



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Ambiguities of urban détente: East German town twinning and the struggle with globalization in the 1960s

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## Abstract

This article provides a fresh perspective on the history of East German town twinning in the early era of détente. While previous studies have analysed East German town twinning solely as an instrument of the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) to establish paradiplomatic relations in Western Europe, I explore the dynamic interrelation between global, national and local actors and the ambiguities of urban détente. I reveal the importance of the German Association of Towns and Municipalities (Deutsche Städte- und Gemeindetag, DStuG), the East German association of municipalities, which crucially shaped the East German concept of urban détente through practising trans-local exchange. The role played by the DStuG was backed by the United Towns Organization (UTO), a non-governmental organization founded in 1957 whose aim was to form a global network of cities beyond the East–West divide. In 1960, the DStuG joined the UTO as a member and consciously used its new position to expand its scope and improve its national status through actively working on the conceptualization of urban détente. However, the conflicts between the East German foreign ministry and the UTO grew bigger, resulting in the marginalization of the DStuG and town twinning in the SED's concept of détente. These conflicts encouraged the UTO to redefine its global approach.

## Introduction

Reconstruction and reconciliation are key concepts in the history of town twinning in Western Europe<sup>1</sup> after World War II. However, town twinning within a Cold War setting has not received similar analysis. Cold War studies traditionally concentrate on relationships between nation-states. Although Cold War historians have recently expanded their field of research by focusing on global and regional settings,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>In this article, Western Europe serves as a political category covering all European countries belonging to or associated with Western alliances during the Cold War.

<sup>2</sup>O.A. Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge, 2005); L. Lüthi (ed.), *The Regional Cold Wars in Europe, East Asia and the Middle East: Crucial Periods and Turning Points* (Washington, DC, and Stanford, 2015).

transnational actors and alternative networks across the East–West divide,<sup>3</sup> urban history continues to be a blind spot in the history of the Cold War. This is surprising, given that a large number of Western and Eastern European local authorities were involved in town twinning. In the early 1960s, when a nuclear war seemed most likely, the two superpowers, the United States of America (USA) and the Soviet Union, were trying to establish new forms of mutual communication and understanding.

This shift in Cold War international politics from confrontation to *détente* also had an impact on local and global initiatives in favour of alternative world orders during the hot phase of the Cold War in the 1950s. On the one hand, *détente* politics increased the attractiveness of such organizations; on the other hand, they had to deal with the question of how their visions of alternative world orders would relate to *détente* politics. This question became all the more relevant when East Germany appeared on the global stage of international organizations in an attempt to perform as a ‘normal’ state. In contrast to any other Eastern European state, the scope of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was strictly limited, and not only because of the superiority of the Soviet Union. The existence of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was the second barrier to the advancement of the GDR, since the West German government campaigned intensively against the international recognition of the GDR and received support from France, Great Britain and the USA. Since 1955, the Hallstein Doctrine – named after Walter Hallstein who led the West German foreign ministry from 1951 to 1958 and then became the first president of the European Commission – declared the diplomatic recognition of the GDR by third states an ‘unfriendly act’<sup>4</sup> and forced the ruling Socialist Unity Party of (East) Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) to find different ways to gain international recognition. One of many options was to establish cultural relationships through town twinning. Because of the Hallstein Doctrine, however, town twinning arrangements between East Germany and Western European states in the 1950s were limited to (mostly French) cities governed by socialist parties or by mayors sharing anti-American sentiments with the SED.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, after the

<sup>3</sup>S. Autio-Sarasmo and K. Miklóssy (eds.), *Reassessing Cold War Europe* (London and New York, 2011); S. Mikkonen and P. Koivunen (eds.), *Beyond the Divide: Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe* (New York and Oxford, 2015); C. Kemper, *Medizin gegen den Kalten Krieg: Ärzte in der anti-atomaren Friedensbewegung der 1980er Jahre* (Hamburg, 2016); F. Reichherzer, E. Droit and J.C. Hansen (eds.), *Den Kalten Krieg vermessen: Über Reichweite und Alternativen einer binären Ordnungsvorstellung* (Munich, 2018). See also the book series ‘Rethinking the Cold War’ edited by K. Bönker and J. Curry and published with De Gruyter (Munich) from 2017.

<sup>4</sup>W.G. Gray, *Germany’s Cold War: The Global Campaign to Isolate East Germany, 1949–1969* (Chapel Hill, 2003); H. Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen: Die DDR im internationalen System 1949–1989* (Munich, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>C. Pöthig, *Italien und die DDR: Die politischen, ökonomischen und kulturellen Beziehungen von 1949 bis 1980* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 324–7; H. Hoff, *Großbritannien und die DDR 1955–1973: Diplomatie auf Umwegen* (Munich, 2003); U. Pfeil, *Die ‘anderen’ deutsch-französischen Beziehungen: Die DDR und Frankreich 1949–1990* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 2004), 381–93; S. Berger and N. LaPorte, *Friendly Enemies: Britain and the GDR, 1949–1990* (New York and Oxford, 2020); T. Höpel, ‘Die Kunst dem Volke’: *Städtische Kulturpolitik in Leipzig und Lyon 1945–1989* (Leipzig, 2011), 291–319; C. Wenkel, *Auf der Suche nach einem ‘anderen Deutschland’: Das Verhältnis Frankreichs zur DDR im Spannungsfeld von Perzeption und Diplomatie* (Munich, 2014), 209–10; L. Filipová, *Erfüllte Hoffnung: Städtepartnerschaften als Instrument der deutsch-französischen Aussöhnung, 1950–2000* (Göttingen, 2015); C. Defrance and T. Hermann, ‘Städtepartnerschaften: Ein Instrument der “Versöhnung” von unten?’, in C. Defrance and U. Pfeil (eds.),

Soviet Union had clearly declared its support for East Germany's sovereignty in 1957 and the FRG had co-founded the European Economic Community (EEC) together with Belgium, France, Italy, Luxemburg and the Netherlands in the same year, the SED increased its attempts to expand its network within Western Europe by focusing on those states associated with the EEC and its competitor, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) founded by Denmark, Norway, Austria, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and Great Britain in 1959/60. Internal papers proposed establishing connections with conservative, liberal and Christian parties to help the SED manipulate the political tensions among these states and groups in questions about the future of Europe.<sup>6</sup>

As part of this strategy, the GDR joined the United Towns Organization (UTO) in 1960. The UTO was a globally oriented non-governmental organization founded by French politicians and former Resistance members in 1957 who wished to establish a worldwide network of twin cities that supported the idea of a peaceful world free from conflicts and based on the European traditions of enlightenment and humanism. Yet, neither the SED nor the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, MfAA) could directly appear as representatives of the GDR, since the UTO's statute only allowed municipal associations to be members. Therefore, it was up to the German Association of Towns and Municipalities (Deutsche Städte- und Gemeindetag, DStuG), the East German association of municipalities founded in 1955, to represent the GDR within the UTO.

The article starts at this point and explores the role of the DStuG, which has received little scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup> I argue that the East German association was more than a powerless servant of the SED and the MfAA. Rather, it worked as a go-between since the DStuG as a member of the UTO had to negotiate between the SED's and MfAA's need to advertise for international recognition, the UTO's cosmopolitan approach and the actual problems of practising town twinning. By focusing on the role of the DStuG in the 1960s, the article explores the dynamics of East German and global town twinning. While town twinning in East Germany has only been studied from a national (East German or German–German) point of view,<sup>8</sup> little historical research has been undertaken on the foundation years of the UTO in the 1950s.<sup>9</sup>

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*Verständigung und Versöhnung nach dem 'Zivilisationsbruch'? Deutschland in Europa nach 1945* (Brussels, 2016), 585–603.

<sup>6</sup>Büro des Ministerrates, 'Beschluß des Ministerrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zur langfristigen Entwicklung der außenpolitischen und wirtschaftspolitischen Beziehungen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zu den wichtigsten kapitalistischen Staaten Europa (außer Westdeutschland und Westberlin)', 7 Jan. 1965, Federal Archive of Germany (Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, BA), DC 20/1/4/1071, fols. 1–17.

<sup>7</sup>Only recently has the DStuG become the subject of a historical overview; see U. Pfeil, 'Der Städte- und Gemeindetag der DDR als Akteur der kommunalen Beziehungen mit dem Ausland', in C. Defrance, T. Herrmann and P. Nordblom (eds.), *Städtepartnerschaften in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2020), 133–46.

<sup>8</sup>See n. 5.

<sup>9</sup>See the contributions in *Contemporary European History*, 11, 4 (2004); A. Vion, 'L'intervention de la tradition des jumelages (1951–1956): mobilisations pour un droit', *Revue française de science politique*, 53 (2003/04), 559–82; R. Belot, *Le jumelage des villes: avatars d'une 'bombe de paix' dans la guerre froide*, in A. Fleury and L. Jilek (eds.), *Une Europe malgré tout, 1945–1990* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009), 367–82. For an approach that looks beyond the 1950s, see N. Clark, 'Town twinning in Cold-War Britain: (dis)continuities in twentieth-century municipal internationalism', *Contemporary British History*, 24 (2010), 173–91.

By focusing on the DStuG, this article gives new insights into the ambiguities of globalization – understood as flows of people, ideas and goods – in the early era of détente in the 1960s. It shows how the association developed a concept of urban détente as part of a dialogue on issues of urbanity, which were regarded as useful for paradiplomatic relations, in the middle of political tensions between municipalities, foreign policy and globalism. The article explores these practices and their long-lasting consequences for East German town twinning by using the example of trans-local connections between East German and Scandinavian (specifically Finnish and Swedish) cities, which – alongside France, Great Britain and Italy – played a key role in East Germany's attempts to establish pre-diplomatic contacts with Western Europe from the late 1950s onwards and, thus enabled the DStuG to develop its concept of urban détente in the 1960s.

Previous studies have ignored these attempts and have argued that only the closure of the Basic Treaty (Grundlagenvertrag) between the two German states in 1972 laid the ground for a keener interest in the GDR among Western European states.<sup>10</sup> I explore how East German and Scandinavian local politicians practised and struggled with détente long before the central authorities of the SED and the GDR developed their own understanding of détente policy at the end of the 1960s, in which town twinning then played a less important role.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, the tensions between the GDR and the UTO encouraged the international organization to redefine its global approach. The article builds on records of the DStuG at the Federal Archive of Germany (Bundesarchiv) Berlin-Lichterfelde as well as records of the MfAA at the Political Archive of the Foreign Ministry (Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes) Berlin, especially reports on trans-local exchange. I do not interpret these as neutral descriptions, but rather as aspects of practices through which the DStuG defined its new (inter)national self-perception and scope of action.

### Entering the global stage: the UTO and the establishment of urban détente in East Germany

Inter-municipalism and town twinning developed as two separate forms of transnational urbanism in Europe from the beginning of the twentieth century. While the latter emerged as a project for local civil societies (often bourgeois associations) wishing to contribute to a peaceful world order, particularly after World War I, inter-municipalism was focused on scientific exchange among urban experts, and thus addressed urgent urban problems of urbanization in the aftermath of industrialization, such as housing, welfare and hygiene. In 1913, the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) was founded in Ghent as the first inter-municipal organization supporting scientific exchange and the idea of municipal socialism. However, it was only after World War II that municipalism became 'an international resource whereas beforehand the reverse was true'.<sup>12</sup> The IULA was integrated into a new

<sup>10</sup>J. Hecker-Stamphel (ed.), *Nordeuropa und die beiden deutschen Staaten 1949–1989: Aspekte einer Beziehungsgeschichte im Zeichen des Kalten Krieges* (Leipzig and Berlin, 2007); N. Abraham, *Die politische Auslandsarbeit der DDR in Schweden* (Berlin, 2007).

<sup>11</sup>M.E. Sarotte, *Dealing with the Devil: East Germany, Détente, & Ostpolitik, 1969–1973* (Chapel Hill and London, 2001).

<sup>12</sup>P.-Y. Saunier, 'Taking up the bet on connections: a municipal contribution', *Contemporary European History*, 11 (2004), 507–27, at 519.

international and European order alongside the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), the upcoming European institutions and further transnational organizations. Town twinning and inter-municipalism began to play a greater role in international politics, especially in Europe where town twinning was a pillar of democracy for emerging European institutions, since they lacked parliamentary representation. While the IULA continued to exist, many former supporters of municipal socialism disillusioned by the powerlessness of the IULA to counteract National Socialism helped to build the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) in 1951. This organization supported the newly established European Council and its vision of a European federation from the early 1950s onwards. However, while inter-municipalism remained concentrated on the (less successful) establishment of welfare projects at the supranational level such as a 'European municipal credit community', town twinning became the subject of Catholic parties and mayors. In France and West Germany particularly, twinning received significant financial support from the USA which was intended to counteract French President Charles de Gaulle's anti-American sentiments.<sup>13</sup>

For this reason, the US republican government and related lobby groups also supported associations such as *Monde Bilingue*, founded in 1951 by French educational reformers and former Resistance members who propagated international understanding through educational and cultural exchange, primarily between France, Great Britain and the USA. At this time, town twinning was of no relevance to *Monde Bilingue*. Nevertheless, *Monde Bilingue* registered an increasing influx of mayors who opposed the Catholic approach of the CEMR, which celebrated town twinning in the tradition of medieval Christian brotherhoods as the origins of a European Federation. During the emotional parliamentary debate about a European Defence Community in 1954, *Monde Bilingue* experienced a further influx of socialists and Gaullists who transformed the association into a counterpart of CEMR by propagating a Europe of nation-states reaching from the Atlantic to the Ural. This shift represented a move towards the Soviet Union; the financial support given by the USA was now provided by the de Gaulle government. Furthermore, town twinning played an even greater role for *Monde Bilingue* which formed the basis of *La Fédération Mondiale des Villes Jumelées Cités-Unies* (United Towns Organization, UTO) in 1957.<sup>14</sup>

The UTO, however, could not realize the concept of a Europe from the Atlantic to the Ural. It lacked a common narrative. The Soviets and their satellites on the one hand intended to utilize the UTO to propagate the nexus of communism, internationalism and world peace,<sup>15</sup> an aim that had motivated their increased participation in transnational organizations since the 1940s.<sup>16</sup> French UTO founders on the other hand were obsessed with counteracting the establishment of a European federation.

<sup>13</sup>A. Vion, 'Europe from the bottom up: town twinning in France during the Cold War', *Contemporary European History*, 11 (2004), 623–40.

<sup>14</sup>See n. 9.

<sup>15</sup>Aktenvermerk über ein Gespräch im Komitee für kulturelle Beziehungen mit dem Ausland des Ministerrats der UdSSR am 29.8.1962', Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office (PA AA), M 1 A, 12913, fol. 295; T. Gomart, *Double détente: les relations franco-soviétiques de 1958 à 1964* (Paris, 2003), 124–46.

<sup>16</sup>P. Gödde, 'Globale Kulturen', in A. Iriye and J. Osterhammel (eds.), *Geschichte der Welt: 1945 bis heute: Die globalisierte Welt* (Munich, 2013), 535–669, at 548–9.

In their publications, they harshly criticized the European institutions as expansionist and a threat to the concept of the nation, which they perceived as the keeper of enlightenment and humanism. European integration, they argued, was instead the continuation of a murderous culture of planning as practised in National Socialist Germany and would thus lead to the ‘rule of technology,’ which then would extend to ‘ever greater geographical spaces’, bringing about further dehumanization and a new global war. They contrasted this dystopia with the ideal of a global community of municipalities.<sup>17</sup> In this community, GDR cities were to play a crucial strategic role. After the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship, known as the Élysée Treaty, was closed on 22 January 1963 between Charles de Gaulle and the West German Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, French UTO officials hoped that by expanding the numbers of East German–French town twinning arrangements and having the GDR cities act as ‘intermediaries for UTO’ in dealings with ‘the Eastern countries’, those countries and their societies would have a more ‘realistic’ idea of the ‘dangers of the West German–French treaty’.<sup>18</sup>

The UTO also opened up new opportunities for the GDR to expand its scope during the Cold War.<sup>19</sup> However, since the West German Hallstein Doctrine of 1955 prevented the GDR from establishing official political contacts beyond the Soviet bloc, the European network of the SED remained limited to the communist ‘brother parties’. The expectations of the SED were high when the GDR joined the UTO in 1960. Seen from the outside, the relationship between the GDR and the UTO was a success story. Statistics showed that in 1970 there was a comparatively high number (32) of East German member towns within the UTO.<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between the GDR and the UTO did not just result from the support of the Soviet Union, but could build on different historical connections. First and foremost, it emerged from contacts between East German, French and British left-wing local politicians. For many years, there were close relations between Coventry, the ‘commemorative cosmopolis’, and Dresden, which had been raised to an official level in February 1959.<sup>21</sup> Both cities shared a narrative; they were victims of the ‘imperialist’ air raids of World War II. Together with other Eastern European cities such as Leningrad and Lidice, they formed a symbolic network of ‘martyr cities’.<sup>22</sup> Since Coventry had been the first city of the West to establish relations with

<sup>17</sup>J.M. Chevallier, ‘Neue Berufung der Städte’, tr. DStuG Translation Bureau, n.d., BA, DZ 4/232, unnumbered.

<sup>18</sup>‘Bericht vom Empfang der Delegation des Exekutivrates der FMVJ beim stellvertretenden Außenminister STIBI am 11.11.1963’, PA AA, M 1 A, 18719, fol. 127; ‘Bericht über den Besuch der Delegation des Exekutivrates der Weltföderation der Partnerstädte (FMVJ) in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik in der Zeit vom 7. bis 16. November 1963’, PA AA, M 1 A, 18719, fol. 119.

<sup>19</sup>P. Jardin, ‘La place de la France dans la stratégie diplomatique de la RDA (1949–61)’, in U. Pfeil (ed.), *La RDA et l’Occident (1949–1990): Colloque international Paris – Novembre 1999* (Asnières, 2000), 323–38; Pfeil, *Die ‘anderen’ deutsch-französischen Beziehungen*, 382–93; Wentker, *Außenpolitik in engen Grenzen*, 184.

<sup>20</sup>W.-P. Konzok, secretary general of the Association of GDR Member Towns in the World Federation of United and Twinned Towns, DStuG, ‘Standpunkt zum Vorschlag Bressands, mich im Anschluß an seinen Besuch bei Bürgermeister Schütz in West-Berlin am 20. Januar 1971 aufzusuchen’, 13 Jan. 1971, PA AA, M 1 C, 2842, fol. 148.

<sup>21</sup>S. Goebel, ‘Commemorative cosmopolis: transnational networks of remembrance in post-war Coventry’, in S. Goebel and D. Keene (eds.), *Cities into Battlefields. Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (Farnham and Burlington, 2011), 163–83.

<sup>22</sup>See diverse campaigns of 1959, BA, DZ 4/173.

the Soviet city Stalingrad in 1942 to challenge the military dominance of the USA in Europe,<sup>23</sup> the mayor of Coventry also held the presidency of the UTO. The mayor used his UTO position to campaign for membership for East German cities. These initiatives complied with the official East German narrative that the destruction of Dresden showed what ‘imperialism’ really meant: ‘inhumanity’. Against this backdrop, Dresden remained an important place for the SED to officially demonstrate against the presence of American forces in Europe until the end of the GDR.<sup>24</sup>

The British support for East German town twinning was underpinned by local East German–French relations dating back to 1958, the year the Friendship Society French–German Exchange (EFA, original French term: *Échanges franco-allemands*) was founded by former members of the French Resistance and members of the French Communist Party (PCF, original French term: *Parti communiste français*) who also held central positions within the UTO.<sup>25</sup> In 1959, the communist mayors of St Denis, Argenteuil, Montreuil, Vierzon and the 20th arrondissement of Paris established contacts in the East German cities Gera, Dessau, Cottbus, Bitterfeld and the East Berlin district Lichtenberg.<sup>26</sup> As a result of French and British support, the first six East German member cities within the UTO were Dresden, Bitterfeld, Cottbus, Dessau, Gera and Zwickau. Rostock and Weimar followed them in 1962.

Although the relationship between the GDR and the UTO was based on long-standing contacts between municipalities and anti-fascist networks such as the Resistance movement, the motive for joining the UTO was clearly diplomatic. However, in the early years, the MfAA deliberately stayed in the background, while the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, DStuG, represented the GDR in dealings with the UTO. This was a necessity since only municipal associations were allowed to join the UTO and, moreover, it was a strategic move since Gustav Seifried (1904–85), the mayor of Zwickau, was the chairman of the UTO section of the DStuG formed on 1 August 1960.<sup>27</sup> Seifried had not primarily been elected on account of the position he held in municipal politics, but because he was a battle-hardened communist who had joined the Resistance in France and Belgium after deserting the Wehrmacht in Royan.<sup>28</sup>

However, the UTO section of the DStuG was directly connected to the MfAA. With this national support, East German cities quickly became the second biggest

<sup>23</sup>J. Van Oudenaren, *Détente in Europe. The Soviet Union and the West since 1953* (Durham, NC, and London, 1991), 292; J.M. Lee, ‘Le monde bilingue. British aspects of a movement for promoting world peace through language learning’, *Franco-British Studies*, 23 (1997), 25–40, at 31–2; L. Kirschenbaum, ‘Remembering and rebuilding. Leningrad after the siege from a comparative perspective’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 9 (2011), 314–27.

<sup>24</sup>R. Overy, ‘The post-war debate’, in P. Addison and J.A. Crang (eds.), *Firestorm. The Bombing of Dresden 1945* (London, 2006), 123–42, at 135.

<sup>25</sup>U. Pfeil, ‘Échanges franco-allemands’, in N. Coline, C. Defrance, U. Pfeil and Joachim Umlauf (eds.), *Lexikon der deutsch-französischen Kulturbeziehungen nach 1945* (Tübingen, 2015), 216.

<sup>26</sup>Pfeil, *Die ‘anderen’ deutsch-französischen Beziehungen*, 383.

<sup>27</sup>Protokoll über die Zusammenkunft zur Bildung der Sektion Deutsche Demokratische Republik des Weltbundes der Partnerstädte am 1. August 1960 in Gera’, BA, DY 13, 2971, unnumbered.

<sup>28</sup>U. Pfeil, ‘“Alles begann mit der Jugend”: Die Städtepartnerschaft zwischen Saint-Étienne und Wuppertal (1960)’, in C. Defrance, M. Kißener and P. Nordblom (eds.), *Wege der Verständigung zwischen Deutschen und Franzosen nach 1945: Zivilgesellschaftliche Annäherungen* (Tübingen, 2010), 205–22, at 216; ‘ZK der SED gratuliert Genossen Gustav Seifried’, *Neues Deutschland*, no. 196, 20 Aug. 1984, 5.

financial contributor among the socialist states within the UTO.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the relationship between the DStuG and the MfAA was not clear at all. The DStuG saw itself as communicating and shaping the GDR's foreign policy positions within the UTO, and it was thus encouraged to ensure the influence of the UTO with regard to East German town twinning. Just a few months after the GDR section had been founded, the DStuG's secretary, Linus Stiegler, sent a first signal to all the East German municipalities that maintained contacts with French towns. In a letter dated 25 April 1961, he called upon them to make the UTO's charter and principles (non-interference, non-discrimination, solidarity, bilingualism) the foundations for future twinning agreements. According to Stiegler, 'UTO's good ideas for bringing people together' did not just form the basis for the concept of town twinning arrangements in the GDR; in addition, they offered outstanding protection against accusations from West German bodies that were supposedly only too keen to impute 'one-sided propaganda intentions' to the GDR.<sup>30</sup>

### Developing urban détente: the DStuG and East German–Scandinavian town twinning as an experimental field in the 1960s

Membership of the UTO was more than a symbolic success of the SED. It contributed to the highly dynamic field of foreign politics in the GDR<sup>31</sup> since it enabled the DStuG to become a player on the national and international stage. The UTO played a crucial role in how the DStuG defined its new role. The East German association was established in 1955 and since then had concentrated its work on East–West German municipal relations as one of many tools to campaign for the GDR as the 'better' German state. However, these campaigns remained marginal since the mass exodus of East German skilled workers to West Germany continued unabated throughout the 1950s and the conservative West German government actively campaigned against the 'disguised' local politicians from East Germany.<sup>32</sup>

The DStuG's membership of the UTO increased the association's importance. However, while attempting to achieve its mission to promote the international recognition of the GDR by bringing local communities together, the DStuG officials suffered setbacks which they communicated in their reports. One of the biggest challenges was the unpredictable behaviour of East German local politicians who did not perform as urban diplomats. This was especially the case when municipal exchange proceeded during true diplomatic conflicts. For instance, months after the ratification of the Élysée Treaty, East German local politicians acted as communist hardliners and party soldiers rather than as urban diplomats with their French guests. In a report to the MfAA from 6 September 1963, the DStuG lamented that when French delegations stayed, some towns 'object to formal honours (national anthem, national flag) as long as De Gaulle has not been brought down. Attempts are

<sup>29</sup>Mitgliedsbeiträge an die FMVJ, 27 Apr. 1966, PA AA, M 1 C, 351/72, fol. 17.

<sup>30</sup>L. Stiegler, DStuG, letter to the councils of GDR towns twinned with French towns, 25 Apr. 1961, BA, DZ 4, 147, unnumbered.

<sup>31</sup>M. Lemke, 'Die Außenbeziehungen der DDR (1949–1966): Prinzipien, Grundlagen, Zäsuren und Handlungsspielräume', in U. Pfeil (ed.), *Die DDR und der Westen: Transnationale Beziehungen 1949–1989* (Berlin, 2001), 63–80, at 78.

<sup>32</sup>Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (ed.), 'Deutsche Politik: Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesregierung' (Bonn, 1960), 457.



also made to introduce formulations into friendship agreements such as “struggle against the de Gaulle regime” and the like.<sup>33</sup> In Magdeburg, it required the intervention of the MfAA and the DStuG to make the visit of a 100-strong wind orchestra from Hagondange a ‘great success’ because the district council and other bodies did not wish to accept responsibility for it.<sup>34</sup> Finally, note was also taken of East German municipal politicians who urged their French counterparts to go on the offensive and ‘explain the different characters of the two German states in their country, and initiate activities that contributed to the reunification of Germany and the recognition of the GDR’.<sup>35</sup>

Such reports demonstrated that the DStuG’s influence on local politicians was limited. Its officials often participated in municipal exchange themselves, intending both to avoid unpredictable incidents and to work as role models for urban diplomacy. Swedish and Finnish cities proved to be an excellent stage on which to practise and develop a concept of urban *détente* which was in line with the UTO charter. Both Scandinavian countries belonged to the non-aligned states, which were neither part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) nor the Warsaw Pact. Moreover, Finland was bound more closely to the Soviet Union by treaty. Establishing relationships with these two countries promised to influence public opinion in Norway and Denmark, which were members of NATO. The East German Communist Party could count on former members of the German Communist Party of the 1920s who had fled to Sweden and Finland during the National Socialist period and remigrated to East Germany after 1945 to build and serve the SED. In the 1950s, some of them held positions in East Germany’s diplomatic service and employed their knowledge of northern Europe and contacts in the communist parties to formulate the SED’s foreign policy. The port city Rostock played a crucial role in this context. From 1958, Rostock was the venue for the Baltic Sea Weeks (*Ostseewochen*), one of the most prestigious propaganda events which the GDR staged in opposition to NATO and a popular forum for the East German–Scandinavian exchange. Furthermore, from the 1960s onwards, the traditional Rostock publisher Hinstorff served as an important mediator, popularizing Scandinavian literature in the GDR and vice versa. Although Sweden and Finland never counteracted the Hallstein Doctrine, they were more open to economic and cultural relations with the GDR than other European countries. It was no coincidence that Helsinki was the first place where the GDR was allowed to establish a cultural institute in 1960 and 13 years later served as the stage on which to found the ground-breaking Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE).<sup>36</sup>

Town twinning played a crucial role in strengthening bonds especially with Finland. Many local politicians in Finland were convinced that the existence of the GDR, especially after the construction of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961, was a necessary evil. The DStuG functionaries did as much as they could to make visits to East German cities as lively as possible. Time and again they tried to mobilize local

<sup>33</sup>‘Bericht des Deutschen Städte- und Gemeindetages über Aufgaben und Möglichkeiten zur Unterstützung der auslandsinformativen Arbeit’, 6 Sep. 1963, BA, DZ 4/149, unnumbered.

<sup>34</sup>‘Thesen zum Diskussionsbeitrag für die Präsidiumssitzung der Liga für Völkerfreundschaft’, n.d. [1963], BA, DZ 4/149, unnumbered.

<sup>35</sup>European Department 5, MfAA, letter to First Vice President Manneberg, DStuG, 28 Nov. 1963, BA, DZ 4/232, unnumbered.

<sup>36</sup>See n. 9; K. Hohner, *Abseits vom Kurs: Die Geschichte des VEB Hinstorff Verlag 1959–1977* (Berlin, 2022).

trade unions, sports associations and enterprises to engage in town twinning – with prior instructions on how to behave and what to tell. These initiatives met with little success, but perhaps surprisingly the Finnish guests did not care about the low level of participation in the local societies. They themselves did not put much enthusiasm into ‘real’ encounters. During a meeting with the Finnish association of municipalities at the end of June 1962, delegates of the DStuG and the (East) German–Nordic Society wondered that ‘our stay was organized more as a tourist trip, that means that they showed us much, but they avoided any encounters with citizens, particularly with Finnish workers’.<sup>37</sup> After a stay in Lahti in July 1964, the DStuG officials were annoyed about the official programme, which was packed with appointments and receptions, while there was no time to meet workers and other people. Whenever they asked for such encounters, the hosts of Lahti evaded the issue by referring to the full schedule.<sup>38</sup> When he came back to Lahti one year later to establish official contacts with the Thuringian university city Jena, the city director openly confessed ‘that the Finnish intelligentsia stands with the GDR, but ordinary citizens shared more sympathies with West Germany’.<sup>39</sup> Such statements showed that contact with East Germany was unpopular among the majority of local societies in Finland – not because the GDR was a dictatorship, but because it was considered ‘backward’ in comparison to the Western lifestyle with which most Finns identified. The local government of Lahti also rejected the establishment of official contacts in Jena as long as there was no equal partner city in West Germany.<sup>40</sup>

DStuG officials had to learn that town twinning was about working on distance reduction, which differed from mere cultural or economic exchange. Town twinning was about more than finding objective similarities; it was about dealing with public sentiments which the Scandinavian local politicians also had to take into account. They did not fear to violate the Hallstein Doctrine, but were more concerned about their local political image and the image of ‘their’ city. That was why Finnish local politicians wanted to exclude the wider local public when East German representatives came to visit their cities. They also did not claim to meet East German ‘ordinaries’ when visiting the GDR. While they praised connections between towns as ‘excellent means of communication between the citizens of the respective people (*Volk*)’, they rejected visiting enterprises and talking to people in East German cities<sup>41</sup> in order to avoid similar claims from their East German colleagues during their stays in Finland.

In Sweden, the situation was more complicated. In contrast to Finland, the reluctance to honour requests from East German cities was clearly more pronounced. First of all, trade relations within Western Europe were closer and the fear of jeopardizing these relations was much stronger. Second, Sweden was in serious

<sup>37</sup> ‘Auswertung der Reise einer Delegation des Deutschen Städte- und Gemeindetages nach Finnland vom 26.6.–1.7.1962’, 5 Jul. 1962, BA, DZ 4, 175, fol. 18.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Bericht der Delegation des Deutschen Städte- und Gemeindetages über die Reise nach Finnland’, 1 Jul. 1964, *ibid.*, fols. 128–9.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Delegationsreise nach Lahti vom 10.–12.6. 1965’, n.d., *ibid.*, fol. 156.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Einschätzung, Haltung und Äußerungen der finnischen Parlamentarier von Lahti’, n.d., *ibid.*, fols. 162–5.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Bericht über die Reise des Präsidenten des finnischen Stadtvorstandes, Herrn Oberbürgermeister Lauri Aho, Helsinki, und des Sekretärs des finnischen Städteverbandes, Herrn Henrik Lundsten, vom 27. Februar bis 3. März 1965’, 9 Mar. 1965, *ibid.*, fol. 197.

political trouble with the GDR since the pastor of the Swedish Victoria parish in West Berlin, Heribert Jansson, who had helped East Germans to escape, was banned from entering East Berlin for 10 years in 1963. Even the Saxon town Lützen, where the famous Swedish King Gustav Adolf II was killed and remembered as a 'progressive' hero of the Thirty Years War, had problems finding a Swedish twin city. Out of seven towns contacted in 1964, only Mölndal in the south of Gothenburg agreed to visit Lützen. This was only possible because the mayor, who had been in office for about 20 years, was such a local authority that he only needed to knock on the table to obtain the approval of the magistrate, as he proudly told his hosts. Mayor Bergquist even agreed to visit the Berlin Wall, and though the East Berlin press utilized this episode to demonstrate that there were also Swedish politicians who distanced themselves from Jansson, meaning that Bergquist then had to justify himself to the foreign minister, the exchange between Lützen and Mölndal continued and developed well.<sup>42</sup>

The limitation of town twinning to an exchange programme exclusively for local elites was not a one-sided decision of the DStuG to prevent the East German society from Western influences, as scholars have previously maintained. Rather, such a limitation was mutually beneficial since it also prevented Swedish and Finnish local politicians from getting involved in political scandals in their municipalities or states. And the DStuG soon learned to deal with the reluctance of their partners, which became a fundamental condition of urban détente. Instead of performing as ideological hardliners as so many East German local politicians did, particularly in the weeks and months after the closure of the Élysée Treaty, the DStuG encouraged local politicians to show more empathy for the visitors. After Finnish and Swedish delegates had visited the Saxon socialist model city Hoyerswerda in December 1962, the DStuG complained about the East German attendant who 'had spoken too much about socialism...It has been demonstrated in the past that those concerned had been set under so much pressure in Finland that they had withdrawn their public statements hereafter.' The DStuG considered concentrating on the exchange of expert delegations.<sup>43</sup> This strategic decision proved to be successful since technical exchange allowed face-to-face dialogue which could lead to a revision of GDR stereotypes circulating in the Western hemisphere. During their second official stay in East Germany in October 1963, members of the Finnish Rural Community Association (Landgemeindevorband) confessed 'that they had travelled to the GDR with mixed feelings. They were told that the GDR would not allow any discussions and would arrogantly underline its achievements as the best and highest in comparison to Finland.'<sup>44</sup> However, to keep technical exchange alive, it proved important to avoid Cold War language. When East German delegates spoke about 'capitalist states', Finnish guests reacted sensitively since they did not perceive their country as 'capitalist'. The DStuG concluded, 'we must be careful not to give the impression that we are the only peacekeepers since the other nations contribute to the fight for

<sup>42</sup>Einschätzung des Besuches schwedischer Kommunalpolitiker in der DDR vom 4.11. bis 11.11.1963', 15 Nov. 1963, *ibid.*, fols. 86–97; Council of Lützen, mayor, H. Urban, letter to the DStuG, 13 Oct. 1964, *ibid.*, fol. 138.

<sup>43</sup>Aktennotiz über die Einschätzung der nordischen Delegation, vorgenommen auf dem Flughafen Schönefeld am 15.12.1962', 3 Jan. 1963, *ibid.*, fol. 105.

<sup>44</sup>Einschätzung der Studienreise der Delegation des finnischen Landgemeindevorbandes vom 3. Bis 10. Oktober 1963 in der DDR', 23 Oct. 1963, *ibid.*, fol. 68.

peace, too. It is also perceived as offensive if we tell foreign delegations what we have achieved without giving them the chance to speak about their achievements.<sup>45</sup>

The concentration on technical exchange and the exclusion of the wider local public helped to reduce distance and to find a common language beyond ideological differences which became the essence of urban détente. Instead of focusing on ‘socialism’ and ‘capitalism’ or ‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ differences, urban détente was centred on an older understanding of a modern and functioning municipality. Only this silent consent allowed transfers in both directions and, thus, yielded globalizing effects. For example, after visiting Lahti in 1964, the DStuG praised the Finnish hosts for having built large functional buildings for administration, education, trade and social services. Such centres, the DStuG report concluded, ‘will also be on our agenda sooner or later’.<sup>46</sup> Expert delegations which studied experiences in urban planning and social infrastructures played such a major role in shaping concepts of urban détente that the deputy chairman of DStuG and former first socialist mayor of Dresden, Walter Weidauer, together with his successor in Dresden, Gerhard Schill, established the Colloquium of European local politicians (*Kolloquium europäischer Kommunalpolitiker*) in 1962 as an international platform for discussing the problems of urban planning. As part of the East–West European anti-imperialist network of ‘martyr cities’, Dresden was perfectly suited to be a venue for the event which took place every two years until 1974. In April 1962, Schill welcomed 56 participants from Western, Southern and Eastern Europe.<sup>47</sup> In line with the DStuG’s concept of urban détente, the first Colloquium was relatively free of ideological set phrases, which municipal actors internally marked as an advantage.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from expert exchange, cultural entertainment served to de-ideologize the discourse about the GDR by showing that the East German state was aware of its cultural heritage and invested large sums to take care of it. Thus, opera evenings became an integral part of urban détente schedules, as well as visiting such famous historical sights as Auerbach’s Cellar (Aucherbachs Keller) in Leipzig. During their second stay in the GDR in October 1963, the delegates of the Finnish Rural Community Association were so impressed that they praised the city museum for making the visit to Auerbach’s cellar an unforgettable event which had been so ‘masterful...that the delegation believed to have seen Goethe and Mephisto themselves’.<sup>49</sup> The same goal was served by a policy of presenting guests with specific gifts that promoted the East German state line. The Scandinavian guests were gifted with photo books showing the GDR through the lens of its cities not as an example of socialism, but as a successful post-fascist German state which was able to produce its own post-war ‘wonders’ as West Germany had done.

However, though town twinning allowed transfers in both directions, globalization in the trans-local context did not help to overcome Cold War frontlines. There was dialogue, but the other side of the dialogue was the acceptance of distance. This

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, fols. 74–5.

<sup>46</sup>‘Bericht der Delegation des Deutschen Städte- und Gemeindetages über die Reise nach Finnland’, 1 Jul. 1964, *ibid.*, fol. 136.

<sup>47</sup>‘Liste der Teilnehmer am Kolloquium Europäischer Kommunalpolitiker in Dresden’, 28/9 Apr. 1962, BA, DY 30/94556, fol. 338.

<sup>48</sup>‘Handschriftliche Auswertung des Kolloquiums 1962’, *ibid.*, fol. 337.

<sup>49</sup>‘Einschätzung der Studienreise der Delegation des finnischen Landgemeinerverbandes vom 3. Bis 10. Oktober 1963 in der DDR’, 23 Oct. 1963, BA, DZ 4/175, fol. 72.

became particularly obvious when it came to transfers. For example, Mölndal had adopted the system of theatre subscriptions from Lützen, but Mayor Bergquist declined to popularize this as a result of town twinning with an East German city.<sup>50</sup> This example shows the fundamental ambiguity of urban détente which was based on the interplay of distance and dialogue. Even this practice was by no means without its own ambiguities. Since the DStuG intended to present the GDR as a 'normal' and 'modern' state, the association implicitly accepted that the West German norm remained the central reference point through which the Scandinavian partners perceived the GDR. Conflicts then could arise when Scandinavian guests deliberately violated the unwritten rules of urban détente. When the mayor of Helsinki, chairman of the Finnish municipal association and member of the Finnish Nationalist Party, Lauri Aho, and his secretary Henrik Lundsten came to visit Dresden in March 1965, the DStuG was seriously conflicted. After spending the evening at the opera and returning to the hotel, Lundsten took the chance to join a carnival ball taking place at the same hotel. When the crowd began to sing 'We want our Kaiser Wilhelm back', Lundsten joined in and applauded. Full of enthusiasm, he wondered that such an event was possible in the GDR. The DStuG delegates responded by giving Lundsten a lecture in 'freedom' through the lens of socialism to make sure that this episode would not appear in the press the next week.<sup>51</sup> Such incidents continued to devalue the DStuG and urban détente as a less certain and less controllable project. The activities of the DStuG were increasingly opposed by East German state authorities which were not willing to support the financial demands of the association. As a result, the subordinated position of DStuG within the East German state hierarchy could hardly be hidden from the Scandinavian partners. A year before Aho and Lundsten came to visit Dresden, a DStuG delegation had spent some days in Finland, which proved to be an embarrassing experience. The two-member delegation from the GDR was perceived as insulting since the Finnish association had sent five delegates. It was all the more mortifying as the DStuG had not planned a gift for the hosts, assuming there would be no official reception. However, when such an event took place at the East German trade agency in Helsinki, the DStuG stood empty-handed and even the trade agency was not willing to help their East German colleagues.<sup>52</sup> Apart from such incidents, the international position of the DStuG had already deteriorated on account of the conflicts between the MfAA and the UTO.

### **Pitfalls of globalization: the UTO, the MfAA and the decline of urban détente in the GDR**

In April 1963, the DStuG was convinced that the GDR's position within the UTO had become 'firmly established'.<sup>53</sup> However, the reality was somewhat different. Just one year after the DStuG had joined the UTO, the organization had suffered setbacks that

<sup>50</sup>Council of Lützen, mayor, H. Urban, letter to the DStuG, 13 Oct. 1964, *ibid.*, fol. 138.

<sup>51</sup>Bericht über die Reise des Präsidenten des finnischen Städteverbandes, Herrn Oberbürgermeister Lauri Aho, Helsinki, und des Sekretärs des finnischen Städteverbandes, Henrik Lundsten, vom 27. Februar bis 3. März 1965', 9 Mar. 1965, *ibid.*, fol. 230.

<sup>52</sup>Bericht der Delegation des Deutschen Städte- und Gemeindebundes über die Reise nach Finnland', 1 Jul. 1964, *ibid.*, fol. 132.

<sup>53</sup>Einschätzung des gegenwärtigen Standes der kommunalen Beziehungen zum Ausland und ihrer weiteren Entwicklung', Apr. 1963, BA, DC 20/I/4/717, fol. 184.

threatened its very existence. This was not only a result of the construction of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961, but a consequence of the previous admission of East German cities to the organization in 1960, which led the French government to abruptly withdraw its financial support.<sup>54</sup> The UTO, which was financed exclusively by membership fees and some state funding, therefore found itself in a financial crisis<sup>55</sup> and its vision of a world society was overtaken by Cold War politics. It was this crisis that encouraged the leadership of the UTO to change their political strategy. In 1960, delegate general Jean-Marie Bressand was the *de facto* leader of the UTO because of 'the absence of an appropriate apparatus and trained cadres'.<sup>56</sup> He had begun to advertise his vision of a 'little UN of towns'<sup>57</sup> that was intended to 'appeal to the public and governments of the industrialized countries'.<sup>58</sup> It was not the cities exclusively, but rather the UN, which was to become the forum through which Bressand tried to influence the global community, and the upcoming conflict with the GDR gave him the legitimacy to realize this strategy. He blamed the DStuG for the economic plight of the UTO,<sup>59</sup> strengthened the UTO's relationships with African town twinning organizations and broke with organizational traditions. At the fourth World Congress of the UTO in Coventry, the Senegalese foreign minister, Doudou Thiam, was elected as president of the UTO as a result of lobbying by Bressand. Together, they argued the UTO's case at the UN, which for its part offered the postcolonial states an important public forum. The narrative of East–West friendship, which had been symbolized by the presidency of the mayor of Coventry, lost its dominance in favour of the opportunities the UN seemingly had to offer. The DStuG's representatives had been refused entry to the UK for the congress in Coventry because of the travel policy of the allies, and only learned about this change of personnel after the event. It was not until May 1963 that Bressand travelled to the GDR with a Senegalese delegation to explain the reasons for the new direction. As Bressand now argued, the British were too conservative and cautious: 'an institution as important as the World Federation could not be advanced' with them, he explained. By contrast, the Senegalese seemed young and dynamic to him, as he noted when explaining his political *volte-face*.<sup>60</sup>

The status of the GDR and the DStuG within the UTO began to further falter as the UTO leadership rejected East German attempts to use the organization for

<sup>54</sup>'Bericht über die Aussprache mit dem Generalbevollmächtigten Jean-Marie Bressand und dem leitenden Mitarbeiter der Weltföderation Jean Rous, Berater des Präsidenten der Republik Senegal', 4 May 1963, BA, DY 13/2971, unnumbered.

<sup>55</sup>In the year of its founding, 1957, just 45 towns from four countries belonged to the UTO; by 1960 (the year the first GDR towns joined) there were 400 members; in 1966, it had well over 1,000 member towns from 50 countries. Figures from various statistics in BA, DY 13/2972.

<sup>56</sup>'12. Tagung des Exekutivrats, Le Locle 7./8. Oktober 1966', tr. DStuG Translation Bureau, BA, DY 13/2965, unnumbered.

<sup>57</sup>'Unkorrigierter Bericht über Delegation des Weltbundes der Partnerstädte durch Städte der DDR 3.11.–9.11.1960', BA, DZ 4/148, unnumbered.

<sup>58</sup>'FMVJ-Korrespondenzen', no. 12, Dec. 1968, tr. DStuG Translation Bureau, BA, DY 13/2972, unnumbered.

<sup>59</sup>Jean-Marie Bressand, UTO, letter to the towns Riesa, Freiberg and Eisenhüttenstadt, 7 Nov. 1963, PA AA, M 1 A, 12913, fol. 211.

<sup>60</sup>'Bericht über die Aussprache mit dem Generalbevollmächtigten Jean-Marie Bressand und dem leitenden Mitarbeiter in der Weltföderation Jean Bous, Berater des Präsidenten der Republik Senegal', 4 May 1963, BA, DY 13/2971, unnumbered.

propaganda against West Germany. At this point, even the dissent between the DStuG and the MfAA became obvious. Whereas the DStuG representatives wanted to strengthen inter-municipal contacts to demonstrate 'normal' life within a 'normal' state, the MfAA encouraged the DStuG to go beyond this approach and convince the UTO members not to establish contacts with West German cities, which undermined the politics of restraint as practised by the DStuG. Bressand reacted promptly in order to keep the organization from getting entangled in the peculiarities of the German–German conflict: shortly after the Berlin Wall had been built, he raised the idea of a pan-German section.<sup>61</sup> Later, the UTO leadership repeatedly called on the DStuG to actively build bridges with West Germany to put up some opposition to Adenauer's 'imperialism', for instance by forming an all-Berlin committee.<sup>62</sup> Convinced of this line of argument, the UTO's leadership had high hopes for the West Berlin mayor, the Social Democrat and former Resistance member Willy Brandt. Since this preoccupation with the systemic German–German conflict ran counter to the goal of recognition for the GDR, however, Bressand soon came to be regarded as a 'dubious' figure in the East Germans' eyes.<sup>63</sup>

Bressand himself admitted that the membership of the GDR towns made his work 'extraordinarily' more difficult because there were 'various opinions' about East Germany, especially among the French members who held a majority on the Council.<sup>64</sup> This conflict can be illustrated by the example of Gera, the Thuringian city which was among the first to have joined the UTO in 1960. In 1964, Gera had been visited by Henri Jaquet, the second most powerful man after Bressand and mayor of the Swiss city Le Locle, who made no secret of the fact that he saw the Élysée Treaty purely as a step to strengthen West German nationalism. Nonetheless, the significance of Jaquet's supposedly benevolent attitude towards the GDR was over-estimated in East Berlin. After *Neues Deutschland* had published a brief report on 13 September 1964 about the visit of Jaquet to Gera, which depicted the secretary general as an advocate of international recognition for the GDR,<sup>65</sup> he faced fierce criticism from leading UTO officials in France. For instance, Pierre Billotte, the former French defence minister, member of the Gaullist party Union for the New Republic (Union pour la Nouvelle République, UNR) and chairman of the UTO Economic and Cultural Council, had been asked by his party colleagues, 'whether he was still intending to work in UTO under these circumstances'.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, with the shift in focus to African cities and towns, the German–German conflict, which was played out in the background of East German–Scandinavian town twinning, now dominated the trans-local arena. The towns and cities in Senegal

<sup>61</sup>First Vice President Manneberg, German Conference of Towns and Municipalities, letter to European Department 5, MfAA, 'Durchführung einer Konsultation in den sozialistischen Staaten zu Fragen der Weltföderation der Partnerstädte', n.d., BA, DY 13/2971, unnumbered.

<sup>62</sup>Elisabeth Langdon, UTO, letter to Gustav Seifried, 28 Feb. 1964, PA AA, M 1 A, 18719, fol. 76.

<sup>63</sup>First Vice President Manneberg, German Conference of Towns and Municipalities, letter to European Department 5, MfAA, 'Durchführung einer Konsultation in den sozialistischen Staaten zu Fragen der Weltföderation der Partnerstädte', n.d., BA, DY 13/2971, unnumbered.

<sup>64</sup>'Niederschrift über die Aussprache mit Genossen Isajew, Oberbürgermeister von Leningrad', 5 Mar. 1965, DY 13/2965, unnumbered.

<sup>65</sup>'Partnerstädte berücksichtigen DDR-Interessen', *Neues Deutschland*, no. 253, 13 Sep. 1964, 7.

<sup>66</sup>'Information über ein Gespräch des Verantwortlichen für das Afrikanische Informationsbüro im Senegal, Herrn Boujasson, mit dem Vorsitzenden der Sektion DDR der FMVJ, Gen. Oberbürgermeister Seifried (Zwickau) am 20. März 1965', PA AA, M 1 A, 18719, fol. 16.

proved to be difficult territory for the DStuG. In October 1962, the DStuG's first vice president, Werner Manneberg, highlighted the apparent contradiction in a letter to the MfAA that, 'where the GDR's positions have become firmly established in the neutral, young nation-states, there are no relations of any kind in the municipal sector'.<sup>67</sup> The representatives from Senegal and other postcolonial countries demanded concrete material support,<sup>68</sup> which Bressand also welcomed. Furthermore, the Senegalese side had already established close contacts with West German foreign policy-makers and municipal politicians, who offered material development aid. Especially in Africa, the informal co-operation between the West German Federal Foreign Ministry and municipal politicians proved to be markedly more effective than the official but barely co-ordinated co-operation between the MfAA and the DStuG. For instance, a twinning agreement between Kaolack and Rostock fell through in April 1962, just before it was signed, because Gelsenkirchen had promised practical assistance in improving the city's drinking water supply to the Senegalese, which the DStuG was unable to offer since the MfAA's focus was still on Western Europe.<sup>69</sup>

Within a few years of East German cities joining the UTO, the dissent between the DStuG and the MfAA with regard to municipal exchange had become obvious, and even the interests in the UTO leadership had diversified. In 1963, the socialist countries, including the GDR, stopped their efforts to persuade further cities to join, arguing that the UTO had lost the cosmopolitan character that connected Eastern and Western Europe.<sup>70</sup> Meanwhile, the lack of co-ordination between the MfAA and the DStuG formed the background for the ministry to demonstrate its dominance. In March 1965, the MfAA published new guidance on municipal foreign relations, which not only ensured that the ministry had a stronger influence on inter-municipal exchanges and further limited the DStuG's autonomy, but also reflected the ongoing moves to distance the GDR from UTO. The guidance stated that every future official town twinning arranged under the UTO's auspices would have to be authorized by the ministry; it was only prepared to do this if the UTO advocated the GDR's interests more vigorously, which was not anticipated. Furthermore, official partnerships with towns in the socialist bloc and communist strongholds in Western Europe were to be curbed, and liberal, conservative and Christian circles were to be extended, without explicit reference being made to the UTO.<sup>71</sup> While the DStuG welcomed these claims, the growing tensions between the GDR and the UTO encouraged the MfAA to increase its influence on town twinning and to devalue the status of the DStuG.

<sup>67</sup>Werner Manneberg, German Conference of Towns and Municipalities, letter to Gen. Schwab, deputy to the minister, MfAA, 24 Oct. 1962, BA, DY 30/94556, fol. 287.

<sup>68</sup>This happened, for instance, during the first visit by a UTO delegation to the GDR: 'Protokollarischer Bericht über die Reise der Delegation des Weltbundes der Partnerstädte durch die DDR vom 3.11. bis 9.11.1960, unkorrigiertes Exemplar', BA, DZ 4/148, unnumbered.

<sup>69</sup>Bericht über die Teilnahme der Delegation der DDR an der ersten Generalversammlung der kontinentalafrikanischen Partnerstädte in Dakar/Senegal vom 17. bis 24.4.1962', BA, DY 13/2971, unnumbered.

<sup>70</sup>First Vice President Manneberg, German Conference of Towns and Municipalities, letter to European Department 5, MfAA, 'Durchführung einer Konsultation in den sozialistischen Staaten zu Fragen der Weltföderation der Partnerstädte', n.d., BA, DY 13/2971, unnumbered.

<sup>71</sup>'Beschluss über die Arbeit auf dem Gebiete der kommunalen Beziehungen zum Ausland', 26 Mar. 1965, BA, DC 20/1/4/1101, unnumbered.



Just a few months later, the conflict between the GDR and the UTO escalated when Bressand travelled to Siegburg, not far from West Germany's capital Bonn, for negotiations with West German municipal politicians in order to explore the potential for their towns to join the UTO. The outcome of the negotiations was a four-point paper that provoked outrage in East Berlin and was met with scepticism, to say the least, in Bonn.<sup>72</sup> According to the paper, the West German municipal politicians gathered at Siegburg held out the prospect of their joining the UTO if Germany was recognized as a 'cultural and human entity', with exchanges to take place in 'all strata of the population'. Members that did not abide by this ruling were to be excluded by the Executive Council, while all members were to be granted the right to leave the UTO. While the French and Senegalese representatives on the Executive Council voted for the adoption of the paper, the socialist states rejected the agreement unanimously, citing the UTO's apolitical character, which the amendment would subvert. The conflict ensured that the results of the meeting at Siegburg did not translate into action.<sup>73</sup>

Disappointed by the socialist representatives, but encouraged by the discussions in Siegburg, Bressand increasingly aligned himself with the West German policy of détente, which found significant supporters in the municipalities regardless of the governing party. City officials from Erlangen, Frankfurt am Main, Lüneburg, Lübeck, Worms, Kassel and Offenbach invited East German local representatives to join national heritage festivals, for example celebrating Martin Luther or the Hanseatic League. When the coalition of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD) and the liberal Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei, FDP) took office in West Germany in 1969, Bressand intensified the contacts he had already started to cultivate with West German partners. Against the background of the 'Neue Ostpolitik' of the new West German government, Nördlingen became the first new West German member of UTO in many years. This milestone was celebrated in the Bavarian town on 17 May 1970 in the presence of the mayors of Nördlingen and its French twin town Riom as well as Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt (SPD), as the leading representative of the 'Neue Ostpolitik', and Jean-Marie Bressand for the UTO.<sup>74</sup> In so doing, Bressand granted the Federal Republic of Germany the kind of public recognition which he was refusing the GDR.

Years before the Basic Treaty between the two German states put an end to the Hallstein Doctrine, inter-municipalism and urban détente were of little significance to the GDR. Town twinning, however, was not stopped, but transformed into a platform for propaganda events. As a consequence, even the most prestigious project of the DStuG, the Dresden Colloquium, was soon infiltrated by propaganda which negatively affected the atmosphere between the participants as well as between the GDR and the UTO. The third Colloquium in 1966 had already revealed the

<sup>72</sup>Information über eine Aussprache der Vertreter der Mitgliedstädte der DDR in der FMVJ (Weltföderation der Partnerstädte) mit Vertretern der Generaldirektion der FMVJ am 31. Oktober 1965 in Berlin', BA, DZ 4/148, unnumbered; Federal Foreign Office, Section I A 1, 'Vermerk, Ressort-Besprechung am 11. Oktober 1965', 13 Oct. 1965, PA AA, B 30, 458, unnumbered.

<sup>73</sup>FMVJ, Generaldirektion, Die deutschen Angelegenheiten und die FMVJ, streng intern', tr. DStuG Translation Bureau, BA, DZ 4/148, unnumbered.

<sup>74</sup>Weltföderation der Partnerstädte, Für eine neue Orientierung der französisch-deutschen Partnerschaften', tr. DStuG Translation Bureau, 26 May 1970, BA, DY 13/ 2965a, unnumbered.

ideological differences between the participants concerning the question of European integration. Since 1965, municipal exchange in the GDR had become increasingly centralized; the growing influence of the MfAA encouraged the East German participants to convince their European colleagues to publicly express their support for an anti-American Europe. While some mayors took the invitation, others threatened to leave the conference when these abstract visions were coupled with concrete political demands. Such was the case with Louis Deschizeaux, mayor of Châteauroux and president of the international committee which organized the Dresden Colloquium, when he was encouraged to support an East German resolution against West German 'imperialism' and the Vietnam War.<sup>75</sup>

The 1966 Colloquium elicited criticism from the UTO. Jean-Marie Bressand perceived it as a potential threat to his organization since the Colloquium had adopted and altered the UTO's charter by adding the principle of European security.<sup>76</sup> However, the scientific exchange the Colloquium provided was a success story. By the 1970s, the number of participants had increased to about 1,000. Nevertheless, since it had proved to be of less relevance for propaganda, it was abandoned in 1974 – the year the DStuG had ceased to exist and town twinning had become one of many issues co-ordinated by the League for International Friendship (Liga für Völkerfreundschaft). One year later, the prestigious Baltic Sea Weeks were also abandoned.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

Although the East German state was in the unique position of having to act on every chance to perform as a 'normal' and sovereign state in the 1950s and 1960s, since West Germany campaigned against the GDR's right to exist, urban détente as a strategic concept did not emerge from the drawing boards of policy planners, but from negotiations between actors working on the local, national and global levels. In the end, urban détente in the GDR remained a short-lived experiment. This chapter was finally brought to a close after the ratification of the Basic Treaty in 1972. Nevertheless, studying the short-lived experiment in urban détente as practised between East German and Finnish as well as Swedish partners reveals the ambiguities of globalization – understood as flows of people, ideas and goods – in the emerging era of détente. In contrast to previous research on East German town twinning, which has focused first and foremost on national actors such as the MfAA and central SED authorities as the driving forces, this article has highlighted the role of the UTO as a globally oriented non-governmental organization and the DStuG as the association of municipalities of the GDR. Unlike these studies, this article has shown that the UTO was not dominated by a particular Soviet agenda, nor was the DStuG a passive servant of the SED's foreign policy. Rather, the DStuG had to manoeuvre between the charter of the UTO, the expectations of the SED and the MfAA and the problems occurring in actual trans-local exchange. As a result of these manoeuvres, the DStuG

<sup>75</sup>'Bericht über das 3. Kolloquium europäischer Kommunalpolitiker in Dresden', 7 Jun. 1966, BA, DY 30/99045, unnumbered.

<sup>76</sup>'Probleme in der Zusammenarbeit der Städte der DDR mit der FMVJ', 15 Feb. 1967, BA, DY 13/2961, unnumbered.

<sup>77</sup>O. Griese, *Auswärtige Kulturpolitik und Kalter Krieg: Die Konkurrenz von Bundesrepublik und DDR in Finnland 1949–1973* (Wiesbaden, 2006), 54; Pfeil, 'Der Städte- und Gemeindetag der DDR', 145.

developed a unique understanding of urban détente which did not arise from conceptual planning, but from face-to-face and internal negotiating practices shaped not only by East German actors, but also by foreign town twinning partners.

However, though the emerging era of détente brought about a surge in globalization and allowed the GDR to participate, the UTO as an agent of globalization was soon directly affected by the German Cold War which threatened its very existence and resulted in a revision of its global approach. Instead of overcoming the Cold War in Europe in order to counteract the influence of the emerging European institutions, decolonization and development aid became the main focus of the UTO. Nevertheless, the DStuG could broaden its scope with the UTO behind it. Globalization at the trans-local level was an ambiguous issue, characterized by both dialogue and distance. Ideological differences were not intended to be overcome, but put aside in favour of technical exchange and cultural entertainment, which were described neither as 'socialist' and 'capitalist' nor as 'Eastern' or 'Western' achievements, but as features of a functioning municipality. On this basis, even transfers across ideological divides were possible, but speaking about these transfers in public remained a Cold War red line. The practice of urban détente, moreover, lacked support by the MfAA and central SED authorities since the concept proved uncontrollable and the status of the GDR within the UTO diminished only a few years after its membership began. After a short-lived period of practising urban détente, town twinning survived as an instrument through which the GDR attempted to perform as a 'normal' state within Europe and as a platform on which to propagate socialism within the decolonized states, but it did not continue to work as a driving force of globalization.

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