



Séminaire

Atelier Paris-Berlin : Grand Berlin, écriture de l'histoire et politiques urbaines

Jeudi 21 février 2019 : 9h30-13h

Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-Belleville

<https://www.inventerlegrandparis.fr/link/?id=590>

Gross Berlin (1920), research project in the perspective of the jubilee of 2020 : the rediscovery of an unfinished metropolis

par Harald Bodenschatz

Résumé

Le 1er octobre 1920, le Grand Berlin a vu le jour sous le nom de « Communauté de Berlin unifiée » – sans susciter grande attention. Le 30 janvier 1933, le projet était déjà terminé. Néanmoins, au cours de ces 12 années, beaucoup de choses ont été accomplies, mais peu de réflexions ont eu lieu. Il s'agissait d'activités à la fois constructives et politico-administratives. Entre 1933 et 1989, la capacité d'action de la « Communauté unifiée de Berlin » a été un champ d'action pour deux dictatures. Ce n'est qu'en 1989 que le Grand Berlin a pu redémarrer. Mais à l'époque, on l'a complètement oublié. Cela s'applique à la politique, au public et aux experts. Ce n'est qu'à l'approche de cet anniversaire que le Grand Berlin a été redécouvert – comme un projet qui n'avait pas été achevé.

Consultez l'article en ligne

<https://www.inventerlegrandparis.fr/link/?id=673>

DOI

10.25580/IGP.2019.0007

The birth of the idea of a “Greater Berlin”

I would like to address the issue of Greater Berlin in terms of its reception and of its consequences for our professional politics.

First, we have to remember that Berlin was a very small city in the midst of the 19th century. If we look back at the situation in 1853, we see a very compact city surrounded by small villages which are now part of the urbanized area of Greater Berlin. Around a small medieval core was an agglomeration of different regular quarters, most of them dating back to the 17-18th century, surrounded by a tax wall [octroi] completed in the 18th century.

The expansion began around 1860 with the famous Hobrecht plan (1862). The proposed expansion added a comprehensive area around the city composed of a ring-boulevard and a grid of new blocks without much modifications of the pre-industrial settlements. This Hobrecht plan area enclosed is today identified as the inner city characterized as a compact and mix-used urban texture. If one thinks of Berlin one means especially the Hobrecht city including residential and worker districts. This boom period of Berlin was very short and lasted essentially from 1880 until 1910. The usual representation of Berlin dated back to this period. Towards the twentieth century only few additions competed the picture, mostly the modern *Siedlungen*.

During this period lots of elements changed in the small pre-industrial city. There were some attempts to monumentalize the historic city that became the center of a growing region. Even if later on it underwent some modifications, the center was transformed especially by the implementation of the cathedral, the most important protestant Church in Prussia. Meanwhile started the development of another center in the West, in the so-called New West, an area where, before the 1880s, there was nothing, not even a village. It's a very rare example of a most important regional center developed from nothing and that will later be the center of West Berlin. As pendant to the cathedral was built the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtnis-Kirche, one of the biggest churches of its time. The architecture style was new in Berlin, inspired by the Romanesque in the United States, with no links to any historical level in Prussia. And, ironically, at the same time, the other real medieval center was progressively being destroyed.

At the same time, other secondary centers appeared in the urban region such as along the Schloßstrasse in Steglitz or on the Kurfürstendamm which concentrated still today retails and shopping areas. Around the S-Bahn stations appeared more modest sub-centers serving residential areas and very carefully designed by architects and landscape architects. As there were not yet automobiles or very few, this enormous growth was rendered possible thanks to a policy of suburban high-speed rail links.

From a contemporary point of view, it's very interesting because this is *avant l'heure* an example of TOD, transport-oriented development. The difference with today is but that these links were built before the residential developments.

The growth in this region rapidly encountered a problem. There were 60 or 70 different municipalities and villages, each one with its own planning and its own interests. It made the urban development relatively chaotic. The impulse towards a united metropolis came from professionals, architects and engineers. Taking into account the problem, they initiated in 1906 the famous competition of “Greater Berlin”, aiming to show what could be done in order to control the expansion on four elements: level of traffic, housing, green, and improvement of the city center. The competition and the exhibition that followed succeeded in mobilizing the public opinion and convincing the politicians to create a regional institution for planning. In 1912 was voted the *Zweckverband Groß Berlin*, covering a very large area, much larger than Greater Berlin today. Based on an intercommunal council and administration it started purchasing all private transport networks, putting them under control of a single municipal board. The *Zweckverband* succeeded especially for protecting parks and forests from building.

Then in 1920, Greater Berlin was created. As it was just after the first world war, a very hard time for Berlin and Germany. Resources were scarce and a lot of reactionary attempts occurred against the Weimar Democracy. Politicians had other problems than Greater Berlin at the time. The law of Greater Berlin was but supported by the social democratic parties that ruled only in a short time before the political majority changed in 1921.

At least Greater Berlin had been created but its realization encountered firstly oppositions from some municipalities fighting against the fusion. All these autonomous municipalities — each of them had its own townhall because it used to be an autonomous municipality before — needed a project to bring them together. The administration of Greater Berlin took shape around the year 1925 with the appointment of Martin Wagner as chief for city-planning and construction and the appointment of Ernst Reuter as chief for public transports and services.

The center issue

Discussing what a center should be was a completely new question. The Greater Berlin competition brought some propositions on where it could be relocated and on how it could be designed. The main issue was to decide on a place for a new station connecting all railroad networks and their existing dead-end stations. This problematic started a lasting history that kept on through Weimar and the Third Reich and found its conclusion only by the Reunification after the fall of the wall. Answering the Greater Berlin competition the architect Bruno Möhring proposed a high-rise central quarter near the area of a future central station located north to the Spree river. The place was found relevant for most of the following projects including Ludwig Hilberseimer's (1929) and Albert Speer's (1938).

Traffic as a perspective towards the future

The Weimar era succeeded but in improving Alexanderplatz into a modern square organizing traffic, and dedicated to retail and office buildings. Automobile was considered as positive, synonymous with dynamics and modernity. The square was redesign as a traffic circle for cars preventing people from cross-walking with tram rails crossing the middle on a lawn. Alexanderplatz project was part of a much bigger project of tabula rasa and redevelopment of the southern part of pre-industrial Berlin. Already in the Weimar Republic, before the Nazi and the RDA eras, emerged the idea of destroying the historical fabric and rebuilding a new car-oriented center.

The disappearance of Greater Berlin

In 1933, in a certain sense, Greater Berlin stopped existing as a municipal project being subordinated to the state and the party. Like other German cities the mayor was no longer elected but appointed. However, the capital city and its region underwent much of developments. In 1936 the capital city of the Third Reich was the subject of a new law. And in the following year 1937, Albert Speer was appointed *General Bauinspektor* by the first level of the state being responsible for the development of the Greater Berlin area but with no link to the new

municipality. An outer highway ring introduced a new scale for the regional city being partially realized during the Nazi period and achieved under the GDR. Inside this border new quarters were projected towards the North-East and South-East but not built because as the war broke out. In the Southern part of the very center the Third Reich took over the proposals of the Weimar Republic and managed to destroy the historical urban fabric wiping it off from our collective memory. There is no other example of a dictatorship in Europe neglecting so much the existing centers in favor of new ones. There are so far few in-depth researches about Greater Berlin under Nazism in spite of numerous books about politics. The central part of the North-South axis has been however documented.

After the Second World War Greater Berlin was divided into occupation zones subordinated to the former allies — Soviet, American, French and English. The city center has been very much destroyed by bombs and battles. Nonetheless, the name Greater Berlin was kept by the allies ; and GB got a new constitution in 1947 identifying two urban centers East and West Berlin. The GDR introduced the concept of the Socialist City into the center after the Soviet Moscow. The existing streets layout was firstly respected, only one central high-rise building for the party and state institutions was planned – a project never built. Later, on the East Berlin center underwent a modernist car-oriented proposal with streets enlargements and the building of a new television tower at Alexanderplatz. It was a car-oriented urbanism without cars, typical of the GDR cities improvements of the 70's that were fields of ideological applications at the time.

In West Berlin, it wasn't so different. A car-oriented urbanism caused new destructions in the city center. However, civil society had more influence. The bombed-out Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtnis-Kirche should have been completely erased if there hadn't been a citizen movement against it. The old church was kept, completed with a new one, the place becoming symbol for the West Berlin new modern center.

A “new” Greater Berlin

After the fall of the Wall, 1989 onwards, Greater Berlin was again a political topic and an experiment field for urban architecture. Lots of new infrastructures were to be planned inside and around Berlin limits, like shopping malls, railways improvements, a new airport. The reunified center was the object of fancy ideas coming from international architects taking into account very optimistic real estate developments. In the 1990's Hans Kollhoff proposed to concentrate the expected economic pressure in two high-rise clusters at Potsdamer Platz and Alexanderplatz, so to keep the historical center in between out of vertical densifications. His winning design for the competition of Alexanderplatz (1993) was but too much unrealistic to be implemented. Another important decision came from the Federal State that decided in 1991 the location of its institutions in Berlin declaring it Capital City of Germany. It was decided to locate the main federal buildings in the same area planned by Albert Speer in the 1930's as the Nazi government district, that is the Spreebogen. The reunified Berlin caused much of destructions to modern GRD official buildings, among them the Palace of the Republic. Again, the East central area was the field of voluntary oblivions, this time under the auspices of the new capitalism. And then, at last, after 100 years of studies with no further action, a new Central Station was built in the North of Spreebogen.

But Greater Berlin as such is not yet realized. An ongoing discussion is whether Berlin should be considered as an agglomeration or as an addition of autonomous villages? In my opinion the answer is both. There are villages but there is also a common institution, Greater Berlin, and a common central area.

Publications and researches in progress about Greater Berlin

The most important report on Greater Berlin during the Weimar Republic is the book left by Gustav Böss, *Berlin von Heute* (1929). Gustav Böss was almost ten years the Governing mayor of Greater Berlin (1921-1929) and the organizer of its new administration. It's a very clear summary of the situation before the crisis in 1929. Later, at the end of the Republic of Weimar, the geographer Friedrich Leyden (*Gross Berlin. Geographie der Weltstadt*, 1933) gave unsuccessful impulses to reform the Greater Berlin Act and solve the problems concerning the relationship between the districts and the central administration. Actually Greater Berlin really existed under democratic conditions quite short, from 1920 to 1932, and in the last decades after 1990.

The best publication about Greater Berlin so far is a book collected for its 75th anniversary by the Archives of the Land Berlin (*Vor 75 Jahren Gross-Berlin entsteht*, 1995), followed in 2010 by an exhibition catalog for the century of the competition and international exhibition of 1910, setting comparative perspectives with Paris, London and Chicago (*Stadtvisionen 1910/2010 : Berlin, Paris, London, Chicago, 2010*) at the initiative of TU-Berlin and TU-Weimar professors and with the support of the German Werkbund. In the run-up to the Great Berlin Jubilee (2010) the same group has been holding a series of annual conferences, dealing with housing (2016), traffic (2017), green (2018) and planning culture (2019). In the meantime, Markus Tubbesing has also published his dissertation on the 1910 city planning competition (*Der Wettbewerb Gross-Berlin 1910: Die Entstehung einer modernen Disziplin Städtebau*, 2019). New historical approaches have opened up the focus to the relation between Greater Berlin and the larger area of Land Brandenburg since the 1900's concerning political and administrative cooperation or rivalry, real estate market and the sharing of public services (see in particular the researches of Harald Kegler and Christoph Bernhardt).

The current expansion of the city region is fostering the idea of a new exhibition for 2020 combining together historical researches and urban design projects. First it would bring new comparative perspectives with other partner cities like Moscow, Vienna, Paris and London. And secondly it would be an opportunity to organize an idea competition for the regional area, on a broader scale than Greater Berlin of the 1920's focusing on the topics of housing, traffic, green and polycentrality.

A propos de l'auteur

Harald Bodenschatz est professeur émérite de la Technische Universität de Berlin, praticien de l'urbanisme, historien et critique. Parmi ses nombreuses publications, notons une trilogie sur l'histoire de l'urbanisme dans les pays européens sous les dictatures avec un volume sur l'Italie de Mussolini (*Städtebau für Mussolini*, 2013), puis sur l'Union Soviétique (avec Christiane Post, *Städtebau im Schatten Stalins*, 2015), puis sur les années Salazar au Portugal (avec Max Welch Guerra, *Städtebau unter Salazar*, 2019). Un quatrième volume est à venir sur l'Espagne de Franco. Harald Bodenschatz s'est signalé par un livre très important dans la discussion sur la reconstruction de Berlin dans les années 1990. Il portait sur l'histoire du centre-ville de Berlin, négligé jusque-là par l'historiographie sur la ville moderne : *Berlin, auf der Suche nach der Verloren Zentrum* (1995), c'est-à-dire « Berlin à la recherche du centre disparu ».

<https://harald.bodenschatz.berlin> (<https://harald.bodenschatz.berlin/>)

Harald Bodenschatz is Emeritus Professor at the Technische Universität of Berlin, urban practitioner, historian and critic. His numerous publications include a trilogy on the history of urban planning in European countries under dictatorships with a volume on Mussolini's Italy

(*Städtebau für Mussolini*, 2013), then on the Soviet Union (with Christiane Post, *Städtebau im Schatten Stalins*, 2015), and then on the Salazar years in Portugal (with Max Welch Guerra, *Städtebau unter Salazar*, 2019). A fourth volume is forthcoming on Franco's Spain. An Harald Bodenschatz's book is very important in the discussion of the reconstruction of Berlin in the 1990s. It focused on the history of Berlin's city center, previously neglected by historiography on the modern city: *Berlin, auf der Suche nach der Verloren Zentrum* (1995), i.e. « Berlin in search of the disappeared center ».