



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>

Politics, architects and the construction industry in Berlin 1950-2000 : from the tabula rasa to soft urban renewal

par Markus Tubbesing

Résumé

Ma contribution portera sur la coopération des acteurs en matière de développement urbain à Berlin, en particulier après la Seconde Guerre mondiale. À l'époque, il y avait une articulation complexe entre les urbanistes professionnels, la politique et les intérêts de l'industrie du bâtiment. Outre l'opinion publique, qui a surtout fait défaut après la Seconde Guerre mondiale. La présentation suivante traite du périmètre du plan Hobrecht de 1866 que nous associons toujours à « Berlin ». C'est une zone assez petite par rapport à l'ensemble du Grand Berlin, mais c'est une zone assez vaste par rapport au noyau historique même de Berlin. Un exemple des interactions sera détaillé dans le projet situé près du château de Charlottenburg, appelé Klausener Platz.

Consultez l'article en ligne

<https://www.inventerlegrandparis.fr/link/?id=675>

DOI

10.25580/IGP.2019.0009

Reconstructing Berlin?

Germany Year Zero is the title of a very well-known film by Roberto Rossellini. This title resumes the fact that, in the year 1945, for a large extent of the German population, the only possible thinkable future for Germany was supposedly one without history. On the other hand, it underlines a common fallacy which continues today. In 1945, Germany was, of course, very seriously damaged in every aspect, but history remained. The city of Berlin has been very heavily bombed out especially in certain parts but we have to keep in mind that 70% of the building structure in Greater Berlin was still intact. So, Germany still had a history and Berlin still had a lot of urban substances that survived World War II.

Reconstructing Berlin was totally out of mind from the first moment on. Although a few cities in Germany, like Augsburg for example, chose this option, in Berlin's case only two options came into discussion: giving up the remained urban fabric to found a new Berlin, or thoroughly plowing through the historical structure something like a new modern city on the grounds of the old. Both groups had something in common, considering both the so-called *Mietskaserne Stadt*, the tenement city, as the incarnation of evil and therefore as a city type which had to be abolished in theory and in practice.

This injunction did not come from historians but from architects. Hans Scharoun, a very important figure at that time, director of the Housing Board of Berlin since May 1945, spoke of the Berlin air raids as a "mechanical de-densification" of the historical city structure. He proclaimed that the state of destruction was a good opportunity to tear down the ruins and plan a new landscape with new modern houses. This is how he explained his concept which, at first, was mainly discussed among architects. The idea of a radical urban renewal was also picked up quite eagerly by municipal politicians. In addition to these two groups of protagonists, the architects and the city politics, large building firms joined the group of urban renewal, being highly interested in this concept, especially the nonprofit building firms. There was also a group of unidentifiable financial speculators that did favor this idea. They invested their capital into the city development projects because Germany had a very high tax depreciation law, called *Abschreibung Gesetze*, which was primarily set up to encourage new building projects. This conjunction of four, architects, politicians, building industry and speculators, is sometimes described as the cross of city destruction. Post-war planning in Berlin wasn't really interested in history but rather in a fundamental structural change.

A new structure

In 1945 Hans Scharoun and his colleagues laid out the *Berlin Struktur Plan*, also known as "collective plan". This plan proposed to rebuild a linear city parallel to the Spree, thus thoroughly negating the concentric ring structure of the Hobeicht Plan. It also completely negated the functional mixture of the turn-of-century city by separating carefully the functions. Although this concept was not carried out in such a radical form, the Senate of Berlin, under the mayor Willy Brandt, proclaimed six very large inner-city redevelopment areas to be led by the municipality. It was mainly the Tiergarten area in Charlottenburg, some places in Schöneberg, Kreuzberg, and a large one in Wedding. One of the first projects started in Tiergarten on the premises of a heavily damaged neighborhood by the bombing during World War II, which went back to a reformist project erected around 1900. The ruins were erased and a much less dense structure on the principles of the CIAM doctrine was erected on the same grounds. It opened in 1957 as the Hansaviertel International Architecture Exposition. Two further redevelopment areas were foreseen in Charlottenburg in 1963 : one around the Deutsche Oper, on Kaiserdamm, and another in the Charlottenburg Palace area. Around the Deutsche Oper, a carpet-like structure was foreseen, just as out the *Collective Plan*. The old core of Charlottenburg which had been standing there since 1700 was totally ignored and supposed to vanish in this plan. The inscription on the model says: "*Die Neue Prinzipien in einem zerstörten Stadtteil*", which means "new principles on a destructed city area". A look at the damage record plan of 1945 shows very heavily destructed areas, one of them being the Hansaviertel, but other areas having suffered much less damages like around the Deutsche Oper, and the old core of Charlottenburg, around Klausener Platz, having survived the war quite well.

The two areas were typical Hobeicht city quarters, both with roughly 30 000 inhabitants. Some buildings have been damaged during the war but, by 1960, the tenement houses were mostly intact. However, in the years following the declaration of a redevelopment area in 1961, the houses gradually ran down lacking of expenses on maintenance. Investment left moved into the newly established projects on the outskirts of Berlin. Remaining inhabitants were mainly low-income workers, war widows and senior citizens.

In the consecutive ten years between 1963 and 1973 the substance of this quarter suffered more through neglect, vacancy and vandalism than it had suffered during the war. The appointed renovation contractors for the redevelopment area, instead of trying to repair it, offered to the remaining inhabitants guided bus tours into the newly built housings, showing them the advantages of living in newly established neighborhoods. But especially the poorest wanted to stay in their older tenement houses, and by 1972, the rental agreements were terminated without a single lawsuit undertaken by any tenant. There was basically no public opposition to the eviction campaigns, no established organizations protesting against the destructions. The tradition of opposition seemed to have been eradicated in the lower social strata.

The return of history

In parallel to this ongoing devastation, history came back into the discourse of urban development. The new leading officer of preservation Hinnerk Scheper started recording the structures within the historical parts, putting some of them on the lists of protected buildings. His book, in several volumes *Die Bauwerke und Kunstdenkmäler von Berlin* (1955-1961) ("The Buildings and Monuments of Art of Berlin") was already including tenement houses to the list of preservation.

The writings of Wolf Jobst Siedler also reactivated the notion of history within the urbanistic discourse in Berlin, especially the entitled, *Die gemordete Stadt* (1964) ("*The murdered City*"), and as well the Alexander Mitscherlich's book : *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte* (1965) ("*The Inhospitability of our Cities*"). This reintroduction of historical aspects marked a turning point in the *tabula rasa* approach of the city planning in Berlin.

In the case of the Klausener Platz, what was protected in Charlottenburg in 1960 was of course the castle itself, two small pavilions by August Stüler, the town hall of Charlottenburg, a small church by Friedrich Schinkel. A row of tenement houses was also put onto the list of protected buildings in the year 1958, that was quite unusual at that time. This was nevertheless a first step towards the awareness of the historical value of the urban fabric.

By the 1970s, the notion of history increasingly came back. First were some compromises with the complete *tabula rasa* to be found. Destructions were admitted in the courtyards, by so-called *Blockkernung*, the block-cores being hollowed out in order to reach a lower

density [*Blockentkernung* is “*curetage des îlots*” in French. I propose in English “de-coring” i.e. remove the core]. The first proposal of that kind in 1972 was the result of a competition amongst architects as an alternative to the total destruction by a partial rehabilitation of the structure. The de-coring strategy of entire blocks of the Hobrecht city made them compatible with the de-densification dogmas and heavily financed by a government program called ZIP (*Zukunft Investitions Programm*).

The period from 1972 to 1974 led therefore to a second form of destruction. Hardly any resistance was to be found from the side of the tenants. But from 1975 onwards, that is the European Year of Preservation of monuments, the general atmosphere changed. Oppositions amongst the citizens towards the ongoing destruction increased and many inhabitants became aware of the value of the social mixture being found in the Wilhemian housing. The first tenant initiatives appeared calling primarily not for buildings protection but for the maintenance of the social mixture inside the building structures. It's not so much historiographical researches but tenant initiatives that led towards a soft urban renewal in Berlin, establishing the values of the historical the pre-war substance on a broader political level.

A softer approach to urban renewal

During this transition period emerged the influential figure of Hardt-Walther Hämer, an architect who owes to be entitled the father of “the gentle urban renewal in Berlin” (*Die behutsame Stadterneuerung*). He succeeded in developing a mode of urban renewal aimed at avoiding the relocation of the people living with or without rent contact. Stressing the importance of social standards, its presentation at the Council of Europe symposium in 1976 was echoed throughout Europe. The strategy was based on an interaction between acting and affected parties. Together the actors (in politics and economy) and the affected (inhabitants) were to form what he called an “advisory board”. One of the most famous application was on the Block 180 on the Klausener Platz in Charlottenburg. Hämer managed to keep as much as possible buildings in the backyards, thus preserving the most affordable housing. In his eyes taking care of the social mixture was as fundamental as restoring the front facades of an Hobrecht block. For this intervention he was awarded the golden medal of the National Competition of Urban Renewal and Heritage in 1978. But in spite of that first successful experiment, the destruction of the city of the 19th century proceeded. Harald Bodenschatz' book *Platz frei für das Neue Berlin* (1987) documented the chronology of this destruction occurring all over Berlin. From 1980 onwards the opposition toward city destruction radicalized thoroughly led by the *Instandbesetzer* which means “(building) maintenance squatters”.

Retrospectively if a large part of tenant houses of the Wilhemian period survived demolition it is not thanks to architects, neither historiographical works, nor increasing heritage values, but mainly because politics and construction firms were compelled to arrange themselves with the building squatters. Something similar happened again after the Reunification in the east borough of Prenzlauerberg. Around 1980, Wilhemian architecture received little academical attention. Most scholars founded it absolute “rubbish”. Thanks to few theorists, such as Julius Posener, and the generous support of foundations, like Fritz Thyssen's one, researches on that period of architecture and urbanism began in the late 1970s. In his famous book, *Auf dem Weg zu einer neuen Architektur* (1979) (“Towards a New Architecture”), Posener identified the beginning of the century as the advent of Modern Architecture, as evidenced by some buildings for the bourgeoisie built by architects like Alfred Messel, Paul Mebes or Albert Gessner. The first to recognize the qualities of the ordinary block worthy of preservation was Posener's successor at the Hochschule der Künste, Jonas Geist assisted by Klaus Kürvers. Their trilogy, *Das Berliner Mietshaus* (1980, 1984, 1989) introduced a depth-in revision of the Berliner *Mietskaserne-Stadt*, promoting a gigantic step towards its rehabilitation. Geist and Kürvers analyzed these urban fabrics on the city scale and the different type of individual block with courtyards. They also refer to the micro-history of their inhabitants – documenting the social and economics evolution they underwent since they settled in.

Projection by law

In 1995 the Klausener Platz underwent an “Ensemble Protection Law” allowing no new buildings to undermine the qualities of the urban fabric. Another law, called “Milieu Protection Law”, dating also from 1995, intended to protect the social mixture in the quarter avoiding tremendous changes of functions. The message sent in the 1970s by the residents in resistance has finally reached the level of the law but twenty years later. Since 1995, the Heritage Department of the Berlin Administration has been protecting a large part of the substance of the city of Hobrecht, both individual buildings and urban complexes, thus ensuring that the law complies with what historians and architects such as Hämer, Posener, Geist and Kürvers, coming from outside the mainstream research, had demanded.

Conclusion

Today, the Wilhemian fabric is cherished by the real estate market and undergoes a gentrification which was not goal of the social protest of the 1970s.

In retrospect, at every crucial moments of the Berlin metropolitan development a bunch of actors was involved as it came up to urban discourse. There were of course politics, architects, historians but, in the specific context towards gentle urban renewal of the mid 1970s, simple citizens, tenants, squatters emerged as well as main actors.

A propos de l'auteur

Markus Tubbesing is a German architect, monument conservator, architecture historian and Professor in design and monument preservation at the University of Applied Sciences in Potsdam (2018).

Some publications :

- *The Gross-Berlin 1910 competition. The emergence of a modern discipline of urban planning*. Wasmuth Verlag, Tübingen/Berlin 2018
- with Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, *Harald R. Stühlinger: Atlas on Urban Development*. 2 volumes, Hirmer Verlag, Munich 2018, ISBN 978-3-7774-2966-3
- with Harald Bodenschatz and Gerwin Zohlen *Berlin and its centers*. Ernst Wasmuth Publishing House, Berlin/Tübingen 2019