



Dieter K. Buse. *The Regions of Germany: A Reference Guide to History and Culture.* Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005. xix + 290 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-32400-0.



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Regions and Identity

This book was clearly a labor of love for accomplished German historian Dieter Buse. Academically active for the last forty years, the author has produced a basic reference work covering the Federal Republic's current *Länder* that seeks to show the reader how a focus on regions enables us to understand the reconstruction of German identity after WWII. Buse argues that after the catastrophe of the Second World War, most Germans rehabilitated themselves from the local level outward. While the focus on *Heimat* is not new, the book is well organized, factually accurate, and easily accessible to a variety of audiences, from academics to those planning a trip to central Europe.

The text is divided in sixteen chapters, or one for each federal state. They cover the same eleven major themes, making comparison simple. Buse shows us that while some political and cultural entities, such as Bavaria and Hamburg, emerged after the war largely intact, others, such as Lower Saxony and Hesse, developed out of diverse jurisdictions and had to mold new regional identities. He reminds us that while today it seems normal to look at Baden-Württemberg as a unit, these territories

represent areas with distinct cultural traditions. While this interpretation does not address work by scholars such as Robert Moeller (who focused on the role of the national government, film, and exile organizations) or Maria Häflich (on the consumer encounter with Americans after 1950) in rebuilding German national identity, it clearly engages an important component of the equation. The result was a new national identity in which Germans were democratic citizens committed to social justice and the global economy but determined to preserve regional diversity. Buse's intimate knowledge, built up over a professional lifetime, allows him to use charming examples such as traditional dress as a vehicle to spot continuing difference. Furthermore, the author uses recipes as a remarkably effective window into regional identity.[1] I still (positively) associate Württemberg with *Spätzle* and *Maultaschen* from my time there as an undergraduate in 1995. He includes particularly interesting overviews of the political history of eastern *Länder* such as Saxony and Thuringia, which have been reinvented numerous times since the 1750s. The summaries of voting patterns across Germany are also helpful. Finally, Buse's dry, ironic humor comes out in several great

one-liners about the relative speed with which Germans from different regions addressed the Nazis and the Holocaust.

The work ends with a bibliography that lists some printed and on-line sources about regions in the Federal Republic. Most of the written texts are in German but the official web sites of the *Länder* have English language sections. Anyone wishing to see how Germans are marketing themselves in an age of intense globalization will find these sites informative.

Note

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[1]. The reviewer confesses that he followed the advice of the publisher to “apply judgment and experience when preparing recipes, especially ... working with young people” on a number of these that contained creatures of the sea. At the urging of my toddler and wife I stayed away from the Hamburg eel soup. However, Buse’s recipe for Black Forest cake even won the approval of my two-year-old. While it is wrong to call her discerning in palate, she certainly knows what she likes. I have been trying various recipes to get close to the German original for years with no luck; this one is close.