

THE NETWORK VIEWPOINT

4 August 2009

A think piece by The Network researchers

Pic left a photo of a work by Salustiano.com

Germany today: What a change!

How new developments may change your view on Germany

by Daniel Plettenberg, MD Evo Resarch and Consulting Germany

Germany has the reputation of being supremely Prussian: highly reliable, yes, but also highly boring.

But over the last decade, massive changes have dramatically transformed German society.

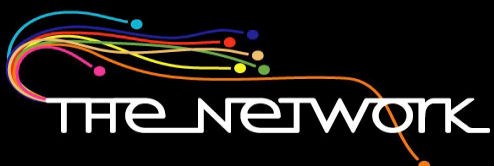
Not everyone may be aware of what's

happening in Europe's largest market. But these changes can have huge effects on brand positioning, addressing German target groups and so on.

So this short think piece starts with a bit of German history since World War II, which helps show why today's

changes are so fundamental.

Following this we offer spotlights on Youth today, the role of sport in German society, the behaviour of 30-45 year old Germans, and where in a globalized world the local differences may lie that are crucial for marketing success.



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A little bit of History!

From World War II to the 1990ties

After the defeat of the Third Reich at the end of WWII and the partition into West and East, Germany struggled to regroup as a nation and to find its place in world society. Germans had trouble finding a positive national identity.

As a reaction to the horrors of the Hitler regime experienced by the "father-generation", Germany fell into a state of denial in the 1950s and early 60s, and unpolitical thinking was the default mode. A certain "don't ask - don't tell" attitude concerning people's thoughts and deeds between 1933 and 1945 led to widespread bland conservatism.

At the same time Germany found its way back into the Western democratic community, joined NATO and profited massively from the US Marshall Plan and the sheer hard work of its citizens.

All this led to a shared but narrow-minded work ethic and lifestyle, focused on consumption, a new-found mobility and a new use of media.

The protest generations of the 60s and 70s were the first to break this mental stagnation and create a countermovement to the "father-generation". In hindsight, they also laid the foundations for profound changes in society.

The 1980s and 90s were times of prosperity and consolidation. At the same time there were cautious ventures into new areas: on the one hand the Green Party gave environmentalism a political voice, but xenophobic right-wing parties sprang up as well.

The big turning point came in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin Wall and peaceful reunification. Germany was forced by political developments to rethink its role in the world. At the same time Germans were forced to work on their self perception. Following the fall of the wall came a time of uncertainty: people feared economic upheaval, mass migration to the West and a revival of nationalist movements, which had long been repressed in East Germany.

It took a few years for these fears to subside, and they are still not to be discounted; the rightist reactionary movements in parts of Germany show that a new national identity is anything but easy to find.

To cope with the East German history of state-run terror, as shown in the Oscar-winning film "The Lives of Others", was difficult for many and remains so today.

Following reunification, Germany rode an economic and emotional rollercoaster. The cost of reconstructing the bankrupt East was much higher than first expected. At the same time crucial economic reforms were neglected in the euphoria of reunification. This sparked divisive debate over Germany's economic and political identity.

In addition the currency conversion from the German Mark to the Euro in 2002 was felt as a serious loss of national identity. Among some, traces of this trauma remain even today!

Two major events for the Germans: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the launch of the Euro
Far right: the Green movement 1985



Germany Today

The economic reforms of ex-chancellor Gerhard Schröder and chancellor Angela Merkel, combined with the re-positioning of the economy, have taken Germany from stagnation back to its familiar role as Europe's economic locomotive. Unemployment has fallen dramatically, from 5.5 million jobseekers in 2004 to 3.4 million today, with further decreases expected.

Germans were hard hit by the economic slump of the early 2000s and found themselves in a national malaise. But now we are seeing dramatic changes in the mindset: a new "can-do" attitude is pushing aside the old pessimistic scepticism.

Germany's Youth

As Germans, today's youngsters are untouched by feelings of collective guilt for their country's role in WWII. Thus they are much more free to find a positive national identity for themselves.

At the same time young people see themselves more and more as part of the global culture. So it is cool to like Hamburg rappers and global stars like Snoop Dogg



I used to be so anti-German even though I'm German myself, but this has changed; now it is pretty cool to live in Germany. Old Germany is over! Berlin is so rocking and has created a new picture of Germany

Dennis, 24

at the same time. To establish their private identity, they shop around like at a supermarket: mix and match what you like, no matter where it comes from, and of course it might happen to come from Germany. And there is enough to be proud of: German football, German skiing, German film, technology, music etc.

30-45 year olds

This generation used to bear the main responsibility to draw lessons from the Third Reich and felt it to be an especially heavy burden.

But nowadays, this generation has a much easier and lighter approach to life: many of them see globalization as a chance for new developments on a personal level as well as for society.

At the same time people of this age are increasingly defining themselves as part of their local environments: it is cool to live in the redeveloped areas of Berlin-Prenzelberg or the Hamburg-Schanze; you'll see people wearing t-shirts with their postal codes hand-printed on them. Places formerly associated with marginal, alternative lifestyles are now symbols of local identity.



Michael Schumacher
A role model for many young Germans

Sports

The psychological effect of sports for the masses cannot be underestimated. Michael Schumacher or Florian Hambüchen have become positive icons for national identification.

The Football World Cup of 2006 was a huge and pleasant surprise for Germany. The hopeful slogan, "The world hosted by friends", came true: for the first time Germans across the country felt

they were not the bad guys, but friends among friends. It was no longer "bad" to admit you were a German around other football fans from around the world.

For many, this so-called "summer fairy tale" showed that Germans were successful in developing a wholesome positive image of themselves.

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I like German bands like Tokio Hotel or Lafée, it is cool to understand what they are singing about, as they sing in German. But I like Brit-pop as well, they are a bit cooler. So, of course I have national and international music on my I-Pod!"

Paul, 14



Music and lifestyle

For several years now German music groups have been soaring in popularity. Even the French are now listening to German-language acts. The charts are full of all kinds of genres from boy groups to rap to alternative, and no one finds it strange to listen to different styles (another change compared to just a few years ago).

In today's urban scene it is cool to combine Berlin streetwear with Nike trainers, to know a local fashion designer or to have the local DJ do your next party.

Again, this open-minded mix-and-match attitude is helping German influences to develop in the midst of many other (global) trends.

Perspective on life

In recent years, three different trends in Germany have exerted massive influence on people's outlook on life: these were globalization, the gender debate and the fragmentation of life styles.

These influences are forcing the younger generations to find new creative ways toward their own identities. Of course those who struggle to cope with these changes will feel lost and lack a positive outlook. But we at Evo believe that more and more, today's 15-40 year olds are facing change with optimism and perceiving it more as a chance than a threat. They are becoming clever navigators, finding new paths and opportunities in a society of accelerating change.



Looking for a new hairstyle? Rent a convertible!

Golf TDI. Incredible Acceleration

... so what does this all mean for advertising, branding and market research?

Roger Smith from Saatchi in London posed the big question: "Do these changes have any effect on advertising?"

Well, Germans don't change overnight, and some things will never change. The German tendency toward a more rational world view, the tendency to see the glass as half empty, and a certain conservatism might still apply to some Germans.

But change is happening; many Germans are much more open-minded. They have shaken off their old hypercritical self-centric views and are enjoying being citizens of a world society.

And this fits with the nineteenth-century self-description of the Germans as "Dichter und Denker" (poets and thinkers): they will always show their rational side first, but the poetic side is there as well and flourishes just at the moment it is called for.

Humor? Germans actually can laugh at themselves. Though Germany used to be notorious for its nonexistent sense of humor, the Germans are opening up and finding that laughing doesn't hurt.

For example, T-Mobile and Saatchi developed a quite visually arresting series of ad campaigns that were quite well received by the German audience. And this is no exception: in 2007 Germany came in second at the global Cannes advertising festival.

So we urge brands and ad agencies to take a fresh look at Germany and to give new things a try.

And when it comes to market research, the old rule holds true: to inspire a German discussion group you need excellent moderators.

But be prepared for surprises: once they get going, they are hard to stop! Wrigley's head of international research, Tanja Faist, was amazed at the quantity and quality of the results when we challenged our respondents with a newly developed qualitative research method called Evoporters.

Finally, what does this all mean? Keep in mind: the Germans have a creative poetic side as well, they have a sense of humor and are open for new things!

Ad agencies: Give the creatives working for the German market more freedom, Germans are done with rational!

Multinational companies: Be more daring! Germans will accept more than you might think!

A British view on new Germany Sir Peter Torry

The former British Ambassador to Germany Sir Peter Torry was interviewed by the German newspaper "Abendblatt" in September 2008. Excerpts:

During the World Cup 300 000 British Fans discovered a new Germany: great, modern, friendly, quite different than expected... It was not just the hospitality and the fantastic mood all over Germany...

For young Brits Berlin is quite a cool city to travel to...

But: For many Germans the glass is often half empty and not half full, they like to nag and to complain..., but there is a change in the mood of the Germans...



Sir Peter Torry
Was the British Ambassador for more than a decade and knows Germany inside out

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