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Paolo Avarello

What plan for what town planning?

*edited by* **Biancamaria Rizzo**  
**Manuela Fornani**  
**Tiziana Masuzzo, Luigi Iorio**  
**Paola Altobelli, Giuseppe De Togni**  
**Maria Valeria Erba, Mina Di Marino**

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## Town planning in the new Berlin

Harald Bodenschatz

Town planning in Berlin may be subdivided into three phases. The first one (1990-1995), after the collapse of the wall, was one of great elation, of great projects and great speculation, especially in the city centre and for office blocks, but it was also a phase of great uncertainty about how to plan the 'new Berlin'. As opposed to the spectacular projects of architects the world over, the city administration kept to the 'critical reconstruction' of the urban structure (Iba 1984-1987), reproposing in fact the structure of the pre-modern city, the 'European city', as the model for the postindustrial city. The debate went on in particular in the competitions for the big public and private projects (1991-1994: Potsdamer Platz and Alexanderplatz, Parliament), and regarding the major infrastructures. The principles of 'cautious regeneration' instead guided the renewal of certain housing areas, making some of the central districts attractive to the middle classes and also rehabilitating some of the popular districts in East Berlin (e.g. Hellersdorf). Following over-ambitious forecasts of population growth, the Berlin Senate also launched an ambitious programme for new districts, radically different from those of the preceding decades: of high density, with mixed functions and conceived as traditional urban structures (e.g. Neu-Karow). After the exaggerated expectations of the first phase, the second one (1995-1999) was rather that of disillusionment: after the big projects came the plans and, at least on paper, the emphasis was on producing houses, also to limit the migration of high-income families to the suburban

areas: the 'Planwerk Innenstadt Berlin' programme (1996) expressed this turning point, albeit amid much criticism. The third phase (1997-2007), lastly, is characterized by some degree of stagnation, in the centre and in the suburban territories, as all over Germany. A few big projects to be completed - including the new central station, and also the suburbanization process started slowing down: the future of Berlin seemed so obscure. In 2003 however an interesting project, the Townhouses at Friedrichswerder, aimed at introducing a new (for Berlin) type of housing into the central areas, attempting to limit the settlement sprawl. Between 2006 and 2007, after the World soccer Championship, with the first signs of economic revival, the updating of the Stadtentwicklungs-konzept Berlin 2020, the Stadtforum Berlin and the turnover of some of the City councillors, a new phase seemed to be ushered in. In 2007 the mayor of Berlin convened a Berlin Board to draw up an urban marketing strategy, subdivided over three levels:

- urban development themes (strategic themes);
- spaces for urban development (strategic spaces);
- the actors of importance for urban development (strategic actors).

The starting-point was that of regarding Berlin as a 'city in transformation', to tackle profound economic and social changes. In Europe the characteristics of industrial societies are about to disappear: relatively short times of formation, well-defined lifestyles of certain age groups, permanent jobs, a certain daily and annual rhythm, a fixed position in political and social institutions, fixed private relationships, fairly stable public revenues, low energy

prices, etc. In this context urban policies become a key element in the competition among cities to attract new economic activities, for the middle classes with high formation, for international attention. Berlin's potentials have been pinpointed as its health economy, its communications, its media and its culture, its traffic technologies and, above all, its tourism, one 'of the most important job machines'. New functions therefore take pride of place, presented to the public as strategic themes. These include: 'creative people' and the middle class, temporary uses, especially for the rundown areas, the 'healthy city', living in the city, city and university, tourism, new trends in sport, traffic and environment, attractive public spaces, and lastly, Berlin in international competition. To attract the interest of the middle classes, the objective is an urban centre outstanding as a place for events, with interesting offers, namely culture, gastronomy, sport, exhibitions: without the return of the middle classes to the urban centres, development is unthinkable. A more attractive Berlin needs more attractive city planning, to act as a stage for the self-representation of the middle classes. The central thematic fields of city planning are dedicated to this theme: the recovery and creation of public spaces, the re-use of areas along the rivers, pedestrian roads and squares, a certain density and a mix of functions, ensuring safety and security, the upgrading of public transport, new museums and other tourist attractions. Despite this strategic orientation, however, the 'dropouts' of 'post-industrial' society must not be forgotten. For this it is necessary to think about training and formation, stimulating the local

economy, maintaining low-price housing, promoting health. Urban development policies cannot be successful without social compensation measures. Future city means also a city compatible with the environment: climate, energy saving, reduction of pollution. The environmental question is always also a question of health. If the citizens' health is at risk, it is necessary to limit the traffic of goods and persons on the road and to improve public transport. An ecological city does not help just the environment, but itself: only a city in good health is attractive to the emergent classes, with whom to sustain international competition. Berlin is an avantgarde city for temporary uses: there are still some areas that are unused or little used, even in the central zones, and a new class of persons has formed who prefer to remain in Berlin, even though adequate occupations are not to be found there. Stemming from this class are the temporary users, who use the disused spaces for short periods; for example the Badeschiff, beaches, bars, clubs, but also the red Infobox at Potsdamer Platz, the provisional stadium for the World soccer Championships or the White Cube project at Schlossplatz. Strategic themes are concentrated in strategic spaces. First and foremost the new key spaces for traffic, linking the city with the international networks: the new station north of the Bundeskanzleramt (2006), which involves the development of important areas, particularly to the east, around the Humboldthafen, and the new Berlin international airport (Bbi), on which work started in 2006, on which great hopes are centred, and which will again change the hierarchy of the various areas: the south-east area,

between the centre and the airport, will gain in importance, especially in the spaces along the Spree. But it will also be necessary to tackle the problem of the large abandoned areas (Tempelhof and Tegel), on whose use the debate has already started. Along the Spree between the new station and the new airport, between the Jannowitzbrücke and Elsenbrücke bridges, there is a former industrial area, today used by temporary users (bars and clubs), with an extraordinary potential: it is to be transformed into a space for the new media, leisure, art, but also hotels, shops, houses and a large park, with a promenade along the river and an arena for 17,000 spectators (Mediaspree project). The centre of Berlin is revitalizing space, its image attracts tourists, and only the centre is able to sustain this role: the centre is unique, the symbol of Berlin's particular character, its history, its monuments, its main institutions. For long it was thought that the centre was losing its importance, but it was an error: only an attractive centre can offer adequate spaces for the higher services, and only an attractive centre can link the middle classes to the city. The renewed centre is the best publicity for an expanded urban region, the true economic-territorial unity in an increasingly more globalized economy. The revitalization of the centre of Berlin is at a very advanced stage, but is not complete. In particular, the development of its 'heart', the Spree island, is still on the agenda. As decided by the Bundestag, the 'castle' will be rebuilt by 2014, as the Humboldt-Forum. Another project is the reconstruction of the Schinkel Bauakademie, although its financing is not yet certain. Lastly, restoration work will be terminated on the museum

island, forming part of Unesco's world patrimony, with the debated reconstruction of the Egyptian Museum, designed by D. Chipperfield. But developing the centre of Berlin is not enough, and moreover it increases the difference with a number of other central and increasingly poorer districts. And a centre surrounded by 'faded' districts is not a prospect that is sustainable for long. In the disadvantaged districts (North Neukölln, Moabit or Wedding) the inhabitants are becoming impoverished, investments are scanty and social problems are concentrated. The revitalization of these districts must start from strengthening the small district 'historic centres', which often offer potentials that are presently underrated. In these centres, Turmstraße (Moabit), Müllerstraße (Wedding) and Karl-Marx-Straße (Neukölln) the economic activities are concentrated, making them recognizable. With the initiative called Mittendrin Berlin! die Zentren-Initiative the Department of Urban Development has begun to come to grips with the theme. In the old centre of West Berlin, which on the whole has lost attention, are the boom zones (e.g. Tauentzien), but also areas of stagnation such as the terminal part of Kantstraße. For this the City Council has promoted a meeting of the important actors who can be involved in strategic planning. A start has been made by constructing a panoramic wheel of 185 metres at the Zoologischer Garten station (due to open in 2009). Urban development policies need strategic planning, very different from the old city development plans, both in content and in the way in which they are drawn up. A complete scientific

analysis of the whole area, as the basis for drawing up the objectives, is no longer the centre of attention. Other objectives are now in the forefront: the city has to express its desired development objectives, and also those which instead are not welcome: the important themes for development, the priority spaces, the economic, social, ecological and cultural objectives, and with what methods it is wished to reach these objectives. In drawing up a plan of this sort, cultural, economic and academic actors, and those of urban society, have to be involved, but also critics and oppositions. A plan of this type, moreover, needs constant modification and re-elaboration. So far, however, only partnerships with thematic and time limits function, and the initiatives of 'contrast' generally work very superficially: the capacity to find compromises still has to be developed by both sides. For these processes, at all events, a strong public administration is necessary, which identifies the key projects for providing an incentive for urban transformations, at the same time reducing social differences. This is not always easy, also because of the different administrative levels: on the one side the regional government of the city of Berlin, and on the other the single Bezirk (districts).