"Berlin Does Not Love You"

Notes On Berlin's "Tourism Controversy" and its Discontents[1]

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The word "Berlin," a crossed-out heart, a capital "U," and an unmistakable message: when the by now notorious "Berlin does not love you" stickers first appeared in the city in the summer of 2011, there was considerable commotion. However, the stickers really shouldn't have been a surprise, since they didn't simply materialize from nothing, but rather reflected a conflict that had been emerging for a considerable period of time, one which the media had already long-since taken notice of. Whereas Berlin's business elites and politicians had been intoxicated by constant new records in the number of visitors, and the booming tourism branch was stylized, with the enthusiastic support of the media, as a kind of savior for the economically troubled city, many residents particularly in the inner city have reacted far less enthusiastically to the constantly increasing flood of visitors in their neighborhoods. While often far more reflective than portrayed by the media, their criticism of and resistance against the increased deluge of tourists has led to heated debates about the way tourism impacts urban space and the role tourism plays in wider processes of urban change. It is a debate that is long overdue and surely worth having but that occasionally gets caught up in unwarranted tourist bashing and anti-tourist rhetoric. This contribution argues that it makes no sense to make tourists the target of political conflicts and that all attention should instead be directed at the politics that have not only tolerated but rather have actively encouraged the steamrolling of many of the city's neighborhoods by tourism and other forms of place consumption.

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1 | Source: Novy, J. (2013) "Berlin does not love you" – Die Tourismuskontroverse in einer von Besuchern "eroberten Stadt". In Holm, A. (ed.) *Reclaim Berlin. Soziale Kämpfe in der neoliberalen Stadt.* Assoziation A, Berlin/Hamburg, forthcoming.

BERLIN TOURISM — A FIRST APPROXIMATION

According to the raw numbers, the development of tourism in Berlin since German reunification reads like a singular success story. Whereas the euphoric predictions from the period immediately after the reunification that Berlin would, within a few years, develop into a prosperous service sector metropolis or even a "global city" turned out not to be true (Krätke 2004), the development of tourism exceeded even the wildest expectations (Krajewski 2006). While there were 7 million overnight stays in 1993, in 2012 there were already almost 25 million. The number of actual overnight stays is believed to be at least double the number officially registered by the city's accommodation industry and if one adds the circa 132 million annual day trippers that, as of 2011, were estimated to visit the city, we arrive at an annual total of approximately 182 million days of stay, or – reduced to the amount of daily visitors – about 500,000 tourists who stay in Berlin on any average day (SenWTF 2013).

In comparison to other European metropolises, Berlin as a tourist destination is at third place behind London and Paris, even though in comparison with other European metropolises as an economic location it only occupies the midrange. Due to the weak industrial base of Berlin, tourism is of great economic importance: according to information from the Berlin Senate, in the year 2011 the tourism business yielded an employment effect of over 275,000 people – including the non-working members of households that are also provided for (SenWTF 2011: 10). Furthermore, with a gross turnover of more than 10 billion Euros, it contributes considerably to the total income and the tax revenues of the state of Berlin, and is in addition to this widely viewed as a crucial image factor that has helped the city to shake of its various troubled histories and redefine its identity (c.f. Häußermann and Colomb 2003).

The changing hotel landscape of the city illustrates the rapid development of tourism in Berlin. Between 2001 and March 2013, the number of accommodation establishments in Berlin grew from 543 to 786. In the same period of time, the number of beds rose from 62,024 to 131,220 (SenWTF 2013) and branch experts expect that the accommodations market in Berlin will continue to grow for years to come. In the period until 2015 alone, around 15,000 further beds are expected to become available (Falkner 2012; cf. also Deloitte 2011). Furthermore, the "gray market" accommodations have also grown considerably in the recent past. According to a study by the tenants association *Berliner Mietergemeinschaft*, in 2011 in Berlin there were already around 12,000 vacation apartments in Berlin with 50,000 beds – and the number is rising (Berner und Wickert 2012). The boom in traffic for business trips as well as conference, congress, and convention tourism in particular in the meantime have become important pillars of the tourism business, but it is private travel in particular that allows Berlin to play in the big leagues of the most popular urban destina-

tions. Without a number of "hard" location factors, such as the city's excellent transportation links (including especially its addition to the route networks of EasyJet, Ryanair and other low-cost airline services) or its still favorable price-performance ratio, Berlin's dynamic development within the last twenty years would have been unimaginable. Nonetheless, several researchers emphasize that Berlin as a travel destination can also score points within the tough inter-urban competition for tourists and the accompanying revenue as a result of "soft" factors (Colomb 2011; Vivant 2007). The city is perceived as attractive to visitors due to its turbulent history, its uniqueness as a formerly divided city as well as its status as a "capital city" and in addition to this seems to benefit particularly from its image as the epitome of a "young" and "creative" metropolis that captivates visitors because of its contrasts and contradictions, as well as its dynamism and diversity (Novy and Huning 2009).

At the latest, ever since the American *Time Magazine* referred to Berlin in 2009 as "Europe's Capital of Cool" (Gumbel 2009), the word is out worldwide that Berlin is "hip" and "exciting," so it's not surprising that the city is particularly beloved by young visitors. The average age of Berlin visitors both foreign and domestic is, according to survey of guests from 2008, 37 years, and hence considerably below the number for Germany as a whole (45 years), and about 40 percent of visitors are younger than 30 years (BTM 2010b).

It is not least due to Berlin's attractiveness as a supposed trend and nightlife destination that tourism in the city has also been noticeably felt beyond of the core tourist areas of the city's two city centers – the Mitte district and the City West – as well as the classical excursion destinations or heritage sites elsewhere (Krajewski 2006; Novy and Huning 2009; Huning and Novy 2008). This can be observed for example in the gentrification strongholds such as Prenzlauer Berg, Friedrichshain, and Kreuzberg, but also in numerous other parts of the city, including Neukölln which until recently was portrayed in popular discourse rather as a place to be avoided than as an environment for tourist consumption.

None of this is entirely new, of course. One thing that is new, however, is the extent and breadth to which areas beyond the inner city are today integrated into Berlin's tourism and leisure trade. Tourism and leisure development has in other words become more evident and more pervasive. And it has emerged in many places as a powerful force, bringing about significant changes with respect to the urban fabric of the areas in which it occurs. As the Berlin press reports: "Tourists are discovering and increasingly changing Berlin's neighborhoods," wrote *Die Welt* already in the summer of 2010 (Bock 2010) under the headline "Tourists Conquer Berlin Off the Beaten Track," and a short time later *Der Tagesspiegel* referred to Berlin as a "conquered city" (Bartels 2010).

Primarily in the old eastern districts of Friedrichshain and Prenzlauer Berg as well as in Kreuzberg considerable overnight accommodation capaci-

ties were – and are being – created, whereby the number of budget hotels and hostels in particular has increased considerably (SenWTF 2011: 6). At the same time, the glut of hostels and hotels observable in many parts of the city is merely one aspect of a more comprehensive transformation of urban spaces associated with tourism, which often leaves behind deep traces in the everyday lives of the people living there: local businesses tailor their offerings to the growing visitor market or are pushed aside by shops and restaurants catering to visitors; once calm residential streets are transformed into shopping and party miles and community assets and resources are objectified, and commodified for external consumption. This multi-faceted transformation of urban places, occasionally described as "touristification" (Evans 2002; Gotham 2005), has – together with nuisance issues (noise pollution etc.) and the so far insufficiently examined role of growing tourist demand as a contributing and accelerating factor of gentrification processes – contributed decisively to the fact that the development of tourism has become an increasingly contested topic and tourists have become an increasingly popular bogeyman in the course of conflicts concerning urban restructuring processes.

FRIEDRICHSHAIN-KREUZBERG — THE WORLD AS A GUEST OF TOURIST-HATERS?

Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg plays a special role in this context. In the press the district is regarded, at the latest since the district's branch of the Green party caused a stir by hosting an event in February 2011 with the title "Help, the Tourists are Coming," as the center of the "tourist-haters" (cf. Haas et al. 2011). And in fact, in no other district of Berlin is tourism so controversially discussed as here. As in most other parts of the city, tourism was a marginal topic in district politics for a long time. While particularly Kreuzberg as West Berlin's former radical and multicultural center has attracted visitors for decades and can hence look back at a long history of being a tourist destination, at the district level the weal and woe of tourism had been dealt with sporadically at best (Novy and Huning 2009; Novy 2010). Only after the turn of the millennium, after Kreuzberg was merged with the neighboring Friedrichshain into the new district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, did the topic of tourism obtain a new importance in district politics. Initially, aspirations to promote local tourism were the focus of attention. Among other things, the district's own marketing bureau was expanded by an economic development project co-financed by the European Union and a roundtable was called into existence in order to better connect actors relevant to tourism in the district. The success or failure of these measures, which illustrate the permeation of district politics by the principles and premises of entrepreneurial urban policy (cf. Hall and Hubbard

1998; Harvey 1989; Mayer 1990), is difficult to evaluate. In any case, in the following years the district was confronted with a veritable tourism boom that soon assumed such dimensions that it was no longer the – supposed – benefits of tourism that were dominating the district's political debates, but rather tourism's negative side effects.

A whole series of different conflicts soon loomed: the Admiralbrücke in SO36[2] became the arena of a bitter struggle concerning the party-tourism occurring there; in many quarters characterized by Wilhelminian-period architecture, complaints multiplied concerning the legal or illegal conversion of rental apartments into bed and breakfast accommodations and vacation apartments; and the seemingly endless proliferation of hotels and hostels, originally well-received by district politicians, also became increasingly subject to criticism. The number of commercial accommodation facilities had more than quadrupled since the early 1990s and with the number of overnight stays now surpassing that of several mayor German cities such as Stuttgart (SenWTF 2011: 6) many residents, community groups and district politicians argued that a point had been reached where the development of additional hotels and hostels, especially in residential areas, should be blocked.

Furthermore, voices became louder concerning the negative influences of tourism upon neighborhood's existing urban fabrics and *Kiez* structures, for example in the area around Schlesische Straße, a *Kiez* which for quite some time has been in high demand among visitors and which in the eyes of many residents, for example the blogger Sebastian Kraus, has been considerably negatively affected by tourism. Kraus (2010), in his "blog novel," extensively addresses the "increasing imposition upon everyday life and living environment of people living here by tourism, its presence and infrastructure" as well as the advancing "transformation of streets and squares in photo and postcard motifs, pictures, and backdrops." Kraus describes how, through the "loss of urban and social free spaces and niches" as well as the "disappearance of authentic places," exactly that mythos is undermined that forms the basis of Berlin's current attractiveness as a tourist destination. And he discusses the larger issue of gentrification that serves simultaneously as cause, context, and consequence of the neighborhood's rise to prominence as a visitor destination.

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2 | Translator's note: SO36, which refers to the former postal code of the area, is the colloquial term for the eastern part of the Kreuzberg district, traditionally characterized by the presence of political leftists and residents of Turkish descent. It is also the name of a longstanding concert venue.

Don't Blame it All on Tourism! Who is "Visiting" and "Changing" Berlin's *Kieze*

Concerns like the ones Kraus discusses have become more and more widespread in recent years and have, unfortunately, also led to some annoying excesses. Indeed some more militant groups engaged in the city's political struggles have even gone so far to argue that, since tourists were complicit in gentrification, attacking them would be a viable and legitimate way to fight it. An article in the left-wing scene magazine *Interim* suggested for example that by "steal(ing) their mobile phones and wallets [...], burn(ing) their cars, smash(ing) their hotel windows, drop(ing) rubbish, (and) throw(ing) stuff at tourist buses," tourists could be scared away and prospective developers discouraged to invest (cited in Hasselmann 2010).

Contrary to portrayals in mainstream media, such outright malicious "reasoning" – if it can be called as such – is by no means typical for the wider protests spreading across Berlin's neighborhoods. At the same time, however, there can be no denial that it has become increasingly popular to look at tourists as some eleventh biblical plague (Meinholt 2010) and make them single-handedly responsible for the unwanted changes the city's more centrally located neighborhoods are currently experiencing. From the perspective of those who live or work in the immediate vicinity of tourist poles of attraction, the recent vituperation against tourists might be understandable. For example, whoever lives on Kreuzberg's Falckensteinstraße – which residents rechristened "Ballermanstraße"[3] by placing stickers over the street signs – has good reasons to be annoyed by the legions of party-crazed visitors that flock there. Overall, however, tourist-bashing isn't really helpful. It distracts from the fact that many problems that have come to be associated with tourism are not primarily, let alone exclusively the fault of tourists, and furthermore rests upon undifferentiated – and often also rather elitist – clichés about who tourists are and how they behave. To put it more bluntly: there is no such thing as "the tourist." To portray tourists as a homogeneous whole has always been misleading as different kinds of people have always engaged in different activities and practices when traveling (Cohen 2004: 66) but is even more inadequate today in light of the changing and increasingly complex realities that have come to characterize contemporary tourism.

These realities are maybe best described as a continuously ongoing differentiation or segmentation of tourism, due the constant development of new niches and trends which has led various authors to postulate the emergence of

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3 | Translator's note: Ballermann is a bar on the Spanish island of Majorca notorious for being a hangout for obnoxious German tourists. The term is also applied to the neighborhood in which the bar resides.

a "new tourism" (cf. Poon 1989; Voase 2007), and de-differentiation because of wider changes in leisure, consumption, and mobility patterns in advanced capitalist societies that make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between tourism and other forms of migration and mobility, as well as other forms of leisure and (place) consumption (cf. Urry 2001; Hall et al. 2006; Novy 2011).

Contemporary tourism is, in other words, not just more diverse than ever, but also characterized by an increasing "routinization" (*Veralltäglichung*) (cf. Wöhler 2011). One the one hand, this is due to the fact that travel for certain social groups is increasingly a part of everyday life and on the other hand, because the lines between tourist and non-tourist activity have become increasingly blurred. Several studies have for instance shown that certain, usually privileged urban milieus increasingly behave as "as if tourists" (cf. Lloyd and Clark 2001), meaning they use urban spaces and resources in a manner similar to tourists (Maitland and Newman 2004: 341; cf. Novy 2010). Furthermore, the lines between tourism and other forms of (temporary) migration are also becoming increasingly blurred. The growing number of highly mobile academics, artists, and "creative" workers and entrepreneurs that can be encountered in Berlin is a case in point. Sometimes referred to as YUKIS (Young Urban Creative Internationals; Knight 2011), these temporary "city users" cannot be unambiguously classified as either tourists or residents and due to their growing presence in today's cities indeed call essentialist distinctions between "locals" and "others"/"outsiders" increasingly into question (cf. Martinotti 1999; Costa and Martinotti 2003).

In this context, and against the background of constantly increasing mobility and international linkages, Maitland and Newman (2009) speak of a growing and increasingly mobile "cosmopolitan consuming class" – which in some large cities, including especially "world tourism cities" like London or New York has reached a critical mass – or rather of changed behaviors in the mobility, work, and consumption of urban milieus, whose effects upon cities and their subspaces have up to now not received sufficient attention in urban policy or urban research. Alluding to the concept of "new tourism" already mentioned, Maitland and Newman also speak of the constitution of "new tourism areas" in which traditional tourism, combined with other forms of "place consumption" (Selby 2004) emerges in a way that impacts and changes urban space (Maitland and Newman 2004, 2009). A new internationality emerges, there is an increased concentration of cafes, bars, and other offers for target groups that enjoy going out or are hungry for experiences, processes of transformation and valorization are favored. There is strong indication that such dynamics, which Maitland and Newman first observe in various quarters of North and East London, are also present in Berlin. Here too, processes of urban and neighborhood change seem to be influenced – and sometimes even shaped – by the practices and preferences of different leisure and consumption-prone groups of city us-

ers – groups that include residents, tourists but also many others that do not fit neatly into either one of the two categories. However, this is not the only reason why scape oating tourists is unwarranted and ultimately also counterproductive. Arguably, even more importantly, doing so also distracts attention away from the political factors that have conditioned the ways in which tourism has developed and Berlin's socio-spatial configuration has changed.

CITY TOURISM AND LOCAL MUNICIPAL POLITICS

Without a doubt, tourism plays an important role in Berlin politics, and not just since governing mayor Klaus Wowereit openly declared in an interview in 2004 that he wished to make tourism a "top priority" (Sontheimer 2004a). Already before the fall of the Berlin Wall, politicians gave above-average attention to tourism, not least because tourism was regarded as an important instrument in the propagandistic competition of both halves of the city (and both political systems). After the *Wende*, tourism moved increasingly to the center of attention as an important pillar of the city's economy. The visual power of the fall of the wall and the reunification brought record revenues for Berlin tourism and led, along with the natural ebb in visitor traffic that followed the immediate post-reunification period, to increased political engagement concerning its economic importance, the organization and orientation of Berlin tourism policy, as well as the development and implementation of appropriate marketing activities (Nerger 1998; Colomb 2011). In 1992/93, it was decided to involve the private sector more strongly in the marketing of Berlin as a location. First, the (West-)Berlin tourism office (*Berliner Fremdenverkehrsamt*) was replaced by the *Berlin Tourismus Marketing GmbH* (BTM for short), a public-private partnership, later renamed to *Visit Berlin* that is partially financed by the city of Berlin and the tourism industry. In 1994, there followed the founding of *Partner für Berlin – Gesellschaft für Hauptstadt-Marketing mbH* (PfB; today known as *Berlin Partner*), a second public-private partnership devoted to marketing Berlin. Against the background of far-reaching economic and political restructuring marked by a profound re-orientation of urban governance and policies emphasizing growth and competitiveness, two important actors thus emerged that would significantly influence the orientation of political and administrative action with regard to tourism.

During the Red-Red (SPD-PDS/DIE LINKE) state government, which took power after the collapse of the CDU-led grand coalition in 2001, tourism, if anything, gained in significance in the city's political arena. By then, policy-makers had come to grips with the reality that previous dreams that Berlin would regain its status as a major economic center were nothing more than that: dreams. They were also confronted, not least due to the Berlin banking scandal that had come to light in 2001, with an increasingly dramatic economic

and financial situation. Whereas Berlin was economically at rock bottom, the tourism sector exhibited a downright boisterous development and therefore came – along with a few other areas of the so-called tertiary sector – to play an even more important role in the city's increasingly market-, consumption- and property-led approach to urban and economic development.

A "roundtable for tourism" situated in the Senate chancellery was called into being, a tourism concept to increase the number of visitors was created, and despite the acute budgetary crisis of the state, a considerable intensification of Berlin tourism marketing, including the allocation of additional public subsidies, was resolved. The tourist branch of the economy in Berlin was pleasantly surprised. The state government led by Wowereit was supposedly doing "much more for tourism than all of its predecessors" proclaimed the then-head of BTM, Hanns Peter Nerger, in 2004, and that despite the fact that the industry was skeptical toward the Red-Red Senate at the beginning (Sontheimer 2004b). Meanwhile, the Senate saw itself as vindicated by the sustained growth of the tourism sector and during its second term in office continued place a special emphasis upon boosting the sector's development. Since the originally formulated goal of raising overnight stays to 15 million by 2010 had already been reached during the 2006 soccer world cup, the new goal became to crack the 20 million mark by 2010.

Furthermore, noticeable changes occurred with regard to the contents and spatial orientation of many measures related to tourism. Berlins *Kieze* had played a rather subordinate role in previous years within BTM as well as in debates concerning the development of tourism in the city. In particular, BTM focused upon advertising the city center and other mainstream or big-ticket attractions located elsewhere, despite the fact that travel guides and other tourist media at the time had long recognized the tourism potential of many *Kieze*. This began to change over the course of the 2000s when Berlin's policy-makers as well as the city's marketers *Partner für Berlin and BTM/Visit Berlin* began to implement various policy measures to promote Berlin as a "creative city." Now, motifs beyond the usual tourist destinations increasingly shifted to the center of attention: places with which the image of the city as a creative and "scene" metropolis could be emphasized, such as the temporary "urban beaches" on the banks of the river Spree (Colomb 2011), but also images of trendy street cafes, apartment building courtyards and other, supposedly *kiez*-typical motifs (cf. Colomb 2011; Kalandides and Colomb 2010). Largely absent during this period was a concern for tourism's negative effects. Rather, the city's approach to tourism policy – understood as what governments choose to do or choose not to do in relation to tourism (Hall and Jenkins 2004) – was almost exclusively concerned with marketing initiatives, the reorganization of Berlin's urban environment according to the needs of affluent consumers and the visitor economy as well as other activities aimed at promoting further tourism growth.

More recently and in response to the growing criticism of and resistance against the course of the city's development, there have been some slight policy changes. Most notably, legislation was introduced to curb the conversion apartments to tourist rentals. The thrust of the city's tourism policy – as exemplified by the recently published "Tourism Concept 2011+" – has remained virtually unchanged, however. Growth continues to be prioritized – the magic number the city wants to crack next now is 30 million annual overnight stays – and in the rare instances that tourism's negative externalities are mentioned this seems more to be due to a concern about the future prospects of Berlin as a destination than a concern over the integrity of the city and its neighborhoods as lived-in environments.

CONCLUSION

Tourism has become a defining feature of the profound transformation of Berlin since the fall of the wall and the reunification of both halves of the city. It makes its mark upon the city in terms of its image, its ambiance, and not least its self-conception, and is regarded as one of the decisive economic glimmers of hope in the next few decades. As a source of (tax) revenue, a job engine, and an image factor that puts Berlin in a positive light, tourism is courted, celebrated, and promoted. Some commentators even see the future of Berlin as a sort of "Las Vegas on the Spree," a city built around and sustained by leisure and consumption (cf. Büscher 2006). One particular characteristic of the tourism boom in Berlin is the observable spatial expansion and dispersion of tourism. This development is inseparably connected with a profound transformation of tourist interests and practices, but is also not least the result of political and political-economic conditions of the last few decades. As with other cities, the premises and principles of entrepreneurial-neoliberal urban policy have become essential characteristics of political activity. They are articulated among other things in urban development and economic policies that overwhelmingly conceive city spaces as "arenas for both market-oriented economic growth and elite consumption practices" (Brenner and Theodore 2002) and in which tourism is of particular importance. This orientation of Berlin politics has played a considerable role in the continuing tourist "conquest" of Berlin, the negative consequences of which, particularly in inner city neighborhoods, are now being problematized by residents and neighborhood initiatives. It is because of their activism and protests that the development of tourism as well as the so far almost exclusively growth-oriented tourism policy of Berlin's state government have become controversial topics of discussion, and the costs and benefits of tourism, their distribution, as well as questions of tolerability are now being publicly discussed. Given the extent of tourism-induced transformation in the city it was about time.

At the same time, it is also important to emphasize that many tendencies now being debated using buzzwords like "touristification" can by no means be attributed exclusively to tourism. The kind of disrespectful and obnoxious behavior that is often associated with tourists is in reality not an exclusive failing of out-of-towners (Alas 2011), and many of the broader quarrels and conflicts that currently rage in Berlin's inner city neighborhoods do not take place between tourists and residents, but along other lines of difference, including especially social status and economic resources. Since this development is due in no small part to the policies of the last few years, and clear delimitations between residents and tourists have become increasingly more difficult to make, it makes no sense to make tourists the target of political conflicts in the city. Doing so implies to mistake the effect for the cause and divert attention away from what should be the primary focus of political pressure and that is the way the city approaches tourism as well as the more orientation of urban and economic development policy in present-day Berlin.

Translated by Alexander Locascio

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