



Book reviews

David Storey, Mariusz Czepczyński, Maarten Loopmans, Friedhelm Fischer, Kelvin Mason, Eric Sandweiss, Rachel Granger, Dirk Schubert, Leandro Minuchin, Anna Richter, Luciana Martins, Tom Woolley, Melanie Lombard, Jill Pearlman & Nora Lafi

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explores how planning and urban design are deployed to intervene in everyday life and links urban planning with political struggles for legitimacy and hegemony. Unfortunately, while providing excellent and timely empirical analyses of hitherto under-explored subjects, this volume avoids any reference to the heated theoretical debates going on. If it had done so, it would undoubtedly have moved them to a higher level.

Maarten Loopmans

*Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences,
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium
maarten.loopmans@ees.kuleuven.be*

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Berlin urban design – a brief history, by Harald Bodenschatz, Berlin, DOM Publishers, 2010, 140 pp., €28 (paperback), ISBN 978-3-86922-105-2, published simultaneously in German **Städtebau in Berlin – Schreckbild und Modell für Europa**, ISBN 978-3-86922-022-2

Berlin Urban Design has been published in two languages simultaneously; the slightly different titles indicate that it can also be read in two different ways. It can serve as a straightforward introduction to Berlin's urban design history. On a different level, it can be read as an exploration of the underlying patterns of reception, and, in turn, of their significance for construction and destruction in the city. As the German title suggests, Berlin has not only served as a model, but also as a *Schreckbild*, a spectre, a paragon of aberrations. Images of this sort have repeatedly been used to justify demolition and clearance schemes, notably in the 1960s and 1970s.

Let us look at the way in which the book deals with each of these aspects. As the English title *Berlin Urban Design – A Brief History* promises, it does indeed provide a concise history of architecture and urban planning in Berlin from the early days of the city to the present. In combination with the brilliant illustrations the text is an excellent introduction to the complex urban history of Germany's capital. It is therefore very useful 'for professionals and students interested in urban design, urban planning, and history of urban design ... for everybody coming to Berlin', just as the advertising flyer says. Four chapters deal with the major development phases: Old Berlin, the emergence of the metropolis, its transformation into a radically new city of modernity, and Berlin as 'a City with a Past and a Future'. The final chapter discusses Berlin as a 'Reference City for European Urbanism' (German edition: 'Urban Design in Europe').

The author, Harald Bodenschatz, is a sociologist and practicing urban planner, who holds the Chair of Sociology of Architecture and Planning at the Technical University of Berlin. He has dealt with Berlin's planning history right through into the twenty-first century in a multitude of high-powered books, planning reports, and essays like no second authority on the subject. *Urban Design in Berlin* draws on this wealth of knowledge, research, and publication activities, to the extent that it even points out areas for further research, which obviously is a quality going far beyond an introductory text. With a mere 140 pages, half of them illustrations, the book is something of a distilled concentrate, but it still manages to provide enjoyable reading. The more challenging must it have been for the author to find a path through the complex subject matter and to decide which aspects to include in this compact book.

The author's concern for the cultural context in which urban design has been perceived in history has given the book its German title, *Urban Design in Berlin – Specter and Model for Europe*. While the notion of Berlin as a spectre or a topos of horror is mainly connected with the kind of multi-storey tenement housing which has been held responsible for the social problems of its inhabitants, the idea of Berlin as a *model* for Europe relates essentially to the products and processes of the *Internationale Bauausstellung – IBA* (International Building Exhibition) in 1987. But the story is more complex than the juxtaposition suggests.

First, there are more demons than just the tenement bogey. Thus the blurb inside the book cover similarly enlists the large-scale housing estates of East and West Berlin within the ranks of the bugbear brigade; and if we go back again in history, we can see that the early twentieth century was dominated by manifestations of anti-urban sentiment such as a 'Demon Berlin' and the notion of Berlin as a 'Phantom Metropolis'. Among the plethora of urban horrors, the anti-tenement campaign has however had the most momentous and disastrous effect. This was largely a consequence of its failure to distinguish between the built form of that multi-storey rental housing and the often nefarious processes of its production on the one hand and the ensuing social problems of its inhabitants on the other. The tenement narrative thus supplied arguments for the large-scale clearance schemes of the 1960s and 1970s, and was eagerly taken on board by the prevailing vested interests of the time.

As Bodenschatz reminds us, the seminal publication in this context was Werner Hegemann's *Berlin of Stone – The World's Biggest City of Rental Barracks* (1930). Combined with the contributions by urban economist and sociologist Rudolf Eberstadt, Hegemann's brilliant analysis of the production processes in the real estate and building sector was an eye-opener for the housing reform movement and for any socially conscious observers of the housing scene. Yet, as we know, this polemic was throwing the baby out with the bath water. As Bodenschatz put it very sharply in his earlier publications, this even amounted to libel and to wholesale denunciation of the entire housing stock summarized under the heading of 'rental barracks'.

It is indeed phenomenal that successive generations of architects, planners, sociologists, and politicians were unable to imagine what the qualities of tenement apartments might be once they were no longer overcrowded with up to 10 people per room; that one day, the inner courtyards might no longer be synonymous with tuberculosis; and that the small-scale mixture of housing and workshops might one day be appreciated. But this lack of imagination fitted only too well with the interests of the post-war coalitions for inner urban re-development and suburban large-scale housing estates.

The tide turned in Berlin, as it did in many other European cities, in the context of the European Year of Historic Preservation in 1975, when a campaign for conservation was launched under the heading of 'A Future For Our Past'. In this context, Bodenschatz points out the significance of a pioneering project in the district of Charlottenburg (71). Block 118 near Klausener Platz was shown to 'international experts who visited Berlin' as a *model*, and as evidence that it was possible to renovate a housing block without substantial demolition. The principles developed there, which later were termed 'cautious' or 'careful urban renewal', were implemented only 'after an intense struggle against the ruling political system and administration as well as against the corporate non-profit housing industry'. It was a victory won by a 'rebellious Berlin', 'a coalition of local citizens' action groups, a segment of the expert urban design community, and numerous political groups' in a battle against the 'official Berlin' (70).

The principles of careful urban renewal introduced in Charlottenburg were developed further during the 1980s culminating in the IBA of 1984–1987. As a consequence, the housing stock once stigmatized as ‘rental barracks’ underwent a metamorphosis in public perception which, inspired by the title of the German edition of the book, we might label ‘From Bugbear to *Model*’ (from Beast to Beauty?). Today, the contrast between a heavily decorated stucco façade and the living conditions of those crowded behind it is no longer interpreted as an outrageous lie. This contrast has largely evaporated, and the most lavishly restored and repainted stucco façades are an indication of the fact that the real estate industry soon latched on to ‘luxury renovation’ as a profitable enterprise, thus forcing out poorer residents, including the squatters and students who once saved them from the bulldozer (of course, profiting from upward social mobility, they also made their contribution to social segregation).

The sweeping condemnation of the ‘tenements’ helped overlook the fact that the developers during the Wilhelmine era had produced a broad variety of urban designs and floor plans for different markets in the multi-storey bracket. These ranged from truly desolate compounds covering very deep street blocks with up to seven small inner courtyards to clever arrangements with generous public squares for the up-market clientele. The book introduces a couple of these projects in Berlin’s Rhineland and Bavarian quarters. A double page aerial photograph in the summary chapter presents an excellent view of this type of urban ‘reform housing’ which emerged before and during the 1920s.

In this context, Bodenschatz makes a point of considerable relevance for the international planning history debate: ‘Not a single book exists on the many realized and many more unrealized projects for compact urban districts for Berlin’s bourgeoisie. This is extremely regrettable as a more accurate knowledge of Berlin’s development could provide a corrective to some of the basic convictions of the international urban planning debate ... Specialist literature often speaks of two main paths for bourgeois residential urban planning: The Anglo-Saxon method of the suburbanization of the bourgeoisie and the French method of the urbanization of the bourgeoisie ... Before World War I, a third way emerged, for which Berlin was a prime example and a forerunner for similar developments in other European capitals: urbanization of the bourgeoisie through up-market, attractive urban expansion in a compact, multi-storied style of construction.’ Bodenschatz argues that ‘this Third Way was a hitherto underestimated contribution of Berlin to the history of European urban planning’ and explains that it was ‘discontinued as a result of World War I. In addition, it received little contemporary recognition ... It was later forgotten in the writing of the history of urban design that was oriented towards modernism’ (26ff.).

While this observation of a kind of amnesia is as important as it is correct, there seems to be some contradiction with Bodenschatz’s claim that Berlin has been regarded as ‘a *model* of European urban design in terms of compact urban bourgeois quarters before World War I’. Be that as it may. It can be confirmed that to this date that there are a number of blind spots in the planning history debate resulting from its focus on modern architecture and urban design, as well as, one might add, resulting from its focus on the new processes and actors which gained importance in the 1920s, that is the production of social housing and the role of the housing associations and cooperatives.

This having been said, the reviewer cannot help noting that the terms ‘housing associations’ or ‘cooperatives’ do not occur in the book. While for the period after World War I, the text addresses them in more general terms as ‘the flourishing businesses of the public housing

economy'; the chapter on Berlin's pre-World War I history does not recognize their existence at all. This is a significant omission, because the contribution of the cooperative housing associations to urban 'reform housing' was substantial from the 1880s on.

The picture of the different actors in the urban housing sector comes across in a slightly skewed manner, which is only partly due to faulty translation. The book distinguishes between two major actors of the imperial era: there were the developers who produced the high-density workers' tenements branded by Hegemann as profit-ripping entrepreneurs, and there were the "*Terraingesellschaften*" [Land Development Companies] which developed new large-scale bourgeois urban districts with magnificent greened urban streets and squares and more lavish open spaces inside the housing blocks ...' (120).

It has to be remembered, however, that *Terraingesellschaften* were active in all housing sectors. All were reaping similar profits under a three-class franchise system, which gave a disproportionate share of political power to the owners of land, property and wealth, allowing them to decide whose land would be turned into valuable building land and to publicly subsidize their private activities in multiple additional ways. The cooperative housing associations overlooked in this chapter of the book were trying to find a way round these profit-extracting mechanisms.

The author then continues: 'World War I marked a caesura ... The economic resources of Europe were wasted away in a horrific war. Private urban development came to a halt, and as a result the organizations responsible for their (?) development, the *Terraingesellschaften*, withered away' (120 ff). The cooperatives now built the new estates, which became *models* for urban development in Europe, similar to those in Dessau, Frankfurt and Hamburg. But the estates 'had their price: they were ... publicly subsidized. They also had their particular clients: the flourishing businesses of the public housing economy' (41). Here, mistakes in the translation, which by and large does a decent job, are bound to leave English readers puzzled. The German text talks about the *Bauherren*, the owners and builders of the estates, that is the non-profit housing associations and cooperatives of the Weimar Republic. The word can be translated with 'clients' in the sense that they were the architects' clients – but in the context of this text such a translation is entirely misleading, since it suggests that the residents who moved in are being referred to. Calling the cooperatives 'the flourishing businesses of the public housing economy' is on the one hand somewhat abstract. On the other hand it entails the risk of overlooking their non-profit character and in this sense of equating them with the truly flourishing businesses of the pre-war '*Terraingesellschaften*'.

By the 1960s/1970s, however, some of their successors had indeed morphed into flourishing businesses as part of an interest block of political party sleaze, banks, developers, and architects driving the machinery for urban redevelopment and suburban high-rise estate construction. Their descent from the late 1970s on marked the end of large-scale clearance and the practical reorientation of urban policy towards the rehabilitation of the inner urban areas.

The associated breakdown of public confidence in municipal politics required a radical reorientation of planning policy, which was met through the establishment of the IBA in 1978. Designed to prepare the 1987 exhibition, this was a new special authority working in parallel to the existing authorities. Their activities served as a *model* for the rehabilitation of the nineteenth-century housing stock through careful urban renewal, and, it might be added, for the resurrection of the perimeter block instead of the modernist avoidance of the 'corridor street'. The IBA also developed a method termed 'critical reconstruction', which aimed at an orientation

towards the historic pattern of streets and public spaces, building parcels, density, social mix as well as a mix of actors and architects. A key to the success of these developments lay, as Bodenschatz points out, in the precedence of process and structure over individual architecture.

The first two-thirds of the book manage to trace these developments, more specifically the products of urban design, in city and suburbs; to document the transformation of the city core(s) in plan and reality; to point out the significance of competitions and building exhibitions ranging from the Greater Berlin Exhibition (1908–1910) to the International Building Exhibitions of 1957 and 1984–1987; and finally to portray differences between East and West Berlin.

In this context, once again, one endeavour of the book is to correct misconceptions and to point out developments which seem to have escaped the attention of planning history such as the roughly simultaneous reorientation in East and West towards a postmodern historicity. It was in particular the city's 750th anniversary celebrations in 1987 which, in East Berlin, too, triggered numerous projects. These include the restoration and reconstruction of individual buildings such as the huge nineteenth-century *Berliner Dom* (Berlin Cathedral) and K. F. Schinkel's *Schauspielhaus* (Playhouse) and its environs, as well as the postmodern reconstruction of the Nicolai Quarter. The book excels with praise for the 'renaissance par excellence of the Spandauer Vorstadt, a district that contained more preindustrial architectural remains than any other' (84). If all of this goes to show that the idea of East Berlin as 'the capital of the concrete-slab building' (81) is a misconception, as Bodenschatz argues, then we also have to keep in mind that substantial parts of this reconstruction were indeed carried out in prefab technologies, too. The term 'concrete-slab building' tends to be rigidly linked to the monotonous housing estates of the 1970s. However, by the 1980s, the GDR had developed true mastery in the field of neo-traditional prefab construction featuring gables and pitched roofs.

The last-third of the book is devoted to 'Berlin after the Fall of the Wall' and the consecutive phases of euphorically exaggerated expectations, disillusionment and stagnation. Associated with these phases were shifts in emphasis on office building versus housing and on inner city development versus the establishment of New Town type districts and regional schemes. Again, plans and implemented projects are portrayed in brilliant illustrations: studies for an outburst of skyscrapers at Alexanderplatz and the reality of Potsdamer Platz in 2006, colourful designs for and models of the ribbon of federal government buildings and concepts ranging from *Planwerk Innenstadt* (Master Plan for Central Berlin) to regional development planning.

This *Planwerk Innenstadt* is an overarching concept for the redesign of East and West Berlin in the tradition of 'The European City'. Oriented towards the concept of 'Critical Reconstruction', one of the largely undisputed aims of the *Planwerk* was to heal the wounds cut into the urban fabric by inner city highways and by traffic junctions on historic squares. Double-page colour reproductions allow readers to compare the 1996 concept with the plan approved by the Berlin government in 1999. While the book does briefly mention that there were controversies over these plans, it says next to nothing about the nature of these conflicts. Beyond the obvious antagonisms between modernism and traditionalism and the particular nature of the power play among the local actors, the strong anti-modernist stance taken by the authors of the *Planwerk* has particular consequences for East Berlin. Here the politics of the Berlin government were in part sensed as an expression of the victorious capitalist west eradicating GDR modernism and East Berlin identities attached to spaces and cherished monuments ranging from the *Ahornblatt* (Maple Leaf Restaurant) to the *Palast der Republik* (Palace

of the Republic). The demolition of this central object of GDR identification can be spotted in a panoramic aerial photograph but receives no comment beyond the caption ‘Berlin between Destruction and Construction’.

Other sources of conflict are those generated by the gentrifying effect of big capital preparing for the takeover of areas of the alternative scene next to the River Spree (‘Mediaspree’) and in the area of the *Tacheles* in central Berlin. Since the quotation of this name in the book is not likely to be meaningful for most non-locals, the next edition should briefly point out what it is: The *Tacheles* building is a graffiti-adorned former department store (built in 1907–1915), which has developed into a centre and symbol of the alternative culture with indoor and outdoor galleries, performance spaces, workshops, little shops and bars.

There is very little necessity for additional explanations of this sort. In its four core chapters, the book has concentrated the most important strands of information into an excellent layout of text and illustrations topped only by the final chapter. This once more distils the subject matter in terms of Berlin’s role as a ‘Reference City for European Urbanism’ and addresses new challenges confronting the city. These include Berlin’s ambition to maintain its claim of being a ‘Social City’ with an ethnically diverse society.

If at the end of this review I add that it would be good to give the English translation of the next edition a bit of a brush-over (not much more than this is required), this is tantamount to saying that there are going to be further editions, because this book is going to be a standard work in the field of urban design literature.

Friedhelm Fischer
Universität Kassel, Germany
ffischer@uni-kassel.de
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Cities, citizens and environmental reform: histories of Australian town planning associations, edited by Robert Freestone, Sydney, Sydney University Press, 2009, 407 pp., US\$36 (paperback), ISBN 9781920899356

Although its extent and effectiveness are always open to question, we tend to take public participation in planning for granted, at least in contemporary western(ized) democracies. The histories of town planning associations presented in this volume describe a civil society endeavour which surely helped make that presumption the case in Australia. Between 1913 and 1916, citizens from the ‘middle-upper classes’, predominantly professionals – notably architects and engineers – but also politicians and businessmen, banded together to form town planning associations in each of Australia’s state capital cities. Rather than sharing a specific programme, in the face of hostile business interests and a wider lack of awareness and apathy, their unifying theme was simply the need for urban planning. Conceptually, the associations drew on the Garden City utopianism of Ebenezer Howard and his founding of the British Town and County Planning Association.

In his introduction, Robert Freestone notes that the evolution of modern urban planning in Australia has distinct synergies with Britain and the USA. With the ‘demands of capitalism pre-eminent’, the Australian experience is distinguished by ‘a federal system with strong and