

## 9 Urban myth

### The symbolic sizing of Weimar, Germany

Frank Eckardt

Weimar is a small city with a big reputation. Situated in the state of Thuringia, Weimar has remained a small city compared even with its neighbouring cities – Erfurt and Jena. Nevertheless, Weimar has become the only East German city which has been able to keep its number of inhabitants stable while other former cities of the Socialist Republic lost 20 per cent or more residents after the German reunification. Weimar is an example of a small city that has used its ‘cultural capital’ to enable its integration into national and European urban structures. This cultural redevelopment strategy, however, has not been introduced in a way that is comparable to flagship developments and is only to a limited extent due to ‘festivalization policies’.

The significance of Weimar in German history has been assured by its assumed *genius loci* throughout the last two centuries. The urban development of Weimar has to be understood with acknowledgment of the role of myth (Theile 2000). In urban theory, the role of myth has often been discussed with regard to urban tourism and the consumption of places (Urry 1995: 129–162). The strength of the myth, however, goes beyond the tourism sector and is part of a wider cultural economy of Weimar. In this chapter, the influence of the myths linked to the city of Weimar will be analysed as the key factor for a small city in eastern Germany facing double transition – into the reunified German Republic and into the globalizing world.

Myth-driven urban development is understood as a predominately modern phenomenon wherein rationality itself becomes a myth. As Zygmunt Bauman (2004) shows, modernity started from the assumption that the enlightened spheres of culture and politics are separate from each other, while the creation of myth overshadows the modern split between both aspects of society (Bauman 2004). Mystification, therefore, leads to a specific form of urban development wherein the ambivalent relationships between culture and power are constantly at stake and perceived as being balanced. In Weimar, the process of societal differentiation did not take place and, instead, the myth of enlightened power was produced. The people of Weimar also do not differentiate between the ‘centre’ and other parts. Weimar has been too small to develop a modern geography of differentiated spaces. Weimar has been dominated by its function as the court of the Duke and has hosted neither a bourgeoisie nor a working class, which are both regarded as having imposed particular social and spatial patterns on the modern form of urban life (see Häußermann and Siebel 1987).

## PRODUCTION OF MYTH

The discrepancy between the number of inhabitants and the symbolic importance of Weimar can be analysed using a myth model of urban development based on a certain atmosphere – where social and personal relations are dependent on easy encounters enabled by limited opportunities to meet. For example, Weimar is ranked low in the urban hierarchy in terms of economic wealth and industrial production. However, if one were to make a ranking of symbolic places in Germany, the city might be placed after Berlin as the second most mentioned cultural city. Different surveys support the idea that Weimar be placed high at the top in a symbolic urban hierarchy and Weimar has a high concentration of many places of significance for German culture.

The face-to-face communication between intellectuals is the root of the Weimar myth. The most important part of all visits to Weimar has always been the search for a personal nearness to buildings and places which have symbolized the intellectual spirit of the place. When Johann Wolfgang von Goethe left his hometown of Frankfurt in 1775, he described his motives in letters to his mother. At that time, Frankfurt was seen by the young poet as a 'dirty nest' where the industrial revolution had started to take root. The city was dominated by a bourgeoisie with a 'hands-on' approach leaving little space for romantic feelings. Goethe was attracted by Weimar as he could then work with the young Duke Carl August whose mother had started to build up an intellectual milieu in the small Thuringian town. Originally from Russia, Anna Amalia later initiated the famous library with a rococo-style reading room and chose enlightened teachers for her son. When Goethe fled the upcoming development of a German bourgeoisie in Frankfurt to be part of a pre-modern form of government, his biographer Karl Otto Conrady (Conrady 1994: 251) concluded 'his willingness to contribute to the freedom of the people has been lesser than his belief in the possibilities of patriarchal power'. The widespread picture of a clichéd intellectual, who spent most of his time writing and thinking, is even less tenable. It is convincingly reported that the German genius appreciated Weimar because of its lack of industry and trade, the opportunity for a closeness to nature, the vineyards and the opportunities to meet the opposite sex (Merseburger 1999: 64–110).

However, even though Goethe might have had the intention to reform the dukedom Saxony-Weimar, he should not be regarded as one of the fathers of German democracy. For example, his attitude to human rights points strikingly to his anti-democratic personality. Nevertheless, even during Goethe's lifetime, he and Weimar were already regarded as a small island of liberty in a largely backward Germany (Wilson 2000). All the same, Goethe, being a writer and politically active in Weimar, created an image of the city that attracted the attention of a wider public in Germany. This was the outcome of a promotion generated by the growing distribution of German literature and the installation of a theatre culture. Friedrich Schiller, fleeing to Weimar from political persecution in the south-east of Germany, probably embodied the myth of the liberal Weimar, the German idealism *pars pro toto*, more than Goethe (Safranski 2004). However, in his later

years, Goethe rejected romantic anti-modern movements and entered his 'classical period' with a rationalist attitude. In this period, he reflected on many issues that demonstrated his open-mindedness and modern approach to reflections on natural science, Eastern philosophy or the 'nature of light' (Mandelkow 2001). Goethe's productive years until his death in 1832 are more or less the substance of the mystification of Weimar.

While it is true that many intellectuals visited Weimar during the classical period, the city missed major urban developments that had taken place in other German cities such as the shift to industrial production, massive migration from the countryside to the cities and the political awakening on the eve of the 1848 revolution. In contrast to its neighbouring city, Jena, where Goethe had already ordered his soldiers to fire on politically motivated students on strike, Weimar was calm and devoted to the residence of the ruling Duke. With liberalism based on the freedom of the arts, the royal court of Weimar attracted the composer Franz Liszt to be 'director of music for extraordinary services'. Under his influence, Weimar experienced the so-called 'Silver Period' in which the famous pianist reformed the Weimar theatre and performed, for example, the work of Richard Wagner that was neglected or even forbidden in other parts of Germany during the period of political and cultural restoration (Bahr 2001).

After the death of Liszt in 1886, a 'Third Weimar' emerged. In 1900, the sister of the mentally ill philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, bought a villa in Weimar and started to begin misusing her brother's fame. Although Nietzsche remained in Weimar only for a short time, she was capable of linking these two places in the cultural perception of the educated classes of Germany. Falsifying many manuscripts, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche published the Weimar-based Nietzsche archives with an anti-Semitic and nationalist fervour (Riedel 2000). Weimar was no longer synonymous with liberal artistic movements and had, by then, already become a place of rivalling interpretations of the city's cultural heritage.

While conservative, nationalist and reactionary artists and writers claimed Weimar as a place of the 'real German', the reformist and modern protagonists had a difficult standing against it. When the Belgian architect, Henry van de Velde, and Harry Graf Kessler came to Weimar, the local authorities and the general public demonstratively showed their hostility against the 'New Style' and Walter Gropius faced strong resistance from the conservative forces in Weimar when he was nominated as director of the Bauhaus School in 1919. For a short period, Weimar attracted the European arts avant-garde of modernity. Names like Feininger, Kandinsky, Klee, Mucbe or Itten assured the international attention of the Bauhaus and its worldwide reputation in later years. In 1925, however, Walter Gropius abolished the Bauhaus in Weimar to avoid a slow death because of the decision of the regional parliament to cancel all payments and funding (Hüter 1982).

## MYTHS AND THE ANTI-MODERN CITY

The number of inhabitants and the size of Weimar remained small in comparison with the neighbouring city of Erfurt. The forced industrialization of Erfurt during

the periods of Prussian rule and the German Democratic Republic kept alive the duality of an 'industrialized' Erfurt and a 'cultural' Weimar. Both cities and the whole region of Thuringia experienced severe poverty until the twentieth century. Nonetheless, Weimar's culturally symbolic position in the urban hierarchy of Germany remained. The expulsion of the Bauhaus from Weimar, however, showed that it had become a place where antagonistic political discourses fought to decide the way in which the cultural heritage of the city was to be integrated in the ongoing processes of modernization in German society. In the 1920s, the first democratic republic hosted its parliament in the national theatre of Weimar. In his inaugural speech, the social-democratic president, Friedrich Ebert, invoked the *genius loci* and the democratic tradition inherent in the 'city of Goethe and Schiller'. Only a few years later, the hostile atmosphere of Thuringia and Weimar and the impracticality of the location led to the relocation of the parliament to Berlin. During the National-Socialist times, Weimar came to be one of Hitler's favourite cities, which he visited 19 times (Mauersberger 1999). Abusing the heritage of Nietzsche and Goethe, persecuting political enemies and creating a culture of terror, the most visible wound of the Nazi dictatorship remains the concentration camp of Buchenwald on the hills surrounding Weimar where, from 1937 to 1945, Jews, 'asocial elements' and political prisoners suffered and where 56,000 prisoners were killed.

The people of Weimar, however, had denied knowledge of the character of the camp, when forced to visit Buchenwald by the American soldiers. As evidence shows, the city and the concentration camps were linked intensively, so that it has to be considered a part of the ambivalent history of Weimar (Schley 1999). Weimar was meant to work as a model for the reshaping of German cities. With the building of the oversized 'Gauforum' (a Nazi administrative institution) in the middle of the city, the Nazi architecture was intended to cut into the historically grown urban mosaic. The Nazis wanted to tidy up the chaotic street structure by implementing a dominating orientation towards their buildings in the city (Loos 2000). During the GDR period, the city, its history and especially Buchenwald were interpreted as legitimation for the socialist regime (Overesch 1995).

### **SOCIALIST IMPLEMENTATION OF MODERNITY**

As socialist rules restricted freedom of movement, the number of inhabitants remained stable during the GDR period. To avoid the possibility of Weimar becoming a sort of counter-capital city, it was Erfurt which gained the status of 'Bezirkshauptstadt' (regional capital city) and hosted regional governmental institutions. Nonetheless, Weimar's experience of the socialist period was similar to that of other East German cities. Besides neglect for the built environment, the presence of the Russian army on the hills on the opposite side of Buchenwald had a particular influence on the life of the Weimar population. However, as part of GDR society, Weimar experienced a significant transformation during the 45 years of the socialist regime. This meant, in the first place, that Weimar was integrated into an industrial regional complex which had been developed previously only

in the neighbouring cities of Erfurt and Jena. Nevertheless, Weimar kept up and maintained its position as a city of national cultural importance and had only partial success in catching up with the overall industrialization of East Germany. However, for most of its inhabitants, the city followed a 'principally different framework of a socialist city' (Häußermann 1996: 7) wherein from 1972 private ownership of land was nearly totally abandoned. Architects and urban planners were powerless, obeying the prerogatives of the higher echelons in the GDR planning system. This became especially visible in Weimar where the University of Architecture and Civil Engineering (HAB) rejected the heritage of the Bauhaus which was seen as bourgeois by the socialist regime (Schätzke 1991).

According to the socialist ideal of a city of workers and a homogenized social society, everyday life in Weimar was organized by integration into the process of production (Niethammer 1990). Especially in the Honecker era, housing politics became the major field of commodification of the East German population. A serious lack of housing units had generated substantial criticism of the entire political and societal system and was then, in 1971, addressed as the primary social objective for the following decades. This led to the building of prefabricated high-rise housing estates which were placed only on the outskirts of Weimar (for example, in Weimar-West and Schöndorf). In the GDR period, these new houses were commonly regarded as being modern because of their water, gas and electrical facilities. Following the distribution policies of GDR companies, families with children were given priority during the allotment of these dwellings. Meanwhile, the older city areas between the railway station and the area of 'classical Weimar' together with the north-east went into decay and were left either to 'asocial elements' who were not members of company associations or to the elderly (see also Hinrichs 1992). Thus, like other German cities, Weimar exhibited a low segregation on the basis of income and social status but was clearly divided by age (Hannemann 1996).

The socialist regime in general respected the significance of the inner city of Weimar and used it as an attraction for the modest foreign tourists that already pilgrimed to it in that period. However, the inner city suffered severe underinvestment because the total economy was not able to fulfil the basic consumption needs of the East German population.

Although Weimar was lucky that the socialists also respected the historical Christian monuments in the city, especially the churches, and did not blow them up as in other East German cities, the principle had to be realized that socialist rule must visibly express the victory of the working class.

### **RETURN OF THE MYTH**

Changes occurring following German reunification led to a wide range of visible expressions in urban life. The transformation from a 'gray into a colourful city' (Bertels 1995) was accompanied with political transition characterized by the introduction of political autonomy for the city and the restriction of urban planning competences which recognized fundamental rights of land ownership

(Häußermann 1996). In 1992, the urban sociologists Christiane Weiske and Uta Schäfer, affiliated to the HAB Weimar, conducted interviews with inhabitants of the city (Weiske and Schäfer 1992). According to their findings, 74 per cent of the persons interviewed found that Weimar had an 'urban character' while only 13 per cent saw the place as a village and seven per cent stated that the city had to be regarded as a 'capital or metropolis'. Interestingly, only two per cent of the interviewees compared the city to a museum. In this document of early studies about the transformation of Weimar, the authors also applied qualitative studies with regard to a wider perspective of urban life in the city. While doing so, the perspectives of the researchers reflected the return of traditional myths about Weimar. In the introduction to the research report, the authors conclude: 'The myth of Weimar. It exists and it still lives. It is the myth of enlightenment'. In the body of their argument, the 'reality' of the myth is said to be in harmony with both the conscience of the population of Weimar and the urban form. The table company/salon of Anna Amalia, the company of friends led by Liszt, the Bauhaus Weimar – all these are examples of a kind of culture, where communication is the aim and the centre of formal and informal relationships between equal citizens. Social hierarchies have been relaxed and social dynamics and mobility have been enabled. Here, the real nodes between everyday culture and the haute culture of the Weimar tradition can be found. The sociologists are but one of the intellectual elites of the post-reunification situation where 'Weimar' has been idealized.

#### FROM MYTH TO EVENTS

After the German reunification, Weimar's population began to fall. The regional government of Thuringia reacted with a policy which intended that small communities at the edge of Weimar be integrated into the administrative borders of the city. This intervention prevented suburbanization, which could result in a loss of inhabitants from the core city and which occurred to a large extent as settling outside on the green meadows was previously forbidden. In particular, the integration of Gaberndorf, an old agrarian village which quadrupled its number of inhabitants in five years as a consequence of Weimar's suburbanization, kept the total number of inhabitants steady. With the shifting of administrative boundaries in 1999, the size of Weimar was changed for the first time since the community border reforms of the Weimar Republic, when new classifications of city limitations were introduced. The question of which city should be the capital of Thuringia was discussed once more after the collapse of the GDR system. A clear decision in favour of Erfurt was taken only weeks after the declaration of the regional constitution. Weimar was seen as being enriched already with its cultural heritage. Moreover, the city was smaller in comparison with other Thuringian candidates. Erfurt, Gera, Eisenach, Jena and Gotha had more inhabitants and a larger geographical scale but were observed to be threatened more by the processes of shrinkage, suburbanization, de-industrialization and social decline than Weimar. Since the second largest city of Thuringia, Gera, had neither been given any governmental office nor a university, Weimar was in a difficult position to

protest against the decision to make Erfurt the regional capital. In the regional planning documents, Weimar was accorded the same status as the other forementioned larger cities. By that time, the government argued that Weimar should get lower governmental support because of its smallness and that the cultural institutions such as the university and the theatre should merge with those in Erfurt. The symbolic size of Weimar helped to avoid the loss of these institutions at that point as they could claim to be of national significance.

The re-establishment of Weimar's symbolic size had been generated amidst the turbulence of the transformation of all parts of its life. When the American urban planner, Peter Marcuse, first came as visiting professor at the Weimar 'University of Architecture' in 1990, he was not able to get a taxi from the railway station to his apartment (Marcuse 1990). The physical infrastructure and other obstacles to everyday life in those days of transition hindered the responsible and influential actors in their development of a long-term vision or strategy for urban development. As for the political debates regarding the future development of Weimar at that time, the urban sociologist Johannes Böttner titled his book *What Now, Little City?* which perfectly expresses the lack of direction in public debates of the early 1990s (Böttner 1996). Without giving suggestions, Böttner reflected the confusion and varying ideas about possible strategies. In 1993, the initial enthusiasm for German reunification had waned and Weimar enthusiastically embraced the idea of applying for the status of Cultural Capital of Europe for the year 1999. Although the suggestion was made by political actors from the East, the West German Klaus Büttner, mayor of Weimar since August 1990, was the one who embodied the idea the most. In 1993, the European Commission unanimously voted for Weimar to be Cultural Capital of Europe for the year 1999. With this award, the European Union wants to focus on certain cities which contribute particularly to European culture. The title does not carry any financial support from the European Commission, but it has been regarded by political actors as supportive of urban development projects and the general promotion of the city. The application for 'Weimar 99' resulted from a strategy to reach these objectives through a general approach to the concept of 'event organization' (Schulz 2003). The introduction of the 'Kunstfest' (Arts festival) way back in 1990 was the first major attempt to make use of the positive connotations of Weimar for the development of the city. Until the start of the 'event year', Weimar was seriously overloaded with preparatory tasks and related costs. From 1996 onwards, the Kunstfest was planned as an integral part of the framework for Weimar 99.

In 1994, the city had nearly given up further investment in the upcoming mega-event. Because the city's budget was not balanced, the regional government withdrew Weimar's right to prepare its next financial framework. This extraordinary measure was guided by the installation of an external auditor. In the background of this financial crisis, voices from the broader public claimed that the city should refuse the title. As a consequence, the 'imported' West German mayor was replaced during local elections in July 1994 by the former GDR second mayor of Weimar, Volkhardt Germer, who has been in power since then (Fascher 1996). In 1995, further dedication to Weimar 99 was only safeguarded by external

intervention from the Thuringian Government when the West German Bernhard Vogel from the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) took control. Vogel was a strong supporter of Weimar 99 and finalized the much debated structure for organizing the event. With the founding of Weimar 1999 Kulturstadt Europa GmbH in 1995, the Vogel government institutionalized its predominance and influence on the realization of the Cultural Capital Year. The federal state and the city were only given a minor stake in this organization. Nevertheless, the deadlock on the precise planning of the upcoming event was not broken and major controversies were still to come. This was especially true with regard to one key person, the cultural director for Weimar 99. In 1996, the hitherto President of the Classical Weimar Foundation, Bernd Kauffmann, was appointed to the seat and his new position was vested with far-reaching competences (Hammerthaler 1998). His programme was ambitious and criticized for being restricted to high culture and the national intellectual elites. The local population felt widely excluded from the upcoming events and, in the polls, the majority of the inhabitants did not support Weimar 99. The conflict between the population of Weimar and Kauffmann's plans peaked when he suggested dedicating a central square (the Rollplatz), which is still used as one of the scarce parking places, to an art exhibition by the French artist, Daniel Buren. A broad protest by the population, supported by the local media and food outlets, put sufficient pressure on the decision makers to restrain him from this plan (Frank 2003).

Coinciding with the two-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of Goethe, Weimar 99 had a programme which focused merely on high culture and the classical German arts. Although claiming to be European-oriented, foreign contributors played a minor role. However, the population soon started to like the cultural events and there seemed to be a substantial switch in public opinion. Even the rather unpopular exhibitions on 'Rise and Fall of Modernity' and 'Official and Unofficial - Arts in the GDR' could not upset the improving relationship between the local audience and external attention to this small city. In particular, the question of how to deal with the heritage of Buchenwald was followed with much interest by external observers. The sensitivity of the organizers and particularly of Bernd Kauffmann led to an approach where the concentration camp was represented in an appropriate way (Roth 2003).

Although Weimar 99 was viewed as a convincing success, the realization of the event year fostered the hypothesis of 'occupation or colonialization' of the East by the West. The famous playwright, Ralf Hochhuth, used this issue in his work *Wessis in Weimar* which found a wider audience within the East and with critical intellectuals in the West. The fictive play claims to reflect the reality that East German elites in the symbolic city of Weimar are replaced by incapable Westerners. In reality, the institutions in Weimar have been only temporarily directed by a few Westerners and some, such as Bernd Kauffmann, have left the city because of opposition.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF MYTH

The mapping of Weimar is dominated by the attractions of the city which are upheld by the external world. This is most remarkable with the cultural heritage of Classical Weimar, which is under the auspices of the Classical Weimar Foundation where the Federal State contributes the majority of the annual budget. In German federalism, this interference with local and regional cultural affairs is an extraordinary exception and only legitimized by the acknowledged special significance of Weimar for national culture. But the support from the German government could only have been fostered by the national consciousness of the myths and their tracing back to the sacred places of the 'real Germany'.

While seven million visitors came to the small city of 60,000 inhabitants in the period of the Weimar 99 events, the number of tourists in Weimar reached an average of around four million in the following years. With this number, however, the level of tourism has been put on a higher level than it was before. In a survey of 252 representatives from the tourism sector, the vast majority stated they had gained from the European entitlement (Eckardt 2005). In conclusion, Weimar has found its place in the (foremost national) imagination of German culture and is a 'must' for visits by school classes. The only remaining question is the view of the actors that tourism has not created separated places for the local population and the visitors. One of the authentic aspects of Weimar is the convulsive and complex structure of its small alleyways where inhabitants live and numerous restaurants and cafés are situated. The inner city is certainly used by both groups, but the lines of communication for tourists in the city are limited and qualitative studies (Eckardt and Karwinska 2006) on the places they frequent indicate that there is a particular geography for tourists in the city: there is a special central parking area for tourist buses in the city from which an axis leads to Goethe Square. Another route passes from the railway station to the inner city alongside which are situated cafés, museums, restaurants and youth hostels. Within the inner ring of Weimar, cafés and restaurants signify, through their design and gastronomical ranger, a certain preference for either tourists or locals. Major tourist cafés at the Frauenplan (near Goethe's former residence) are predominated by tourists and locals use them only selectively. This becomes most obvious when only a few visitors are present in the city in winter. On the other hand, gastronomic places dominated by locals can be clearly defined. At Theatre Square, one bakery frequented by both groups lies opposite to another where only East Germans spend their time. 'The Westerners do not seem to like the rather narrow entrance and our restricted offer of sweets', is how the owner explained the situation (interview with author 25 March 2004).

The mythological geography of Weimar is also produced by another important group of temporary inhabitants in the city: students and academics from the Bauhaus-University Weimar, which is the second largest employer in the city. When the European Summer School was started in 1997, international students were subject to a mass attack by young neo-Nazis hanging around in the inner city. Only the courageous engagement of the university president was able to mobilize the wider public for the security of foreign students. When national newspapers

started to report how these students had to be safeguarded by the police to and from the university, a consensus was reached that the city needed a *cordon sanitaire* where the neo-Nazis would not linger. Even during Weimar 99, artists were attacked and pieces of public art were destroyed by these groups. Nevertheless, the neo-Nazi attacks are widely rejected and a broad union of activists from all parties organizes protests against the manifestations of neo-Nazis who often want to demonstrate at Buchenwald (Eckardt 2003: 158–168).

In subsequent years, the influence of students on the city's life has become even more obvious (Morales 2005). Students of architecture and music are attracted to the city as followers of the Bauhaus and Liszt myths. Approximately 5400 students from both the Bauhaus-University and the Liszt School of Music account for nearly ten per cent of the population derived from West Germany and these young people contribute to all parts of urban life. Most of them have not grown up in the city and are in need of economical accommodation. As the students have only limited financial resources, the phenomenon of shared flats (WG) has led to an incumbent upgrading of many houses that had poor facilities. In particular, the unrenovated houses along the 'Trierer Ring' surrounding the inner city of Weimar offer reasonable housing for students. Regarding the labour market, it is obvious to see how the students contribute to the cultural economy with their low wages and flexible working hours. Many tourist cafés and restaurants depend on their client-friendly attitude and prefer students to unemployed locals. Last but not least, students support many cultural events which would not survive if based only on local support.

As regards the principle of a sacred place, Weimar speaks of the separation of the 'holy' from the profane (see Eade and Sellnow 2000): Weimar is a profane place with broken-down houses beyond the inner city. Weimar-West attracts the concerned attention of political decision makers as the GDR high-rise estates in these areas show a higher concentration of those receiving social benefits and immigrants. However, the differences compared with the rest of the city are only relative. The separation from the rest of the city is generated more by the relative geographical distance (Pippi 2004). The situation in Weimar and other parts of the city reflects the mobility patterns of the inhabitants. While Weimar has been socially homogeneous during the GDR period (Rasche 1992), the income differences are now leading to the establishment of a suburban tract of the better-off in the surrounding region. Another myth, the dream of living in the untouched green, has left the poorer population behind in certain areas, and creates disturbances in the small villages receiving the new population. In some cases, the incoming suburbanites have increased the number of inhabitants in these small places from 500 to 4500. Empirical research, however, has shown that conflicts between insiders and outsiders have not arisen and that the suburban population remains intensively linked with Weimar in terms of work, transport, social infrastructure, consumption and culture (Eckardt 2005: 150–233). In accordance with the requirements of the State government, Weimar reacted to this development with their incorporation into its territory. Since then, Weimar has been the only East German city where the population has remained stable.

## CONCLUSION

Weimar is an example of how small cities can regain significance in a national culture and even beyond for the external visitor and for inhabitants. With regard to its development throughout the different political systems, however, only within a society with freedom of movement and where culture exchanges symbolic values into material ones, does Weimar place itself into a situation wherein symbolic and real size (in terms of inhabitants) are related to each other in a direct way. When the Dutch writer, Cees Noteboom, visited Weimar as one of the first individual tourists after the destruction of the Berlin Wall, he asked himself: 'Why am I here in Weimar? To immerse myself in Goethe, of course'. He took a hotel room at the Frauenplan where the German poet lived and studied essays by Ortega y Gasset about Goethe and Kant. Noteboom pursues his interest in Weimar because, to him, Goethe seems still omnipresent in the German culture. During his stay in Weimar, Noteboom noted two interesting observations: first, he saw two young girls reading poems at the graves of Goethe and Schiller with 'such an emphasis that he was afraid the dead would come crawling out of their final rest'. Second, he went to Theatre Square where a performance by the citizens of Weimar took place and came to the conclusion: 'Goethe and Schiller are not dead. While the exodus out of East Germany takes frightening shapes, the people from Weimar meet their poets here, holding a board saying "We are staying here"' (Noteboom 1991: 283–291).

Like Noteboom, many visitors followed the fame associated with the few public spaces and streets between Goethe's house and the Bauhaus building. The small city of Weimar has remained a nucleus in a shrinking urban landscape which has suffered the loss of more than 1.5 million inhabitants. After 1989, other East German cities, such as the neighbouring Erfurt, lost up to one-quarter of its inhabitants because of demographic change, suburbanization and westward migration. While all East German cities are looking to cope with their shrinkage, Weimar benefits from the direct and indirect effects of the myth economy. The roots of the sacralization of Weimar lie at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the intellectual life in Germany developed its classical form. Since then, Weimar has developed a symbolic value for German identity. Untouched by the processes of industrialization and the challenges of the bourgeoisie, Weimar remained a niche city.

The myth transformation of the city became increasingly anti-modern and, in this sense, Weimar reflects, better than any other German city, the overall development of German society with its crucial antagonism between cultural and economic modernity (Merseburger 1999: 405). The forced modernization in the GDR period seems to have had only a limited effect on the principal dualism between the sacralized heroism of the classical period and the profane everyday life. This dichotomy doubled after German reunification, when the transformation of the city centre was driven and pushed by external factors. With the realization of the European Cultural Capital Year in 1999, these conflicts became visible but, to some extent, were made negotiable. While Weimar suffers from a high unemployment rate like every East German city, many other factors of decline, such as the

shrinking population and a lack of urban culture have been avoided by opening up the city to tourists, artists, students and academics. Therefore, it seems that for the first time in the history of Weimar, German haute culture and its representatives have been accepted by the local population. Interactions between East and West Germans have found a home in Weimar which is still an exceptional occurrence in reunified Germany.