

Bielefeld conspiracy

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This text is taken and slightly edited from Wikipedia (2022).

Chapter 2

First chapter

2.1 Overview

The Bielefeld conspiracy (German: *Bielefeldverschwörung* or *Bielefeld-Verschwörung*) is a satirical conspiracy theory that claims that the city of Bielefeld, Germany, does not exist, but is an illusion propagated by various forces. First posted on the German Usenet in 1994, the conspiracy has since been mentioned in the city's marketing, and alluded to in a speech by former Chancellor Angela Merkel.

This is not really relevant but I am going to cite two paper here: Ye and Jennifer E. Arnold (2023b) and Ye and Jennifer E Arnold (2023a).

Chapter 3

Second chapter

3.1 Synopsis

The story goes that the city of Bielefeld (population of 341,755 as of December 2021) in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia does not actually exist. Rather, its existence is merely propagated by an entity known only as SIE ("they" in German, always in block capitals), which has conspired with the authorities to create the illusion of the city's existence.

The theory poses three questions:

1. Do you know anybody from Bielefeld?
2. Have you ever been to Bielefeld?
3. Do you know anybody who has ever been to Bielefeld?

A majority are expected to answer no to all three queries. Anybody claiming knowledge about Bielefeld is promptly disregarded as being in on the conspiracy, or having been themselves deceived.

The origins of and reasons for this conspiracy are not a part of the original theory. Speculated originators jokingly include the CIA, Mossad, or aliens who use Bielefeld University as a disguise for their spaceship.

Chapter 4

Third chapter

4.1 History

The conspiracy theory was first made public in a posting to the newsgroup `de.talk.bizarre` on 16 May 1994 by Achim Held, a computer science student at the University of Kiel. When a friend of Achim Held met someone from Bielefeld at a student party in 1993, he said “Das gibt’s doch gar nicht”, a phrase comparable to “I don’t believe it”, signifying disbelief or surprise. However, its literal translation is ‘That does not exist’, thus suggesting (ambiguously) not only that claim wasn’t real but also that the town isn’t real either. From there on, it spread throughout the German-speaking Internet community, and has lost little of its popularity, even after 28 years.

In a television interview conducted for the tenth anniversary of the newsgroup posting, Held stated that this myth definitely originated from his Usenet posting which was intended only as a joke. According to Held, the idea for the conspiracy theory formed in his mind at a student party while speaking to an avid reader of *New Age* magazines, and from a car journey past Bielefeld at a time when the exit from the Autobahn to it was closed.

There are a number of conflicting theories about the reasons behind the joke’s gain in popularity, the most popular being a flame war between Usenet admins and the Bielefeld-based Z-Netz BBS about text encodings.

Historian Alan Lessoff notes that a reason for the amusement value of the theory is Bielefeld’s lack of notable features, as being home to no major institutions or tourist attractions and not being on the course of a major river, “Bielefeld defines nondescript”.

Bibliography

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