

Introducing the UFZ Centre for Environmental Research Leipzig-Halle

UFZ Staff

Founded in December 1991, the UFZ Centre for Environmental Research Leipzig-Halle (the UFZ) was the first and only research institute in the HGF (Hermann von Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres) to be exclusively dedicated to environmental research.

The UFZ currently has some 600 staff (including support personnel), compared to 380 when it was first set up. Ninety per cent of its annual budget is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Technology, with the remaining ten per cent being shared equally by the regional governments of Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt.

Established in response to the severely polluted landscape in central Germany, the UFZ has since become an acknowledged centre of expertise in the remediation and renaturalisation of contaminated landscapes, as well as the preservation of natural landscapes worldwide.

Environmental research at the UFZ is increasingly targeted towards global challenges and problems, and has a strong international dimension (as demonstrated by close research ties with North and South America, Eastern Europe and southern Africa). Building on a solid scientific foundation, landscape-based research and environmental medicine are combined within interdisciplinary research topics with social sciences and ecological economics. *Kulturlandschaften*, i.e. landscapes which have been used and altered by mankind, must be shaped in a sustainable manner—along with their typical terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and the animals, plants and microorganisms they harbour.

In the renaturalisation of damaged landscapes, the UFZ increasingly relies on nature's self-healing mechanisms. It seeks to understand these highly complex, networked, dynamic systems so that the effects

Table 1. Organization of the UFZ

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Departments:	Analytical Chemistry Applied Landscape Ecology Community Ecology Chemical Ecotoxicology Ecological Modelling Ecological Economy and Environmental Sociology Environmental Microbiology Exposure Research and Epidemiology Hydrogeology Inland Water Research Remediation Research Soil Sciences
Interdisciplinary Departments	Industrial and Mining Landscapes Conservation Biology and Natural Resources Urban Landscapes Riverine and Lacustrine Landscapes UbZ Centre for Environmental Biotechnology
Joint scientific establishments	UMZ - Environmental Medicine Centre (UFZ, Department of Exposure Research and Epidemiology and the University of Leipzig's Faculty of Medicine) WTU - Project Management Organization Science-Technology-Environment

of anthropogenic encroachment such as river correction, flooding opencast mines, unsealing land and landscape fragmentation on the ecosystems can be forecast and assessed. Dynamic, feasible models and environmental quality goals are then worked out for various types of *Kulturlandschaft* and applied in land use.

As environmental quality and the quality of life (and its assessment) are closely related,

research into urban ecological and environmental medicine occupies a key position at the UFZ. Towns and cities in eastern and central Germany are at present undergoing a process of immense structural change, whose conclusion in consolidated urban development is still a long way off. The UFZ assists by helping to set the course for a new form of urban development which does not neglect ecological viewpoints.

As being near the countryside is an important requirement for human well-being in urban areas, this too is a topic of research. Although the biological situation of more or less natural areas in the vicinity of urban centres in eastern Germany is often better than initially expected, this does not obviate the need to make efforts to preserve them. Moreover, quasi-natural landscapes form an initial nucleus for the regeneration of severely polluted landscape areas. Therefore, the UFZ is deeply involved in networking research in natural areas and conurbations, and studies of industrial and mining landscapes.

Scientific principles are worked out for the environmentally acceptable remodelling of excavated landscapes left behind by the exclusively production-based economy of the German Democratic Republic before its unification with West Germany in October 1990. By cooperating with partners from science, business and politics, the UFZ will play a role in shaping the region to become a biotechnological reference location.

Nowadays environmental research calls for an interdisciplinary, flexible approach. No longer the preserve of specialists and academics, environmental research has

become an applied science relying on interdisciplinary cooperation—a principle which is embodied in the work of the UFZ and all the other research institutions in the HGF.

Table 1 provides further details and contact information for the UFZ.

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