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Windmills and Walls: A Social Club Harnesses the Winds of Change in Brandenburg

Taylor C. Merkley
John Hawkins

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The Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference showcases some of the best student research from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. The mentored learning program encourages undergraduate students to participate in hands-on and practical research under the direction of a faculty member. Students create these posters as an aide in presenting the results of their research to the public, faculty, and their peers.
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Introduction
The town of Lütte in Brandenburg, Germany survived a fire in 1833, but faced a bigger threat to its survival when the Wall tumbled down. Residents began to move away for better jobs and the older population began to dwindle as the local economy looked bleak. Despite these challenges, the residents have found a way to revitalize their community using what is already available to them. In the former East Germany, where many rural towns face depopulation and isolation, the thriving, modern town of Lütte maintains its distinct agrarian character and outward connections. The local club Verein “Altes Haus” successfully creates a cohesive identity, restores local history, promotes social connections, and utilizes local resources to sustain the town and the club’s activities.

This club provides insight into how the use of history and organized activity can propel a community into the future without leaving an empty space in history and identity.

Methods
The study used ethnographic data gathered from participant observation during my daily life in the community and participation in festivals. I conducted semi-informal one on one interviews with key informants and members of the club. Photography, drawn maps, and a tour of the “Altes Haus” corner complemented this data.

The Verein “Altes Haus”...

“Where the winds of change waft, some build walls and the others windmills.”

Creates Identity
• Agrarian imagery
• Classic characteristics of small rural towns (Dorf)
• Self-sufficiency
• Tie to local history
• Sense of belonging

Restores History
• Maintains strong tie to agrarian roots
• Restoring “Altes Haus” corner
• Teaching traditional crafts
• Historical machinery
• Conveys rustic simplicity

Promotes Social Connections
• Festivals creates ideal environments for socializing
• Festivals maintain outward connections
• “Altes Haus” as a meeting place for residents
• Membership and volunteering

Utilizes Resources
• Labor- volunteers and construction workers
• Landscape- setting for festivals
• Homes- recycling materials and restoration
• History- unique atmosphere for festivals

By Taylor Merkley
Mentored by Dr. John Hawkins
Brigham Young University
Department of Anthropology

Komm, lieber Mai, wir feiern

das Obstblüttenfest in Lütte
am 1. Mai 2009 ab 12 Uhr

Enjoying the festival’s atmosphere

Knocking down “the Wall”

Ully in the smith house

Learning to spin

Ully in the smith house