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DOWNTOWN BERLIN AFTER THE REUNIFICATION AS AN EXAMPLE OF GLOBALISED DESIGN.

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ABSTRACT | After the fall of the wall in 1989, the revitalization of the city centre of Berlin, that is located in the former eastern part of the city, became one of the most important directions of the urban planning in Berlin. The leading model of the new planning was called “Critical Reconstruction” of the “European City”. That meant reconstruction and maintenance of the street pattern of the 19th century, of the block structure, of the height of the buildings, of stone facades, and of the open spaces. The structure and function of a vivid downtown, that implies mixed-use neighbourhoods, was not rebuilt. There are many similarities between the planning for American downtown areas and Friedrichstraße in Berlin. This is remarkable, because the official directing ideas of the German planning were the “Critical Reconstruction” and the “European City”. The reconstruction was not critical. The new downtown does not represent a European city, rather it has many components of American central business districts. Strategies to make our cities more livable have to be developed from the actual social, cultural, and economical situation of the city. In the case of post-wall Berlin, local Stakeholders, architects and citizens had very limited possibilities to influence, improve or even change this globalised design. Therefore, the center of Berlin has led to a mainstream design ignoring present local cultures and needs.

1. Revitalization in American City Centers

Modern city planning replaced networks of multi-use neighbourhoods with a model that separated living, working, production, and leisure within the city. The city was fragmented through this reduction of specialized areas to technical functions. This development started between the world wars. After the second world war there was an even bigger flight from downtown with large numbers of apartments and single-family homes being built in the suburbs. In some parts, this also meant racialized transformations of inner cities, including the white flight from downtown areas. Places of work partly persisted in the downtown areas, but offices were also built outside of downtown, following the idea of the decentralized concentration.



Figure 1. New York City Revitalization Project, Promotion. Photo: by the author.

1.1 Malls and Mixed-Use Developments

Shopping centers were constructed extensively in the countryside near the suburbs. They were autonomous compounds surrounded by parking lots, that had given up on the street concept. Leisure activities were directed towards theme parks also located away from the city. These fragments were connected through highways.

After this development downtown areas could only be used as tourists' attractions, if they had an attractive, historic core, which concentrated monostructurally and seasonally on visitors' activities. If they did not have an interesting heritage, they were ruined by neglect and often became ghettoized areas. This is the reason for the density of the city center to decrease while the density of the suburbs increases. In many cities in the USA, the suburbs have de-colonized the city. The suburbanites do not even come downtown to work, to go to the cinema or theatre, or to shop. They find all these amenities in their own or in a neighboring suburb. This flight from downtown has led to a deurbanization of downtown areas. Important attributes of city cores such as density, mixture of functions, and public transport were lost.

Following the decline and destruction of many buildings, the downtown was no longer a place with central functions and central importance, no longer a place of identification with the city. The centers have been deurbanized, and the downtown areas themselves have become suburbs of their own suburbs.



Figure 2. Car-Oriented City Centre Memphis, Tennessee. Photo: by the author.

Because of this development city officials and developers thought of two attempts of revitalization:

- Malls and mixed-use developments with own circulation systems in the sixties and seventies;
- Revitalization of the historic Main Street in the eighties.

In the sixties and seventies mega structures were developed to try to save the dying North American downtown areas. Mainly office towers, some shops, and few apartment buildings were built in city centers. These huge autonomous compounds also contain shops, hotels, conference rooms, and restaurants. They were frequently linked through skywalks. In cities with hot climate tunnels were constructed.



Figure 3. Inward-Oriented Shopping Center Eaton Plaza Toronto, Main Street Revitalization Atlanta, Georgia. Photo: by the author.

The mixture of types of buildings and of functions was given up in the center. Variety was only achieved by esthetic means through use of different materials, form or color of the buildings, rather than through different functions or variety in use.

Urban life was concentrated in certain locations, certain hours, and certain categories of 'acceptable' activities. After working hours and on weekends, the center is devitalized through the functional monostructure.



Figure 4. Downtown by Car in Boston, Massachusetts, Driveway New York City. Photo: by the author.

The main entrances are directly from the underground parking. Blank walls homogenize the streets. The compounds do not animate the surrounding streets and sidewalks. They are self-centered, and lack direct street relation. Their inner circulation systems inverse indoor and outdoor space. Public streets are

emptied through parallel circulation systems as passages or skywalks. Moreover, streets become more and more dangerous, because they are not observed and controlled by passers-by anymore.

Originally passages were thoroughfares or shortcuts between streets. However, they were developed as systems that attract their own population and divide it from the ordinary person on the street. The mixture of the urban population to be observed on public streets is hardly possible in malls and indoor plazas, and it is not wanted. The indoor worlds are realms with special regulations. Users have to be willing to follow the rules, e. g. to consume, or they are excluded. Groups of people are thereby segregated. “The public” is divided into several “publics” of populations of the same descent, education, income, and way of thinking.

The indoor worlds such as shopping malls, arcades, atriums, underground cities, and skywalk systems want to substitute for the lost public space in streets or on plazas. These spaces are nearly always privately controlled, offering privatized versions of the once-public street life. The potential for these plazas to be truly public is highly dependent on the owner’s attitude. Therefore, the result is privatization and control of open space and public life.

Therefore, the construction of huge, autonomous mega structures did not lead to a livable city center. These compounds did not animate their surrounding open spaces. The cities’ physical appearance became similar throughout the continent. The downtown areas therefore lack individual character.

1.2 Simulated Main Streets as Revitalization Strategy

In the eighties and nineties, the disadvantages of this development were taken into account by planners and politicians. They looked for a new strategy to revitalize the deserted and unsafe downtown areas, and they wanted to give their cities a new identity. Preservation of the historical heritage of small-scale buildings directed towards the streets, emphasis on walking instead of driving, and a vital street life, became the new guidelines for the restoration and creation of the American downtown areas. Where historical complexes were already destroyed, new buildings with historical appearance were erected. Naturally grown cities were simulated.



Figure 5. Atlantic City Building Type Simulation. Photo: by the author.

2. Revitalization in a European City Center: Friedrichstraße in Berlin

From an urban design point of view, the situation in the city center of Berlin after the fall of the wall in 1989 can be compared to the situation in some American city centers in the sixties. The reasons for this and the history are very different, obviously, but the situation of the central area in Berlin in the year 1989 resembled many American downtown areas. A disperse building structure with many voids was prevalent, there was no vital street life but many deserted open spaces.

2.1 “Critical Reconstruction” as Urban Planning Goal

After the fall of the wall, the revitalization of the city center, that is located in the former eastern part of the city, became one of the most important directions of the urban planning in Berlin, mainly for political reasons. The political situation was very different from the one in North America, evidently, but the dynamics and intentions for the revitalization were similar.

The leading model of the new planning in Berlin’s center was called “Critical Reconstruction” of the “European City”. That meant reconstruction and maintenance of the street pattern of the 19th century, of the block structure, of the height of the buildings, of stone facades, and of the open spaces. It was developed by the municipal city planning office with very little influence of the local people or by local architects. The main driving factors of this development were commercial ones.

Besides Potsdamer Platz and Alexanderplatz the Friedrichstadt with the central Friedrichstraße was one of the main revitalization areas. It was based on a street concept. The building type that was introduced to fill the street was called a “mixed-use commercial building”. It consists of nine stories above ground and four below ground. The first and second floors as well as the first basement floor were filled with shops and restaurants. From the third to the seventh floor offices were planned. The eighth and the ninth story were reserved for apartments, and the remaining three underground floors contained parking.

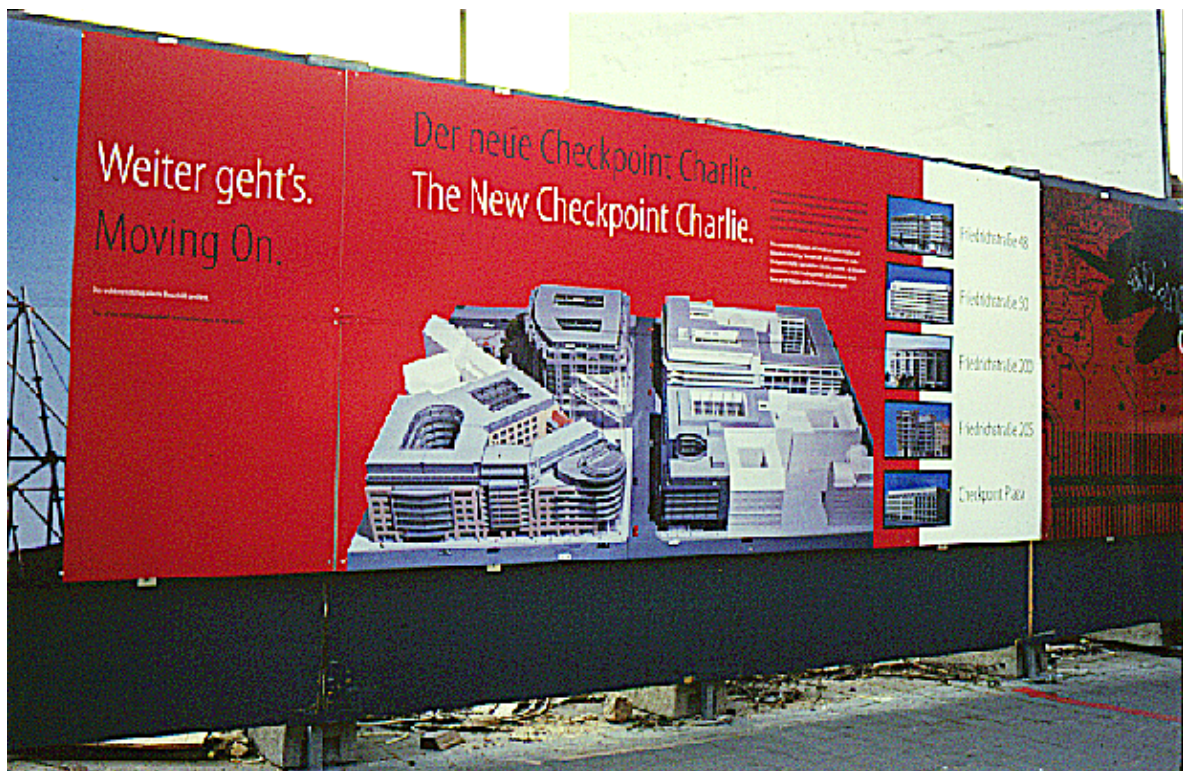


Figure 6. Berlin, Checkpoint Charlie at Friedrichstraße Revitalization Project. Photo: by the author.



Figure 7. Friedrichstraße Building Type. Photo: by the author.

2.2 Simulation of Historic City Patterns

These “historical downtowns” can be interpreted as theme parks of history. The functions in these new, pseudo-revitalized city centers and in the renovated areas were directed towards tourism and shopping, not towards living and working in an urban environment. Downtown areas were transformed into museums or into drive-in shows.

The simulation of city life did not lead to a revitalization of the downtown areas based on real and diverse urban life, but it intensified the negative tendencies that were already introduced in the sixties: monostructure of functions, commercialization, segregation of the urban population, privatization and control of open space. Malls and revitalized Main Streets are similar concepts. Housing had to be 20 per cent in this building type.

This was achieved with small luxury apartments on top of the buildings as well as apartment hotels. In comparison to other city centers in Germany this figure is very low. Housing occupancy in the center normally is 50 to 80 per cent.



Figure 8. Is Berlin Located in the USA and Only Accessible by Car?. Photo: by the author.

The most prestigious project in these areas is the Friedrichstadt Galleries (“Friedrichstadt Passagen”). They form three blocks in the center of the Friedrichstrasse, near the legendary boulevard “Unter den Linden”. (Block 207: architect Jean Nouvel, investor: Roland Ernst; block 206: architect Henry N. Cobb, investor: Tishman Speyer Properties; block 205: architect Oswald Mathias Ungers, investor: Arc Union/Bouyues).

1400 million DM was invested for a brut floor area of 99600 square meters, containing 35 per cent shops and restaurants, 59 per cent offices, 5 per cent apartments and 1 per cent cultural functions. The floor area ratio is 6.5. The three complexes are connected by an underground passage.



Figure 9. Friedrichstadt Galleries Shopping Mall, Block 205, Block 205. Photo: by the author.

2.3 Similarities in City Planning – Globalised Design

Comparing this German strategy of downtown revitalization with the one in North American city centers, several similarities are notable. What both have in common is the reevaluation of the city center. But this return to the center is mainly a geographical one. The structure and function of a vivid downtown, that implies mixed-use neighborhoods, was not rebuilt.

Historically, the city of Berlin consisted of many similar mixed-use neighborhoods. The center is now directed towards service and business, whereas huge housing areas are built as suburbs outside of the city. Berlin is fragmented by this specialization.

The displacement of housing towards the suburbs leads to a deurbanization of the center by means of depopulation. The center is only frequented during rush hours and lunch breaks. At night and on weekends, it is becoming a deserted area. In Germany, there is a high demand for housing in the city center. Therefore, this planning means mismanagement.

The regulation of street width (22 meters) and the height of new buildings (22 meters) was set up to create a homogeneous streetscape. However, homogeneity in a negative way results from monostructures. The new buildings in the Friedrichstrasse contain shops, banks, automobile showrooms, offices, and hotels. The center now is a central business district displaying multi-national chain stores and not an individual city center. Moreover, this one-dimensional monostructure of functions can hardly adapt to changing needs of different uses.

The banks and car showrooms of the Friedrichstraße do not encourage window shopping and strolling along the sidewalk. The shopping compounds and indoor galleries do not attract street life, in fact they lack a direct street relation. The autonomous complexes of the Friedrichstadt Galleries are directed towards their interior rather than towards the street. Private indoor plazas like the “Place Voltaire” in block 206 want to substitute for outdoor public streets and plazas. These commercial buildings have direct access from the parking garage. This leads to a social devaluation of the street.



Figure 10. Inward-Oriented Building Type and Simulation of Building Type in Berlin. Photo: by the author.

The tendency of gentrification is also obvious in the Friedrichstraße. Small shops and little trade and craft businesses, families and subcultures were expelled through demolition of old buildings or high rents. The new trade spaces and luxury apartments are directed towards high-class shops, high-profile businesses, and high-income professionals.

The regulations, which have directed the design of Friedrichstraße, originate in the late 19th century city (street pattern, block structure, height of the buildings, stone facades). In some places this also led to a simulation of a naturally grown neighborhood in blocks that were divided into pieces simulating different architectural styles and ages, and to the construction of new buildings that pretend to be old.

The historical tradition of Friedrichstraße as a nightlife area, as it was in the twenties, with many bars, clubs, and theaters is an image which the new builders want to promote in their advertising, to give the street back its historical value as an address. But they did not supply the street with the functions that make a street vivid.

There are many similarities between the planning for American downtown areas and Friedrichstraße in Berlin. This is remarkable, because the official direction of the German planning was a regional one: the “Critical Reconstruction” and the “European City”. There were inhabitants, researchers, planners and architects who raised their voice against this development. This only had a minor effect. The public discussion and the economical promotion of Friedrichstraße were hypocritical. The new downtown does not represent a European city, rather it has many components of American central business districts and therefore is an example of globalization in architecture and urban design.



Figure 11. You are leaving the American Sector, Friedrichstraße at Checkpoint Charlie, Berlin. Photo: by the author.

3. Conclusion and Outlook

If we want our cities and their public spaces to be open, human, accessible, and adaptable to changing causes and fashions, how can we achieve it?

Developing general guidelines for city planning is not the right direction. Efforts that are made to solve the city through developing general city patterns are questionable as revealed above concerning the recent development in Berlin. Strict guidelines often become recipe books that contain overall proposals for urban planning. They are based on the wrong assumption that common design guidelines can fit every city and every town. But every city has its own language, pattern, history, and requirements, and thus it has to be analyzed and designed individually. But some points should always be taken into account concerning planning and revitalizing cities:

The downtown area has an important role for the whole city. In economic terms, constructing in the center is desirable, because the technical infrastructure already exists, whereas in a new suburb it has to be constructed newly. Public transport often serves the center, if it has not already been dismantled. For ecological reasons, a city should be planned and built in a dense and urban manner in order to stop the urban sprawl.

City planning has to direct towards the urban population. Each city and each business are dependent on their users, consumers, and passers-by. A city center that is not planned according to the residents' needs and desires will not survive, neither in an economical, nor in a social way.

The planning process has to become more democratic. City planning may not be dominated by speculation. Local community groups and local architects should be involved in the planning.

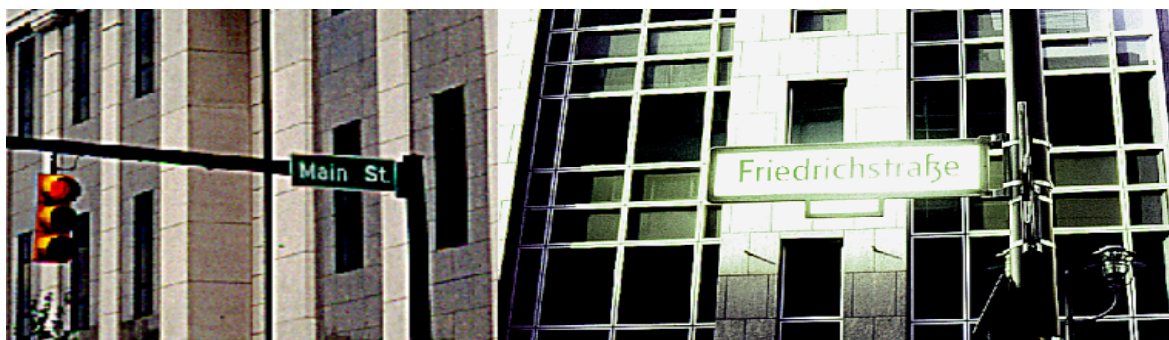


Figure 12. Similarities between US Main Streets and Friedrichstraße in Berlin. Photo: by the author.

Adaptability and flexibility are key words in city planning. Historical cities have survived because they are based on flexibility. Monostructures and the creation of a final situation of a city, as it was done in the Friedrichstrasse in Berlin, contradict the adaptability of the city to changing needs.

One essential quality of the open spaces is accessibility and multifunctional use. Plazas and streets, that are only accessible to a limited part of the population, and that are only serving one function, are not truly public.

There are, however many examples of successful revitalizations in Berlin and elsewhere. Strategies to make our cities more livable have to be developed from the actual social, cultural, and economical situation of the city. For every planner concerned with the urban environment, this presents a tremendous challenge.

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Sigrun Prahl, architect, has studied, published and lectured around the world. She holds a professorship at the University of Applied Sciences in Krefeld, Germany. Her main research activities include revitalization of public space and mental mapping as a design tool.

P/REFERENCES OF DESIGN

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