



GERMANY

# LIQUID WALL

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Strachau, Lower Saxony. A family of mother, son and grandchildren dine in the garden of their home. The family from Hamburg is one of many who, after the reunification of Germany, chose to come and live in this area that was DDR during the Cold War.

- ▶ 30 years ago, when the Berlin Wall came down, the 100 kilometers-long fence which divided East and West Germany along the river Elbe was demolished as well
- ▶ Between 1961 and 1989, 49 people died along this liquid wall while trying to escape from the DDR
- ▶ Nowadays the same river's stretch symbolizes all new divisions between East and West: the Elbe has never stopped to be a border, even if a mental one
- ▶ The Eastern shore has been abandoned by many of its inhabitants and in 30 years only a bridge has been built
- ▶ The only positive legacy of the long separation is the intact ecosystem which, together with the beauty of the land, is attracting a growing number of tourists



Domitz, Mecklenburg - Vorpommern. Faithful in the Lutheran church of Domitz await the beginning of the service.



Village of Herrenoff, Lower Saxony. Guests invited to a ceremony move from the east to the west bank of the Elbe by ferry. Thirty years after the end of the Cold War, only one bridge has been built in 100 km of river and the movements from one side of the river to the other are made with a system of ferries.



Amt Neuhaus, Lower Saxony. Thomas von der Heide, manager of the largest farm (Agrarvereinigung) in the former closed area east of Elbe.



Lower Saxony. Young people on the west bank of the river swim in a small lake not far from the Elbe.

The Berlin Wall came down 30 years ago. In the very same days, the fence which divided East and West Germany along the river Elbe was demolished as well. The Elbe flows through the Eastern part of Germany, from its border with the Czech Republic to the port of Hamburg and the North Sea shore. Until 30 years ago it incorporated a 100 kilometers-long segment of the Iron Curtain which used to split in two unreachable parts Germany, Europe and the entire world.

Forty years of separation and then, in November 1989, the border was eventually over, making possible again the simple act of boarding a ferry and reaching the fellow Germans on the other side of the river. Between 1961 and 1989, 49 people died along this liquid wall while trying to escape from the DDR. They drowned in the river's water, froze in the cold or were killed by the border policemen. The very few who succeeded to escape recall their heroic enterprise, while the ones who used to live close to the river tell about the villages which were destroyed, and the many families who were deported in order to clear the restricted area from "dubious elements".

And yet the euphoria associated with the reunification has long been over. Nowadays the same river's stretch symbolizes all new divisions between East and West: in many people's view the Elbe has never stopped to be a border, even if a mental one. The Eastern shore is being abandoned by its inhabitants, both in the villages as well as in the major towns: one third of the young people has already gone, and the older ones are increasingly holding a grudge against the so-called "Western system", and harboring a kind of nostalgia for the former communist society.

It's no coincidence that in thirty years only one bridge has been built along the 100 kilometers-long former border. Commuters must rely on ferries, which stop working at 9 PM. As if the border would rise again when the sun sets. The only positive legacy of the decades-long forced separation of the two shores is to be noticed in the natural ecosystem: the huge biodiversity and the staggering beauty of the former no man's land are attracting many tourists and a growing number of pensioners from Hamburg, Berlin and other big cities.



Rutterberg, Mecklenburg - Vorpommern. Inside the Rutterberg Museum. The village was closed in a double border and residents were in possession of a special permit.



Lower Saxony. A boat on the Elbe takes tourists to visit the most important places of the former border. Today these places are a wealth for biodiversity. In fact, thanks to their isolation, their ecosystem has remained intact.



Strachau, Lower Saxony. Two elderly inhabitants of Strachau photographed exactly where the net was. Their house was close to the fence.



Mecklenburg - Vorpommern. Mother and daughter ride bikes through the deserted streets of Lenzen, a former GDR village.



Hitzacker, Lower Saxony. Document of Zerbin Holger, a retired doctor, when he was 17 years old. Zerbin Holger escaped by swimming in 1969 at the age of 18. He now lives in Hitzacker, on the west bank.



Amt Neuhaus, Lower Saxony. A view of the floodplain of the Elbe river in the area .



Lower Saxony. River fish smoking during a festival in a village, part of the municipality of Amt Neuhaus.



Amt Neuhaus, Lower Saxony. Cattle from the largest farm in the former forbidden area east of Elbe.



Darchau, Lower Saxony. Britta Kowalsky, an agronomist, was a child when, in 1974, the fence along the embankment in front of her house. was built.



Domitz, Mecklenburg - Vorpommern. A picture of Honecker inside an ice cream parlour museum.



Lower Saxony. The Elbe River in the area of Hitzacker town, located on the west side of the former border.



Lower Saxony. A mother walks her son on horseback. There is a great tradition of horse breeding in this area.





Stachau, Lower Saxony. Two girls ride a horse in the floodplain area of the Elbe River. This region was forbidden during the Cold War. Today, the entire area along the bordering stretch of the river is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Herrenof, Lower Saxony. Wilhelm Jahnke, a former truck driver, escaped to the West by swimming in 1973. With the reunification he returned to live in his village, Herrenof, to the East.



Domitz, Mecklenburg - Vorpommern. An ice-cream parlour museum. in the centre of the town, where the typical GDR ice cream is sold.



Domitz, Mecklenburg - Vorpommern. Inga Millon, 31, Lutheran pastor in Dömitz. From her experience as pastor she says: "One third of the citizens here still have the Wall in their head".



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