

# Berlin Won't Remain Berlin<sup>1</sup>

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*Hartmut Häußermann and Walter Siebel*

The decision has been made concerning the future seat of government of the Federal Republic of Germany. The constitution, the political system, and even the name of the newly created country will simply be taken over from the Western half, but the seat of government will be transferred: according to the majority in the *Bundestag*, this is the “completion of unification.”

We wish to deal more extensively with the consequences for the development of Berlin arising from the decision to make it the capital.

## URBAN STRUCTURAL ASPECTS

The perspective that after the unification of both German states Berlin might simply become a big city with lots of problems has apparently come as a lasting shock to Berlin politicians. The only political perspective for the city that the Senate and municipal authorities were capable of developing was: being the seat of government for Germany. This appeared to be the simplest solution, since it was associated with the hope of continuing federal subsidies and preventing a decline in importance. Berlin: the capital. What else? Yes, what else? That would have been the question if by coincidence another majority had won the day in the *Bundestag* on June 20, 1991. Nobody in Berlin would have been able to answer the question, since in the past, nobody had to seriously consider any strategies other than throwing money at problems and dressing them up in symbolism.

However, this bet won't pay off in the future. On the contrary: in terms of its inner structure and political culture, the city is confronted with even more difficult times than ever before. And if people are now gushing about the “metropolis of the future,” we have to ask what contours can already be made out.

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**1** | Source: Häußermann, H. and Siebel, W. (1991) Berlin bleibt nicht Berlin. *Leviathan. Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft* 19.3, 353-371.

## BERLIN HAS SOME MASSIVE CHALLENGES BEFORE IT

- In Berlin, both social systems confront one another: two different economies and cultures, as well as a diversity of biographies and individual characters. Here, we'll find out most quickly whether that which was so fundamentally separated can grow together, and at what cost to whom.
  - Berlin has to once again become a *single* city. Two city torsos, which had alternately stood in secret and open opposition to one another, have to become one.
  - In terms of economy and urban development policy, Berlin had existed in a bubble. That preserved economic and spatial structures that had long since disappeared in the old Federal Republic of Germany. Now, in the shortest possible time, Berlin has to catch up with changes that have been consummated in West German cities for the last thirty years:
- (a) For one thing, suburbanization. The wall had inhibited any push into the hinterlands, but in the next few years the pent-up desire for a house with a lawn will pour out onto the sands of the Mark of Brandenburg. Industry will occupy new lots in the previously untouched landscape. Nowhere has it been possible to stop urban sprawl into the surrounding countryside. In light of the long pent-up pressure and the expected influx to Berlin, the city will have to make great efforts in order to prevent the Mark from being covered in the same tenacious mush of settlements that has sprawled out between Frankfurt am Main and the Taunus mountains.
- (b) For another thing, the reorganization and dismantling of industry. In contrast to London and Paris, Berlin first became prominent as an industrial city – not as exclusively as the Ruhr, but similarly. The city still bears the marks of this structure even today. In West Berlin, the enormous subsidization of industry led – as in East Berlin – to the maintenance or creation of structures that had long since disappeared elsewhere: obsolete production facilities for obsolete products, extended workbenches, and too many workers with low qualifications or the wrong qualifications. In industrial enterprises in Munich, the share of academics is double that of Berlin. Berlin is standing before a dramatic upheaval in its economic base, for which other regions had far more time to prepare, even if they have not completely managed it. In the upper Spree region in the east, in Oberschöneweide, Trep-tow, Friedrichshain, and Marzahn, old hazardous waste dumps have to be found and eliminated, and branches of industry revamped. There are thus enormous tasks of constructional, social, ecological, and cultural renewal comparable to those taken up by the IBA [International Building Exhibition] Emscher-Park in the northern Ruhr region for the next ten years.

(c) And third, the transformation into a modern service-sector city; service sector employees in Berlin work primarily in public service and services financed by the state. More thinly staffed are the so-called production-oriented services, which are decisive for the economic prosperity of a region. So there is considerable catching-up to do. However, these are jobs for those with above-average qualifications. That means that of the cautious estimate of 300,000 unemployed for the year 1991 in the greater Berlin area (DIW-Wochenbericht 22/1990: 301), only a small number will be able to occupy new jobs – in part because high qualifications are required for the new jobs in the production-oriented services, which local unemployed people don't have, and in part because the reorganization and shrinking in industry will have as a consequence a reduction in the number of low-skilled workers, and partially because the technical and cultural abilities of future immigrants are not in demand in a post-industrial metropolis. As a result, the gap between the employed and those in the gray area of the labor market or the unemployed will continue to widen – with far-reaching consequences of social marginalization.

In addition to these problems of a long backed-up spatial, economic, and social structural transformation, which have to be caught up on in the shortest possible period of time, there are also the tasks of merging two different social formations and two cities, as well as managing new growth spurts.

## PROGNOSES

The prognoses for greater Berlin are impressive. In the coming twenty years, the number of residents is expected to increase by about 1.2 or 1.4 million, the number of jobs by 700,000, and the number of automobiles by 1.8 million. 800,000 apartments and 20 million square meters of office space have to be built. For industry and trade, an additional 22.5 million are required. The enormous need for space will have to be satisfied primarily in the surrounding areas, since there are too few industrial areas and areas cleared by the allied powers available. Recreational areas near the city will presumably be settled. The construction of new dwellings will to a considerable extent have to occur in the space-eating form of the single family home, if competition for inner city residential locations is not to be further intensified. Environmental contamination from automobile traffic and energy use will increase.

So the demand for construction is massive: according to conservative estimates, 20,000 to 40,000 apartments and 1 million square meters of office space have to be built each year. Furthermore, the enormous tasks of maintaining and modernizing apartments, office buildings, road networks and canals,

the extension of the public transportation system, and the renewal of industrial facilities. Construction capacity, on the other hand, is extremely limited. The Berlin Senate speaks of a lack of 152,000 apartments for the year 1992 alone. In the 1980s in West Berlin, a maximum of 8,000 apartments and 50,000 square meters of office space were constructed annually.

The discrepancy between the need for spaces and construction and the available capacity and reserves will necessarily lead to an extreme jump in prices. This process is already underway. Rents and sale prices for apartments, offices, and commercial space have risen explosively, with corresponding consequences for less profitable businesses and low-income households (cf. *Der Spiegel* 10/1991). In the real estate section of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), reports on Berlin are dominated by keywords such as “gold rush” and “gold-digger mentality.” Here, the federal government will be confronted “up close and personal” with a socio-political problem: real estate speculation. Office rents have tripled and quadrupled within a few months after German reunification to 70-100 DM per square meter. “Even residential real estate is worth its weight in gold. Monthly rents of 20 to 50 DM per square meter are being demanded” (FAZ, April 19, 1991). The Berlin government will have to think of something to prevent a situation where most of the money earmarked for reconstructing the capital ends up in the hands of real estate owners.

In light of the foreseeable deepening economic decline in the East and South, we can expect strong immigration from Eastern European countries, Turkey, and more distant countries. As in the metropolises of the Western world, the Third World and also the “Third Europe” will settle in Berlin.

## **SPATIAL AND SOCIAL SEGREGATION IN THE CITY?**

Prognoses concerning the extent of immigration from the East and Southeast are highly speculative. Less speculative, however, is the assumption that on the real estate market, as well as on the job market, the gap between those on the inside and those on the outside will increase. Even in Berlin, slums and larger territories with emergency accommodation, a shadow economy, and gray labor markets could spread; in cities like New York, London, or Paris they have long since become normality. However, this has negative effects upon the islands of the well-off. Locations whose immediate surroundings are threatened by the spread of slums, such as the London Harbor area, will hardly be attractive to the growing number of business people over the long term. Some so-called “good neighborhoods” in New York (e.g. Battery Park City) are secured with a military effort and the most sophisticated surveillance techniques. In Liverpool, new residential areas with elements of medieval fortifications are constructed as so-called “defensible space.” These architectural and security techniques are

the necessary consequence of social segregation in the city. At the same time, with the defense that they offer, they give their beneficiaries the experience of being permanently threatened and subject to complete control. Over the long term, both might put off even the most hardened yuppie from living in the city.

In any case, Berlin will definitely grow, and much too fast for its construction and planning capacities to become adequate to this growth. During the process of deciding what city would be the new German capital, the question was not *whether* Berlin would grow, but rather *how fast, how chaotically, and how ruthlessly* toward weaker interests.

## URBAN DEVELOPMENT RISKS

Among these weaker interests are not only groups living at the margins of society or the environment. Creating space in ten to fifteen years for an entire government also contains urban development and architectural risks. Will buildings constructed under such time pressure withstand the next forty years? Will the architecture conceived so hastily age with dignity, so that it will still be regarded as tolerable in future times? Or will it be the case that all too soon the fads of the 1990s will be recognizable, like the annual growth rings of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s are today? For the International Building Exhibition of 1957, Berlin gathered the heroes of modernism: Alva Aalto, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Oscar Niemeyer. Their result, the Hansa district, was celebrated worldwide. These days, it would lose in every international competition. The shelf life for urban and architectural fads has become considerably shorter than that of the buildings themselves. The great gestures of postmodernism might also age rapidly.

At the moment, the relocation of the government offers the hope of realizing the postmodern dreams of many architects. The FAZ action "12 Architects Design the Berlin of Tomorrow" offers the most striking proof that a city can no longer get by without the gesture of an architectural grand master. O.M. Ungers thus drew the ironic conclusion: he proposed to build everything in Berlin that had hitherto remained unrealized in architectural history. "Louis Cahns office high-rise, Leo Nidov's concept for Red Square, Adolf Loos' Chicago Tribune tower, or L. Lissitzsky's cloud iron" (FAZ, May 1, 1991). His proposal would gain a bit of color if one added a few living exemplars to the unrealized drafts: the Great Pyramid of Cheops, the Eiffel Tower, the Empire State Building and Neuschwanstein Castle. Berlin as a theme park of world architecture! And a competent developer could also probably be found: the Disney Company.

Such urban planning absurdities nonetheless have a rational kernel: the notion of the polycentrality and chaotic diversity of the modern agglomeration and the attempt to create good individual buildings. However, one fears that

Berlin will get a lot of new junk. In Berlin, there will be little time for good architecture and urban planning, democratic participation and “cautious urban renewal.” The haste alone with which the central zone between Potsdamer Platz and the *Staatsbibliothek* was thrown at Daimler Benz reveals what kind of “mixture of actionism and privy council politics” (Manfred Sack) holds sway in Berlin. When the federal government is added to the picture, the result is an orgy of “unbureaucratic decisions” and fashionable glamour architecture that the city will suffer from for at least a century. Christoph Hackelsberger writes:

“Greater Berlin needs a totally reorganized, powerful, central planning department which attracts a large number of free forces and makes use of their creativity. This reorganized planning department needs a departmental leader at the top exempt from any feuds and the usual hindrances that loom over electoral seasons and who can behave intelligently over the long term” (*Die Welt am Sonntag*, August 7, 1990).

This is the old longing of the architect for Baron Haussmann and Napoleon the Third, which Hitler’s “general inspector for the *Reichshauptstadt*” also probably would not have formulated any differently. The cry for authority and authoritarian power arises less from a self-conscious conviction than from a powerless display in the face of the helplessness of the urban planner with regard to the reality of modern big cities. However, the task of designing a capital city will all too often yield pretenses for imposing gestures, and will leave little time for rethinking and reflection – and above all else will change the political culture of decision making concerning the design and utilization structure of the city. Where history and the nation find their way, the years will hardly be squandered on the nerve-racking involvement of economically uninteresting groups in urban planning.

## **A CLIMATE OF REPRESSION INSTEAD OF METROPOLITAN URBANITY?**

Due to its position as the easternmost Western city, Berlin had the chance to offer a place for the encounter and intersection of different cultures. As a multicultural city in a welfare state system, during the period of the “new mass migration” expected as a result of the collapse of the socialist countries, it could have actually become the “capital of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” However, the chances of all this will be worse, when national and international centers of power usurp the city.

A multicultural city, which bears this title not as a burden but as a privilege, is comprised of a multitude of sufficiently large ethnic and national minorities, who need a liberal environment and spatial development possibilities in order to work out their cultural tensions.

“The bracing climate of a world city can, in the form of a concentrated intelligentsia, be very productive for the whole society; in contrast, such a bracing climate is a considerable danger for political centers, and the transmission of tensions in their sphere of activity make them unpredictable, susceptible to extortion, or defensive. When East-West cooperation was taken into consideration in the 1980s, the unique cultural resources of Berlin were regarded as the foundation for its status as a city of culture and a center for the encounter between East and West. Now, after the collapse of the Soviet empire, Berlin’s chances are better than those at any time during the last sixty years to draw upon its old mediating function as the fringe of Eastern Europe. And, through its reclaimed central position, in which Berlin has become the starting point for Eastern Europe, hardly an hour from the Oder border, such a mediating role is more important than ever. Recent news items show us that Berlin is not spared the foreigner-syndrome of the new German states. But a cultural world city, which is always comprised of many sufficiently large partial cultures, can remain capable of integration, can translate social tensions into cultural ones, and can confront the unavoidable consequences of a world city, namely increased delinquency, criminality, and mafia-like structures, with a liberality more promising of success than a circle of violence. A city with emphatic political functions, in which politicians have to isolate themselves against the susceptibility to extortion, will not be able to perform this task: it will become defensive, it will seal up the border of prosperity at the Oder, it will nationally displace its multicultural potential, it will become a hotbed of inner militarization and attempt to transform the space of experimentation known as culture into a coulisse of representation” (Niethammer 1991: 7 f.).

Very little speaks for the notion that the relocation of the federal government to Berlin will make the management of its enormous economic, social, architectural, ecological, and socio-political tasks any easier. On the contrary, the pressures of growth will increase and thus the time pressures and costs. Even more demand, even greater use of space, price increases, and displacement, and less time for decisions to be made in a well-considered manner and for plans to mature. The relocation of the federal government to Berlin will intensify Berlin’s problems. According to estimates from Bonn, 55,000 jobs are directly affected by the decision. Along with family members, this means an addition of 100,000 new residents of Berlin with purchasing power. The fight for the capital can begin; it’s clear who the probable losers will be.

## PERSPECTIVES

When, in the last twenty years, the “crisis of the big cities” was debated and the perspective of a “new urbanity” discussed, concepts like “ecological, social, decentralized, democratic, and multicultural” played a central role. In the dis-

cussion concerning the advantages of Berlin as a seat of government and the future perspectives of the new capital, they were hardly mentioned, and they were not relevant to the decision in any respect. It looks like the decision for the capital was made against a modern development of the city, as if policy and city conceptions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the inspiration and not perspectives for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If ecological, social, and democratic perspectives are not to be simply yielded to the new city management without a struggle, Berlin will be confronted by a more conflict-laden and turbulent future than was ever conceivable in the past. However: the chances for the new, the chances for a livable city, in which *all* residents can establish themselves in an acceptable way, have in no way become better.

*Translated by Alexander Locascio*

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