



## Chapter 1: Why Bitterfeld?

- *East-German town near Leipzig*
- *chemical industry since 1890*
- *brown coal mining*
- *pollution*
- *strong unemployment after the reunification in 1989*

Bitterfeld is a small town in the east of Germany. The town with its 16000 inhabitants is situated about 25km north east of Halle and about 34km north of Leipzig. It was first mentioned in the year 1224. At that time you could not think of any chemical and other industrial environmental pollution

One of our teachers who spent most of his life there directed our attention on the situation before the reunification of Germany. He told us that you could know the wind direction from the smell in the air. The smell of nitrous oxide meant wind from the north, the smell of sulphur meant wind from the south etc.

Even before the world war II Bitterfeld was a modern industrial centre , because there was a large deposit of brown coal. Since 1890 there also was chemical industry. At that time there was already produced chlorine and sodium hydroxide. But in the democratic republic of Germany (GDR) Bitterfeld was known because of its tired out equipment of industry. Until

1989 they still used the filtration plants built in 1912. These didn't correspond to modern standards of course.

Because of the increasing production these filtration plants were not able to reduce these harmful substances. That was also the reason for the bad smell lying over the town.



*chemical industry plant*

It was not only the chemical industry but also the surface mining of brown coal which damaged more and more the general aspect of the town.

After the reunification most of the manufacturing plants had to be closed because of their tired out conditions. Furthermore the reserve of brown coal drew to a close.

As a result thousands of working places were abolished. Only in the mining industry 82% of all workers lost their jobs until 1997. At that time



unemployment was nearly unknown for the population of east Germany.

Because of the national planned economy of the GDR full employment was guaranteed. The sudden change after the fall of the wall (reunification of Germany) didn't only lead to the misery of the population and region of Bitterfeld and its surroundings but also in large other parts of the GDR. This is going on up to nowadays. As a consequence many people left Bitterfeld to West Germany. From 1989 to 2002 the population decreased about 30%. Especially many young people left their home because there

was no future and no possibility to learn a profession. Also the birth-rate declined very much in Bitterfeld. As a consequence the age structure of the population changed in the direction of senescence. Nearly only the old people stayed because they were used to live there. They still felt attached to their home in the contrary of the young people.

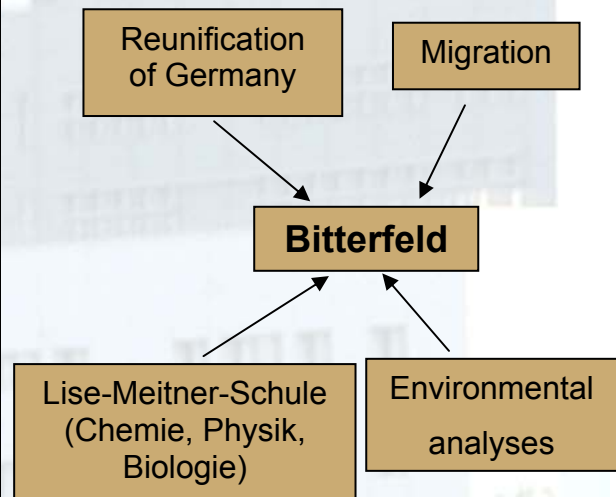


*Industrial pollution in Bitterfeld*



For our Comenius Project „Promise“ we were looking for a subject that concerned us directly, our private life as well as life at school. Bitterfeld and its history seemed to be qualified in a special way. We found each necessity in this town: The German reunification which influenced the life of each German (Bitterfeld is a town with typical problems the reunification brought to towns of the former GDR) and the refer to the point of our education of school, sciences.(Bitterfeld is an industrial point with typical environmental problems.)

If anywhere in Germany signs of migration and their effects to people's way of life and environment are to be found they should become evident in Bitterfeld in a special way.



*Mining industry*



*left building in Bitterfeld*



*more chemical industries*