

the heart of them. Perhaps it would have been too much to ask for an in-depth study like Anne Zetsche's recent book *The Atlantik-Brücke and the American Council on Germany, 1952-1974* (2021). As it stands, *Guido Goldman: Transatlantic Bridge Builder* serves mainly as an interesting short introduction to an important transatlantic "informal diplomat."

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## **Sustainable Utopias: The Art and Politics of Hope in Germany**

**By Jennifer L. Allen. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2022. Pp. 368. Cloth \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0674249141.**

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As the East Bloc began to crumble in the late 1980s, Germany found itself at the epicenter of tumultuous political change. Much has been written about West German chancellor Helmut Kohl's long tenure in office, which began in a divided Germany and ended in a reunified one. Jennifer Allen's important new book takes a fresh approach to this period by exploring its cultural dimension. The 1980s saw the demise of the guiding visions of the post-World War II period in both West and East—the turn away from the "68ers" ideals, the decline of the postwar settlement between labor and capital, and the beginning of an era of neoliberalism in the West, as well as the failure of the socialist ideal in the East. It seems odd, Allen acknowledges, to frame a book in terms of utopias in an era of apparent anti-utopianism. This is, however, exactly what she does. She reinterprets the meaning of the term, or rather her research subjects do, abandoning grand societal visions in favor of stepwise progress toward practical, community-level "sustainable utopias" (14).

Allen builds her argument around the trajectories of three West German activist movements stemming from the early 1980s. Each was utopian, she asserts, in the sense that it mobilized space with the intention of upending societal power relations and fostering radical democracy. The Berlin History Workshop was a nexus of professional and amateur historians whose goal was to challenge "undemocratic hierarchies of knowledge" by moving historical methodology out of the academy and into local communities, helping ordinary citizens narrate their own histories (23). The Greens, a movement turned political party, pursued a program of cultural engagement in everyday spaces. They viewed this engagement as a "catechism" for both green living and for grassroots democracy (140). The spatial interventionists were less an organized group than a "loose collection" of practitioners and advocates for public art (23). They tried to force local citizens to think differently about the nature of public spaces by placing ordinary objects in unusual places or in unusual patterns in a space. Their installations were meant to compel democratic engagement with those spaces in order to foster social change.

The first three chapters describe the origins of these movements and their early interventions aimed at promoting community-level cultural change. The Berlin History Workshop's signature project was documenting the Nazi rise to power in everyday Berlin life. The Greens supported the decentralization of cultural spaces and the notion of average citizens as cultural mediators, reflected in their support for an Active Museum and opposition to a

traditional German Historical Museum. Spatial interventionist projects transgressed the boundaries of traditional installations by choosing themes such as “traces.” They also featured public participation. Examples include citizen tree planting and, discussed in later chapters, Gunter Demnig’s ubiquitous “Stumbling Stones,” each commemorating a citizen killed or displaced in the Holocaust.

Chapters 4–6 examine the sustainability aspect of each project’s activities. Here the case studies diverge. The Berlin History Workshop and the Greens, writes Allen, could not propel their practical utopias into post-reunification German society. The spatial interventionists’ movement proved more sustainable. What mainly seems to have tripped up the former two was their insistence on the indivisibility of means and ends. Their organizational structures proved unworkable, and internecine conflict stymied their visions for grassroots democracy. They had both begun as collaborations of professionals and lay citizens. In each case, the professionals had difficulty cooperating with each other, and the grassroots elements fell away from the organizations.

The Berlin History Workshop, asserts Allen, collapsed under the weight of financial problems and infighting. Ironically, it was the lack of a common alternative vision that contributed to the conflict. Many Western participants needed the GDR in order to situate themselves: “the ongoing project of state socialism offered hope that real social change might be possible from below” (182). Once the Easterners abandoned this project, their Western counterparts did not know what to do. For their part, the Greens insisted at first on a party structure that would promote radical democracy. The imperative mandate and the rotation principle, however, both fell victim to the exigencies of parliamentary participation. And, like the historians, the Greens had trouble combining their Eastern and Western cohorts. Their cultural program could not flourish while this connection weakened. The spatial interventionists, on the other hand, benefited from the growth of a bottom-up, international network that continued to link artists to the lay public without much of a formal structure. In the case of the Stumbling Stones, communities have to approve them, and different artists craft them.

Allen presents a compelling narrative that highlights the often-overlooked importance of art and spatial interventions in politics. Its interdisciplinary reach will ensure that the book finds a home in history, German studies, political science, and perhaps even environmental studies classrooms. I found myself wanting more clarity on what insights the “sustainable utopia” frame provides beyond the Habermasian notion of a public sphere that comes up repeatedly in the narrative. And it is not entirely clear what lessons we should take from Allen’s three case studies. They seem to demonstrate that sustainable utopias cannot be designed, rather their success depends on the largely spontaneous growth of grassroots networks. Allen’s measure of the Stumbling Stones’ resonance is the global uptake of this type of memorial, even when new initiatives make no reference to Demnig’s original project. What counts is that they “originate out of grassroots community organization, intervene in quotidian spaces, and invite passersby to reckon with ... history” (230). By this criterion, the Greens’ project might also be viewed as a major success. Grassroots green cultural initiatives abound in the world, some inspired by the German Greens and some not, but many with a similar democratizing intent. In all, Allen’s provocative argument opens new ways of thinking about the Kohl period and provides food for thought long after one puts the book down.

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