LEARNING THE POTSDAMER PLATZ URBAN PROCESS

by

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Abstract

With the reunification of Germany, Berlin is once again the capital of Federal Republic of Germany. After the fall of the wall in November 1989, it was inevitable that things have changed substantially in Berlin. Again the capital today, Berlin continues to present an interesting urban case, as it is an opportunity to repair an artificially divided city and re-store the former capital as one of the world’s great cities.

Berlin, Potsdamer Platz has been chosen as a limited case study. The scope of study arises from the Berliners’ attempt to give form to the German capital. Having come to terms with the troubled course of German history in this century and also being insecure about their national identity, Germans have sought to salvage some meaning and lessons from their past.

The concentration of troubling memories, physical destruction, complex renewal and the awareness of each era of Berlin’s history have, contributed to the city’s distinct identity. The highly politicised landscape of Berlin has been a royal residence, an industrial and imperial powerhouse, a Nazi capital, a Cold War battleground, and is now a newly unified capital.

The six weeks, from May 20, 1998 to July 1, 1998, were spent in Berlin itself as part of the research process. The INFO BOX, libraries and bookshops in Berlin were foraged. Informal interviews were conducted at the Technischen Universitaet Berlin (Technological University Berlin), Senatsverwaltung fuer Stadtentwicklung, Unweltschutz und Technologie (Ministry of Urban Development, Environment Protection and Technology Department), and the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin fuer Sozialforshung (Social Science Research Centre Berlin). Special tours were also taken to visit the Potsdamer Platz site and the surrounding areas.

The principle of critical reconstruction continues as a banner beneath which the procedure of today’s urban planning in Berlin takes place. The patterns defining and used in the urban planning provoke criticism, and the need for understanding.

Berlin’s search for its historical roots has become a revival of the memories of the 1920s; a time without Nazis, Communists, or overwhelming poverty. Critical reconstruction, in terms of urban design and planning, hopelessly tries to recapture the lost ‘character and charm’ of the roaring twenties. This arguably restores Berlin’s identity in light of its tradition, at the expense of exploring issues pertinent to urban design and processes for the twenty-first century.

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