

Introduction

Matthias Bernt, Britta Grell, Andrej Holm

“Berlin belongs to the whole world” – this quote from a current travel guide (Merian Berlin, 2013) paradigmatically symbolizes the growing international interest in the German capital. Berlin has, for many years, been a magnet for tourists and a city with an enormous attraction for students, artists and other so-called creatives from around the globe. The number of annual overnight stays more than doubled from 11 millions to almost 25 millions between 2002 and 2012. Berlin, since 2009, is positioned in third place behind London and Paris as the most popular European city. Interest in the German capital is growing among planners, architects, historians, social scientists, as well as among all those who are professionally concerned with questions of (careful or social) urban development, housing policy, and urban social movements, too, and also in relation to its particular urban history and the contestations that result from it. This is, among other things, visible in the growing number of national and international academic conferences and workshops to which experts in urban politics from Berlin are invited to share their findings and experiences. At the same time, more and more publications appear (ranging from journal articles to doctoral theses) on the topic of Berlin, particularly in the English-speaking world.

In this process we can observe, however, that key findings and publications in the field of social sciences made by German experts and authors, as well as their particular debates on Berlin’s urban development, are rarely noticed – not at least due to existing language barriers. In the past, it was only a few texts that were also written for an audience from abroad and translated into English. It is only since quite recently (for approximately the past ten years) that one finds texts that are specifically written for an international audience and made by academics, architects, and politicians who live in Berlin. And still, this international audience somewhat struggles – according to our experiences of talking to colleagues, students and visitors from abroad – to comprehend the specific political position and development of Berlin and the resulting conflicts (the coming-together of East and West since 1989; specific social, cultural and economic demands; traditions of careful urban renewal and so on).

ACADEMIC DEBATE AND RESEARCH

Due to its front position during the Cold War, for a long time Berlin held a special status and for this reason was of rather little interest to international urban research. Over the past twenty years this situation has increasingly changed, and subsequently the themes and questions that are negotiated since the fall of the wall are today fairly numerous. In the 1990s the contributions often focused on the process of becoming the capital and the realization of large-scale construction projects (see Strom 1996; Marcuse 1998; Cochrane/Jonas 1999) alongside the politics of remembering in relation to the painful German history (see Ladd 1997; Czaplicka 1995; Huyssen 1997; Young 1999; Jordan 2006; Till 2005). Since the turn of the millennium we can observe a shift towards “urban based cultures” (Stahl 2008: 301) centering on the by now established creative economy (see Boyer 2001; Jakob 2011; Ward 2004; Gresillon 1999; Färber 2008) and various alternative and DIY projects (see Rosol 2010; Sabate Muriel 2009; Shaw 2005; Novy and Colomb 2012).

A singular common narrative framing research on Berlin no longer exists. Instead, catchphrases in Feuilleton-style such as “Berlin is poor but sexy” continue to circulate alongside Berlin being the “party and clubbing capital,” or, more recently, narratives about a surprise boom in Berlin real estate. In addition, academic attributions such as “Cultural Metropolis” (Grésillon 1999), “Virtual Global City” (Ward 2004), or “European City” (Molnar 2010) seem less well suited to represent the particularities of Berlin’s urban development. The image often reproduced within critical studies of a “site for experimentation for social movements and alternative life styles” similarly is a rather idealized and one-sided description of urban realities.

Like a jigsaw puzzle without a frame, it seems difficult to combine existing insights and observations of development trends to form a consistent image of Berlin. As much as clubbing and hipster culture, the squats, the many new community gardens, memorial sites of the wall, or the argument over the rebuilding of the Prussian City Palace in the borough of Mitte belong to Berlin, there are few conclusions we can make from these about the living conditions of most residents and about what we consider as key sites of urban political conflict, interest, and power relations. The majority of contributions about Berlin are – from our point of view – concerned with rather specific phenomena and neglect a necessary historical and political assessment of the objects under study; this neglect stands in the way of a fuller understanding of the city’s development as a whole. Typical for many studies (e.g. on the squats, club culture, or alternative economic projects) is a focus on internal visions and a perspective concerned with the particular project, analyzing its motivations, actors and processes but omitting contextual conditions, comprehensive processes and above all their outcomes in terms of urban politics. A detailed description of

the needle is of little use in the middle of the haystack. In addition, many of these studies are in danger of exoticizing Berlin's situation and contributing to an unreflective hype (aka "Berlin: the city of unlimited possibilities").

Hardly illuminating in this context are also the many studies and texts on the debate over changing the German capital and the relocation of the government from Bonn to Berlin. Studies on the background of the "Capital Contract" of 1991 and its implementation are certainly well suited to critically analyze the new German patriotism and the changing constellation of German elites at the end of the Cold War. However, with Berlin almost exclusively understood in these debates as a discourse topic and metaphor for a new "republic" and a new geopolitical positioning of Germany, actual urban change rarely features in these studies.

Another visible trend in research on Berlin lies in using the here-found restructuring, problems, and political disputes solely as proof for broader international trends and developments. Often, as seen for example in the charge of an UK-based author to his colleagues, these seem to remain stuck in their own debates and "impose their own preconceptions on distinctive experiences which actually fit uneasily with them" (Cochrane 2006: 371). Thus, most studies on large-scale urban renewal projects and key development sites in Berlin (such as Potsdamer Platz, Alexanderplatz, Friedrichstraße) solely "rediscover" in these locations the developments that already exist in New York, London, and other cities in the English-speaking world. The massive restructuring processes of the 1990s in particular were usually interpreted as a catching up of globally-oriented and investor-driven urban development (see Strom 1996; Lenhardt 2001; Lehrer 2003).

Gentrification processes, the restructuring of the welfare state and of planning instruments, or the tourist boom of late, are also primarily analyzed and discussed against a model of urban development concepts as established in international research. Yet, what commonalities the dynamics of displacement in Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg and the Lower East Side in New York actually share, whether investment planning at Potsdamer Platz follows a similar logic to the reclamation of the London Docklands, or whether Berlin's tourist marketing can be explained with the strategies applied in Bilbao, is usually left unexamined. Whether Berlin constitutes an "exceptional case" (Latham 2006) or an "ordinary city" (Cochrane 2006), whether the developments of the past twenty years can be described as "normalization," and what perspective would result from either, are all important questions – also for the urban researchers who live here. One requirement for a qualified response, however, has to be a jointly shared idea of what the actual developments in Berlin are.

FRAMING THE JIGSAW PUZZLE: WHAT WE CONSIDER AS NECESSARY FOR UNDERSTANDING BERLIN

If urban research does not want to confine itself to the reproduction and application of global statements and concepts but is instead seriously concerned with explaining urban processes, it seems to us that a historical, political, and economic contextualization is required. Our starting point for this is: Berlin was and is in a whole range of ways “particular” and shaped by framing conditions that (at least in this combination) are nowhere else to be found. Key influences and contextual factors of urban development in Berlin today are found in:

- 1) the continuing consequences of the East West division and the new inequalities and injustices that are the outcome of the take-over of East Germany by West Germany;
- 2) the continuing economic crisis of Berlin and its development as the poorest metropolis of Germany;
- 3) moments of crisis of the Berlin banking scandal at the start of millennium and the resulting politics of austerity;
- 4) a historically specific grown culture of planning and its particularities in re-ordering urban politics and development.

1) Consequences of Division and Reunification

Forty years of division and the subsequent joining up of the East half to the West half of the city still remains one of the most formative events and experiences and is indispensable for understanding Berlin. From a *geographical* perspective, the reunification was linked to a territorial re-ordering of the city. In contrast to almost all other metropolises across the globe, this re-ordering involved the complete renegotiation of the relationship between the center and the periphery. While locations such as Alexanderplatz (since the late 1960s the center of East Berlin) thus immediately after the fall of the wall rapidly lost their significance, areas that, due to their proximity to the wall or on the margins of the West Berlin half of the city, had for a long time remained rather insignificant, such as Potsdamer Platz or the area around the Reichstag, gained a new centrality. For the *political administration*, reunification of the two half-cities meant a radical wind down of all East Berlin institutions. This not only applied to the state and administrative apparatus but also to large sections of industry, which were practically pulverized over night. Part of the *everyday experiences* of many East Berliners was not only the neglect of their educational and vocational qualifications but also the restoration of property to former owners, which led to a vast dominance of West German land owners. Those who had

grown up in East Berlin were suddenly confronted with the fact that from 1990 onwards not only was their workplace in danger but it was no longer certain that they could pay the rent for their homes. Bus and tram lines changed their numbers over night, trusted shops closed down, and the independence so hard fought for in the revolution of 1989 was no longer worth much.

In *urban planning*, a far-reaching transfer of personnel, structures, and instruments from West to East took place. The devaluation of East German experiences was reflected here in the open stigmatization and marginalization of urban planners, architects, and other professionals from the GDR (see particularly the contribution by Simone Hain in this collection). *Culturally*, the East West conflict was expressed in how to deal with, among other things, the historic center, the demolition of the Palace of the Republic, and the public perception of precast concrete buildings; considered as a modern form of housing provision in the East but regarded in the West mainly as an aesthetic irritant and structural symbol of the hated GDR. While many East Germans valued Alexanderplatz as a place for meetings, shopping, and demonstrations, West Berlin planners only found “Mongolian expanse” (see Wolfgang Kil’s contribution in this collection) and had little inhibition in proposing a comprehensive redesign. Parts of the *social aspects* include, not least, the drastic consequences arising from the considerable construction projects and gentrification processes that set in after the fall of the wall (see the contributions by Holm and by Bernt and Holm for this). In Prenzlauer Berg and other East Berlin areas of renewal, they caused the displacement of up to 80 per cent of their original (mainly East German) residents. In total, these developments often led, particularly among East Berlin intellectuals and social movements, to a feeling of “colonization” by Western bureaucrats and elites.

2) Berlin: Metropolis of Poverty

Another crucial starting point for understanding Berlin lies in the crisis of its urban economy, something that has not been overcome in the past twenty years. Considering Berlin was before WW II still the largest industrial metropolis of Germany and East Berlin later the economic center of the GDR, for a not inconsiderable part of the local population the fall of the wall meant the destruction of their foundations for living and a definite loss in social status. The outcome of privatization and winding down of the industrial base of East Berlin, the dissolution of one whole government and administrative apparatus, as well as an end to the subsidies for labor-intensive businesses in the front-line city of West Berlin, is that they have primarily resulted in the extreme decline of jobs and an erosion of the city’s economic base, which to this date has not been overcome (see Krätke’s contribution in this collection).

This development took place in East Berlin as early as the summer of 1990, almost over night, and led to the high base unemployment and low level of income that exists to this day. But also for a not inconsiderable part of West Berlin's population – in particular from the left and alternative milieu, and for migrants who arrived since the 1960s from Turkey and other South European countries as so-called guest workers in the front-line city – the new circumstances led to considerable disadvantages. For one, many migrants felt threatened and excluded when confronted by the reunification fever which at times included openly nationalist and racist traits. Also, their working and living conditions came under unexpected pressure, often after having taken on a kind of niche existence in the shadow of the wall (e.g. in large parts of Kreuzberg).

Accordingly, Berlin is until today not only the German city with the highest unemployment but is also on a European scale the only capital whose GDP lies below the national average (Gornig 2012: 43). Or, to put it differently: the wealthiest and by now also most powerful country in the European Union has the relatively poorest capital. The city's constant economic crisis not only has social consequences but is also, and always, at the same time the basis for the extensive clubbing culture and alternative economies (see in this collection the contribution by Scharenberg and Bader). The widely famed techno scene of the early 1990s would simply have had no playground without the closure of East Berlin's industrial businesses. The same applies to the start-ups (considered as innovative by various sources) as well as to the many commercial or cultural temporary uses of space in often income-poor neighborhoods such as Wedding or Neukölln. Many of the new and hip galleries, "art spaces," bars and small businesses – whose offer is often not addressed to local populations but largely to out-of-towners and visitors – to this day benefit indirectly from the extensive unemployment and poverty and the resulting relatively low costs of living in Berlin.

3) Banking Scandal and Austerity Politics

Although Berlin's economic and financial crisis has many different structural and political origins, the "Berlin banking scandal" at the start of the 21st century deserves a special mention. After all, speculating with public finances – with the knowledge of the former government, several billion Euros were gambled away as security for private real estate transactions through a publicly-owned bank – permanently changed the framework of Berlin's urban politics. By rescuing the bankrupt *Berlin Bankgesellschaft* an "extreme budgetary emergency" was created (the city's deficit sits at the moment at around 60 billion Euros), which for many years has been used to justify the retreat of the local state from a range of tasks and funding programs (e.g. the funding of social housing and self-help construction projects). The highest political aim for Berlin has since,

and independently of current political power and government coalitions,¹ been a balanced budget (long before the official adoption of the so-called debt brake in 2011 into the German constitution). This orientation led to an extensive wave of privatizations at the start of the millennium, both of public housing stock as well as of numerous communal infrastructure companies (electricity, gas and water), affecting a range of other welfare state achievements (see the contributions by Uffer and by Beveridge and Naumann in this collection). The transition to “austerity urbanism” (Peck 2012) in Berlin did not have to wait for a global financial crisis.

4) The (Lost) Inheritance of “Careful Urban Renewal”

A formative particularity for Berlin’s planning culture is the concept of “careful urban renewal,” developed in West Berlin in the context of the 1987 International Building Exhibition. It can also be considered as a response to the squatters’ movement in the West half of the city, which was very active in the first half of the 1980s with their massive protests against property speculation. The concept combined the physical renewal of existing buildings with the expectation of preserving urban and social structures. During the 1980s what this practice meant for the neighborhoods with old building structures in West Berlin was restoration instead of demolition, protection of low-income populations instead of displacement, as well as an active participation (where possible) of the residents in restoration decisions where they are concerned. This inheritance, supported by considerable financial subsidies from the federal government, shaped into the 1990s the planning culture of Berlin and led to a range of participatory processes as well as to particular forms of cooperation between NGOs, respective networks, and coalitions of interest (see Bernt 2003). Although the instruments used in the past to create “carefulness” are largely considered outdated and are discredited among experts due to their poor sustainability and high cost, the aims of “careful urban renewal” have never been openly challenged. In contrast to many other Western metropolises, there still exists in Berlin a shared belief – reaching far into conservative quar-

1 | Following the fall of the wall, Berlin was governed by changeable political coalitions: between 1989 and 1990, first by a coalition of Social Democrats (SPD) and Greens, which broke up over the dealing with squats in East Berlin; between 1990 and 2001, by a coalition of SPD and Conservatives (CDU), which broke up over the banking scandal; between 2001 and 2011, by a red-red coalition including alongside the SPD also as junior partner the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) – the successor party to the Communist part of the former GDR and today called DIE LINKE (the Left). Since 2001 the city is governed, despite a tendency towards a left majority among the voters, by a grand coalition of SPD and CDU.

ters – that displacement of low-income populations from the city center should be avoided; that a socially mixed city has to be preserved; that residents are to be involved in decisions that directly affect them; and that the local state is responsible for all this. Although the reality is often a different one, these convictions remain to this date a significant influence on Berlin’s urban politics.

ON THE STRUCTURE AND THE INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS READER

Setting out with the assumption formulated above on the factors that influence Berlin’s urban development, we, when conceptualizing this Berlin Reader, began our search for contributions that either explicitly approached these concerns or were suited to making explicit for an international audience the main lines of conflict linked to the far-reaching restructuring and urban transformations since 1989. At the start of the project we sought inspiration from experienced colleagues who research and write on Berlin, and asked them to point us towards what they consider to have been key texts on Berlin’s urban development over the past two decades. The result is a combination of some more traditional social science texts presenting key empirical findings – e.g. on social segregation and the city’s economic base, or in relation to migration – and more journalistic articles and polemics that are best considered as interventions in public political controversies (such as over the design of the historical center or the consequences of the government relocation).

To allow for a certain orientation we allocated the texts – which, except for a few, were only published in German before (see the copyright information on p. 277 ff.) – into four chapters that follow a rough chronology and are intended to reflect key themes or specific stages of urban political contestation in Berlin. We have included brief introductions to each chapter to provide some historical context for the contributions and their line of argument and to briefly introduce the author(s).

The first section is titled “Berlin’s Megalomania” and above all provides a reminder when viewed from today of the odd expectations (of growth) and capital fantasies that dominated political debates immediately after reunification and during the first years after the fall of the wall. The authors assembled here belonged to the few critical voices in that situation that questioned the megalomania and wishful thinking of many predictions and called for a different planning culture – one that was guided by the needs of local populations in both East and West. The contributions in the second section, entitled “Berlin In-Between,” originate from a period of transition and a shared sense of disillusion during the second half of the 1990s. In contrast to today, during that time in Germany and Berlin hardly anyone outside of expert circles

knew of the term gentrification. This marks the phase during which the first comprehensive empirical studies on new social and geographical divisions in the city were conducted. These led to extensive public discussions about the causes of the emerging divisions. The third section concerns the clearance sale of Berlin (“Berlin on Sale”). The city was facing bankruptcy at the beginning of the 21st century due to both a lack of economic development towards a successful service and commercial metropolis and the many errors made by local elites. This decisive stage for urban politics – characterized by considerable welfare cuts and a strict plan for budget consolidation, despite a fairly leftist local government – still remains to be properly analyzed and come to terms with (see Holm et al. 2011). Accordingly, most studies on the privatization of housing or of public infrastructure organizations and their consequences, of which we assembled a few in this section, are of a fairly recent date. Finally, with the contributions to the fourth and final section, under the title “Berlin Contested,” we seek to cast light on to several significant contemporary cultural currents and social movements in the city. All these ask, in very different ways, how is the “Right to the City” to be understood in the context of a metropolis that like Berlin considers itself to be liberal, tolerant, and cosmopolitan? What does this mean in the context of diverse forms of old and new migration? How does Berlin deal with the demands that are linked to the ever-increasing diversity of life styles and ideas of urban use, in particular in relation to the central spaces of its city center? What alternative demands are made by current political protest movements, and what are their chances of realization in the face of conditions that in the critical social sciences are increasingly considered as “post-political” or “post-democratic” (see, e.g., Swyngedouw 2009)?

This collection takes on these questions but certainly does not provide sufficient answers. As with other readers, there remain thematic gaps and the selection of material and authors can be called into question. A comprehensive, complete and balanced presentation of all issues that are to be discussed in relation to Berlin does not only exceed the frame of a reader but is practically impossible; the topic itself presents a “moving target.” At the same time, there remain huge gaps in relation to research on Berlin’s urban development – this is also reflected in our edited collection. This applies, e.g., to an analysis of urban social movements, the history and present of migration, or the role played by the local government and specific governance structures. All these points are not given the relevance that they actually deserve in light of their significance for Berlin’s urban development – neither in actual research nor in this reader. For these reasons we hope that our Berlin Reader provides further inspiration for research but also for political debate over the future of Berlin and other cities.

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