

Policing, Traffic Safety Education and Citizenship in post-1945 West Germany

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Introduction

A photograph, taken in the German city of Dessau in autumn 1948, shows a policeman carrying out traffic policing. He was standing on a pedestal in an empty street crossing with ruins in the background.¹ The photograph was part of the newspaper coverage of the city's traffic safety week (literally 'traffic education week'). Historians have examined the problems understaffed police forces faced throughout Germany in the immediate post-war years.² With large-scale black market activities, rising crime rates, food and material shortage, marauding gangs and badly equipped policemen, traffic education was, we might believe, not high up on the official agenda.

But before the rubble was cleared and well before urban planners implemented ideas accommodating traffic through spatial changes and *Autostädte*,³ traffic education weeks took place throughout Germany. Leipzig held its first in December 1945; Hamburg, Berlin Dortmund, Lünen and Castrop-Rauxel followed in late 1946.⁴ A year later, the Soviet zone of occupation staged its safety campaign which was repeated in 1949 by the newly established German Democratic Republic. The Federal Republic of Germany followed suit in 1950. Traffic safety education and traffic policing happened here, although mass motorisation was far from a reality—a fact that already hints at another purpose of these events.

¹ Bundesarchiv (hereafter BArch) Berlin, DO1/25592, Verkehrserziehungswoche 1948, Bilder u. Zeitungsausschnitte der LB DVP Sachsen/Anhalt, Mecklenburg, Thüringen an Hauptverwaltung DVP.

² See, for example, G. Fürmetz et al (eds), *Nachkriegspolizei. Sicherheit und Ordnung in Ost- und Westdeutschland 1945-1969* (Hamburg, 2001), 57-68; R. Bessel, 'Policing in East Germany in the wake of the Second World War', in *Crime, History & Societies*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2003), 5-21; S. Noethen, *Alte Kameraden und neue Kollegen. Polizei in Nordrhein-Westfalen 1945-1953* (Essen 2003); E. B. Boldt, *Die verschenkte Reform. Der Neuaufbau der Hamburger Polizei zwischen Weimarer Tradition und den Vorgaben der britischen Besatzungsmacht 1945-1955* (Hamburg, 2002); L. Hilton, 'The Black Market in History and Memory. German Perception of Victimhood from 1945-1948', in *German History*, vol. 28, no.4 (2010), 479-497.

³ This is not to say that traffic planning was not at the forefront of city planners' minds as shown by J. M. Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War. The Reconstruction of German cities after World War II* (New York, 1993), 205-220. More generally see M. Heßler/ G. Riederer (eds), *Autostädte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 2014).

⁴ Stadtarchiv Leipzig, StVuR (1), no. 7920, Infoblatt 59, 12.12.1945, 78; BArch Koblenz, B108/2570, vol. 1; BArch Koblenz B108/2200, vol. 3, 721; 'Der Verkehr und die Polizei. Verkehrserziehungswoche in Berlin', *Neue Zeit* (3 May 1946).

Traffic safety campaigns shed light on the efforts and difficulties of reconstructing citizenship in post-1945 Germany. The rebuilding of a democratic German society was closely linked to orderly, law-abiding and considerate behaviour—traffic safety events were the testing ground for these values. They were designed to create a sense of order, manners and civil responsibility in which citizens were urged to participate. Konrad Jarausch's 're-civilizing process' of Germans after 1945 also happened on the streets.⁵ While the difficult security situation in post-war Germany and changes to police forces have been well documented, the police's role in traffic education and traffic policing has been neglected for this period even though the street as key public space for interactions between the state and its citizens has long been of interest for historians.⁶

Traffic safety and traffic policing might seem trivial when compared to the massive scale of destruction and the equally massive task of reconstruction. But both areas allow us insight into notions of order, of allegedly appropriate behaviour of citizens in a new democratic society, of efforts to rebuild relations with local authorities and of individual responsibility for a wider community. At the same time, official understanding of concepts of order and good citizenship clashed with a public who interpreted them selectively, feeling little obliged to follow traffic rules or police orders. Unlike other efforts to influence public

⁵ K. Jarausch, *After Hitler. Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford, 2006).

⁶ One important exception is G. Fürmetz's excellent essay on Bavaria, "'Kampf um den Straßenfrieden.'" *Polizei und Verkehrsdisziplin in Bayern zwischen Kriegsende und beginnender Massenmotorisierung*, in G. Fürmetz et al (eds), *Nachkriegs-polizei. Sicherheit und Ordnung in Ost und Westdeutschland 1945-1969* (Hamburg, 2001), 199-228. For a concentration on women in the police and their tasks in traffic education see B. Blum, *Polizistinnen im geteilten Deutschland* (Essen 2012), 254-280. D. Klenke's insightful study focuses on German traffic policy and the different agents involved in it but, unfortunately, neglects the police. See D. Klenke, *Bundesdeutsche Verkehrspolitik und Motorisierung. Konfliktrüchtige Weichenstellungen in den Jahren des Wiederaufstiegs* (Stuttgart 1993). Interestingly, the Anglo-American scholarship on police forces has examined the role of British police forces with a focus on traffic policing much earlier. See C. Emsley, "Mother, what did policemen do when there weren't any motors?" *The law, the police and the regulation of traffic in England 1900-1939*, in *The Historical Journal*, vol.36, no. 2 (1993), 357-381; P. Donovan/ P. Lawrence, 'Road Traffic Offending and an inner London Magistrates' Court 1913-1963', in *Crime, History & Societies*, vo. 12, no. 2 (2008), 119-140; J. Klein, 'Traffic, Telephones and Police Boxes. The Deterioration of Beat Policing in Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester between the World Wars', in G. Blaney (ed.), *Policing Interwar Europe: Continuity, Change and Crisis 1918-1940* (Basingstoke, 2007), 216-237. For a focus on clashes on the streets see M. Gailus (ed.), *Pöbelexesse und Volkstumulte in Berlin. Zur Sozialgeschichte der Straße 1830-1980* (Berlin, 1984); T. Lindenberger, *Straßenpolitik. Zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin 1900-1914* (Bonn, 1995); B. Davis, 'Polizei und Gewalt auf der Straße. Konfliktmuster und ihre Folgen im Berlin des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts', in A. Lüdtkke et al (eds), *Polizei, Gewalt und Staat im 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 2011), 81-103.

behaviour, traffic education and traffic policing meant everyday interaction and communication between the public and law enforcement agencies. Citizens decided on a daily basis to what extent they wanted to obey traffic rules and to contribute to the officially proclaimed ‘traffic discipline’-- also referred to as ‘traffic politeness’ or ‘traffic morals.’ The examination of post-war etiquette books demonstrates how new codes of conducts and, sometimes traditional, social rules were revitalised after the war—but also how they were disregarded.⁷ Something similar was meant to happen on the streets according to a set of bourgeois values of appropriate behaviour combined with civil responsibility.

Responsibilities and duties linked to citizenship were not just communicated top down, citizens also showed what they expected. The implicit suggestion that those who did not behave correctly and respectfully on the streets were not decent citizens can be turned on its head by claiming that local representative of authority can be ignored as long as they did not address more urgent problems.⁸ These conflicts played out in the local environment as state representatives and private safety associations clashed with the interpretation of other citizens over ‘appropriate’ behaviour as traffic participants and good citizens. Within these debates and activities we see democratic civil society in the (re)-making. Boundaries of the *Rechtsstaat* were tested, citizens’ engagement demanded, bourgeois values of politeness, manners and discipline promoted, while, at the same time, over-policing was criticised, rules and regulations ignored and individual interests, rather than ‘traffic discipline, followed. My article mainly concentrates on West Germany but also includes references to the situation in East Germany.

⁷ P. Betts, ‘Manners, Morality and Civilization. Reflections on Postwar German Etiquette Books’, in F. Biess/ R. G. Moeller (eds), *Histories of the Aftermath. The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe* (New York 2010), 196-214.

⁸ Jan Palmowski reminds us of Charles Tilly’s definition of citizenship as ‘a set of mutual, contested claims between agents of states and members of socially constructed communities’ cited in J. Palmowski, ‘Citizenship, Identity and Community in the GDR’, in G. Eley/ J. Palmowski (eds), *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth Century Germany* (Stanford 2008), 74. The reluctance that characterised many regarding the obeying of traffic regulations also reminds of Michael Geyer’s concept of the injured citizen who mistrusts state invention and defends his/her private sphere, even though Geyer formulated his ideas linked to the anti-nuclear movement. See M. Geyer, ‘Cold-war Angst: The case of West German opposition to rearmament and nuclear weapon’, in H. Schissler (ed.), *The Miracle Years* (Princeton 2001), 385-392.

Traffic Safety in the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany

Traffic safety education and traffic policing in the late 1940s and early 1950s partly grappled with similar issues as previous initiatives of the Weimar and Nazi years. The rapidly increasing traffic in the 1920s meant that traffic education was an area in which policemen were required to act as educators of the public. Traffic safety events were organised on regional level in the Weimar years heavily relying on police involvement. In early 1929, a nation-wide week to prevent accidents in all spheres of life and work included a strong focus on traffic accidents.⁹ The Prussian Ministry of the Interior reminded policemen already in 1926 that traffic policing should not come across as petty but as friendly and, above all, educational.¹⁰ But efforts of lenient and well-meaning policy did not have an impact on everyone. The *Neue Leipziger Zeitung* commented that the city's cyclists and drivers only behaved correctly as long as a policeman was in sight.¹¹ Police forces realised that citizens' behaviour was not just dependent on their knowledge of traffic rules but increasingly on their willingness to obey them. The head of Dortmund's uniformed police concluded that adults found it difficult to adapt to new circumstances which made traffic safety education of the young even more important.¹² Consequently, greater attention was focused on cooperating with schools.

In schools, policemen carried out lectures and practical exercises and from late 1924, the police received support in their work through the private association *Verkehrswacht*. Organised in local branches, the *Verkehrswacht* had its origins in representing the interests of auto drivers. It encouraged its male members to note the breaching of traffic rules and to communicate these incidents to the local police. By and large, local police authorities liked

⁹ See Reichs-Unfallverhütungs-Woche (RUWO, 24.2.-3.3.1929), zweites Nachrichtenblatt und viertes Nachrichtenblatt, 1929. For a very good overview see also D. Fack, *Automobil, Verkehr und Erziehung. Motorisierung und Sozialisation zwischen Beschleunigung und Anpassung 1885-1945* (Opladen, 2000).

¹⁰ RdErl. MdI, 17.6.1926: Stoppuhren für die Landjägerbeamte, in Ministerial-Blatt der Preußischen inneren Verwaltung, nr.30, 23.6.1926.

¹¹ 'Leipziger Verkehrsverhältnisse', *Neue Leipziger Zeitung* (8 April 1925).

¹² 'Zur Frage der Verkehrsbeschulung der Jugend', *Die Polizei* (5 December 1927).

the cooperation with the *Verkehrswacht* mainly because the organisation had numerous teachers in its ranks who delivered talks in schools. The *Verkehrswacht* was keen to present traffic education as a way of creating a modern ‘traffic accustomed’ generation.¹³ Berlin police officer Seyffahrt explained how this active participation should work: ‘The police need everyone, every pedestrian, cyclist, car driver and especially every pupil when the traffic should be regulated to prevent accidents. If successful, Germany would not need to be a country of police because everyone would be his own policeman.’¹⁴ Here the police suggested responsible behaviour of every citizen for his/her actions rather than appointing some who should monitor the behaviour of others. Occasionally, the police became irritated when the *Verkehrswacht* wanted police powers, e.g. powers to arrest or to fine, for its members. Local police from a number of cities stated that *Verkehrswacht* members had no more powers within traffic policing than anyone else.¹⁵ Hermann Paetsch, *Regierungsrat* in the Prussian Ministry of the Interior, cautioned that the police should make sure it kept the core expertise and authority on areas as accident prevention and traffic education.¹⁶

Initially, the National Socialist take-over of power changed little in relation to traffic safety education and traffic policing. But National Socialist rhetoric turned the traffic community of the 1920s into a symbol of their *Volksgemeinschaft* calling those causing accidents selfish and egocentric.¹⁷ Similarly to the Weimar years, the success of traffic safety weeks did not become evident through falling accidents. Therefore, stricter police actions were announced.¹⁸ It was the nation-wide traffic safety week in late June 1938 that spelled an

¹³ There are no substantial studies on the *Verkehrswacht*’s activities in the 1920s and 1930s but the ideas of the organisation can be found in its publications. See, for example, BArch Berlin, R5/840, *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Verkehrswacht e.V.*, no. 2, 29.12.1925.

¹⁴ ‘Welches Interesse hat die Polizei an der freundlichen Mitarbeit des Publikums bei der Verkehrsunfallverhütung und insbesondere an der Verkehrserziehung der Jugend?’, *Verkehrswarte* (December 1932), 183.

¹⁵ BArch Berlin, R5/840, *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Verkehrswacht e.V.*, nr.2, 29.12.1925, S. 2, Verkehrswachtleute.

¹⁶ E. Gies/ H. Paetsch, *Polizei und Verkehr* (Berlin 1926), 198.

¹⁷ ‘Autounfall’, *Kampf der Gefahr*, no.3 (July 1934), 5.

¹⁸ Stadtarchiv Leipzig, Verkehrsamt, 10.10, p. 106-107, p. 159. ‘Schärfste Überwachung der Straßen’, *Leipziger Neuester Nachrichten* (29 September 1935).

end to educational efforts and publicly announced harsher fines. Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels stated that this event was the last one in which traffic rules were still explained, any wrongdoings afterwards would be severely punished.¹⁹ From 1938 onwards, police could punish traffic violations without having to involve the legal system. This could mean confiscating driver's licences as well as publicly naming (and shaming) those involved in traffic violations.²⁰

Policemen, local authorities, teachers and private associations had experienced throughout the Weimar and the Nazi years that the public differentiated between *knowing* and *following* traffic regulations. Furthermore, the National Socialists came to realise that their alleged traffic community was shaky. In March 1936, the journal *Kampf der Gefahr* asked the public to point out local danger spots on the roads that could be easily abolished. Under the heading 'The street belongs to everyone', every 'national comrade' should participate in this little contest to prevent accidents.²¹ After having looked at the suggestions, the police realised that most were complaints rather than constructive proposals.²² Citizens did use the opportunity to make their voices heard but not in the way the organisers had hoped for. The beginning of the Second World War substantially reduced civilian traffic and, consequently, scaled down traffic education.

Engaging the Public: The Difficulties of Participation

Scholarship on the post-war years in West Germany has shifted from interpreting this time period as complete break with the past (Zero Hour) to a conservative restoration or simply a preparation for the Cold War. More recently, historians have interpreted the time period as

¹⁹ J. Goebbels, 'Verkehrsgemeinschaft ist Volksgemeinschaft', *Die deutsche Polizei*, 6, no. 13 (1 July 1938).

²⁰ Fürmetz, 'Kampf um den Straßenfrieden', 202. See also D. Hochstetter, *Motorisierung und „Volksgemeinschaft.“ Das Nationalsozialistische Kraftfahrkorps (NSKK) 1931-1945* (München 2005). The NSKK took over many of the educational tasks previously carried out by the Verkehrswacht from 1936/37 onwards.

²¹ 'Ankündigung: Großer Wettbewerb', *Kampf der Gefahr*, 2, no.11 (March 1936), 13.

²² 'Die Straße gehört uns', *Kampf der Gefahr*, 3, no. 12 (April 1937), 9.

more dynamic suggesting that it was a learning process that selectively incorporated past memories and continuities *and* offered scope for innovation and (re)-learning.²³ Within this process of re-making and re-defining societal values, traffic education and traffic policing provided an important role for the police to contribute to this development—even though the police occasionally had to safeguard its competences and powers from other associations. Citizens defined and re-defined their role(s) in relation to police policy but also in relation to expectations that were linked to their behaviour as good citizens and exemplary traffic participants. Within these debates on traffic safety, we can see how larger issues, such as civic participation, democratic engagement, liberty vs. state interferences, and the privatisation of police tasks, were (re)-negotiated in this newly create democratic society.

After the end of the Second World War, democracy, *Rechtsstaat*, re-education and citizenship became keywords in the debates that envisioned a new democratic state *and* a new mind-set of the German people. The head of North-Rhine Westphalia's police department, the Social Democrat Siegfried Middelhaufe, emphasised in 1947 that the police should be part of this process: '... the police also need to contribute to this re-education of the people through their work as part of the people.'²⁴ This was easier said than done. The difficulties of police forces to re-gain trust from the German public in the immediate post-war years become obvious in the monthly reports on the mood of the population. Like in many other cities, the public mood in the West German city of Düsseldorf was referred to as 'hopeless', 'desperate'

²³ For a short overview on the historiography with a call for an European view see F. Biess, 'Introduction: Histories of the Aftermath', in F. Biess/ R.G. Möller (eds), *Histories of the Aftermath* (New York, 2010), 1-5; J. Echterkamp, *Die BRD 1945/49-1969* (Paderborn, 2014), 9-13. For the post-war period as a learning process see U. Herbert, 'Liberalisierung als Lernprozess. Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte—eine Skizze', in U. Herbert (ed.), *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland* (Göttingen, 2002), 7-49; K. Jarausch, *After Hitler*; M. Fenske, *Demokratie erschreiben. Bürgerbriefe und Petitionen als Medien politischer Kultur 1950-1974* (Frankfurt, 2013). For selective remembering and selective forgetting see R. G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001). Edited volumes that have presented the post-war period, an particularly, the 1950s as a dynamic period (rather than one of restoration) include, for example, A. Schildt/A. Sywottek, *Modernisierung im Wiederaufbau: Die westdeutsche Gesellschaft der 50er Jahre* (Bonn, 1998); H. Schissler (ed.), *The Miracle Years* (Princeton, 2001) and D. Fulda et al (eds), *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt* (Göttingen, 2010)

²⁴ Landesarchiv NRW (Düsseldorf), Nachlass S. Middlehaufe, RWN 15, no.1, Recht, Staat, Wirtschaft (Sonderdruck, 1947) 'Die Polizei im Volksstaat', 9-10. On S. Middlehaufe see Noethen, *Alte Kameraden und neue Kollegen*, 110.

and ‘worrying’ due to severe food shortage, lack of heating material, inadequate housing and high crime rates. In 1948, the annual report of Düsseldorf’s police suggested that a good relationship between police and all sections of society still required great patience and much work.²⁵ Two years later, the report wrote of ‘a satisfying relationship’ but pointed out that ‘every German citizen needs to be reminded of his duties—and not just of rights—in the democratic state.’²⁶

However, there were efforts to start a conversation between the police and the public. The police journal *Polizei-Praxis* put up posters in Frankfurt a. M., Düsseldorf and Stuttgart asking for people’s attitudes regarding the following questions: ‘What do you like about the new police?, What do you dislike?, What could be improved?’ In December 1948 the journal published some of the responses pointing out that the participation of over 500 had been unexpectedly high. The reprinted letters were certainly carefully selected and all of them praised the friendly, helpful and polite behaviour of the police. Critical points were made, too. Black market activities and corruption were not fought enough and the enforcement of traffic rules in overfilled trams seemed petty.²⁷ Mrs Erika B. from Frankfurt received the first prize for her detailed reply in which she firstly expressed her delight that she as ‘an average consumer, medium height, medium bombing damage’ should express her opinion. Among other aspects, Mrs B. praised traffic safety weeks but criticised policing of cramped public transport.²⁸ These letters provide a glimpse into the public’s ideas about the police’s new behaviour and reminded the police of the some of the urgent problems on people’s minds. While 500 letters were not an enormous number, it still demonstrates a willingness to participate in the shaping of the country. Michaela Fenske shows how letter-writing to politicians, ministries and other state authorities in post-1945 West Germany meant an

²⁵ Polizeipräsidium (PP) Düsseldorf, unverzeichnet, SK-Polizei Jahresbericht 1948, 5.

²⁶ PP Düsseldorf, unverzeichnet, SK-Polizei Düsseldorf Jahresbericht 1950, 3-4.

²⁷ ‘Unser Preissauschreiben: meine Einstellung zur neuen Polizei’, *Polizei-Praxis*, 2, no. 19/20 (December 1948) 240-244.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 243.

engagement of the individual with the democratic political process which, over time, resulted in ‘learning democracy.’²⁹ It was this development the police hoped to encourage.

The constantly rising number of traffic accidents—especially fatal ones-- caused efforts to involve the public into traffic safety measures after the end of the Second World War. The Chamber of Business and Commerce in Bonn found that in 1947 the area of North-Rhine Westphalia had far more casualties per car than England or the USA. It suggested that regular traffic safety activities were needed because ‘the discipline had suffered through the *Verwilderung* during war time.’³⁰ Statistics for North-Rhine Westphalia from 1947 to 1950 show increasing traffic accidents; the number of fatal accidents also rose.³¹ It was the war and the chaotic post-war years that were presented as the rupture to orderly, disciplined, polite and considerate behaviour here. Similarly, East German newspapers presented ‘traffic discipline’ as something that citizens needed to re-learn.³² While policemen could have pointed out that the exemplary ‘traffic community’ of the 1920s and 1930s had never existed, the official discourse fitted to the way many Germans remembered the past in which the ‘good years’ had been the ones before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The late 1940s and early 1950s saw a number of strategies to encourage the public to react to this rise of traffic accidents. Two films from 1950 and 1951, supported by the police forces from Stuttgart and Wiesbaden, made the link between traffic safety and citizens’ duties even more obvious. The 1950-documentary film *Everyone is a Pedestrian* stressed that problems of traffic safety were relevant to everyone and that everyone should be part of the solution. Stuttgart, the film’s example, had a traffic committee which involved members of

²⁹ M. Fenske, *Demokratie erschreiben*, 396-403. The insightful piece by Nina Verheyen suggests that the early 1950s can be considered as a time period of quite active public engagement shifting the focus away from the allegedly silent 1950s. Nina Verheyen, ‘Eifrige Diskutanten: Die Stilisierung des ‘freien’ Meinungs-austauschs zu einer demokratischen Kulturtechnik in der westdeutschen Gesellschaft der fünfziger Jahre’, in D. Fulda et al (eds), *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt* (Göttingen, 2010), 99-121.

³⁰ ‘Verkehrserziehung’, *Die Polizei*, no. 4 (3 Febr 1950).

³¹ L. Brandt, *Probleme der Verkehrsunfallverhütung. Methoden und Maßnahmen zur Bekämpfung der Strassenverkehrs-unfälle* (Dortmund 1951), 10-11.

³² ‘Der Verkehr und die Polizei’, *Neue Zeit* (3 May 1946); ‘Verkehrserziehung notwendig’, *Berliner Zeitung* (19 July 1947).

the police, industry, civil service, traffic experts, teachers, parents and ordinary citizens. They responded to letters and suggestions made by the general public. The film ended with the reminder: 'Every constructive suggestion is welcomed. Wherever you live, you need to help—everyone is a pedestrian and everyone is a contributor to solving the traffic problem.'³³ A year later, Munich had a similar committee. These activities tried to involve the individual citizen and, at the same time, suggested that the police reacted to problems together with the public.³⁴ The film *Citizens in Uniform* from 1951 presented the official message of West Germany's police by portraying one day of a policeman filled with helpful tasks and the film concluded: 'And now we know that policemen are citizens just like us, citizens in uniform.' The audience should not make the job of the police even more difficult by traffic violations.³⁵ While both films continued police efforts to re-gain public trust, they also asked for active participation.

Not everyone appreciated these initiatives and some felt that the line to denouncing fellow citizens had been crossed. The liberal weekly journal *Die Zeit* criticised in March 1952 a voluntary organisation in Hamburg called 'the community of traffic friends' whose members reported traffic violations to the police. Allegedly, the police responded with letters thanking for their help and advising them to bring even more people to the attention of the police. *Die Zeit* argued that Hamburg's police encouraged the denunciation of citizens and that this was hardly compatible with the values of a democratic society.³⁶ The police journal *Die Polizei* investigated these claims. According to Hamburg's police, its 'community of traffic friends' consisted of 300 experienced drivers who had been selected based on their excellent driving record. They had no police powers but were asked to remind people about correct behaviour, to report wrongdoings and to inform the police of exemplary behaviour too.

³³ Filmarchiv, BArch Berlin, *Jedermann ein Fußgänger*, FRG, 1950, München Hochland-Film GmbH.

³⁴ Fürmetz, 'Kampf um den Straßenfrieden', 223.

³⁵ Filmarchiv, BArch Berlin, *Bürger in Uniform*, FRG, 1951, Kopp-Film-Verleih. The phrase 'citizen in uniform' is most commonly linked to West German debates on re-militarisation in the mid-1950s encapsulating the new leitmotiv constructed for the military.

³⁶ 'Die Polizei schult demokratisch', *Die Zeit*, 13 (27 March 1952).

To make sure the 'traffic friends' knew what they should look for, Hamburg's police handed out short forms on which the appropriate traffic violation(s) should be ticked and combined with the licence plate number of the vehicle and the name of the person observing. These reports had consequences as the police asked those who had been reported repeatedly to come to the police station and to be instructed about the dangers of their behaviour. Also Munich's police operated a similar policy. However, Munich seemed to have had more problems with those who had been reported as 40% turned to the courts to protest.³⁷

These efforts to engage citizens clashed with difficulties of channelling their participation within legitimised democratic bodies. We also find a lack of unified official policy that regulated engagement and cooperation of the police with voluntary associations. Sace Elder suggests that the police's encouragement of public engagement in the Weimar Republic helped in creating the denunciatory framework of the Third Reich. It was this legacy and the blurred boundaries between denunciations, surveillance and engaged/ concerned citizens that created difficulties in the early 1950s, a time period when civilian officials and the police, as Larry Frohman states, debated the importance of registry lists and population surveillance in West Germany.³⁸ However, the police did not react to everything the public reported and the public were often reluctant in reporting what the police wanted to know. Gerhard Fürmetz shows for post-war Bavaria that citizens told the police little on black market activities even though the authorities were keenly interested, while the police reacted reluctantly to reports on neighbourhood disputes.³⁹

³⁷ 'Verkehrsfreund oder Petze, Petze?', *Die Polizei*, 5, no.13/14 (July 1952), 114-115.

³⁸ S. Elder, 'Murder, Denunciation and Criminal Policing in Weimar Berlin', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2006), 401-419; L. Frohman, 'Population Registration, Social Planning, and the Discourse on Privacy Protection in West Germany', in *The Journal of Modern History*, 87, June (2015), 331-332.

³⁹ G. Fürmetz, 'Last oder Hilfe für die Polizei? Anzeigen, Meldungen und Denunziationen im Nachkriegsbayern', in *Sozialwissenschaftliche Information*, 27, no. 2 (1998), 139-140.

The messy relationship between reporting and denouncing became even more complicated when voluntary organisations were involved.⁴⁰ Certainly the most interesting and ambivalent organisation within the spectrum of ‘traffic friends’ and other community traffic safety groups was the West German *Verkehrswacht*. Efforts to re-initiate the *Verkehrswacht* in 1946, stressing its root in Weimar democracy, were supported by one of its members with the suggestion that appropriate behaviour of all traffic participants introduced young people ‘to life in a democratic state.’⁴¹ Here we find the link between traffic education and citizenship underpinned by assumptions about a generation that needed to be ‘trained’ to behave correctly on the streets but also, and more importantly, to participate in a democratic state in which rules, laws and duties applied to everyone. Even though local branches of the *Verkehrswacht* had been re-founded before 1950, it was then when the Federal Ministry of Traffic agreed to the *Bundes-Verkehrswacht* as umbrella organisation to unite its numerous regional branches. While the *Bundes-Verkehrswacht* was financially supported by West Germany’s federal government, regional organisations had to secure their funding from German states. The members of the organisation worked on a voluntary basis.⁴² By late 1956 circa 500 local organisations existed in West Germany (including West Berlin) with most in North-Rhine Westphalia followed by Bavaria.⁴³ The head of the *Verkehrswacht* for NRW, Dr Arndt, even presented the organisation’s importance as essential for democracy because it provided a voice for the general public to counterbalance or, at least, negotiate the implementation of state measures regarding traffic policy.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ For a more general outline on denunciation and citizens’ involvement in police tasks see A. Lüdtker/ G. Fürmetz, ‘Denunziation und Denunzianten: Politische Teilnahme oder Selbstüberwachung’, in *Sozialwissenschaftliche Information*, 27, no. 2 (1998), 80-86; G. Sälter, ‘Denunziation—Staatliche Verfolgungspraxis und Anzeigeverhalten der Bevölkerung’, in *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, no. 2, 47 (1999), 153-165.

⁴¹ BArch Koblenz, B108/2200, vol.3, letter, 732. For a concise and critical summary of the *Verkehrswacht*’s self-created public image see D. Klenke, ‘Freier Stau für freie Bürger.’ *Die Geschichte der bundesdeutschen Verkehrspolitik* (Darmstadt 1995), 47-48.

⁴² *Die Bundesverkehrswacht. Jahrestagung 1953* (Bonn 1953), 10-11.

⁴³ *Handbuch zur Verkehrswachtarbeit. Für die Mitarbeiter der Bundesverkehrswacht e.V. Bonn* (Bonn, 1957), 9, 14.

⁴⁴ ‘Was wir wollen: Gedanken zur Verkehrswacht-Bewegung’, *Die Verkehrswacht*, 1, no. 1 (June 1950), 7.

Local *Verkehrswachten* were never intended to carry out police tasks or act with police powers. Explaining, educating and enlightening the public on traffic regulations and traffic safety were the organisation's areas. Cases in which *Verkehrswacht* members reported traffic violations to the police or encouraged others to report wrongdoings to them to pass on these claims were one of the organisation's more fiercely debated activities. Leading voices within the *Verkehrswacht* had seemingly few problems with this practice. The head of the *Bundesverkehrswacht* Dr Enno Becker explained in 1952 that the 'pest of traffic accidents' could only be tackled through daily work that established personal contacts with 'traffic sinners.' One way of doing so, according to Becker, meant that members of the *Verkehrswacht* wrote down licence plate numbers of those breaching traffic rules and then sent personal letters to them. He ensured that this was a very successful method as long as it was not used to denounce people.⁴⁵ A representative of the Interior Minister of Baden-Württemberg praised the *Verkehrswacht* as a civilian organisation that replaced the Germans' traditional trust in authorities with individual responsibility.⁴⁶ But the fact that the *Verkehrswacht* had to stress repeatedly that the aim was not to spy and denounce people suggests problems with these methods.

Police and local authorities were well aware that encouraging some to report on others could have unwanted effects. Bavaria's police believed that information provided by the *Verkehrswacht* would not hold up in court and, therefore, ignored offers from the organisation to expand its programme of reporting people who had been seen breaching traffic regulations.⁴⁷ Allegedly more positive results with reports from the public came when the Automobile Association ADAC asked 2,500 of its member in the mid-1950s to report dangerous spots on the roads.⁴⁸ The minister of the interior of Schleswig-Holstein pointed out that only reports on dangerous spots were asked for and not on the behaviour of others as one

⁴⁵ BArch Koblenz, B108/2200, vol. 2, 466, Vortrag gehalten an der Polizeischule Hilltrup, 4.9.1952.

⁴⁶ H. Bozler, Zusammenarbeit zwischen Verkehrswachten und Verkehrsbehörden, 27-28.11.1952, 2-3.

⁴⁷ Fürmetz, 'Kampf um den Straßenfrieden', 221.

⁴⁸ BArch Koblenz, B108/2201, vol. 2, 654, 658.

did not want to support denunciations.⁴⁹ North-Rhine Westphalia's minister for the economy and traffic saw this differently and reported that already in 1952 specially selected and reliable members of the *Verkehrswacht* had been asked to report dangerous spots *and* traffic violations. According to the minister, these reports had not been misused for the purpose of denunciations.⁵⁰

Not all initiatives suggested along these lines were considered appropriate and in some cases enthusiastic citizens were reminded of the boundaries of the *Rechtsstaat*. When Julius B., a member of the *Verkehrswacht*, volunteered as an auxiliary police officer and suggested that he and others could fine drivers on the spot, North-Rhine Westphalia's minister of the Interior reminded him that police powers remained confined to the police.⁵¹ Hans B. found that a selected group of people (members of the ADAC or the *Verkehrswacht*) should report traffic violations on a postcard. When three had been received referring to the same licence plate, the car owner had to pay a fine. The federal minister of traffic pointed out that fines could only be imposed by the police and that anonymous reports would not hold up in court and would probably lead to a flood of wrong denunciations.⁵² This issue of encouraging individual contributions, participation and 'education' of fellow citizens on the one hand without creating an atmosphere of denunciations illustrates the difficulties of using 'orderly behaviour' as key concept of re-constructing societies. Equally difficult was to rely on semi-private associations as watchdogs.

Public Performance of Orderly Behaviour: Traffic Education Weeks

Another way of engaging the population was the staging of traffic education weeks which publicly put the behaviour of individuals under the spotlight. Often these events were organised locally and one of the first after the end of the war was carried in Leipzig in

⁴⁹ Ibid, 662.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 660.

⁵¹ Landesarchiv NRW, Düsseldorf, NW 276, no. 16, p. 8 letter 27.2.1952, p. 10 response Ministry of the Interior.

⁵² BArch Koblenz, B108/2200, vol. 1, p. 201, p. 199 letter summer 1954.

November 1945. The city's school children attended talks by police and citizens living in rural areas around Leipzig were reminded that traffic regulations were still in place implicitly suggesting that the end of the war did not mean an end to all regulations. High fines would be imposed on those who did not show 'traffic discipline', so the police.⁵³ Also Hamburg's police concentrated its early traffic safety weeks in late 1946 on school children.⁵⁴ Similar localised events were carried out in Dortmund, Berlin, Lünen, Castrop-Rauxel and the area of Brandenburg in 1946. The trinity of public order, discipline and education was obvious in all of the traffic safety activities in East and West Germany. Equally similar were the difficulties of getting the message across to the public.

In 1947 the Soviet occupation zone staged a traffic education week throughout its five states and reported disappointing results. The East German newspaper *Tägliche Rundschau* lamented that many behaved recklessly and 'sleepwalked' along the roads. Parents were told that the ruins of bombed out houses were certainly not a safe place for children to play but neither were the streets.⁵⁵ The *Sächsische Zeitung* clearly linked traffic safety to civil responsibility: 'The traffic education week has to show to our population that voluntary order and self-discipline need to be a necessity, in fact a democratic duty in a democratic state.'⁵⁶ In fact, the report from Saxony grappled particularly with the seemingly lack of willingness of the public. While it praised the good involvement of primary school children and their teachers, this remained an exception: 'Only a small proportion of the population show an understanding of the importance of traffic education and of police measures related to this field. The majority was against any education or only behaved correctly as long as seen by the police and engaged in indifferent and inconsiderate habits as soon as police were out of

⁵³ Stadtarchiv Leipzig, StVuR (1), no.7920, p.78, Infoblatt, no.59, 12.12.1945. Verkehrsaufklärungswoche; Infoblatt nr. 59, 12.12.1945, Straßenverkehrsordnung beachten!

⁵⁴ BArch Koblenz, B108/2570, vol.1 (Verkehrserziehung), Hamburg Schulverwaltung an alle Schulleiter, 23.11.1946.

⁵⁵ 'Mehr Vorsicht-weniger Unfälle', *Tägliche Rundschau*, no. 238 (11 October 1947).

⁵⁶ 'Besonnenheit im Verkehr', *Sächsische Zeitung* (15 October 1947).

sight.’⁵⁷ It was not just the public’s indifference that irritated the police, but their often demonstrative challenges to traffic regulations. Richard Bessel reminds us that East Germany’s police were considered by many in the early post-war years as not getting involved in areas that mattered to the public, while they policed activities seen as unnecessary.⁵⁸ This suggestion echoed public sentiments in West Germany and can probably partly explain the behaviour encountered by the police.

West Germany lagged behind in regards to big and centrally organised traffic education weeks with the first nation-wide one in 1950. In Düsseldorf, the envisioned event in 1947 was cancelled due to a lack of resources.⁵⁹ Despite these early setbacks, Düsseldorf often served as testing ground for traffic safety initiatives before they were rolled out throughout North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW). Wilhelm Vonolfen, a former teacher and the Ministry of Culture and Education’s representative on NRW’s traffic committee, pointed out that traffic safety had not been dealt with for 14 years and, therefore, teachers needed to be trained again in this area.⁶⁰ He neglected his own activities. There was, by no means, a lack of activities when the Nazis came to power and he had been an active contributor to the *Verkehrswacht*’s journal in the Weimar and the Nazi period.⁶¹

In September 1947, the NRW Ministry of the Interior advised local police stations to pay particular attention to traffic education as the first six months of the year had already seen 612 fatal casualties due to traffic accidents.⁶² A list of causes for traffic accidents placed inattentiveness, recklessness and inconsideration as top three followed by poor conditions of vehicles, ‘the current food situation and the general exhaustion of the public leading to slower reaction time’ and the long interruption of efficient traffic education. The Ministry of the

⁵⁷ BArch Berlin, DO1/25313, Land Sachsen, Verkehrserziehungswoche 12-18.10.1947 (page 1-2 of the report)

⁵⁸ Bessel, ‘Policing in East Germany in the wake of the Second World War’.

⁵⁹ Landesarchiv NRW, Düsseldorf, NW 20, no. 196, 51.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 17-18, W. Vonolfen’s report to the traffic minister, 5.5.1947.

⁶¹ See for example ‘Wesen und Spannweite der deutschen Verkehrserziehung’, *Verkehrswarte* 7, no. 12 (Dec. 1934), 211-214; ‘Mit der Schnappschuss-Kamera durch den Straßenverkehr’, *Verkehrswarte* 8, no.3 (March 1935), 42-44; ‘Grundsätzliches zur Frage der Verkehrserziehung’, *Verkehrswarte* 9, no.8 (August 1936), 129-130.

⁶² PP Düsseldorf, unverzeichnet, Innenminister NRW: örtliche Polizeiausbildung Unterrichtsanweisung Nr. 14 September 1947.

Interior put the blame for accidents largely on the behaviour of public which, consequently, needed more education. This education was not solely the responsibility of the police but involved teachers, parents and everyone else stressing that traffic accidents happened regardless of class, age or gender.⁶³ Once again we find efforts to reach beyond the directly concerned local authorities and to present traffic safety as a communal task of an educated and engaged public. At the same time, not everyone of this public seemed to be equally suitable to participate. With phrases similar to East Germany, the urban public was described as ‘numb and indifferent’ concluding with the extraordinary remark that parents who were not teaching their children on traffic dangers were to be blamed in case the children suffered fatal accidents.⁶⁴ Unlike other areas in the immediate post-war year in which ‘a crisis of the youth’ was proclaimed due to the alleged *Verwilderung* and lawlessness of young people,⁶⁵ traffic safety debates suggested that the behaviour of adults was considered as equally inadequate.

Commenting directly on the police, the report from 1947 described the traffic safety of any given area as ‘a mirror of police discipline, education and police achievements.’ Furthermore, policemen were reminded that helping the elderly as well as children demonstrated that the police were truly connected to the people: ‘...and whoever believes that these actions are below his dignity or not masculine enough has not understood the deeper meaning of his profession and cannot be a policeman in a democratic state.’⁶⁶ This is a surprising comment because North-Rhine Westphalia’s police did not depend on women involved in traffic policing and the image presented here of the policeman as friend and helper for the vulnerable sections of society had a long tradition. For some, more pastoral police tasks seemed to counteract a strong masculine idea of law and order enforcement. Generally

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Jaimey Fisher argues that the focus on the youth was to divert attention from adults and to suggest that it was only the young who were in need of re-education. J. Fisher, *Disciplining Germany. Youth, re-education and reconstruction after the Second World War* (Detroit, 2007).

⁶⁶ PP Düsseldorf, unverzeichnis, Innenminister NRW: örtliche Polizeiausbildung Unterrichtsweisung Nr. 14 September 1947.

speaking, the discourses, policy making and law enforcements regarding traffic education and traffic policing in West Germany were dominated by men in the late 1940s and 1950s. Policing and law enforcement was carried out by male police officers and also the leading figures of local *Verkehrswachten* were men and so were civilian officials in the responsible ministries. That the framework of the allegedly inclusive ‘traffic community’ was determined by men might not come as a surprise given the nature of the organisations involved. However, East Germany relied heavily on police women in traffic policing and traffic education—partly based on a lack of manpower but also because women were believed to establish a better rapport with the public and especially with children.⁶⁷

When the first nationally organised traffic education week happened in West Germany in 1950, this type of public event was already under scrutiny as possibly not delivering the envisioned results and as being too costly. The arguments were similar to the ones made in East Germany, but despite concerns in both German states, traffic education weeks remained a long-lasting annual (sometimes bi-annual) feature of traffic education. While the federal minister of traffic supported the safety weeks, the *Verkehrswacht* stressed that these events could only contribute to continuous traffic education carried out by their local organisations.⁶⁸

Even though the early 1950s did not see the same level of indifference that police forces found in the late 1940s, the ‘success rate’ of these activities were not convincing for everyone. Some in the *Verkehrswacht* found that public space could not be used equally well everywhere and that big traffic safety events would have a better impact in small and medium-size towns. Citizens of big cities, so the argument, were used to big and sensational events that they did not care anymore about traffic safety weeks.⁶⁹ To reinforce its importance as local guardian of traffic education, the *Verkehrswacht* stressed the small-scale daily work that needed to be invested into this area. In fact, in the late 1950s the

⁶⁷ Blum, *Polizistinnen im geteilten Deutschland*, 254-263.

⁶⁸ E. Becker, Denkschrift über die Aktion „Augen auf im Straßenverkehr“, Bundesverkehrswacht Bonn (Oct 1952), 16.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Verkehrswacht described the importance of big traffic education campaigns mainly due to the indifferent and apathetic behaviour of those who could only be reached by big-scale events.⁷⁰ The patronising and authoritarian tone of the organisation seemed to have now been complemented by slight dislike for those the *Verkehrswacht* was meant to reach. When traffic safety weeks were envisioned as activities that could publicly demonstrate the good relations between police and public as well as impose pressure on individual behaviour, the reality was often far behind these expectations. The call for stricter regulations and punishment seemed logical for those involved in traffic education who felt frustrated by the public's seemingly reluctance to cooperate and to take their duties as citizens in the new democratic society seriously.

The moderate suggestion of Fritz Stiebitz, teaching at the police school in Hiltrup, who felt that the concept of 'traffic education' was problematic because adults did not want to be publicly 'educated' or even told off and that possibly 'traffic advice' could be its replacement, did not reach a wide audience.⁷¹ Already ten years earlier, Fritz Henkel had hoped that East Germany's 'traffic education weeks' could soon be renamed to 'accidents prevention weeks' as the education of the public would not be needed anymore.⁷² Both men had a valid point with their suggestion of re-considering, among other aspects, the language used for these events. Traffic safety activities were in East and West Germany compounded in 'traffic education weeks' that allowed adults little more engagement and participation than publicly demonstrating orderly behaviour under the watchful eyes of the police. This might not only have rekindled memories of a very different time period in which participation in publicly staged events was expected but also might have reminded many of the negative connotations

⁷⁰ *Handbuch zur Verkehrswachtarbeit für die Mitarbeiter der Bundesverkehrswacht e.V. Bonn* (Bonn 1957), 52.

⁷¹ F. Stiebitz, 'Die Polizei im Straßenverkehr', in H. Kalicinski (ed.), *Polizei im demokratischen Rechtsstaat*, vol. V (Köln, 1956), 39.

⁷² BArch Berlin, DO1/25313 (no page numbers), F. Henkel, *Verkehrserziehung*, 1948.

liked to the word ‘re-education’ in the post-war period. Allied policy quickly changed their phrasing from re-education to re-orientation.⁷³

Policing and Pedagogy: Traffic Safety between Fines and Education

When traffic education was presented as education to civil responsibility, *Rechtsstaat* and democratic participation, higher fines and severe consequences for those breaching traffic rules needed a special justification. At a Düsseldorf press conference on traffic education in October 1949, ministerial director Leo Brandt addressed this aspect. He found that high fines, severe penalties, Sunday lessons and court proceedings sounded like the kind of state interference ‘every freedom-loving citizen’ was happy to have overcome and that they reminded of the Nazi state. But this should not lead to a situation, argued Brandt, where these interferences were impossible and he demanded more help from the press for strict measures against the violation of traffic rules.⁷⁴ He also criticised Allied policy that restricted some of the previous measures such as fining on the spot, naming and shaming ‘traffic sinners’, lessons on Sunday or letting air out of tyres-- only because they had been practiced in Nazi Germany.⁷⁵

Sometimes also state institutions did not see eye to eye in these efforts. In early 1950, the federal minister of traffic Dr Seebohm announced a new ‘name and shame’ campaign suggesting that police forces should give the full name and address of those who caused accidents due to too much alcohol to the local newspaper.⁷⁶ North-Rhine Westphalia’s minister of the interior Dr Menzel pointed out to the police that this announcement of the federal minister should not be put into practice as it was outdated and not practical.⁷⁷ Furthermore, North-Rhine Westphalia’s ministry found that publicly naming and shaming

⁷³ For the negative interpretations of American re-education policy in the early FRG see C. Schrenck-Notzing, *Charakterwäsche. Die amerikanische Besatzung in Deutschland und ihre Folgen* (Stuttgart, 1965).

⁷⁴ Landesarchiv NRW, Düsseldorf, NW20, no. 199, 149-150, 4.10.1949.

⁷⁵ L. Brandt, *Probleme der Verkehrsunfallverhütung* (Dortmund, 1951), 47-48.

⁷⁶ Landesarchiv NRW, Düsseldorf, NW251 nr. 16, p. 1, Ausschnitt: Verkehrsblatt, 15.1.1950.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 13, 31.5.1950, Innenminister NRW an alle Polizei Behörden.

should be considered as Nazi practice and was, therefore, not to be carried out.⁷⁸ Also the journal *Die Polizei* warned that the police were not getting involved in these activities due to its similarities with the Nazi era.⁷⁹

While publicly naming and shaming people in the press reminded some of methods used in Nazi Germany, so did traffic controls carried out by plain-clothes police officers. In February 1952, North-Rhine Westphalia's minister of the Interior found that the use of plain-clothes officers was an appropriate way to act against the lack of discipline on the roads and recommended these actions to local police forces.⁸⁰ By and large, the district presidents from North-Rhine Westphalia reported back positive experiences from their police forces.⁸¹ All reports stressed, however, that the press did not react positively to these measures. Furthermore, the president of the Munich branch of the ADAC could hardly hide his anger regarding the actions of the police in North-Rhine Westphalia and wrote to the interior minister that controls carried out by plain-clothes police officers were incompatible with the constitution and Germany's democratic state. He demanded that these clandestine 'Gestapo methods' needed to stop as they undermined the trust in the *Rechtsstaat*, negated the image of the police as 'friend and helper' and reminded of the police state Germany once was. Furthermore, the ADAC's president claimed that numerous angry letters from the public had made these points.⁸²

While the ADAC's effort to intervene did not create a change of policy, two years later, in 1954 also the press loudly criticised controls by plain-clothes policemen. In December 1952 West Germany had, also due to the lobbying of automobile associations, abolished the speed limit. The impact on traffic accidents was disastrous and in 1957 the speed limit was re-

⁷⁸ Ibid, 14, Innenminister NRW an Bundesverkehrsminister 31.5.1950.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 2, *Die Polizei*, 5/6, (March 1950).

⁸⁰ Landesarchiv NRW, Düsseldorf, NW 276, no.16, p. 2, Innenminister NRW an Polizeibehörden, 13.2.1952.

⁸¹ Ibid, 29-33, 14.11.1952.

⁸² Ibid, 40-43, ADAC München an Innenminister NRW, 22.11.1952. The ADAC continued its strict rejection of state interventions and regulations throughout the 1950s. The re-introduction of a speed limit in towns and cities in 1957 was considered as 'dictatorial' and as an attack on democratic rights by automobile organisations; see Klenke, "*Freier Stau für freie Bürger*", 49.

introduced.⁸³ Not surprisingly, the East German press commented on the abolition of the speed limit and its literally deadly consequences as further proof of West Germany's failings.⁸⁴ When North-Rhine Westphalia's traffic minister Arthur Sträter announced a big traffic policing event in which plain-clothes and uniformed police officers controlled the traffic in January 1954, the newspapers offered mixed views on these actions. The *Essener Allgemeine Zeitung* pointed out that already the announcements of more controls had positive effects.⁸⁵ *Die Zeit* called the shift to more controls and higher fines 'brutal', while the *Westdeutsche Tageblatt* commented ironically that the traffic minister pretended that 'car drivers were collective murderers' and that harsher fines were only imposed to pretend that the minister was doing something.⁸⁶ And the *Welt am Sonnabend* reported that the minister was hunting down car drivers and that 'police terror' was certainly not the right method to increase traffic safety. *Der Mittag* agreed and concluded that only an impressive success could justify such methods.⁸⁷ Also *Die Polizei* found that phrases like 'the fear of the police' and 'brutal penalties' used by North-Rhine Westphalia's traffic minister were neither appropriate to enhance traffic safety nor to improve the relationship between the police and the public.⁸⁸ This time it was the press and the police arguing that state initiatives had gone too far and infringed on citizens' liberties.

In fact, Sträter and his strict actions were even referred to in the West German parliament in a debate on traffic policy in early February 1954 which expressed the helplessness of politicians on this issue. While CDU and FDP representatives agreed that they did not want an overuse of policemen monitoring citizens and, therefore, questioned the

⁸³ Klenke, *Bundesdeutsche Verkehrspolitik*, 96-97, 153.

⁸⁴ 'Schnelle Hirsche machen Straßen unsicher', *Berliner Zeitung*, 10, no. 77 (1 April.1954); 'Haltet Disziplin im Straßenverkehr (section: 'Traurige Bonner Bilanz', *Neue Zeit* (30 July 1955).

⁸⁵ Landesarchiv NRW, Düsseldorf, NW 370, nr. 680, '1200 Polizisten suchen Verkehrsünder', *Essener Allgemeine Zeitung* (15 January 1954); 'Nur Herrenfahrer ohne Verständnis', *Freie Presse* (15 January 1954).

⁸⁶ Ibid, 'Vorsicht-Verkehrschaos!', *Die Zeit* (21 January 1954); 'So geht es nicht, Herr Sträter', *Westdeutsches Tageblatt* (21 January 1954).

⁸⁷ Ibid, 'Autofahrer werden gejagt', *Welt am Sonnabend* (16 January 1954); 'Polizisten als Zivilisten getarnt', *Der Mittag* (19 January 1954).

⁸⁸ 'Der Tod im Straßenverkehr', *Die Polizei*, 7, no. 9/10 (May 1954), 77-79.

usefulness of Sträter's initiatives, the suggested solutions remained vague. The SPD speaker agreed that 'traffic discipline' would only work if the public volunteered to behave correctly rather than forced to do. The politicians concluded by suggesting traffic education in schools, an appeal demanding 'traffic politeness' and intensified work of the automobile associations to create exemplary and tactful drivers.⁸⁹

Since April 1950, North-Rhine Westphalia's police could do something police officials and traffic experts had wanted to do for the last five years but British concerns had delayed its implementation; police could fine on the spot for traffic violations. The fine was 1DM and had to be paid immediately. This was a policy the police could already implement in the 1920s and 1930s and it was seen as particularly efficient as traffic violations had immediate consequences.⁹⁰ Even though this measure was long asked for, it did not translate into noticeable success—as Düsseldorf's annual police report for 1951—stated.⁹¹ A report on traffic safety in West Germany to the Allied High Commission underlined in September 1952 that neither this policy nor the use of plain-clothes policemen were considered as adequate ways of tackling the 'traffic problem.'⁹² Seven years after the end of the Second World War, the report found traffic education particularly important 'because many here have experienced a time period of massive destruction of human lives and human values. Given these circumstances, a strong re-education is needed and it is a necessity to re-educate adults to traffic safety.'⁹³ The report praised police efforts in the area of school education but found that school authorities needed to support these efforts in greater extent. Not surprisingly, the report commended the work of the *Verkehrswacht* considering its local organisations as a

⁸⁹ *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages* (Bonn, 1954), 2. Deutscher Bundestag, 14. Sitzung, 11.2.1954, 424-432, 452, 461-464.

⁹⁰ L. Brandt, *Probleme der Verkehrsunfallverhütung*, 67-68. Most other West German police forces followed suit soon afterwards. The police of East Germany had been able to carry out this particular policy since 1948.

⁹¹ *Jahresbericht SK Polizei Düsseldorf* 1951, 4.

⁹² BArch Koblenz, B108/2200, vol. 3, Bericht über die Verkehrssicherheit in Westdeutschland, 25.9.1952, 525, 527.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 534.

great way of supporting democratic ideas through public's participation.⁹⁴ By late 1952, German authorities already knew how difficult traffic education of adults actually was and had some experience with the sometimes overzealous *Verkehrswacht* members.

GDR efforts to engage and educate the public in traffic safety measures were partly similar to those in the FRG as we have already seen in traffic education weeks. However, the opportunity to rely on state organisations as e.g. the country's youth organisations, the centrally organised support for the police (the *ABV* or police volunteers) and associations that ensured security and safety in factory plants allowed for a more centralised approach—even though this did not necessarily mean more success. Similarly to the FRG, not all efforts to engage a wider section of the population were seen as legitimate. Experiments in Dresden and Chemnitz in the late 1950s involved the *Verkehrsaktive*, voluntary associations that monitored traffic safety in industrial and agricultural work premises, to check on the behaviour of the general public in the centre of both cities. The initiatives were eventually stopped due to interventions of the main office of police in Berlin pointing out that police powers (as stopping cars or even arresting drivers) could not be given to any other organisation but the police. Suggestions to uniform or equip volunteers with traffic policing equipment were considered as unacceptable and any efforts in this direction were abandoned.⁹⁵

While traffic education of adults seemed to stagnate, it was work with children and pupils that triggered innovative initiatives. In line with suggestions already formulated in the 1920s and 1930s, the focus shifted to young people and school activities. Educational and school reforms were key areas of re-education in post-1945 German society and have been focus upon in detail by historical studies.⁹⁶ Traffic safety education in schools has not been

⁹⁴ Ibid, 535.

⁹⁵ BArch Berlin, DO1/27487, p. 87-89, p. 91, p.114.

⁹⁶ Initially, studies have largely focused on the limited or negative effects of Allied re-education policy, for example, J. Tent, *Mission on the Rhine. Reeducation and Denazification in American occupied Germany* (Chicago, 1982). For more positive interpretations see M. Heinemann (ed.), *Umerziehung und Wiederaufbau. Die Bildungspolitik der Besatzungsmächte in Deutschland und Österreich* (Stuttgart, 1981); K. H. Füssel, *Die Umerziehung der Deutschen: Jugend und Schule unter den Siegermächten des zweiten Weltkriegs 1945-1955* (Paderborn 1994); B. Braun, *Umerziehung in der amerikanischen Besatzungszone. Die Schul- und*

discussed in these works as they often focus on more explicitly pronounced educational reforms. But as we have already seen with adults, traffic education targeted at youngsters combined correct behaviour on the roads with good citizenship contributing to participating in civil society. Despite lobbying from numerous circles, traffic safety education never became an independent subject established as part of the school's curriculum neither in East nor West Germany. However, it was carried out as an 'extra' activity at certain points during the school year and within a school context including a number of different agents; namely policemen, teachers, and members of the *Verkehrswacht*. In the city of Münster, the police communicated traffic violations from pupils directly to the schools. Schools contacted the parents and the teachers and used the individual cases to talk about the dangers on the roads.⁹⁷ Practical exercises were carried out as well and in these police officers were particularly involved. These could include showing children how to safely cross a busy street as well as testing pupils' abilities to safely ride a bicycle.⁹⁸ In fact, successful passing of the 'bicycle test' was believed 'to strengthen the responsibility for the traffic community of the future traffic-generation.'⁹⁹

Even more focus on individual responsibility for the traffic community was placed on training pupils to become safety patrols and to help their younger schoolmates to get to school safely and, especially, to cross busy streets. Tried out on local level already in 1948, North-Rhine Westphalia introduced a trial run for safety patrols carried out by pupils over 13 years in Düsseldorf, Münster and Cologne in 1952. The education of the safety patrols was carried out by the police. Parents were reassured that their children did not act as 'teenage traffic police.'¹⁰⁰ The federal minister for traffic recommended this idea to be implemented in all

Bildungspolitik in Württemberg-Baden von 19145-1949 (Münster, 2004); B. M. Puaca, *Learning Democracy. Education Reform in West Germany 1945-1965* (New York, 2009).

⁹⁷ *SK-Polizei Düsseldorf Jahresbericht 1950*, 57; Landesarchiv NRW Düsseldorf, NW 20, nr. 196, 82.

⁹⁸ BArch Koblenz, B108/2570, vol. 1, OB der Stadt Düsseldorf an Verkehrsminister NRW, 21.1.1952, Erfahrungsbericht über die in Düsseldorf durchgeführte Radfahrprüfungen der Schuljugend, 205-208.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 206.

¹⁰⁰ BArch Koblenz, B108/ 2574, vol. 3, Bundesverkehrswacht an Bundesverkehrsministerium, 14.1.1954, Betr. Verkehrsministerkonferenz und Schülerlotsendienst.

German states and praised the safety patrols as role models for their fellow pupils as it taught ‘to serve, to protect and to decide.’¹⁰¹ Wiesbaden’s head of the police announced in the local newspaper: ‘The police need you; you should become a helper of the police!’ A sentence that needed to be clarified quickly as parents initially feared that their children were meant to actually help with police work.¹⁰² The idea of the safety patrols spread to numerous cities and German states and was officially sanctioned by the federal minister of traffic in 1953, approximately 8,000 boys and girls took part.¹⁰³ But this success also triggered fears of ‘a new uniformed youth organisation’ which reminded some of the Nazi years.¹⁰⁴ Police authorities were keen to disperse these fears and to support the safety patrols as it was considered to an effective way of traffic safety education and it guaranteed the police a positive influence on children and teenagers.

Conclusion

In hindsight, a police officer remembered his return to Berlin in the early post-war years: ‘My hometown was a sad field of rubble...its citizens were depressed...but in this hopelessness, I saw a policeman regulating the traffic in front of the Brandenburg Gate--a symbol of new order within the chaos.’¹⁰⁵ Indeed, traffic policing and traffic safety education came to stand for new order but also remained an area in which state expectations of its citizens clashed with public willingness to obey and follow new laws and regulations. In 1953 West Germany’s federal minister for traffic Dr Seeböhm concluded pessimistically that decency on the roads had been lost and that despite efforts to re-ignite this virtue, he found: ‘...a traffic community is the aim of our traffic regulations but there is little of it noticeable nowadays.

¹⁰¹ Landesarchiv NRW, Düsseldorf, NW20, nr. 197, Bundesverkehrsminister an Verkehrsminister der Länder, 23.8.1952.

¹⁰² ‘Polizeipräsident Becker an die Schülerlotsen: Ihr sollt meine Mitarbeiter werden!’, *Wiesbadener Tageblatt* (8 November 1956).

¹⁰³ BArch Koblenz, B108/2574, vol.3, Bundesverkehrswacht an Landesverkehrswachten, 3.4.1954, Ein Jahr offizieller Schülerlotsendienst.

¹⁰⁴ BArch Koblenz, B108/2574, vol. 2, Städtetag NRW Köln 27.5.1955 an die Mitgliedsstädte in NRW.

¹⁰⁵ Cited in C. Groh (ed.), *Öffentliche Ordnung in der Nachkriegszeit* (Pforzheim 2002), 10.

Pedestrians, cyclists and car drivers need to take care of each other and have to get used to the order imposed upon them.’¹⁰⁶ His lament was mainly directed at adults as the 1950s saw some new developments in reaching out to children and younger people.

The strongly suggested link between so-called ‘traffic discipline’ and civil responsibility/good citizenship only partly convinced the general public. The increasingly authoritarian efforts to hammer home the message of traffic safety campaigns were debated and often criticised with references to the Nazi period. Certainly, the accusations of ‘police terror’, denunciations or the fear of a new uniformed youth were also convenient for those who wanted to discredit the efforts and actions carried out by police forces and other state and local officials. Both sides based their arguments on civil responsibility, community and citizenship. Efforts to fight the ‘traffic problem’ were an uneasy mixture of calling for more self-discipline, good relations with the police and traffic decency as well as threatening with draconian penalties and plain-clothes police officers. While ideally traffic experts hoped that citizens learned from each other and behaved as one big traffic community rather than having to impose state authority through police forces, the reality was rather different. State officials struggled with their own conceptual link between behaviour on the roads and behaviour as good/decent citizen—a concept also heavily relying on authoritarian ideas of the state. Efforts to include practices of denunciation within a clear democratic framework were illustrated by the limits of the *Rechtsstaat* pointed out to those who eagerly wanted to report their fellow citizens. The combination of civil responsibility, democratic citizenship and law abiding behaviour was not easily achieved especially when citizens articulated that too much state regulations were actually seen as reminding of anything but a new democratic society.

The conclusion that ‘good citizens’ actually still behaved badly when it came to observing traffic regulations did not fit the moral and civil framework into which traffic policing and traffic safety education had been placed from its very beginning. The idea that

¹⁰⁶ *Die Bundesverkehrswacht. Jahrestagung 1953* (Bonn 1953), 18.

the rights and liberties of a citizen could also mean making wrong decisions and then having to deal with the consequences of this behaviour (legal ones or otherwise) featured little in the 1940s and 1950s debates about traffic safety. The *Eigensinn* of the public choosing to ignore traffic rules, despite better knowledge, was impossible to reconcile with the authoritarian and patronising pedagogical approach so obvious in traffic safety debates of the 1940s and 1950s. At the same time, citizens also negotiated their participation in this process by using a variety of options available to them on an individual basis. Some actively participated through local traffic safety organisations or by reporting wrongdoings, others complained about state interference, over-policing and being publicly told how to behave. Even though officials and policemen would have preferred the public to behave differently, West Germans contributed in their own and personal ways to the re-negotiation of post-war attitudes on citizenship, state interference, individual responsibility and civil society.