

## DEMOGRAPHIA



### **LEIPZIG-HALLE: NEARLY RECOVERED FROM SOCIALISM Halle-Neustadt: Decrepit Commuter Rail Station Preserves Socialist Past**

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan Area Population (Leipzig-Halle)	1,000,000	
Urban Area Population (Leipzig)*	570,000	Allentown, Zaragoza, Hamilton, Brasilia
Urban Land Area: Square Miles	110	Canberra, Brasilia,
Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers	285	Guangzhou, Victoria, Helsinki
Population per Square Mile	5,200	New York, Montreal, Brasilia,
Population per Square Kilometer	2,000	Wellington, Brussels
*Continuously built up area		

5 June 2005

Like a patient recovering from cancer, Leipzig and Halle are recovering from socialism. The recovery is most successful in the case of Leipzig, which is clearly becoming very prosperous.

Leipzig is the core of a metropolitan region that includes Halle, less than 20 miles away. The high quality autobahn system, substantially improved since Germany's reunification, makes commuting between the two areas as simple as commuting between Allentown and Bethlehem (Pennsylvania).

Of course, the best evidence is to be found on the urban fringe, which like in trees, is where growth naturally occurs. And it has occurred spectacularly in Leipzig and also considerably in Halle.

In the northwest corner of the Leipzig urban area is the new international airport complex. It is placed on the Halle side of the urban area, which makes it conveniently accessible from both urban areas. This is a world class facility and architects were able to accomplish the somewhat infrequent feat of making it look attractive (airports are like high-rise parking lots --- utility often defines taste out of the economic equation). A strong, new commercial area is nearby, with a Porsche assembly plant and many other businesses. The airport is well served by the north-south Munich to Berlin autobahn (A-9), and the east-west Magdeberg to Dresden autobahn, skirting the northern part of the Leipzig urban area and the eastern side of the Halle urban area.

A large enclosed shopping mall, Paunsdorf Center, is located a couple of miles to the east of downtown Leipzig. This is a very large facility with 120 stores. There are 7,300 parking spaces, many of which are in multi-story garages on each side (illustration #2). It contains an array of

stores similar to would be expected in an American enclosed shopping center, with the addition of a large grocery store.

The downtowns of the two urban areas are very different. Leipzig appears very prosperous, with international offices, international hotels, major retailers and locally owned businesses that would make Marx, Lenin and Walter Ulbrecht turn over in their graves (or tomb in the case of Lenin). Halle does not look nearly so prosperous, but that may simply be the result of being the “second city” of a two city metropolitan area. The Leipzig Central Railway station is one of the largest in Europe. Since the liberation, much of this monumental structure has been converted into a shopping mall, with 140 stores. In the train shed itself, the high-speed ICE trains can be observed, as well as suburban rail services that have been competitively tendered (competitively contracted or privatized) in the years since liberation.

Large retail establishments are to be found on the fringe of both urban areas. These include the “do-it-yourself” (DIY or Home Depot type) stores as well as hypermarkets as impressive as in France. Unlike West Germany, the liberated East has embraced the hypermarket and good examples are to be found throughout.

There are single family dwelling middle income residential areas that are as attractive as will be found anywhere. These will be found in the city of Leipzig itself and in the suburban areas that surround both Leipzig and Halle.

### **Halle-Neustadt**

A more detailed analysis of Halle-Neustadt by Randal O’Toole of the Thoreau Institute will be found at <http://ti.org/vaupdate53.html>.

But no visit to Leipzig-Halle would be complete without a side trip to Halle Neustadt (Halle New City). Here there are vestiges of the socialist dystopia that is being so quickly replaced by dynamism and entrepreneurship as is found in Leipzig.

Halle Neustadt was established as a new town in the 1960s by the East German socialist government. It was built immediately to the west of the historic city of Halle and has been incorporated into the city. Halle Neustadt has been praised for being “sustainable,” as a result of its urban planning, which includes high density living, a tram line serving the central corridor and the regional suburban rail system (S-Bahn).

The development itself extends east to west for approximately 2.5 miles and is approximately one-kilometer wide. Much of the housing is located within the international mass transit standard of 400 meters (1/4 mile) from a station on the core axis. Virtually all housing is high rise, with some towers reaching 11 floors. Medium rise buildings tend to have six floors, *without* elevators.

But Halle Neustadt falls short of the apparent Nirvana sought by the planners. The failure to address a crucial factor has undermined the very sustainability of Halle Neustadt. The problem is that people don’t like it. Since East Germany was liberated, residents of this paradise have been moving out in droves. There are a number of empty buildings, including high rise buildings, and even some that have been gutted. The city of Halle itself has lost a quarter of its population in barely 15 years --- and it appears that most of the exodus has come from Halle Neustadt. Residents have taken the opportunity to move to the city itself or to the suburban communities

that ring Halle. In these suburbs, people can live the life so cherished by Western European, American and Japanese citizens in single-family or two-family houses.

And for good reason. There is much that is decrepit about Halle Neustadt. The housing was crowded and the transport slow.

### **S-Bahn Station: Shame of Halle-Neustadt**

Exhibit One is the S-Bahn station in the core (illustrations 16 through 21). Even today, more than 15 years since liberation, the government owned Deutsch Bahn (DB) commuter rail station is an affront to public decency. Its condition appears to demonstrate a contempt for customers that could only be justified by historical preservation --- an interest in keeping alive a part of the failed economic system that has been so mercifully terminated.

The condition of the station is as bad as would be expected in a poor third world country --- and while East Germany might have been poor 15 years ago, it is no longer. The Halle Neustadt station is dirty, and covered with graffiti to an extent even greater than in most of Western Europe. But this may be the only place in Germany or the high income world where a mass transit station has many windows missing and is in such need of maintenance.

The dim train platform underneath is long enough for perhaps a 20 car train, at least 16 more than necessary. The excessive length is could be dictated by having station entrances both on the north and south sides of the former communist shopping center. It is also possible that much longer trains are (or were) sometimes operated.

If there were an international award for the most poorly maintained, most demeaning and contemptuous mass transport station, it would be a close call between the main Halle Neustadt station entrance to the north of the center and the somewhat smaller offense to the south. Suffice it to say that it is shocking to have encountered such a thing in a nation that so prides itself (rightfully so) for its tidiness and cleanliness.

### **Progress**

But not everything in Halle Neustadt looks as bad as the abandoned socialist high rises, nor is as repulsive as the S-Bahn station. Some residential buildings are being redeveloped by the private sector. There is what appears to be a privately developed shopping center in the core, with a multi-story parking garage and plenty of business. Parking lots are now provided adjacent to the remaining occupied apartment buildings. In the beginning, garages were provided on the eastern fringe of the development for those few privileged enough to have cars. These can still be seen adjacent to the more recent auto dealership mall that has been added in the area.

## URBAN TOURS BY RENTAL CAR: DESCRIPTION

[www.rentalcartours.net](http://www.rentalcartours.net)

*Urban Tours by Rental Car* offers perspectives on urban development obtained by automobile tours through urban areas. Rental cars are not the favored method for visiting cities, especially those outside one's own country. Instead, tourists and urban planners favor packaged tours or local public transport systems. Both are splendid ways for seeing the city as it used to be --- the very reason for most tourist visits. The historical core areas contain monuments, prime government and religious edifices and quaint neighborhoods that are often centuries old. This is particularly important to tourists from the newer urban areas of the American, Canadian or Australian West, where history extends not far before World War II. It is further understandable that few tourists travel thousands of miles to see the newer suburban areas that look very much like home. But most tourists do not profess to be students of the urban area.

For the urban planner interested in understanding the whole urban area, it is not enough to study the core alone, regardless of its architectural attractiveness, romanticism, history or affirmation of an individually preferred life style. No one, regardless of the depth of their education can develop reliable conceptions from an unrepresentative sample, and urban cores are the very essence of unrepresentative samples. Both public transport and packaged tours miss the larger part --- the expanse of sprawling residential and business development that rings virtually all major urban areas. They may be of little interest to many urban planners, but they should be.

Stripping away regional architectural facades, one might as well be in the suburbs of Phoenix, Portland, Perth or Paris. Here, the automobile is king, because no public transport system has been developed that can effectively serve destinations outside the core (at least at a price any society can afford). While public transport market shares are higher in European suburban areas than in the New World, much of the difference is attributable to lower incomes and less automobile access. Indeed, public transport's principal weakness, lack of automobile competitiveness, is itself a contributing factor to the rising motorization occurring from the suburbs of Copenhagen and Nagoya to the suburbs of Lagos and Mumbai. To oversimplify this phenomenon as being a "love affair with the automobile" is the equivalent of saying that Singaporeans or Brazilians have a love affair with air conditioning. Human beings prefer comfort to discomfort and they prefer free time to time over which they have no control.

It is no wonder that tourists return to the United States thinking that all Paris looks like the second arrondissement (less than one percent does) and that urban planners think all of Milan looks like the architectural treasures that surround the Cathedral. In fact, the sprawling suburbs of Europe, Japan, Canada and Connecticut resemble one another in many ways. For any seeking to study the urban area in its entirety --- not just the favored haunts of core-dwelling elites --- there is no alternative to "getting behind the wheel." Thus, "urban tours by rental car."



Paunsdorf Center

1



Paunsdorf Center  
Photograph Courtesy of  
Randal O'Toole

2



Selgross Hypermarket: Halle

3



Leipzig

4



Leipzig

5



Leipzig: Central Railway Station

6



Leipzig Central Railway Station

7



Privately Operated Suburban Train

8



Leipzig Suburbs

9



Leipzig Suburbs

10



Leipzig Suburbs

11



Leipzig Suburbs

12



Leipzig Suburbs

13



Halle Suburbs

14



Halle Suburbs

15



Halle-Neustadt S-Bahn Station

16



Halle-Neustadt S-Bahn Station

17



Halle-Neustadt S-Bahn Station

18



Halle-Neustadt S-Bahn Station  
Note Missing Windows

19



Halle-Neustadt S-Bahn Station

20



Halle-Neustadt S-Bahn Station

21



Halle-Neustadt  
Gutted Residential Building

22



Halle-Neustadt Auto Mall

23



Halle-Neustadt Shopping Center  
Parking Garage

24