one West German delegation after another visit a dumpsite they were not allowed to come close to it. The West German Green Party, instead, was the first to speak of 'toxic waste tourism' in a press release from 26 February 1986: 'Greens want to legally ban toxic waste tourism' (Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, AGG, B.II.1, Vol. 885), meaning the migration of the material, i.e. the waste export. By understanding the interconnections between 'Toxic waste tourism' and 'political tourism'—'political waste tourism'—the circulation not only of material but also of West German politicians between the two countries becomes clear. In comparison to other environmental problems in the GDR, this intense visiting procedure was unique in the environmental history of the two countries—although it is not an unusual practice in the global waste trade.

The continuing exchange between the two countries fulfilled two major functions: Firstly, it fostered *détente* and the 'special' German-German relationship. During the Cold War, particularly in the 1980s, the two German states endeavored to maintain lines of communication in response to rising tensions between the superpowers after the modernization of atomic missiles and the soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1979. Economic relations, including smaller-scale negotiations over the dumping ground in Schönberg, were favoured as a substitute to political interactions across the Iron Curtain (Kirchhof & McNeill 2019: 7). Secondly, the exchange should help to appease West German critics of the waste export, all the while securing a dumping ground for West German waste.

In particular, local politicians, mainly from Schleswig-Holstein and the city of Lübeck, requested the opportunity to visit, arguing to GDR officials that they needed to directly inspect the site to legitimize transport allowances and to calm down the fears of their voters (Report on a visit to Schönberg, 2 November 1983, BArch, B 288, Vol. 381, Part 5). On home turf, on a political hearing with a citizen's initiative in Lübeck on 11 January 1984, Flessner explained that it was better to keep control of the situation by sending waste to the dumpsite, visiting on a regular basis, and thus being able to demand improvements than to be out of the business entirely (Ibid.). The waste was coming no matter what: In the 1980s, France, the Netherlands, Austria and other countries started to send their toxic as well as municipal waste to Schönberg as well. By 1982, about 400,000 tons of waste had already been brought to Schönberg. By 1985, the total amount

had risen to 900,000 tons, including 100,000 tons from Western European countries other than the Federal Republic (Der Spiegel 8/1986: 52).

In allowing these delegations access that they denied their own citizens, GDR officials—falsely—hoped to directly counteract West German media reports of the dumpsite by presenting FRG politicians with a positive image they could carry back to the Federal Republic (information about the visit of FRG-experts in Schönberg, 28 October 1983, BArch DL 266, Vol. 1690: 85–91). During these visits, most West German experts and politicians praised Schönberg, making comments including ‘such a hazardous waste dump would have been no different and equally carefully laid out on federal territory’¹⁵ or that they had the ‘impression that the landfill meets a high Western safety standard’.¹⁶ It is, of course, difficult to evaluate the authenticity of these statements, in light of the need to maintain access to the dumpsite for FRG waste. Back at home, these politicians did not publicly acknowledge that the GDR provided a better quality dumping ground than those available in the FRG. Thus, they mainly drew attention to their talks with GDR experts, giving the impression that they had everything under control, and demonstrating that they took citizens’ concerns over environmental pollution and its potential risks caused by the Schönberg dump seriously. In this vein, Müller and Itzen (2006) point out that risk in the German legal system signifies rather a ‘weak form of danger’ which—unlike actual danger—demands no state action, since ‘risk’ implies a hazard that is less likely to occur (p. 9), which might explain the politicians’ attachment to the waste trade with the GDR.

Nevertheless, the ‘political waste tourism’ did not remain the only effort of West German politicians to solve the difficulties of the need to export waste.

The ‘Greening’ of Politics?

In November 1982, Peter Christian Germelmann, a deputy in the Ministry for Inner-German Affairs, concluded that ‘... in relation to the GDR, a new environmental problem has come into existence that must be settled’ (BArch, B 136, Vol. 18833). What seemed like a new discovery on the part of the political class had long since arrived in society: By 1980, the forest dieback, air and water pollution, noise pollution at the Frankfurt airport had all made environmental issues part of the social discourse (Uekötter & Kirchhelle 2012), which now expanded to include the export of toxic waste. And it raised the inconvenient question of who was responsible for the waste trade and its legislation—the states or the federal government?

According to West German law, each state is solely responsible for the disposal of its waste, so long as the federal government does not have a reason to intervene (Köster 2017: 217–218). But the federal Ministry of the Economy was responsible for handing out any legal foreign exchange permits (devisenrechtliche Genehmigungen), which were a necessity for any bilateral trade agreements with the GDR. All contracts were concluded between Hanseatische Baustoffkontor, a West German company, and Intrac, a company owned by the office of Commercial Coordination (Kommerzielle Koordinierung, short KoKo), a secretive department within the East German Ministry of Foreign Trade. As such, three different West German

Table 1: West-German Delegations to the Schönberg Dumpsite, 1980–1986.¹⁴

Time	Meeting of experts/Visits	Actors involved
24 June 1980	Meeting of experts, East Berlin, Foreign Office	East and West German experts, delegations of the companies involved
21 November 1980	Meeting of experts and visit	East and West German Experts
9 November 1981	Visit	Experts from Schleswig-Holstein and the media (FRG)
22 June 1983	Visit	Journalists (FRG)
28 October 1983	Meeting of experts and visit	Experts from Schleswig-Holstein and the media (FRG)
29 March 1984	Meeting of experts	Members of the Schleswig-Holstein state parliament (SPD) with delegates from the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry for the Environment and Water Management
18 April 1985	Visit	Local SPD and CDU politicians and a citizens’ initiative from Lübeck
29 November 1985	Meeting of experts and visit	Members of the Schleswig-Holstein subcommittee for Agriculture and Environment (SPD, CDU, Greens); citizens’ initiatives; media; and other government experts (FRG)
17 April 1986	Meeting of experts and visit	FRG government experts; GDR-delegates from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and the Environment and Watermanagement, Intrac Company
4 September 1986	Visit	Members of the Green Party
12–13 November 1986	Visiting East/West delegation to Schönberg (GDR)/Herfa-Neurode (FRG) Dumpsites, meeting of experts in Lübeck	

ministries simultaneously laid claim to governing waste deals and its inherent environmental politics: The Ministry of the Interior was responsible for the environment in general, waste issues were regulated by the Länder (state) agencies, and, the trade deal with the GDR remained the responsibility of the Ministry of the Economy.

The whole discussion surrounding the export of toxic waste—including the protest and the real or election campaign-related doubts of local politicians—made the West German government nervous. In response, officials attempted to explicitly demarcate the divide between the responsibilities of the states and those of the federal government. Thus, effective 1 February 1983, the state agencies (Landesbehörden) were tasked with evaluating all permit requests coming from the states themselves—except the transit of waste from other Western countries. As such, each state was now fully responsible for evaluating all requests for permits, allowing them to express their doubts about specific applications and ultimately to refuse them.¹⁷

As a consequence, this administrative move strengthened the environmental over the economical character of the waste export. In 1986, for example, officials in Schleswig-Holstein reportedly refused approximately 15% of the permit requests for Schönberg.¹⁸ In 1988, state agencies issued about 400 civil charges against permit requests having—presumably—declared incorrect materials.¹⁹ After all the handwringing, these were meager results. Nonetheless, already in 1986, the Christian Democratic Minister President of Schleswig-Holstein, Uwe Barschel, followed the court's decision on some of these transport interdictions without raising any objections and temporarily stored the rejected waste otherwise. In contrast, the Minister of the Environment for Hesse (and Green Party member), Joschka Fischer, aimed to exploit all legal opportunities to send the state's hazardous waste and household waste to Schönberg as—according to him at that time—no better ecological options existed, and he faced strong opposition against the building of new dumpsites in his own state of Hesse.²⁰ Thus, in Schleswig-Holstein, politicians not only engaged with protest, they adjusted their habits and political decisions somewhat in response, likely due to the proximity of the state to the Schönberg dumpsite itself (Hesse is about 600 kilometers further away) as did the government of Hesse in reaction to its own state opposition.

At the time there was still no treaty with the GDR that included a clear understanding of which types of toxic waste were (or were not) allowed for disposal within the GDR (Dicke 1986: 107). Over the course of 1983 and 1984, Schleswig-Holstein Minister for Nutrition, Agriculture and Forests Günter Flessner, attempted to establish a 'Positive-Negative-Catalog' with the GDR and the West German federal government, which would explicitly record which toxic substances and which contaminated materials would or would not be accepted, in what form, and how much. For example: oil-contaminated soils should not exceed 3 per cent pollutant content; mixed landfills on a five meter thick waste layer could only hold soluble pollutants that did not exceed 1 per cent of the original substance

and the total amount of solvent-containing waste (such as paint residues, gas cleaning compound, lime sludge, and solvent-containing residues) that would not exceed 3 per cent. Radioactive substances, hospital waste, animal carcasses, and pesticides were forbidden.²¹ The GDR would have accepted the catalog in order to protect her economic interests, but the FRG could not. The content of the catalog was much more extensive than existing regulations in West Germany. Technically and politically, it was not appropriate for the federal government to force the GDR to comply with requirements for the landfill, which were considered 'technically unsecured', even in the Federal Republic, where research about dumpsites was still ongoing.²² Consequently, the catalog was not adopted and did not become a component of the waste deal with the GDR.

In addition, the rumor—which would eventually become known as the 'Seveso scandal'—that 41 tons of construction debris contaminated with dioxin was transported to Schönberg, further spurred on the protests. Despite rampant speculation to the contrary, it is nearly indisputable that these barrels were burned by the Basel-based chemical company Ciba-Geigy in June 1985.²³ But in the aftermath of the Seveso toxic waste scandal, dioxin became the catch word for the environmental protest movement in West Germany (Köster 2017: 286; Der Spiegel 6/1984: 62–65). Between the ongoing protests and the still unclear responsibility between federal and state governments, it became imperative for the West German federal government to introduce a new federal law on waste.

Furthermore, in a paper from April 1983, the Ministry of the Interior concluded that a lack of control over the export of (toxic) waste would carry severe economic and ecological consequences: First, West German dumpsites and waste facilities would have to compete with the VEB Deponie Schönberg, likely causing them to function at less than to full capacity. Second, the domestic West German industry would have no incentive to develop new methods for the reuse and recycling of their (toxic) leftovers. Third, the Federal Republic was about to lose face within the European Community where they had long argued in favor of a restrictive handling of the waste export issue (disposal in the country in which it originated) while practicing the opposite (export to the GDR) at home. Fourth, the increased amount of waste—up to 900,000 tons per year since 1985—also became harder to control, especially as the Federal Republic became a transit country for waste from other Western nations as well.²⁴ Finally, in 1983, the Green Party was elected into parliament for the first time, putting renewed pressure on the other parties and the federal and state governments in charge to stop the export of toxic waste.

Taking all this into account, in 1985 the Ministry of the Interior developed a third amendment to the federal waste law that would regulate the import and export of (toxic) waste—the so-called 'Schönberg-Novelle' (amendment)—by requiring written confirmation from the dumpsite that it was designed to accept the declared toxic materials. Providing such a document was not a problem for East German officials, and had even been proposed as a solution by the authorities at KoKo in reaction to the

amendment (BArch, DL 266, Vol. 1358: 180). Within the East German Ministry for the Environment and Water Management there were also contrary positions, with some advocating for the refusal of incoming waste.²⁵ That discussion remains to be explored and is beyond the scope of the article here.

So, continuous visits by West German local politicians seemed to remain the best way to keep some control over the dumpsite and to convince the East German regime to adhere to Western safety standards. On 7 September 1987, a German-German environmental agreement was finally signed in Bonn,²⁶ which officially included the exchange of information about dumpsites as it had been practiced as part of earlier 'political waste tourist' visits. Despite its weaknesses, this institutionalization of 'political waste tourism' between the two German states was probably the maximum achievable by West German politicians with regard to the dumpsite. As there were at the time no international regulations yet, both could fashion bilateral regulations according to their own interests.

In 1989, the 'Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal' was signed to regulate the trade with toxic waste internationally. That same year, the fall of the Berlin wall allowed protesters from East and West Germany to work together in their attempt to close down the dumpsite, leading to East Germans to join voices with the West Germans. This would end in a disappointment: Renovated and modernized, the VEB Deponie Schönberg (renamed the 'Deponie Ihlenberg') still exists today and is one of the largest toxic waste facilities in Europe—no longer in the border region but in the middle of the country.

Conclusion

The attempted 'greening' of the economic waste deal, thus the inclusion of environmental concerns, in West Germany at the beginning of the 1980s had several causes: The protests that sprung up around the issue of toxic waste was a major motivator for West German politicians to adjust their course of action, bolstered by the new information provided by emerging scientific research about dumpsites. Moreover, the constant struggle for votes, in particular with the emergence of the Green Party, also led to a more careful handling of ecological concerns. With this slight turn towards environmental concerns within political discussions, the West German government attempted to fix the chaotic economic deal in order to assuage its critics. Conversely, the states—especially Hesse and Hamburg—needed to maintain the option to export their (toxic) waste, thus reinforcing the economic side of the agreement, including the low price of exporting waste to the GDR. Ultimately, through continued contacts with GDR experts, the 'political waste tourism' remained the best way to control the potential risks created by the toxic waste export. That being said, by focusing only on an orderly, legal and environmentally friendly export to Schönberg, the West German government missed the opportunity to correct their own misguided response to modern industrial developments, ignoring the necessity—identified by the Ministry of the Interior—of creating a cir-

culatory system that produced less waste and engaged in more recycling.

The location of the Schönberg dump at the border seems to be the essential reason why any change needed to come from the Federal Republic itself. Its proximity to Lübeck triggered an anticipated risk and NIMBY protest. Unlike the cases of West Berlin or other federal states, the border location forced local politicians to engage with the matter, to demand visits of the dump and to foster communication about it between both sides of the Iron Curtain. At the same time, change to waste legislation and waste export control had to be carried out by the federal government as well.

Nevertheless, questions on the technical aspects of the risk category remain unanswered: which safety standards did the GDR implement in the Schönberg dumpsite after expert meetings with West German delegates? Did the GDR Ministry of Environment and Water Management try to oppose the economic department of KoKo within the socialist system? How did both German states influence the Basel Convention with their experience, but also with their interests in maintaining their waste deal? At the time being, the present article suggests that, rather than an economic win-win situation, the dump of Schönberg is more adequately understood as a border issue, including the struggle of West German authorities to give a green appearance to a 'dirty' deal, and East-Germans who more or less give in to the demands from the West to secure their foreign currency income.

Notes

- ¹ See also Jonas Stuck's work on 'Toxic Divide? The Hazardous Waste Trade between the Two Germanys, 1970–2000' within the Research Group 'Hazardous Travels. Ghost Acres and the Global Waste Economy' at the Rachel Carson Center in Munich.
- ² See Interview with Simone Müller by Birgit Kruse: 'Müll ist ein Machtinstrument', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 July 2019 [online access at <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/muenchen/muenchen-muell-abfallexport-schwellenlaender-1.4520471> last accessed 7 August 2019].
- ³ Paulenz, H and Elstner, P 1980 *Giftgesetz der DDR Rechtsvorschriften mit Kommentar*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag; *Gesetz zum Schutz vor gefährlichen Abfallstoffen (Chemikaliengesetz, ChemG)*, 16 September 1980, *Bundesgesetzblatt*, Part I, Vol. 58, pp. 1718–1728.
- ⁴ This article is based on a presentation held in the workshop 'Is toxic waste the price of modernity or is it a sign of a misdirected development?' at Shanghai University (China) 25–27 October 2018.
- ⁵ Political Archive in the Foreign Office, PA/AA, B2, Vol. 197, Paper by Detlev Karsten Rohwedder.
- ⁶ Federal Archive, BArch, DY 3023/1440: 282, Günter Mittag to Erich Honecker, 23 January 1979. Profit should be secured through long-lasting contracts about waste with West German cities like Hamburg and Lübeck.
- ⁷ Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, RHG/TH 2/9, Martin Irion, Naß oder trocken? Behauptungen und Fakten über den Stand der Rauchgasreinigung bei

- Sondermüllverbrennungsanlagen, Landwirtschaft und Umwelt, 24 January 1988, RIAS I 6.35-7.15.
- ⁸ BArch, DK 5, Vol. 2110, Guido Thoms, 20. Sitzung des Beirats für Umweltschutz beim Ministerrat der DDR, 28 December 1981. For allowed and prohibited materials, BArch, DY 3032/1440, Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski to Günter Mittag, 27 November 1979, pp. 346–347; and Information über die Abnahme von Abfallstoffen aus der BRD und Westberlin durch die DDR sowie Vorschläge über Möglichkeiten der Erhöhung von Valutaeinnahmen aus der weiteren Abnahme von Abfallstoffen, undated, presumably 1980, pp. 356–360.
- ⁹ For example: BArch, B 295, Vol. 10719, Part 1, Christian Lenzer, press release by the CDU/CSU-caucus in parliament on the problems of the renovation of old hazardous landfills in the Federal Republic, 16 January 1985.
- ¹⁰ See BArch, B 288, Vol. 382, memorandum about an expert talk with a GDR-delegation, 17 April 1986; Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, AGG 92 A Joschka Fischer, Carl-Otto Zubiller, Länderarbeitsgemeinschaft Abfall (LAGA), October 1989.
- ¹¹ E-Mail correspondence between the author and Michael Beileites, 11 September 2019; for example: RHG, TH 2/9, Eingabe an den Ministerpräsidenten (not specified who), Wismar, 3 February 1989.
- ¹² The GDR had still about 9.800 ‘wild’ dumping grounds in 1989 (Wolle 1999: 212). See also RHG, TH 2/9: 99, a letter of protest by the East German Ecumenical Center for Environmental Labor (Ökumenisches Zentrum für Umweltarbeit).
- ¹³ For ‘Polit-tourism’ according to the GDR, see Federal Archives, BArch, B 288, Vol. 382, Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, expert talk with the GDR about Schönberg and Herfa-Neurode, 12–13 November 1986.
- ¹⁴ BArch, B 136, Vol. 18833, Part 1 and 2; B 288, Volumes 381, Part 5 and 382, Part 7 and 8; DL 226, Vol. 1690: 85–91; B 295, Vol. 36999; BArch, DK 5, Vol. 4935 as well as the Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis, AGG, B.II.1, Vol. 2037.
- ¹⁵ See BArch, B 136, Vol. 18833, Part 2, Peter-Christian GERMELMANN, Verbringung von Abfall aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in die DDR, 11 December 1980.
- ¹⁶ See BArch, B 136, Vol. 18833, Part 2, Hans-Henning Kaysers, Besuch der Sondermüll-Deponie Schönberg/DDR am 9.11.1981, 16 November 1981.
- ¹⁷ BArch B 102, Vol. 376575, Wagner, Waste Dump Schönberg/DDR, 21 April 1983.
- ¹⁸ See Maletzke, E 1986 Müll statt Marzipan. *Die Zeit*, 7th March, p. 2.
- ¹⁹ See BArch, DL 226, Vol. 1819: 20, Information über die Beratung mit Experten der BRD zu den geologischen und hydrologischen Bedingungen der Deponie Schönberg (Bezirk Rostock), 5 July 1988; Bornhöft, P 1989 Kieler SPD-Regierung – ‘Schad nix, nützt nix?’. *Die Tageszeitung (taz)*, 6 May, p. 13.
- ²⁰ See Kriener, M 1986 Das deutsch-deutsche Giftmüll-Desaster. *Die Tageszeitung (taz)*, 26 September, p. 3; N.N. 1986 Giftmüll. Salz in der Suppe. *Der Spiegel*, 8, 17 February, p. 52–53; Urban, R 1987 Messel oder der Müll-Notstand. *Die Zeit*, 9 October [online accessed at <https://www.zeit.de/1987/42/messel-oder-der-muell-notstandt> last accessed 14 October 2019].
- ²¹ BArch, B 137, Vol. 10375, Part 9, Katalog der zur Deponie Schönberg/DDR zu verbringenden bzw. von der Ablagerung ausgeschlossener Abfallarten, Deponiebetrieb und Sickerwasserbehandlung (Positiv-Negativ-Katalog).
- ²² See BArch, B 295, Vol. 36999, Part 9, Gerhard Feldhaus to Günter Flessner, Sonderabfalldeponie Schönberg/DDR, 5 May 1984.
- ²³ See N.N. 2007 Die Fässer von Seveso. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 23 September, p. 4; Uekötter, F and Kirchhelle, C 2012 Wie Seveso nach Deutschland kam. *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 52, p. 324. In 1976, there was an explosion at a chemical company in Seveso, northern Italy. In 1983, 41 tons of toxic waste disappeared on its way to its final dumping ground. Rumor had it that the barrels had been transported to Schönberg, but they were finally found in an abandoned slaughterhouse in Anguillacourt-le-Sart (France). See, Gaul, R and Gehrman, W 1983 Im Giftschränk wird aufgeräumt. *Die Zeit*, 29 April, p. 7.
- ²⁴ BArch B 102, Vol. 376575, Part 4, Ministry of the Interior on the waste deposit site Schönberg/DDR, 21 April 1983, with Annex 1: Departmental meeting on 9 November 1982; See also Political Archive, PA/AA, ZA, Vol. 132332, Report to the Ministry of the Interior by the Ständige Arbeitsgemeinschaft Abfall on its 37th session, 28 August 1983.
- ²⁵ See for instance, BArch, DK 5, Vol. 781, Projektgruppe VIII, Herrmann, Bericht über die Anstrengungen der Genossen zur Sicherung hoher Valutaerlöse aus Abschlüssen mit dem Nicht-Sozialistischen Wirtschaftsgebiet (NSW), 10 May 1983.
- ²⁶ ‘Vereinbarung zwischen der Regierung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über die weitere Gestaltung der Beziehungen auf dem Gebiet des Umweltschutzes’, *Bulletin der Bundesregierung*, Nr. 83, 10 September 1987, pp. 716–717.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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