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Małgorzata Nowobilska  
Quazi Mahtab Zaman

# Potsdamer Platz

## The Reshaping of Berlin

 Springer

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Małgorzata Nowobilska  
Scott Sutherland School of Architecture  
& Built Environment  
Robert Gordon University  
Aberdeen  
UK

Quazi Mahtab Zaman  
Scott Sutherland School of Architecture  
& Built Environment  
Robert Gordon University  
Aberdeen  
UK

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# Foreword

In this book, Nowobilaska and Zaman engage the debates surrounding *Potsdamer Platz* to weave together a fascinating case study of the contradictions and complexities of contemporary urban design. In the process, they reveal what is underneath the debates (which are often tiresome) to disclose something fresh about the ongoing quest to find an appropriate art and language for city design and place making.

*Potsdamer Platz* has been critiqued from all angles. On the design front, it has been regarded as a “trash bin” for modernist architects, a place that does not even bother to try to integrate with its surroundings. Politically, it is regarded as a graphic example of Western capitalism colonizing the East, a place where multinational corporations, as usual, undermined any sense of authenticity.

The history of *Potsdamer Platz* foretold its evolution. Josef Stübben, the pre-eminent early twentieth-century German planner, wrote about *Potsdamer Platz* in his 1907 masterwork *Der Städtebau* (City Building). He marvelled at the ability of the place to serve multiple purposes, how it could not be classified as belonging to any one kind of place, serving simultaneously as a market place, an architectural area, a garden area and a monumental square. He lamented, however, the looming development pressures. Already by 1907, the double square comprising the *Potsdamer Platz* was deteriorating, as everyone was “obliged to enter the centre of the city just at this point”. The traffic pressures were becoming overwhelming. This marked the beginning of a century-long process of trying to reconcile urban place with urban conduit. As in many cities, the results have been less than satisfying.

It would be easy to write off this iconic part of Berlin as simply another evolving *Blade Runner* landscape of sterile, corporate branding. Surely big corporations “won out”—this is not a place for an afternoon stroll in the park. It is a glitzy, ironically bland commercial hub that could have been located in any of the world’s growing list of global cities. Given the unique historical and political circumstances of the platz, many view this stereotype branding as a missed opportunity of huge proportion.

But Nowobilaska and Zaman probe something deeper, peeling back the layers of contradiction and meaning. The end result is a fascinating exploration of how one place can expose a wealth of contemporary “lessons learned”, a graphic example of how to “read” a place. The authors are able to dissect and expose what would seem to be only single-purpose urbanism.

Above all, the development story of Potsdamer Platz presented in this book reveals the ongoing, underlying debate about what a city is and what it should be. The book exploits this pedagogical potential to present a readable and an accessible story. The ultimate value of this book is that it has figured out what questions need to be asked and answered.

Emily Talen  
Arizona State University  
Tempe, Arizona  
USA

# Acknowledgments

Researching and writing this book started with initial enthusiasm for *Potsdamer Platz* that developed into a Master of Architecture Research at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. The ever-unfolding layers of this topic led to the idea of developing it into a brief approachable by academics but also by others simply interested in the field of Berlin, current changes or urbanism.

We would like to thank IDEAS Research Institute at Robert Gordon University for sponsoring the final output of Potsdamer Platz research; Sebastian Krutkowski and Helen Aggasild for corrections and many others who helped to shape the idea of this book.

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# Prologue

In the midst of the global phenomena of urban transformation, a revolutionary event had been recorded during the last decade of the twentieth century. The biggest reconstruction in the Western Europe—Potsdamer Platz began to stir the contemporary ideology of place making.

In 1989, Berlin encountered a political and an economic challenge that no other comparable city had faced before: a testament of intense demographic shift by doubling its inhabitants as well as the area. Two opposite worlds began to reunite with contrasting ideologies constituted within the dictum of Eastern and Western geopolitical realms resulting in Berlin being envisioned to become one of the most powerful cities in the world.

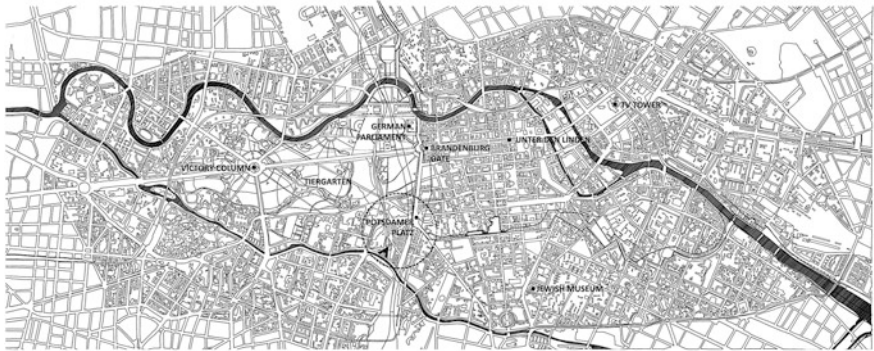
Any other previous redevelopment projects that urban planning had implemented and conceptualised can hardly be compared with the scale and intention of making Potsdamer Platz: arguably surpassing the momentum and intensity of the redevelopment of the ancient Rome or Paris in the nineteenth century or New York and Chicago during the twentieth century.

Today, *Potsdamer Platz*, being over 20 years since its transformation, resonates Berlin's bigger intention as a city still undergoing transformation. This is partly due to the brutal history and its political-economic climate that has been changing almost every two decades and which has reshaped and repositioned Berlin's spirit wanting to heal and forget. However, Berlin's historic characteristic of transformation and seeking strategic methods for these transformations have apparently demonstrated the growing appetite for wider perspective of changes.

Potsdamer Platz is the mirror to Berlin—a gesture to reverberate the dormant power for change. It reflected all the transitions of the past, yet very vividly displayed the biggest contemporary transformation registering the hopes and aspirations to re-define Potsdamer Platz as a new image *of* and *for* Berlin of today, and perhaps of tomorrow; to accomplish more; to boost its vigour; and to sustain in the new global economic order.

# Introduction

Berlin, as a significant geopolitical centre, emerged on the map only at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It functioned as the old continent’s gateway to Eastern Europe and since then, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it became the pulsing heart of the Prussian Empire and later of the Weimar Republic. The apocalyptic era of World War II left the city to disintegrate and to stand still in the middle of a divided country and continent which entered into the Cold War phase. When the Wall came down in 1989, Berlin euphorically attempted to re-invent itself as a multinational economic hub and centre of commerce, which was drastically verified by the recent economic struggle causing the city to look for another chance to become successful as the new–old city and the European capital.



This multi-layering of important and robust historical processes results in Berlin functioning as the contemporary paradigm for understanding political, socio-economical and urban changes by academics, professionals and simply by those interested in the subject of today’s changes.

Potsdamer Platz is arguably Berlin’s most experienced site and can be viewed as a mirror to its transformations. Located sensitively in the centre of the city only a few steps away from The Brandenburg Gate and Reichstag building, this symbol of Europe’s Roaring 1920s, once destroyed by the WWII air-raids and left abandoned for 44 years, has started to engage in the process known as the biggest

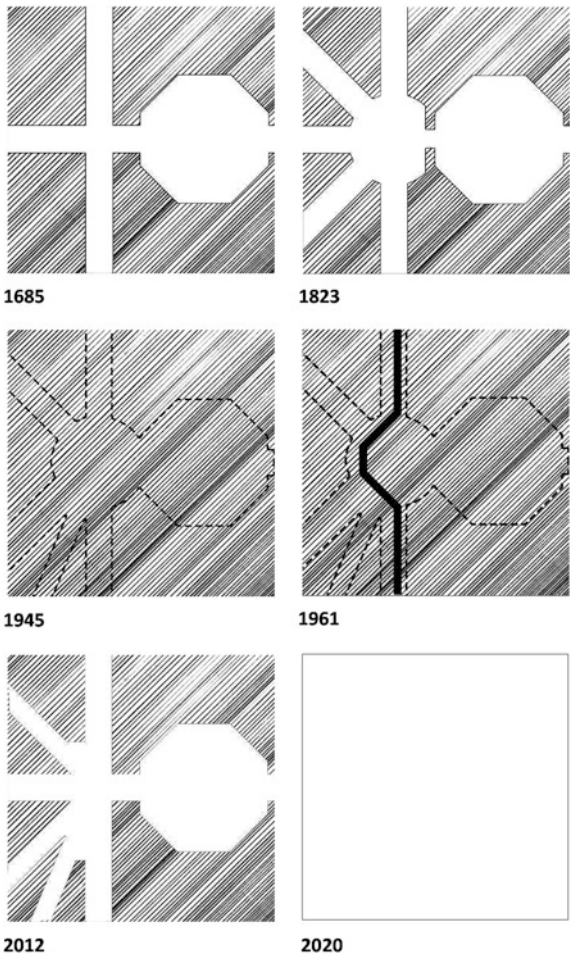
contemporary reconstruction in Western Europe. Berlin once again emerged from an empty field reincarnated into a ‘Manhattan-alike’ skyline. Today, filled with crowds wondering beneath structures designed by the world’s top architects, this New Potsdamer Platz is Berlin’s most popularised image, although not the one that most visitors have in mind when thinking about Berlin.

It demonstrates in a nutshell the issues that the city acquired, mostly itself, entangled in: post-Fordism, global city ambition, neoliberal urban governance and



particularly the phenomena of place marketing. All of those new and hard-to-tackle changes for Berlin were concurrently happening under unfavourable economic climates as well as became hugely influenced by the underestimated socio-anthropological factors.

The ‘points to ponder’ about Potsdamer Platz converge then into several polemical questions: ‘How can urban researchers understand Potsdamer Platz having multiple intentions attached to it?’; ‘has Potsdamer Platz created the desired level of economic impact?’; ‘Was the ‘urban reincarnation’ through injecting global built environment the only choice for Berlin?’; ‘What is the role of Potsdamer Platz for Berlin today?’; ‘What can we learn from it?’; ‘Why are the most current urban changes on Potsdamer Platz taking this particular route?’; ‘Can urban identity be re-invented?’; ‘Why such re-inventions attempted by Berlin are yet to yield its full potential?’



# Chapter 1

## Stage 1: –1945 (Flourishing)

The past of Potsdamer Platz, undoubtedly like the rest of Berlin, is a turbulent one. First of all it was never a proper ‘platz’ as in the English understanding of the word ‘platz’ as a public square. It was a five-cornered traffic junction (Fig. 1.1), adjacent to distinctive octagonal Leipziger Platz, on an important trading route between Bruges and Novgorod. In the early eighteenth century, it was simply an area outside the Potsdam Gate at the end of the road from Berlin to the city of Potsdam and was often referred to as a ‘Gateway to the East’ or ‘The Edge of the First World’ (Ladd 1997). From the mid-nineteenth century, Potsdamer Platz functioned as a transport and commerce hub for the rapidly modernising German Empire and was considered to be a symbol of a progressive, industrial and cosmopolitan Germany of that time (Dempsey 2005). By 1920, when Berlin’s population reached 4 million due to the ‘Greater Berlin Unifying Act’, Potsdamer Platz overloaded by streetcars, automobiles, trams and hectic pedestrian traffic became the busiest public space in Europe (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2), with the ‘movement’ being the most defining characteristic of it (Ladd 1997). It was comparable to London’s Piccadilly Circus or New York’s Times Square. The traffic also brought the installation of Berlin’s first train line in 1838, as well as erection of the world’s first traffic lights in 1924 by Siemens.

Among many of its significant buildings were (Fig. 1.3):

- Wertheim department store—one of the biggest in the world;
- Haus Vaterland—known as the world’s biggest restaurant that acted as ‘a showcase of all nations’;
- Weinhaus Huth—with a distinctive corner cupola;
- Café Josty—a meeting place of international society, including artists, writers and politicians; and
- Hotel Esplanade—that has served among others: Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo or Emperor Wilhelm II.

Those rich structures built mainly in brick in neo-baroque and neo-rococo styles, influenced by the Wilhelminian desire for ostentatious decorations got interrupted by one outstanding example of modernist influence: Columbushaus.

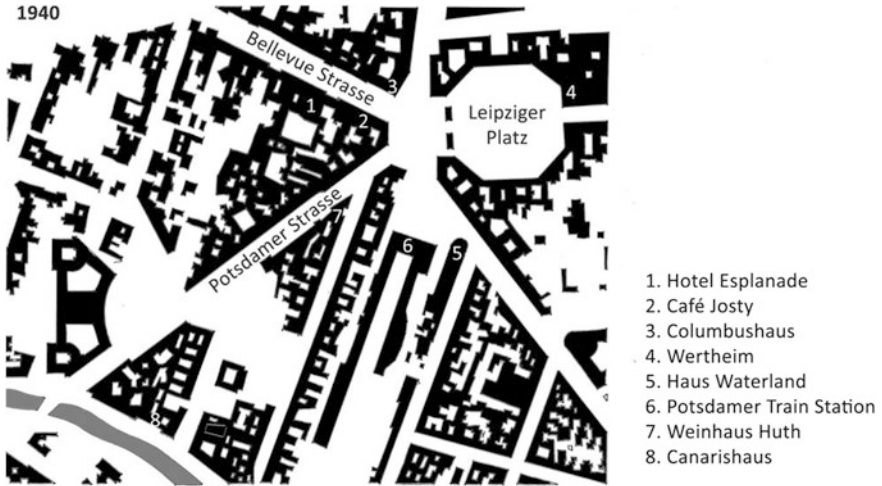


Fig. 1.1 Potsdamer Platz map from before the WWII. Note the dense urban tissue



Fig. 1.2 Potsdamer Platz heydays. Aerial view, 1930

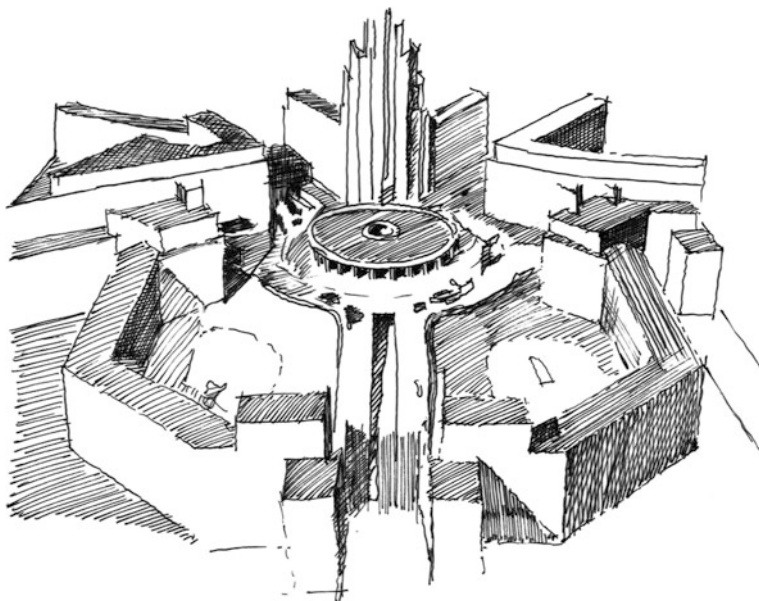
Designed by progressive architect Erich Mendelsohn (known for Einstein's Europahaus) and completed in 1932, Columbushaus was a 10-storey ultra-modern office building with an elegant and a clean form; the first one to have air-conditioning. Its architecture was the absolute contrary to the rich ornaments of



**Fig. 1.3** Haus Vaterland; Wertheim department store; Columbushaus; Hitler's propaganda posters

Wertheim (Ward 2011). It represents Mendelsohn's first attempt to surrounding the whole Platz with modern constructions.

Mendelsohn, however, was not alone in his ambitious visions for the total redevelopment of Potsdamer Platz. The energy that this place possesses had formerly attracted numerous individuals. The first one was Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel who, as early as in 1823, made an overall neoclassical layout for it and proposed a tower as a national monument at this spot (Neumann 2000). Later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Berlin had grown into a pulsating metropolis with a population of almost 4 million (Sonne 2000), resulting from 1870s Hobrecht Development Plan, the dissatisfaction with housing and transportation situation had also grown. It led to organisation of urban competition named 'Greater Berlin' to attain a large-scale solution for transportation, beauty, public health and economic activities. Potsdamer Platz was one of the main competition sites and gained an important proposal for traffic management from Bruno Schmitz in the form of a tall central rotunda that would house the transportation hub. This idea later inspired Martin Wagner, head of Berlin's planning and building control department, also influenced by the modernists who in 1929 suggested an ambitious array of sleek new buildings arranged around a vast, multi-level, glass-roofed circular car park (Fig. 1.4). Multiple similar responses of modern large-scale structures paid homage to the attractiveness of traffic and advertising signs on Potsdamer Platz. However, with the exception of Columbushaus, they were never built due to changes in Berlin's economic situation as well as the slowly moving wheels of Berlin's bureaucracy (Sonne 2000).



**Fig. 1.4** Martin Wagner's idea for traffic hub on Potsdamer Platz

Under the Nazi governance, Hitler's chief architect, Albert Speer, intended to surround Potsdamer Platz with classically inspired prestigious government buildings (Fig. 1.5) as part of his new plan for Berlin's North–South Axis. Lastly, the Nazi did not alter Platz's essential character (Dempsey 2005). They did, however, leave their footprint by hanging big swastika flags, propaganda neon-signs and by occupying Columbushaus by placing a secret Gestapo prison on the upper part of the building.

**Fig. 1.5** Albert Speer's plan for Potsdamer Platz as part of the proposed new North–West axis





A totalitarian period brought yet another dimension to Berlin's urban planning, with megalomaniac historicist ambitions, however, never with fully unified architectural style (Sonne 2000).

Nevertheless, through the course of years, Berlin had always been a subject of consecutive decision makers and city planners' ambitions; and was always referred to as 'Die Weltstadt' (German term for 'world city') with Potsdamer Platz being constantly *involved in*—if not actually *acting as* the front cover for those efforts.

During the last years of the WWII, Potsdamer Platz was heavily bombed with almost all buildings turned into rubble. It transformed from once a vibrant city centre into a derelict area (Fig. 1.6). However, as Dempsey (2005) argues, it was not until the Cold War that the Platz suffered its final destruction.



**Fig. 1.6** Post-bombing devastation and burnt Columbushaus, 1945

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## Chapter 2

### Stage 2: 1945–1989 (Hibernation)

The Cold War Era, that came next, had the biggest influence on the current state of Berlin. After the Second World War ended in 1945, Germany was divided into four zones between the main Allied countries (Figs. 2.1 and 2.2) with Berlin positioned extraordinarily among this division. Located entirely in the Soviet zone, as a strategic point, it was also divided between the four powers with part of the city transformed into a disconnected area entirely on the enemy's territory—an island of capitalism in the sea of socialism. Potsdamer Platz was located directly on the junction of the four power zones, which soon turned it into a black market area.

Only a few constructions on Potsdamer Platz survived the bombing. Amongst them were steel skeleton Canarishaus located in the south of the site, also steel frame Weinhaus Huth with its vast cellars, newly built Columbushaus, as well as some parts of Hotel Esplanade.

From 1961, West Berlin became surrounded by the Berlin Wall with the official aim to protect Soviets from 'not yet fully cleansed Nazi's influence', but in fact from stopping Eastern citizens escaping to the West. This artificial division running in a closed loop around the western part of the city for some 150 km was cutting the centre of Berlin at Potsdamer Platz into two parts. In the first years after the war, the area was cleaned of rubble left by air raids and ultimately turned into an abandoned and fearfully empty landscape. This concluded the deconstruction process that the bombing began, while the proximity of Hitler's bunker in which he committed suicide, additionally amplified the wish for the area to be forgotten about.

During the next 20 years, the border gradually evolved into a reality of a fortified military site with a wide strip of no man's land, reinforced concrete units, armed guards, watch towers and anti-tank blockades. A former heart of the city was changed beyond recognition—physically, culturally and socially (Sandler 2003).

There are numerous facts about Potsdamer Platz centred on division that are worth mentioning. The first resembles the construction of a viewing platform on the western side overlooking the east, which symbolises 'The Cold War Tourism'. The other fact was the 'the Neon War' in which, the Free (West) Berlin press and the East Berlin Press erected signs similar to today's billboards, both facing east,

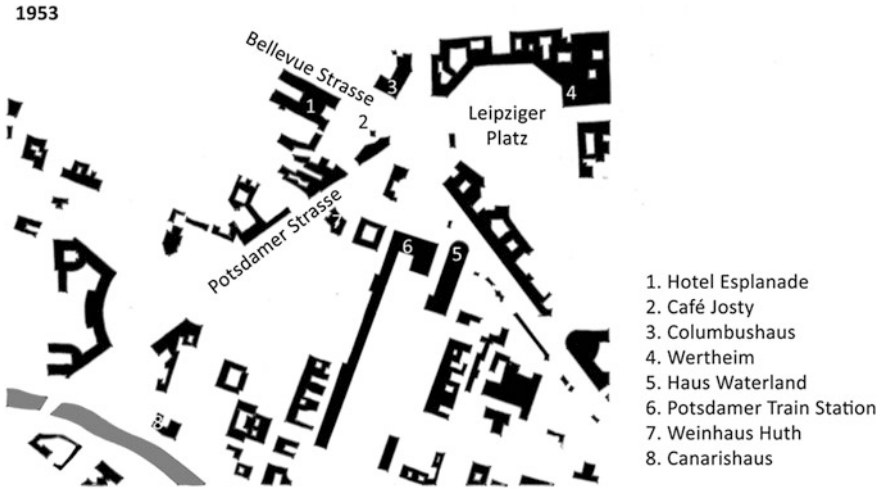


Fig. 2.1 Potsdamer Platz map from 1953

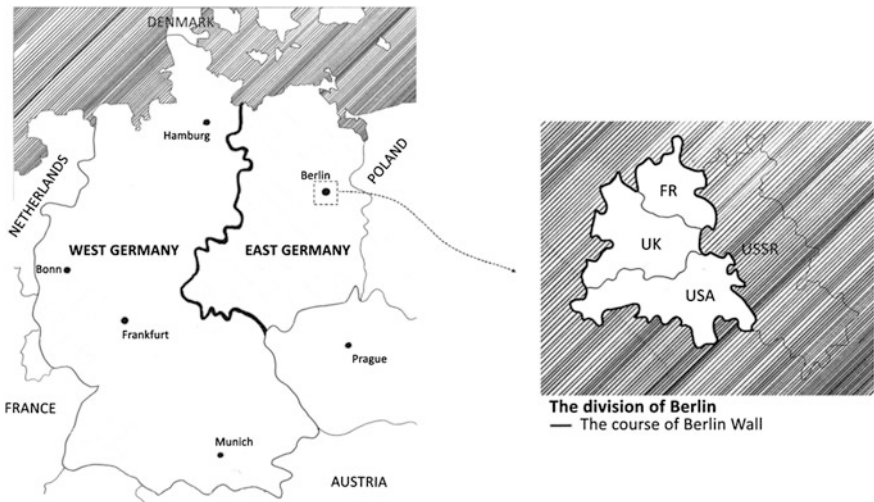


Fig. 2.2 Map of today’s Germany and Berlin with former division between East and West

and both providing the same facts but with opposite meaning, following the agenda of the political systems they represented (Fig. 2.3). On both sides of Potsdamer Platz also The Wall itself became a subject of opposite meaning. While on the east it was abandoned, on the western side, nicknamed ‘Wall of Shame’, it was not guarded by police and became a popular place for socialising and canvas for graffiti (Fig. 2.4).

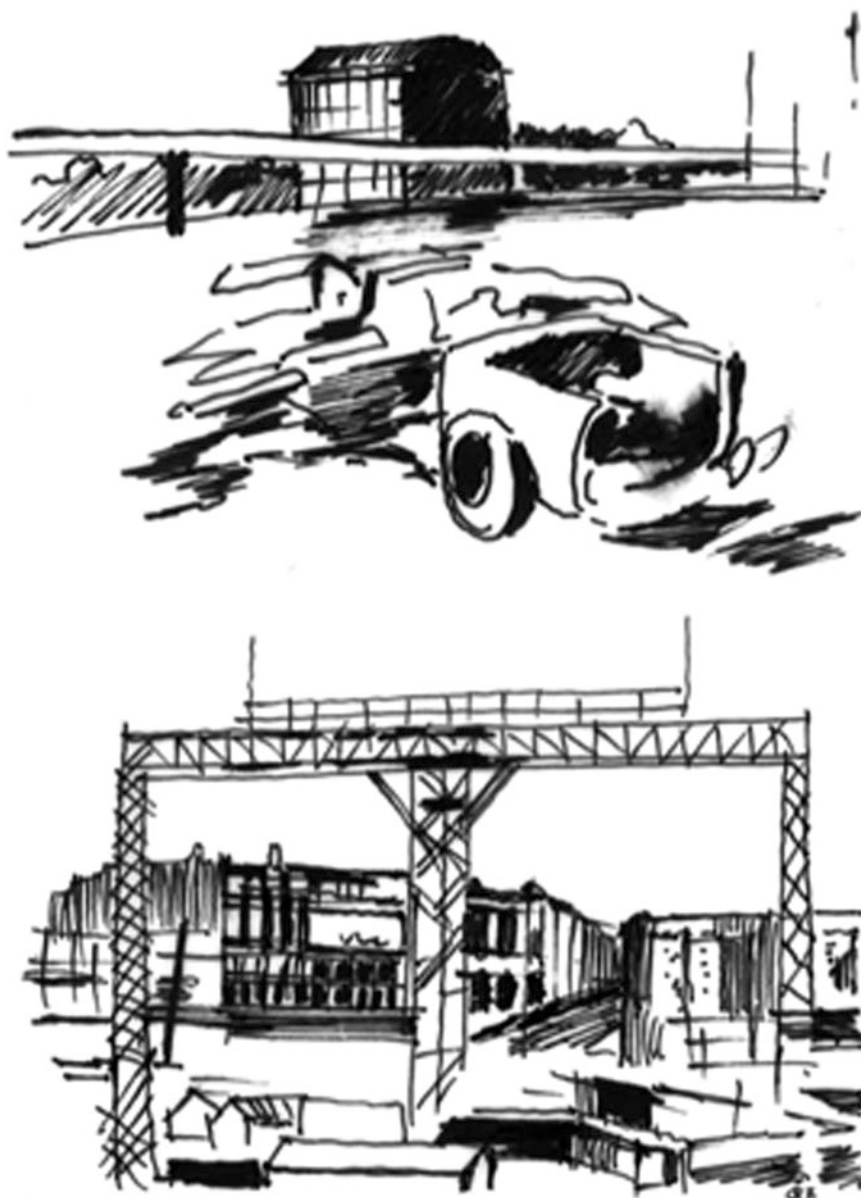


Fig. 2.3 Viewing platform and 'Neon War' on the empty Potsdamer Platz

The divided Potsdamer Platz featured in valuable cinema productions. Renowned German movie director Wim Wenders commemorates the area in his 1987 'Wings of Desire' in which two men wander through the Platz's void, with



Fig. 2.4 View from the West Berlin side with the strip of Dead Zone; the famous sign at a border of the American sector, 1986

the viewing platform and ruins of Weinhouse Huth as the backdrop, in search for the former heart of the city. ‘Somewhere here was Potsdamer Platz’ says the old man named Homer.

In 2005, the young Polish director Bartosz Konopka revealed another meaningful layer of the Potsdamer Platz legacy. In an award-winning documentary ‘Rabbit à la Berlin’, Konopka renders an image of the life of wild rabbits that inhabited the wide field of grass in the Dead Zone. He focuses on their protected artificial existence and their fate, the moment the wall came down. He thereby provokes the polemic about the uneasy turning moment for Berliners themselves upon the unification.

The separation of the city between two opposite political systems unsurprisingly resulted in opposite planning approaches. When the situation was not showing any signs of forthcoming change and the pre-war Berlin’s centre was no longer on the map, both sites needed to look for new approaches to redefine what could become from this new Berlin’s configuration.

Outside Germany the 1960s was a time when the reign of modernism already started to be criticised as empty and naive. After serving as a perfect distancing solution from the Nazi favoured *architecture of power* and its gigantic neoclassical domes, triumphal arches and boulevards and following WWII trauma in the early 1960s, sleek lines and empty spaces with separated functions proved to be unable to fulfil the dream of a utopian community that they had promised. In America, revitalisation had started, with Jane Jacobs publishing ‘the Death and Life of Great American Cities’ (1961) and Kevin Lynch ‘The Image of the City’ (1960). Robert Venturi also began to strongly develop post-modernism. In Germany, post-modernism did not gain popularity. The most influential, on the contrary, was Aldo Rossi’s ‘The Architecture of the city’ (1966), which shifted architects’ and planners’ attention towards preservation of build heritage and restoration projects.

In the prosperous West Berlin, that was heavily subsidised by the Western allies, and in a sense living the modernist dream, the new generation of architects, inspired by Rossi, formed a group called ‘Campaign 507’ and raised the first post-division public discussions on the city’s official building policy. One of the signatories of ‘Campaign 507’, Josef Paul Kleihues, later developed a theory of ‘Critical Reconstruction’ which sought to recreate the pre-war state of Berlin: in scale, materials, density and street pattern (Ward 2011). Critical Reconstruction preferred traditional materials like stone or ceramic over glass and steel, and favoured an urban unit of a dense ‘city block’ composed of five-storey tenements arranged around inner courtyards.

Kleihues, who became influential among the West Berlin’s planning department in 1987 together with H. W. Hämer chaired the International Building Exhibition (IBA’87) where he was appointed “Director of Planning” for the new building areas.

The results of the previous Berlin’s architectural exhibition named ‘Interbau’ from 1957 (that involved Alvar Aalto, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Arne Jacobsen or Oscar Niemeyer) and IBA’87 (designs from Aldo Rossi, Arata Izosaki, Peter Eisenman and James Stirling), became the base and a set of physical representations of Kleihues’ critical reconstruction theory.

Both exhibitions of the above exhibitions depicted the most ambitious architectural initiatives of that time and attracted the brightest designers to try their

skills in this exceptional field of European landscape. It is worth mentioning that the boundary of the master plan was inevitably set to the proximity of the Wall, which although resulted in a successful enhancement of the West Berlin's landscape, also emphasised the dichotomy of the two parts of the city.

Meanwhile, on the eastern side, where the agenda of modernism was also officially rejected, some of its ideas served the Socialists' agenda well and were, therefore, implemented. In an outcome during the weighty 44 years that passed and through which Potsdamer Platz was lying derelict in the middle, West Berlin planners took a course of redesigning their part of the city as polycentric, with a high density multi-functional core; whereas East Berlin was left mono-centric, focusing around Alexander Platz and a wide boulevard leading towards it with a much lower density and functional mix (Ward 2011). With those conditions Berlin was approaching the fall of the Wall—in German significantly called '*Die Wende*'—'turn'.

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## Chapter 3

### Stage 3: 1989–2000 (Awakening)

The end of this East–West division eventually began on 9 November 1989 (Fig. 3.1). It was a multi-dimensional phenomena for Berlin. In the global scale, it symbolised the end of the Cold War. In national scale, it marked the beginning of a new, re-unified, German country; whereas, in a local scale, it is a reunification of a city defaced by war, bifurcated between two extremes that lasted for the lifespan of almost two generations. For Berliners, it simply meant a life-changing moment.

In the wider context, the period of the 1990s resonates a massive acceleration by innovation, globalisation and economic growth manifested mainly in the form of commercialisation. Architecturally, it was the phase of multiplication of high-rise financial centres resembling architectural language existing in Asian tiger cities and structures such as I. M. Pei's Bank of China Tower in Hong Kong. In Germany, completed in 1990, was Frankfurt's 'Messeturm' which, for almost a decade, held the title of European Union's tallest structure.

'*Die Wende*', happening in a festive atmosphere of re-union and the celebration of democracy prevailing over communism (Fig. 3.2), first of all resulted in an instant adaptation of Western Germany's system for the whole reunified country and consequential negligence of the Socialist past that nevertheless had identified one part of the nation for nearly 50 years. Second, it brought high hopes and speculations about the scenarios for 'possible futures' that were about to commence. The primary wish was to place Berlin as a new metropolis back on the global map. Positioned now as the biggest most eastern city of the European Union, Berlin once more became an emblem of the gateway to the East.

In 1991, the German Government made a decision to move the capital from Bonn back to Berlin that made the economists predict a massive increase in Berlin's population, estimating the arrival of around 60,000 people every year due to the creation of new jobs (Ward 2011). One opinion particularly shows the scale of the expectations for the city in the coming years. Only a few days after the reunification, Edzard Reuter, Chief Executive Officer of Daimler-Benz and son of Berlin's mayor, claimed that the city would become the Hong Kong of Eastern Europe (Wolf 1998).

Potsdamer Platz, at that moment of unification, could be best described as 'tabula rasa'. Its area of some 60 ha of clear land (60 UEFA football fields or, in a

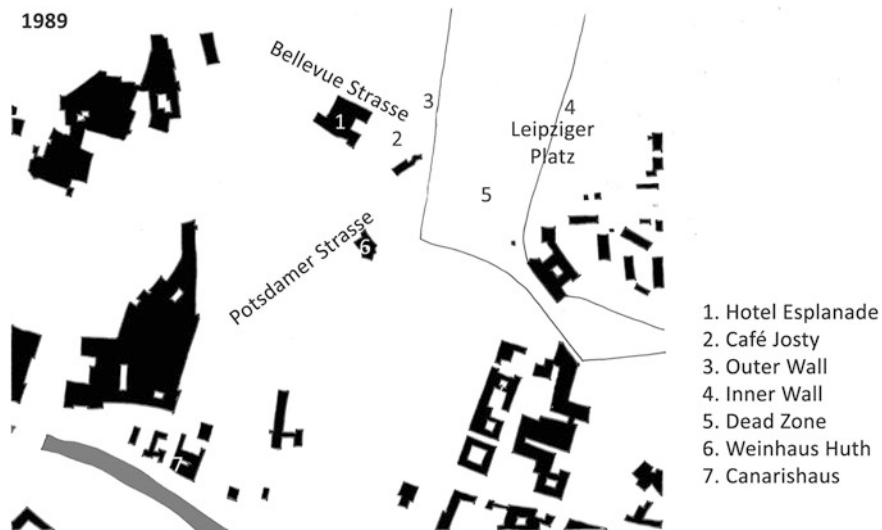


Fig. 3.1 Potsdamer Platz map from 1989

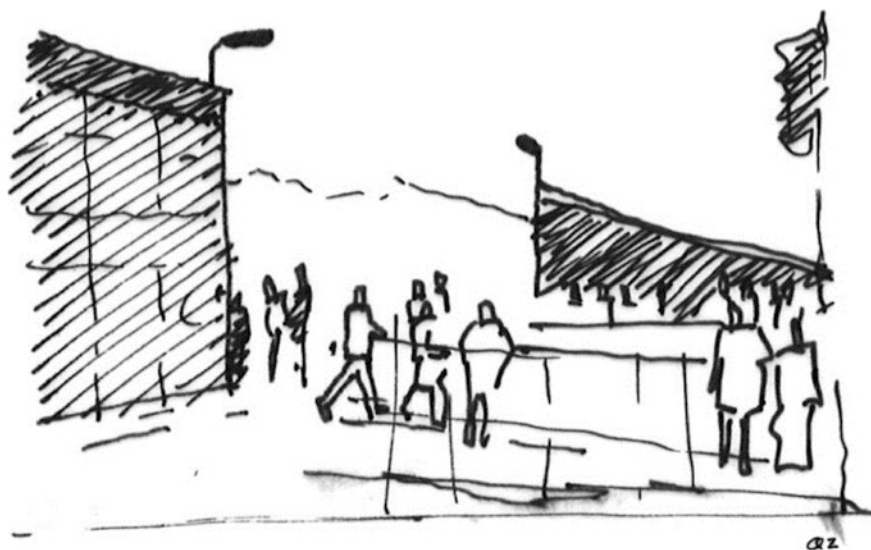


Fig. 3.2 Opening of the border on Potsdamer Platz 1989

more urban context, 60 London's Trafalgar Squares) in the middle of the city was chosen by the government to become the centre of the New Berlin. On 9 November 1989, literally overnight, it was turned into a prime real estate onto which the eyes of the whole world had turned.

To get the attention of investors to the Potsdamer Platz site, the new government was offering attractive subsidies and tax credits; thus enhancing the investors' appetite and accelerating the much desired property boom.

The entire land was divided into four parcels and sold to international investors. Daimler-Benz decided to locate its headquarters here just after the unification having purchased the land even before the Wall went down. Their plot as well as the ambition of the project was so extensive that they established their own marketing company for carrying out developmental promotion. Sony also decided to locate its new European centre there by purchasing a large site nearby to the north. The offers for the two other biggest sites came from private investors: Otto Beisheim, a German businessman and founder of wholesale/cash and carry 'Metro AG' group, and from Asea Brown Boveri (ABB), a Swiss–Swedish multinational engineering company. Offers from other investors were expected to follow for the smaller parts (Colomb 2012).

Berlin Senate was aware of the scale and accordingly, the influence that this redevelopment would have on the city and moreover on Berlin's image outside Germany. In 1990, it launched a master plan competition for the area including Leipziger Platz, in order to obtain a comprehensive basis and to set a vision for further designs. The competition's brief called for *'a recreation of a mixed use design that would function as a bridge between East and West Berlin, a new centre, consisting of retrieved character of pre-war urban life with traditional block pattern, spaces to stroll and relax'*. Furthermore, it was calling for a place *'of high visual quality for staging public life that citizens could identify with'* (Berlin.de 2013). This description involved conflict of interests at the outset. This was the wish to reconstruct the pre-war Potsdamer Platz that Berliners cherished in their memory, which triggered the second wish to make it the face of New Berlin representing it on a global arena.

A discussion took place between the two main opponents: deconstructionists who wanted the scars of history to become the primary feature of the city's landscape; and traditionalists who wanted to escape those scars completely.

Hans Kolhoff from the traditionalist group argues that *'After the Wall had gone down; there was a great opportunity not just to unify but to re-establish the old historical centre of the city'*. He explains that although *'there was a severe damage to Berlin people retained a certain image of their city, a very precise image, and that they want to regain something from that old world'* (Wolf 1998). On the other hand, deconstructivists such as architect Daniel Libeskind, author of the Jewish Museum extension, have a different opinion about it, arguing that traditionalist attempts reflect a vision of a city *'not suited for today or for tomorrow'*. *'Berlin is a new city. It is not 1870, 1910 or 1930. It is post-war and we have a new economy and a new understanding of cities'* (ibid). His opinion is supported by Rem Koolhaas for whom the beauty of the German capital lay in these major areas of 'nothingness', which were left by the European history, making it the most contemporary and the most avant-garde of all cities. *'What's attractive in Berlin is its kind of environment that young people and the very ambitious ones enjoy, because it presents, in every direction, the prospect of problems to be solved'*. It keeps

one's mind continuously engaged in solving those problems (ibid). For deconstructionists, Berlin's voids presented a provocative lack of imposed logic that they value. For traditionalists, it was a chaos that they wanted to get rid of as resulting from what they regarded as an unfortunate course of history, which should not have happened. When Kolhoff speaks about reunification as a 'chance to redevelop Berlin without the chaotic and exploding *forms of the American and Asian cities*', Libeskind argues back saying that Berlin does not need any new order, because it is already a perfectly ordered city. '*It is not chaos; it is an order of a different kind*' (ibid). His approach is represented by his entry for the Potsdamer Platz competition (Fig. 3.3).

The competition which attracted 17 international entries, including star-architects Richard Rogers and Libeskind himself, was won by Munich-based office 'Hilmer-Sattler' by the decision of a jury, composed of city planners, council representatives and architects (also including Koolhaas). The selected proposal divided the area between five radiating streets referring to the site's historic arrangement and accentuated its forefront by high-rise towers. The rest of the buildings were broken into blocks with a maximum height of 35 m referring to the historical urban blocks (Fig. 3.4).

The choice of office towers on the east side is also not incidental, as Wolf and Sonne state (after such authority as Sigfried Giedion) 'a skyscraper in today's society gained a similar meaning to the one that gothic cathedral towers had for their periods—to underline its power over its surrounding' (Giedion 1941).

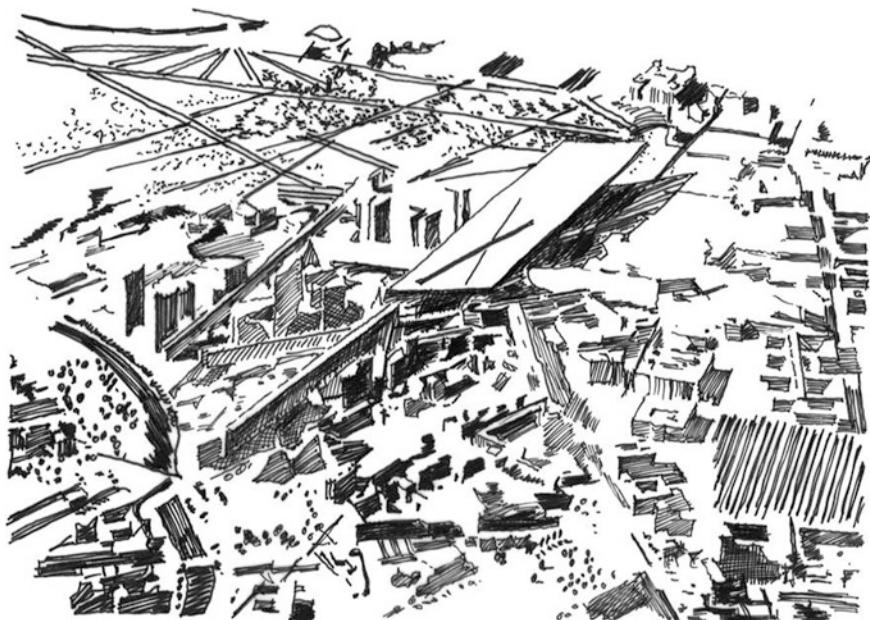


Fig. 3.3 Daniel Libeskind's Potsdamer Platz competition entry, 1990

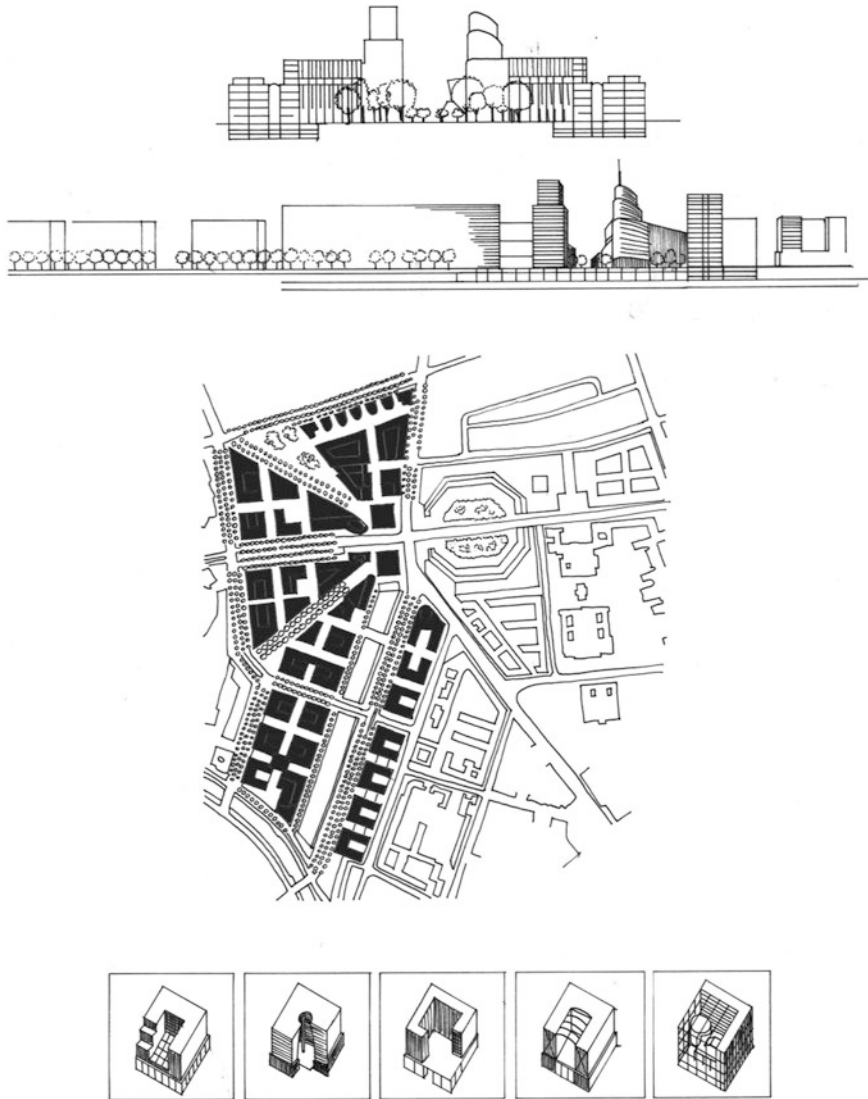


Fig. 3.4 Hilmer + Sattler’s winning design for Potsdamer Platz, 1990

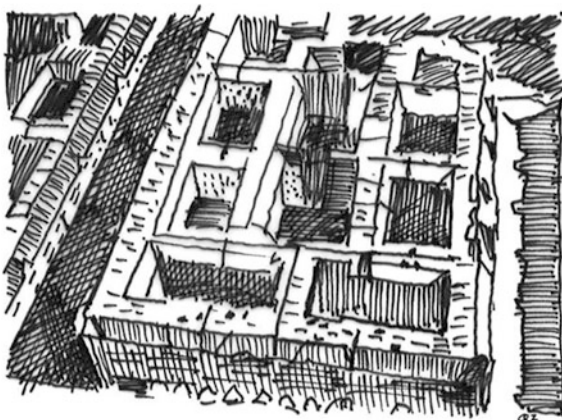
The same happens today, as the presence of skyscrapers in the landscape testifies to the city’s importance in the global arena.

While traditionalists argue their point and Libeskind maintains that they force ‘a *paranoia of historiographical reconstruction, or a pretended historiographical reconstruction*’ (Wolf 1998), it is worth having an insight into the Berlin that the former aspire to re-establish. Their target, in fact, is not the easily assimilated name of pre-war heyday Berlin, but more specifically the Prussian Berlin from before 1914.

In their theory, they did not simply return to the pre-WWII times, but also disregarded the 1920s as being too exuberant—not coincidentally nicknamed ‘the roaring 20s (in German *‘Die Golde Zwanziger’*—the Golden Twenties’. What caused them to neglect such an important phase is partially the impression of the lavish urban life of the era, which does not complement traditional German characteristics such as clarity and organisation. Those on the contrary are idealistically linked to the image of Prussian architecture (Dempsey 2005), which in urbanity is symbolised by dense residential blocks.

The block, however, has its roots in what was an extremely highly packed domestic construction that resulted from the so-called ‘Hobrecht Plan’ (1862), as a solution accommodating the growing population of Berliners (Dempsey 2005). Those dark and overshadowed structures, nicknamed ‘*Mietskaserne*’ (English: rental barracks), arranged around multiple narrow courtyards, were infamous for often housing an entire family in one-room, poor sanitary and hygiene conditions as well as dirt and dust from coal burning (Fig. 3.5). Brian Ladd, in his book ‘The Ghosts of Berlin—Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape’, describes *Mietskaserne* exactly as one of the ‘ghosts’ of Berlin’s past (Ladd 1997).

**Fig. 3.5** Aerial view of the city blocks showing the multiple inner courtyards; view inside the courtyards





Kleihues, however, uses this typology in a new, updated form as spacious and fitted with all the modern sanitary and technology equipment. While keeping their primary arrangement of four or five storey high structures, he differentiates them vertically by imposing a hierarchy of commercial functions on the ground floor, mixed or, in general, different use on higher floors, and apartments on the top. This adaptation, by which city planners ranked as the most desired for Berlin's new developments, was viewed by Ladd as one of the 'erasures of the past' or, at least, its attempted sanitisation (Ladd 1997)—an issue that is going to re-appear for Berlin repeatedly.

As soon as the discussion surrounding whether to reconstruct or to deconstruct was settled, it became subject to a confrontation with the reality of the 1990s (Ward 2011) that included not only the left-aside sociocultural and political consequences of Germany's reunification, but also the changed economic climate that became powerfully influential in any market-involving decisions changing European and regional situations, in which, as Le Gales argues, the occurrence of competition between cities and regions became 'part of the logic of action' for city governments (Le Galès 1998).

At the beginning of the 1990s, the world started to undergo an intensive process of globalisation. The structural economic changes that inherited the labels of 'Post-Fordism' and 'neo-liberalism' marked the shift from an industrial economy towards flexible service and knowledge-based businesses (Colomb 2012). The time also witnessed the emergence of a 'Global City' theory developed by Saskia Sassen, who paid attention to the overtaking influence of international corporations on cities' development over the non-corporate firms and individuals (Sassen 2002).

Going further into this analysis, the core attention of intervention in the cities started to be paid no longer to the provision of public goods and services or the improvement of local conditions, but to the means of bringing financial benefits to the city's vault, which was done by new forms of outward-oriented policies aiming to attract financially influential, however, temporarily mobile investments, international tourists and new residents (ibid). This, in turn, pushed the development of unprecedented cooperation between the public, private and non-profit sectors (Cochrane 2007). Extensive attention started to be paid to 'place marketing', which facilitated by the newly emerging media-technologies and by the professionalisation of marketing and advertising disciplines, appeared to be a perfect weapon in the intensified competitive game.

Place marketing was escalating its influence by the mid-1990s to enjoy a popularity of over 60 % of city governments incorporating it in their municipal policies (Colomb 2012) and started to evolve into a whole strategy. It consists of three principal dimensions: specialised consultants producing the image making and its promotion; dedicated organisations and policies regulating its form; and was accompanied by many academic publications of that time. Claire Colomb calls the 1990s in Germany 'The Golden Years of City Marketing' (ibid, p. 8) with the New Potsdamer Platz redevelopment as a project upon which place marketing reached its peak.

Upon selling to investors, as a result of the previous course of history, the area of Potsdamer Platz was *de facto* a continuous plot of land, without roads, structures or any indications of public space (Sandler 2003). Each of the investors that purchased the land needed to follow the ‘Hilmer-Sattler’ master plan, yet each started to force their own version of the Platz’s future by subsequently launching individual design competitions. No comparable redevelopment scheme has been seen in Europe (*ibid*).

Overall, the developers agreed to build eight new streets with twenty-nine new buildings consisting of 310,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office space, 111,000 m<sup>2</sup> of apartment space and 57,000 m<sup>2</sup> of retail shops and restaurants; also including two IMAX theatres, 27 cinema screens, a concert stage, an underground train station and a shopping mall (Berlin.de 2013). The image of this new ‘Potsdamer Platz to be’ was strongly shaped not only by the desire of city governors but additionally by the aspirations of architectural companies that were commissioned to design particular plots and buildings. These included: Renzo Piano (recipient of Pritzker Prize, Paris) who was in charge of the overall master plan of the Daimler-Benz Site, Helmut Jahn (German-American architect based in New York) responsible for the Sony site and Hilmer & Sattler and David Chipperfield (recipient of RIBA Stirling Prize) for Beisheim. The architects of individual buildings just added the icing to the cake: Rafael Moneo (Pritzker Prize, Madrid), Richard Rogers (Pritzker Prize, London), Arata Izosaki (RIBA Gold Medal, Japan), I. M. Pei (Pritzker Prize, New York) or renowned Swiss office Diener und Diener.

Such a large number of different architects were commissioned with the official intention to provide a diverse mix of buildings, which would correspond to the richness and traditional urbanity of the former Potsdamer Platz. However, this can be read as a mask for the investor’s appetite to make their sites as attractive as they could be to add to their external corporate image. As Sandler (2003) urges, traditional urbanity results from a gradual and complex process of accumulation, layering and evolution of social activities and different businesses; and any attempt to re-produce it within a few years can be read as negligence of the task’s complexity (*ibid*).

The overall face of the Potsdamer Platz, presented to the public as innovative, forward-looking and attractive, was summarised by Colomb as ‘a classic case of corporative iconic architecture’ (Colomb 2012) that was yet to be examined by the unusually high interest of academics, professionals and Berliners themselves.

The presence of international corporate investors on Potsdamer Platz for city officials promised a success of this development. But there was a fear though, that the city would not be able to stand up to such global expectations, a fear that Berlin may be ‘too provincial’ (Dempsey 2005). Efforts to overcome this worry got directed into the formation of promotional campaigns unprecedented in scale with a specific, purpose-centred organisation named ‘*Partner für Berlin*’, which was in charge of coordinating the redevelopment (Fig. 3.6). The global theatre of *staging* the Potsdamer Platz had started.

In order to present the overall planning strategy and the detailed plans, investors decided to fund a temporary exhibition building that would house presentations



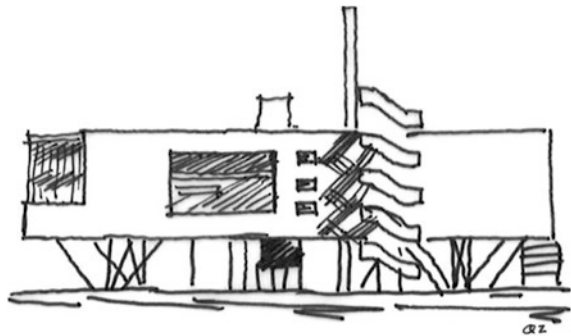
**Fig. 3.6** Berlin’s marketing company logo



and models showcasing the future finished development. The building named INFOBOX (Fig. 3.7), designed by German architects ‘Schneider + Schumacher’, was erected in three months on the site of Leipziger Platz and consisted of a bright red rectangular structure elevated on black stilts.

Inside, Infobox was offering ‘electronic strolls through ‘The Berlin of tomorrow’; although criticised as being merely an ‘IMAGE BOX’ rather than ‘INFO BOX’ for Berlin city officials, it was city marketing at its best (Colomb 2012).

**Fig. 3.7** INFOBOX by Schneider + Schumacher, that lasted between 1995 and 2001



Visitors were welcomed by cutting-edge high-tech representations of architects', planners' and developers' visions of the future. However, those were visions that could not be negotiated. A lot of criticism emerged from that fact, arguing that the attractiveness of images and technology deflects attention from the lack of public influence on the project or for other situations such as selling of the land on discounted rates. On the whole, Infobox gained a huge popularity reaching a total of 8.6 million visitors over its 6-year presence and an average of 2,500 visitors per day. Its success largely contributed to the new phenomena that became to be known as 'construction site tourism', which essentially turned the tables and changed something so far regarded as negative and unpleasant, the dirt, dust and overall chaos of a construction site, into an attractive and awaited event accompanied by public curiosity (Fig. 3.8).

INFOBOX lasted until 2001, when the majority of Potsdamer Platz was finished. By many (Colomb 2012; Krätke 2001) it is still regarded as the most interesting building on the site as what came next was largely a result of compromising unsettled aspirations.

At that time, Berlin was described as a construction site developed into a cliché (Sandler 2003). Berlin's state of change became its essence, as if afraid of being 'finished'—literally and perhaps even more importantly metaphorically. Every summer *Partner für Berlin* and developers would organise a series of events called 'The Summer of construction site' inviting artists to perform on the shells of buildings still under construction, and included dance, music and laser shows, and even 'a ballet of cranes' (Fig. 3.9). The sole topping-out ceremony of the Daimler-Benz project completed in 1998 involved a three-day public event combined with the hanging of giant 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> posters on the new buildings displaying the old Potsdamer Platz (Fig. 3.10). Nearing the completion of the project, Berlin's Partner organised another series of events named 'Open city—the city as exhibition' to show the results of a decade-long effort of redevelopment projects. Representations of The New Potsdamer Platz have occupied the media since the project began in 1990. Newspapers, magazine articles, travel guides, postcards, as well as exhibitions and scholarly studies were publishing the successive stages of

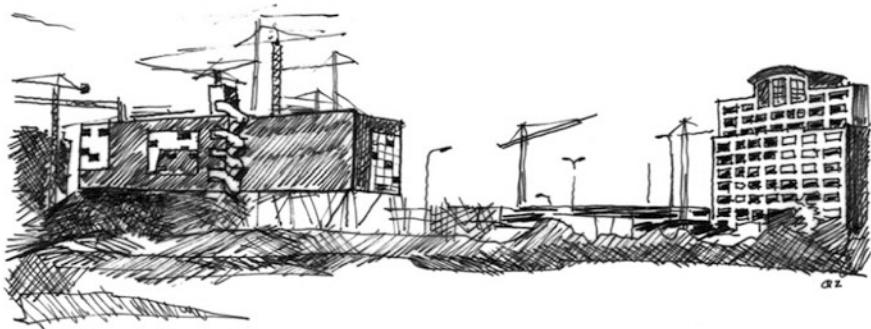


Fig. 3.8 Construction site

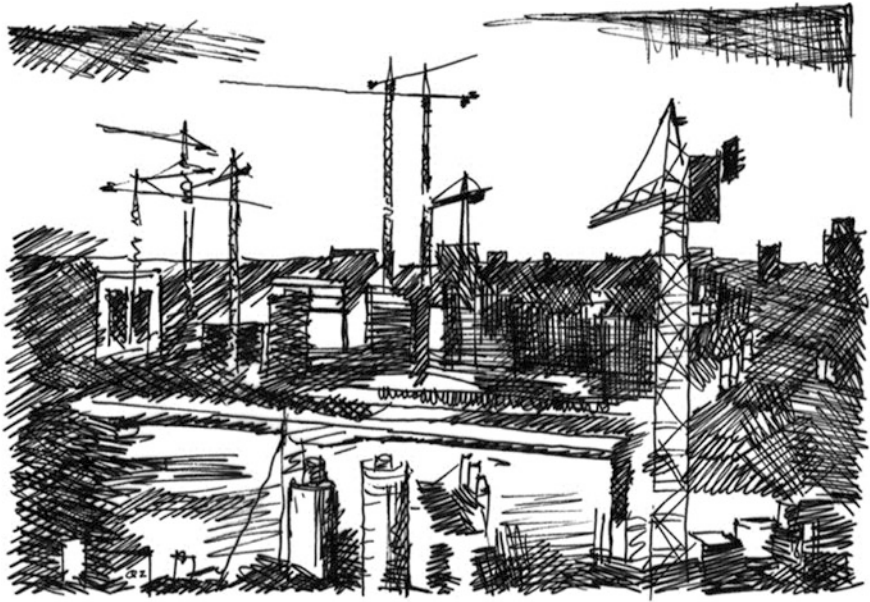


Fig. 3.9 Crane's ballet

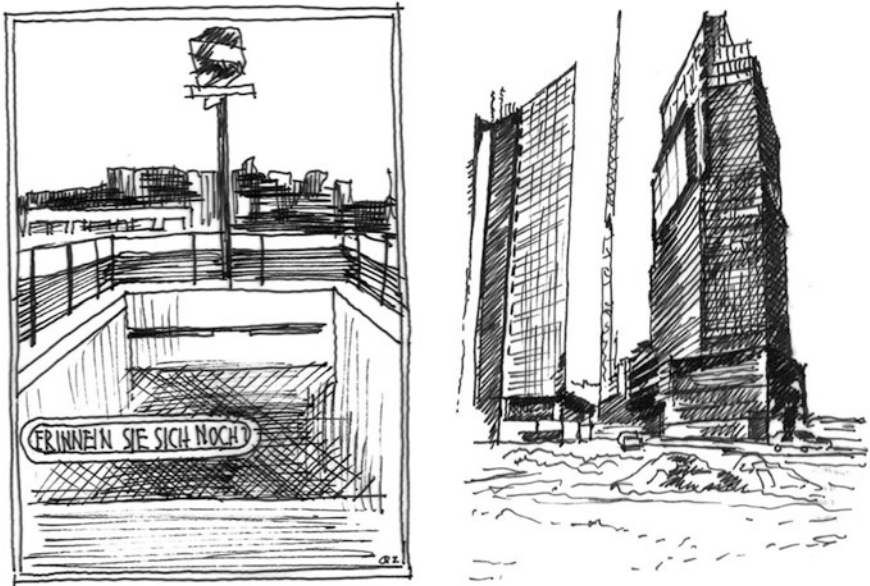


Fig. 3.10 Poster from the opening of Daimler-Benz complex, 1998, showing the entrance to one of the closed train stations. The poster reads: "Do you remember?"; construction of Kollhoff's tower

the area's reconstruction, both in German and English; and what, to the comfort of city officials and investors, ensured the area as a central icon of Berlin's reconstruction (Sandler 2003). As Claire Colomb describes, Potsdamer Platz became not only a building site, but was a statement of intent (Colomb 2012).

The ambitions of city planners for Potsdamer Platz were to make it a symbol *of and for* Berlin as a global city. A 'new service metropolis' put back on the global arena. This wish, combined with the economic climate of neoliberalism that made city governments cry for the corporate investments in order to keep their cities attractive on the global stage, resulted in the final score being dictated by those with more financial flexibility. This can be summarised by the statement of Sony's representative who mentioned that '*you don't need to have offices necessarily located in Berlin, to have a successful business*' (Wolf 1998).

Despite the city planners' intentions to reconstruct Potsdamer Platz's original character, most of the area (including streets and green spaces) became the developers' private property and, therefore, reflects their own objectives towards a successful urban investment.

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## Chapter 4

### Stage 4: 2000– (Belonging)

Today, the New Potsdamer Platz, a result of the biggest redevelopment project in Contemporary Europe (Figs. 4.1 and 4.2), stands out in Berlin's city scape as a group of skyscrapers clustered in the middle of the city. It does not continue or evolve from other similar structures around it, as sites like Manhattan or central London do. Potsdamer Platz stands alone, rising much higher than its surroundings (Fig. 4.3).

On the east site, adjacent to Leipziger Platz, its architecture is a group of platonic single volume towers that refer to Hilmer und Sattler's original guidance, dressed in monotonous glass or stone façades (mainly in white, red or yellow); some curving, some stepping back. Their densely occupied vertical street front contrasts with the flat belts of greenery in between them. At night, it shines like a big window display and during the day it strikes its passers-by as a giant image of its own.

In contrast to it are the redeveloped structures on Leipziger Platz, which together with its recreated classical plan demonstrate a much quieter and robust architectural language.

On the west site, towards the 'Kulturforum', which houses Berlin's renowned twentieth century artistic and cultural institutions including Berlin's Philharmonic, New National Gallery and State Library designed by Mies van der Rohe and Hans Schauron, the new buildings of Potsdamer Platz are organised much more loosely, still large in size, but with their spatial arrangement being dominant, thus diverting attention away from their scale and size (Fig. 4.4). They aim to correspond to the typology as preferred in the master plan competition guidelines.

The Berlin Senate Department for Transport prepares to build a tramline through Leipziger Platz that would connect Alexander Platz with Potsdamer Platz and further with Kulturforum. Due to the tight budget the realisation of this project is not confirmed.

The New Potsdamer Platz buildings have been subject to wide criticism. Some even call the whole complex, nicknamed 'Manhattan am Spree', an architectural disaster (Goldberg 1999). Sandler focuses on Izosaki's building and describes it as a 'massive, anonymous, disproportionate pink block'. Moneo's office for Mercedes Benz also did not receive favourable opinions. Its yellow, stone clad structure,

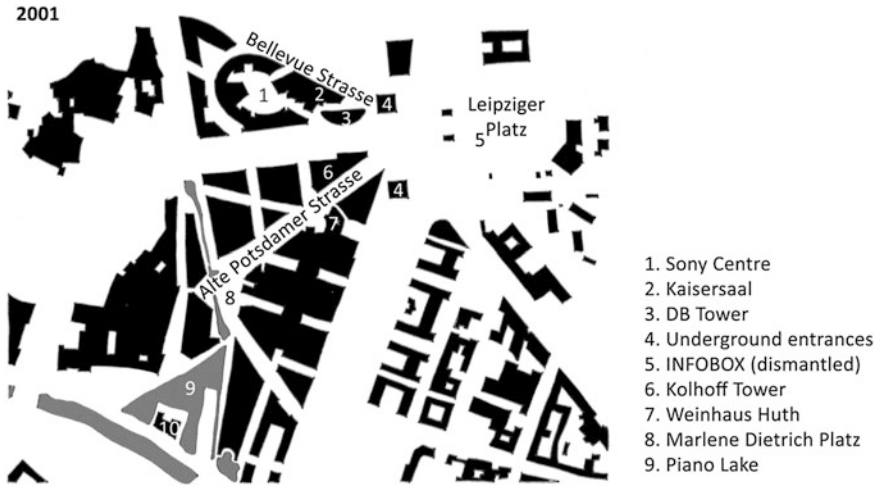


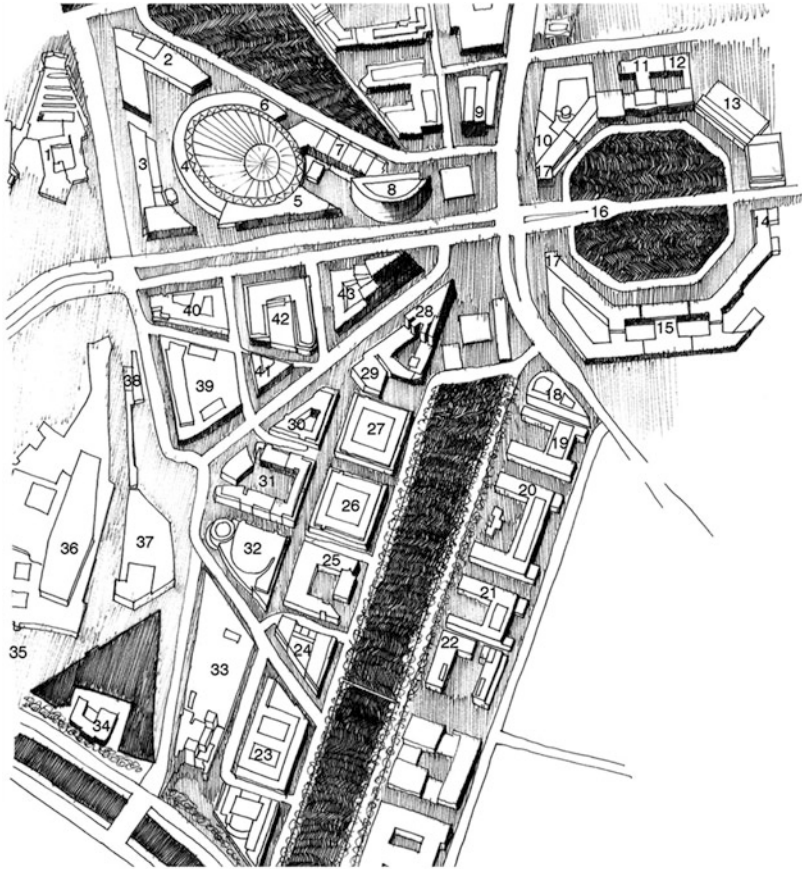
Fig. 4.1 Potsdamer Platz map from 2001

although attempting to address the colour and geometry of the adjacent Philharmonic and State Library, is ‘lacking formal distinctiveness or identity’ (Sandler 2003).

Glass façades used for office buildings also do not remain omitted from the criticism. Designed to showcase the hectic life of corporate activities inside the transparency of the glass, gives only a false impression of the ‘transparency of corporate actions’ and mostly remains a ‘façade’ in a metaphorical sense of the word.

The overall application of modernist architecture on Potsdamer Platz is also worth paying closer attention to, especially after such heated disputes between self-conflicting natures of traditionalists and deconstructionists. When introduced in the 1920s by Le Corbusier and Gropius, Modernism was offering a high degree of architectural freedom: freedom of expression, as well as freedom from politically induced architecture. On Potsdamer Platz, however, this case is not distancing it from politics; but as many argue (Marcuse 1998; Sandler 2003; Zukin 1991), in fact, this as a comeback to politically motivated architecture. In today’s form, modernism allows corporate investors a high degree of commercial flexibility with no ideological commitment to the essence of locality of the area where they are situated. But their desire having official presence in cities results in what Sharon Zukin calls ‘landscape of power’ (Zukin 1991) and Sandler names a ‘corporate-incarnated politics’ (2003).

Potsdamer Platz development marketing between 1990 and the first half of the 2000s has been widely criticised by many scholars. Claire Colomb points out that it selected and favoured only a specific set of culture, history and identity of corporate business, which was sanitised, commodified and marketed to be consumed by groups such as tourists, or high-income residents. Second, the marketed



**Building**

1. Philharmonie
2. Sony Centre
3. Offices
4. Urban Entertainment Center
5. Filmhaus
6. Offices
7. Esplanade Apartments
8. Office tower
9. Delbrück Haus
10. Mixed use
11. Mosse Palais
12. Mixed use
13. Mixed use
14. Mixed use
15. Mixed use
16. Infobox (dismantled)
17. Gate houses
18. Mixed use
19. Mixed use
20. Mixed use
21. Mixed use

**Architect**

- Hans Scharoun  
 Helmut Jahn  
 Helmut Jahn  
 Helmut Jahn  
 Helmut Jahn  
 Helmut Jahn  
 Helmut Jahn  
 Hans Kollhoff  
 Rave & Partner  
 Hans Strauch  
 Jan Kieheis  
 Giogrio Grassi  
 Walter A. Noebel  
 Schultes and Frank  
 Schneider und Schumacher  
 Oswald Mathias Ungers  
 Schweger & Partner  
 Giogrio Grassi  
 Giogrio Grassi  
 Jürgen Sawade

22. Apartments
23. Offices
24. Apartments
25. Mixed use
26. Mixed use
27. Mixed use
28. Mixed use
29. Office tower
30. Apartments
31. Apartments
32. IMAX theatre
33. Debis building
34. Canarishaus
35. New National Gallery
36. Berlin State Library
37. Music Theatre
38. Casino
39. Hotel
40. Offices
41. Apartments
42. Apartments and cinema
43. Office tower

- Diener und Diener  
 Arata Izosaki  
 Lauber und Wöhr  
 Richard Rogers  
 Richard Rogers  
 Richard Rogers  
 Renzo Piano  
 Heindenreich und Michel  
 Renzo Piano  
 Renzo Piano  
 Renzo Piano  
 Renzo Piano  
 Paul Karchow  
 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe  
 Hans Schauron  
 Renzo Piano  
 Renzo Piano  
 José Rafael Moneo  
 Lauber und Wöhr  
 Lauber und Wöhr  
 Hans Kollhoff

Fig. 4.2 The New Potsdamer map and building information



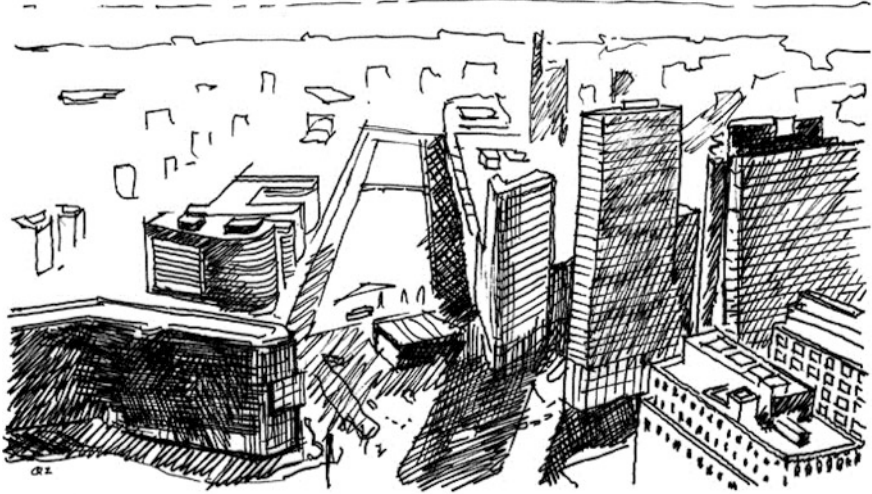


Fig. 4.3 Aerial view of Potsdamer Platz, 2000



Fig. 4.4 The new buildings by Diener + Diener, Arata Izosaki, David Chipperfield and Richard Rogers



‘vision’ of the project was chosen by a restricted group of city officials, business leaders and consultants, with little public involvement; the overall decision making as well as the subsequent implementation of the development plan was lacking transparency (Colomb 2012). It was also regarded as having an uneven social and geographical impact on the city, as the other parts were almost omitted in this promotion (Häußermann 1997). Finally, the development marketers search for ‘distinctiveness’ of Potsdamer Platz, which would compete with other global cities instead of its strong alliance with the multi-layered past; and as David Harvey (Harvey 2001) points out, this in fact only led to its ‘homogenisation’ with other similar projects. Potsdamer Platz marketing became a very expensive game in which nobody wins—with the lack of tools to measure its actual efficiency, thus, adding another point to the criticism (Ward 2011).

The international criticism on the redevelopment started with Peter Marcuse, an American architectural critic, and his article ‘Reflections on Berlin: the meaning of construction and the construction of meaning’ (Marcuse 1998), which depicts his reaction to his visit and subsequently revealed his anxiety about the scale and direction that Berlin adopted. Marcuse argued that the undergoing projects of the public/private redevelopment of Potsdamer Platz, Reichstag building and the new governmental district with its controversial private tunnel, which together form such a meaningful build environment, are worrying signs of Berlin’s attempts to re-gain power. He links it to the time of the Third Reich for which he received comments from other scholars, Häußermann (1999) and Campbell (1999), about being too critical and overly simplistic in linking the historical facts. Discouraged from that path of reasoning, Marcuse answered that anyway as he did not find the replies reassuring.

The second wave of criticism came when the new millennium approached bringing financial crisis and rising unemployment, which proved that Berlin did not deliver as a global city. In 2001, the government had finally completed the relocation from Bonn to Berlin; and the majority of its redevelopment projects were completed. The boom of speculations slowed down, but instead of regaining the role of industrial hub, Berlin de facto reached bankruptcy (The Economist 2006). Already in the 1990s, the city lost two-thirds of its jobs in manufacturing, due to loss of competitiveness in the eastern part and the withdrawal of subsidies in the western part, which led to rising unemployment. The situation was best described in 2004 by Berlin’s Mayor, Klaus Wowereit, who focused on Berlin’s famous edginess and described Berlin as ‘*poor, but sexy*’ (ibid).

Nevertheless, the money spent on the Potsdamer Platz resulted in a new area consisting of office spaces with 20 % of the apartment spaces which once finished stayed partially vacant. Krätke (2004) although aware of the influence of the unpredicted politico-economic changes nevertheless places the blame for Berlin’s such critical situation on the city officials for what he calls ‘*the worst practice*’ of urban governance.

Berlin wanted to revert back to the post-Cold War ‘Gateway to the East’. Yet as Wolf (1998) states, although the nineteenth-century Berlin could have been the centre for manufacturing, today the city’s economy is different. It consists of

decentralised commerce, with materials shipped point-to-point and with crucial intellectual property hardly touching the ground. Wolf also criticises the wish to return to the early twentieth century city model (including critical reconstruction approach) as fantasy and a national myth-making. The reality proved that a contemporary city is not a collection of static containers, but a gathering place to allow a flow of money and people who may only stay for a short while. The new urban layout and functions are different from those pre-war ones sadly stating that contemporary public life happens secretly in sheltered malls and plazas, rather than on the streets and that the future of the cities is to be cities for people with no locality—devoid of conventional notion of place making.

Today, filled with crowds wondering beneath structures designed by the world's top architects, the New Potsdamer Platz is Berlin's most popularised image. It is not however the one that most visitors have in mind when thinking about Berlin; also, not Berliners themselves, who are attached to symbols such as the Wall itself or the Brandenburg Gate (Berlin Partner 2011). Up to 100,000 people come to this square every day (Dailmer 2013), which raises the question of its centrality on the city's map together with its own self-serving ideology and meaning. Sony Plaza is the best example to address this question. Privately owned, sheltered by a magical canopy-like, steel and fabric roof, it appears to be like a generous and attractive gift for public life (Fig. 4.5). It seems to be making it an adventurous space—so desired by theorist Henry Lefebvre for every urban space. However, Lefebvre would surely be critical of this only adventurous-looking architectural creation, as the original adventure of public space that Lefebvre desired contain a mix of events including encounters, observations, reactions and reflections (Lefebvre 2002), while Sony can only offer its visitors leisure and entertainment. Admittedly, those are the most popular and desired choices by today's society, but sadly how flattened they become when prescribed and supplied only commercially by one brand.

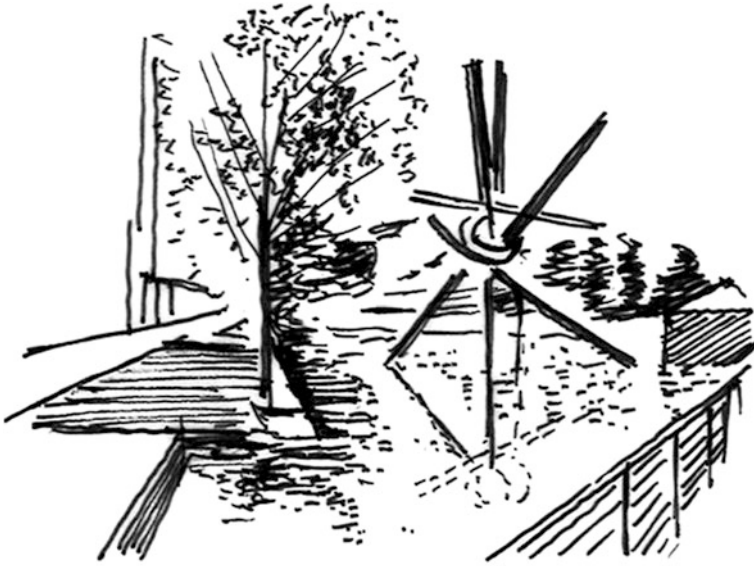
Sony Plaza, when one enters without noticing the boundary between public and private via the '*ambient power*' of corporate ownership, as it was aptly put by Allen (2006), is composed solely of cinemas, restaurants and offices. No unpredicted activities happen here; neither transient life composed of beggars on the floor, nor artists performing music, dance or tricks, and graffiti art, which plays such an important role in Berlin's urban culture. Any activity that is not bringing profit is not desired, which turns this space into little more than an attractive-looking, semi-opened shopping mall.

It does not attempt, however, to 'sanitize the past'. It is just using its entertainment magic to make the past disappear altogether. The Sony developer states, as well, that although the building typology is uncharacteristic and unfamiliar to Berlin, it offers a more accurate picture of contemporary future than anything reconstructed by the planners as native to the city. He reasons further that the fear against complex unprecedented architecture is natural for Berliners, whose city has been encaged and subsidised for half a century and that it will take a generation to change that attitude and allow the city to transform freely.



**Fig. 4.5** Sony entertainment centre

Supporting the ideas of ‘sustainable development’ that started to play a major role in urban planning and architecture since publication of the Brutland Report in 1987, and which befits a project in a nation with strong engineering, technological and manufacturing traditions, Potsdamer Platz redevelopment incorporates some notable examples of environmental solutions. According to its information on Potsdamer Platz website, the urban realm as well as the individual buildings tend to use materials compatible with health and environment, and are cooled without any energy-consuming air-conditioning. Indoor temperatures are controlled by the simple fact that all windows can be opened, but also by sophisticated façade



**Fig. 4.6** Sculpture by Marc di Suevo at the Piano Lake

breathing and ventilation solutions. Underneath, the complex has been equipped with its own centralised underground supply and recycling centre with an exemplary mechanism of collection of waste, and to keep the quarter free from above-ground delivery traffic.

The most acclaimed in regard to green solutions is, however, the water management system designed for Daimler by landscape architect Herbert Dreiseitl, who introduced green roofs for all of the nineteen new buildings. With this sustainable design strategy, the project is capturing the majority of annual rainfall, and is largely re-using it for the water supply. Also connected to the green roof system, on Marlene Dietrich Platz, there is a water landscape area, named ‘Piano Lake’ (Fig. 4.6), which the owners claim to be a successful urban water concept with constantly monitored quality and inhabited by numerous organisms including fish and ducks (Daimler). Dreiseitl also intended to add an artistic and cultural significance to his water system by channelling the collected water down and through the Daimler’s open spaces in a form of shallow pools and grooves that pedestrians can cross by stepping stones, leading to Piano Lake. Overstom links this feature to the intention of Potsdamer Platz being the symbol of Germany’s reunification which perhaps is captured more successfully by this small water feature than by the surrounding oversized buildings. He also wonders what would be the symbolic outcome if the whole of the Platz area would be redeveloped with water as main feature (Overstom 2010).

According to the same website, (nota bene: property only of Daimler, but advertised under the name of Potsdamer Platz as a whole) the aforementioned

architectural, technological and environmental solutions claim to reduce the carbon dioxide emission of the project by 70 % when compared to conventional methods.

Such claims call for attention as even though supported by institutional awards and certificates, are often assessed by methods that are subject to environmental idealisation, and from what Beatriz Ramo calls ‘green demagogy’ (Ramo 2012), in which corporations use ‘green-appearing’ solutions merely as a form of self-advertisement, rather than benefitting the public or the planet. With regard to the above, Wolf summarises the Potsdamer Platz sustainability agenda as ‘an optimistic blending of technology with the needs of businesses (Wolf 1998).

When the recent financial crisis and unemployment persisted, the city marketers, following the previously tested patterns, did not want to wait for any unpredicted situations and rushed to search for yet another new campaign that Berlin could be identified by.

Adding to the already long list of visions for Berlin—as the traditional Prussian capital, the modernist city of progress, the national-socialist capital of power and post-Wall Gateway to the East, is a new concept named ‘Creative Berlin’ (Ward 2011).

‘Creative city’, as an emerging urban theory, gained attention due to an American theorist Richard Florida and his 2002 book: ‘The Rise of the Creative Class’, in which he points out the new way of urban development and the elements that a contemporary city should aim to have in order to be successful, and where creativity and innovation will happen. As quickly as this theory became popular and attracted numerous city marketing officials, it received equally strong criticism as being highly business and economy-oriented rather than focusing on urbanity (Krätke 2010). As Krätke further argues, creative city regards creativity as a push-button development strategy, directed only towards selected target groups, instead of being a common human right.

Among the several efforts to make the site as contemporary as possible, art also could not have been omitted. Daimler’s and not only their quarter incorporates many specially commissioned sculptures and is *‘not only selected to attract art lovers, but also to inspire people walking past to reflect for a fleeting moment. All works shed an artistic accent to this architecturally sophisticated city quarter’*. Their website also provides a comprehensive guide to the purchases from artists such as Keith Haring, Jeff Koons, Francois Morellet. Daimler organised numerous art exhibitions and holds one permanent collection, named ‘Daimler Contemporary’, located in the recovered and refurbished ‘Weinhaus Huth’ (Fig. 4.7). Such gesture from the Platz owners could be regarded as benevolence towards the public, but is done only in a controlled and profit-driven way. Money invested only attracts the public, in turn, leaving their money consumed in cinemas, shopping centres, restaurants and other entertainment units creating a closed and controlled flow of money.

Numerous public events take place on Potsdamer Platz, among which are movie festival ‘Berlinale’, ‘Festival of Lights’ or Berlin’s Marathon. The prestigious hotels and apartments house celebrities and figures including Barack Obama.



Fig. 4.7 Restored Weinhaus Huth housing 'Daimler Contemporary' art exhibition

The splendour and vibrancy of those events attract international attention. Ward (2011) argues that those events, directed only towards small group of people involved in it, are reinforcing the social boundaries for Berliners rather than overcoming them.

The Sony centre, in turn, an expensive investment into hard infrastructure without long-term resources to deliver the cultural content happening below, for which Frank Gehry's Guggenheim museum in Bilbao is the most well-known example, is also regarded as a sign of locality-disregarding corporate marketing rather than long-lasting public life enhancer.

Reformulating Sassen's and Lefebvre's question 'Whose city is it' into 'Whose Platz is it?', it can be answered that most definitely Potsdamer Platz belongs to consumers.

From the moment the division of the city ended, as stressed in the competition brief, Potsdamer Platz was intended to become the identifiable symbol of this festive moment of Berlin's reunification. Potsdamer Platz's redevelopment received many bitter judgements following the question whether it is successfully fulfilling this task. As Alexander Tölle (2010) reasons, it is an 'identity' that turns a space into a distinguishable place. The identification, as Tölle writes further, can be *of* a space, as in the context of attracting investors or tourists, or *with* a space as an 'emotional connectivity' of emotions of the historical remnants (ibid).

The main strategy that Berlin took on since 1989 was, undoubtedly, the creation of a 'global identity' supplied by corporate skyline-dominating structures together with extensive marketing campaigns, which made the effort to turn Potsdamer Platz into an identifiable place for the economically vital international investors. The secondary strategy was to give Potsdamer Platz simply back to the city as a joyful space. Whether those efforts were effective remain debatable.



The initial attraction of investors, supported by tax incentives, got its momentum without difficulties; therefore, at the early stage, identification *of* the site was a success. However, it is the identification *with* the space that raises the biggest criticism. The marketing and delivery of the Platz by strategic business tools such as the Infobox, as well as the finished and unwrapped New Potsdamer Platz, designed by renowned architects, did not involve much of a discussion or negotiation on the image that was presented. It is lacking the emotional value.

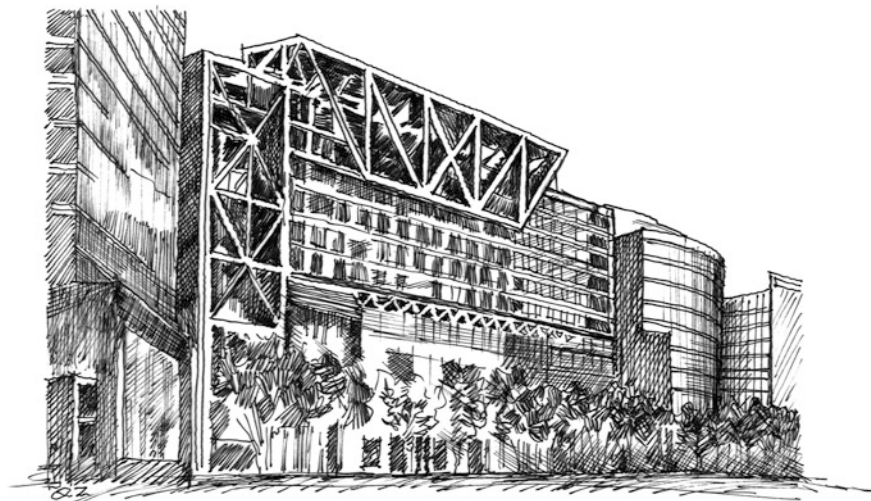
The architectural value, thus delivered in the site, has been summarised by Howard Watson in *Architectural Design* as uninviting and lacking character beyond that of a vast road loaded with traffic, which, in fact, could be anywhere in the world (Watson 2006). The convergence of the redeveloped street pattern has certain historical references, however, not to the extent that could be identifiable for the visitors. The grey and blank pedestrians' walkways are further described by Watson as alienating and disorientating.

Recent years also witnessed successive reselling of the initial four plots. Some original investors moved out of Potsdamer Platz, often unnoticeably. Some parts of it, particularly the required 10 % of residential spaces, also remained empty from the moment of their completion. This re-raises the question whether the identification of the site remains valid and rational to the outside world.

Interestingly after the reunification, a significant number of complaints have been made to Berlin's council by the tour operators and visitors themselves that the Wall, perhaps the most touchable symbol of Berlin's history, is nowhere to be found.

The awareness started to grow that the youngest generation of Berliners had a disturbing lack of knowledge about the time of the German division. As a matter of fact, no one, visiting the New Potsdamer Platz (a busy commercially oriented centre), was likely to experience much of its complex history, either from the Cold War or being in the centre of pre-war Berlin with the collection of the world's famous Columbushaus, Wertheim or Haus Vaterland. The Nazi era was traceless too. The gestures of Daimler and Sony to preserve and incorporate the two remaining structures: Hotel Esplanade and Weinhaus Huth, have become integrated in such a way that today they are hardly noticeable. Kreuder (2000) argues that the current arrangement of Kaisersaal from Hotel Esplanade, which has been placed behind glass façade, is discouraging public engagement and do not carry any signs of the acts to which the structure owes its current condition. Furthermore, Kreuder reason that Helmut Jahn, Sony's designer, by taking an 'architectural museum' approach to the Esplanade's ruins pursues solely a visually attractive, eye-catching purpose that is lacking a historical-reflective attention (Kreuder 2000) (Fig. 4.8).

Ryszard Kapuściński, the famous journalist who lived in Berlin in 1994 for one year, stresses the anthropological differences that remain within Berliners, and that the city still remains a connection to two different halves, of which one did not want to actually become like the other. Kapuściński tells a story from his own experience when taking a crowded bus in the western part of the city, it became



**Fig. 4.8** Hand drawn reproduction of the Esplanade Residence designed by Helmut Jahn, with the historic entrance protected by a glass wall, and the bridging construction of the apartment complex

empty after a few stops, drove through the centre without passengers and began to be crowded again as soon as reaching the eastern part (Burnetko 2007). Today Kapuściński's anecdote would be translated into a bus, which in the centre, rather than being empty, is filled with another group—tourists. Metaphorically, this feature renders the picture of the centre as separating the two extremes and it is only recently that it is slowly beginning to strive for a wider homogeneity.

The 20th anniversary of the end of Socialist Berlin was a good opportunity to bring back the legacy of the Wall into Berlin's visible culture. Pieces of the Wall reappeared at their former locations on Potsdamer Platz, interrupting the sleek glass facades of office buildings in the backdrop (Fig. 4.9). This trajectory of history's sanitation or commodification was, as Tölle (*ibid*) calls it, 'a kind of going back to the future' by first treating the socialist period as a 'disturbance' of a normal track of Berlin's development 20 years later re-introducing it as an important part of its history. But that act had another dimension. By simply replacing the Wall on the site, the city officials simply reduced its meaning to the fact of overcoming the division, converting it into only a positive theme. As Tölle describes it: 'it focuses the story only on its 'happy ending' (*ibid*)'.

Urban policies only have an effect on the identification of the city. The identification with the city requires a much more patient and multi-layered process that evokes that emotional link, which makes one connect to the space in a particular way.





**Fig. 4.9** Pieces of the Wall placed again on Potsdamer Platz

Potsdamer Platz remains to be another point on Berlin's map contributing towards Berlin's polycentric nature.

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## Chapter 5

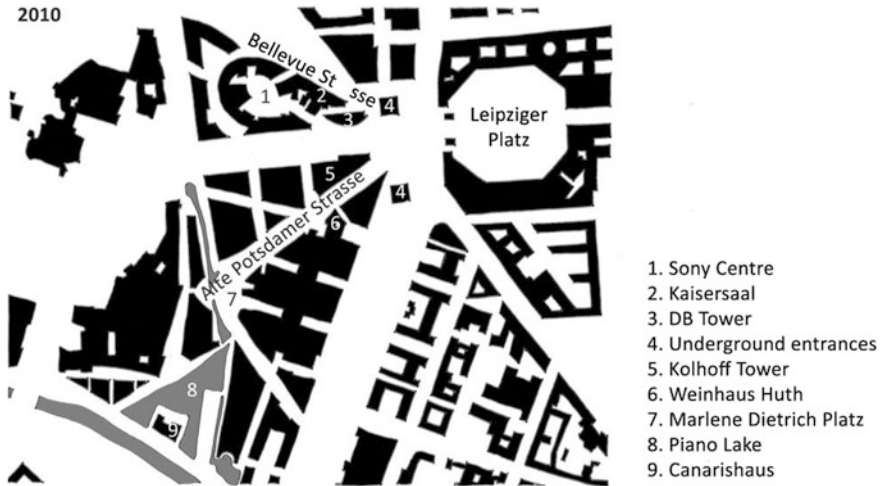
### Summary: History in the Making

Potsdamer Platz emerged after robust redevelopment from the razed footprint left by the Cold War and is shaped by the four main influences. The first influence was represented by those who wanted it to recreate a state that closely resembles pre-First World War (i.e. traditionalists following the theory of critical reconstruction). The second comes from a group of controversial contemporary designers and theorists who argued that the comeback of the pre-war urbanity is naive, and who wanted Potsdamer Platz to reflect the current state of Berlin: full of voids marked by the holocaust of the history. The third grew from a corporate one and the one that had the final word on the image of today's Platz. And the last, but not least, is the influence of Berlin's own wish and tradition to be re-shaped and re-created into what undeniably added importance and almost with the 'mission' for a redevelopment project unlikely to be repeated in the current era. It is undeniably true to follow Sandler (2003) in the sense that the 'redevelopment game' around Potsdamer Platz was eventually won by the corporate players, aided by the economic and political changes of the time.

The most intriguing point, however, remains in the case of Berlin's own ambitions to search for ever-better and ever-changing images, identity and meanings of itself. Nevertheless, it was Berlin's own desire to become a global city that had convinced the key players to engage in urban policies by supporting the final corporate winners, whose influence arguably remains least beneficial for place making in a wider context of Berlin's own identity and the identity that Berliners can relate to. Although it was not Berliners that chose it, which indicates a phenomena unusual to democratic values that the New Berlin should represent.

As a result of this phenomena, today's Potsdamer Platz is an anonymous looking privately owned 60 hectares commercial hub that still remains the most represented and repeated symbol of Berlin after 1989 (Fig. 5.1). It is of no doubt that some of the buildings' forms and materials and street patterns relate to its pre-war state, but not to the extent that the group of traditionalists desired; and not to the point that today's visitors and passers-by can reflect on.

There is also little evidence where potential spaces are truly representing time and context in between 1930 and 1989—when and where legacies could have had respected by the deconstructionists. There are some small attempts of bringing that



**Fig. 5.1** Potsdamer Platz map from 2010

past back; however, none of those do justice to the complicated past that the Platz has left behind, except the signage having lights and logos of the current owners remain the dominant features camouflaging the historical reminiscence.

Perhaps, some of the things could have been done differently on Potsdamer Platz. The ‘Wall’ did not need to be completely removed from the site, only now to be re-introduced; or if the selling of the area, in the festive euphoria of 1989 reunification, would have been done more carefully, or the land would be sold in smaller plots with more pressure on conservation and place-making architecture. It could have had the power to shape or re-shape the context with more diverse ambience; and therefore aiming to bring richer characters and more authentic feel. However, the economic need for instant investors’ commitment towards the city did not allow avoiding the single-layered representation of corporate currencies at that time.

The question of what would happen next is a provocative one at this point. Will Potsdamer Platz continue to be the only self-reflecting and ever-changing image of Berlin? Will it be promoted by another marketing campaign? Or maybe it will turn into the most expensive void of stalemate, after the investors would re-locate their businesses somewhere else given the uncertainty for future investment growth?

Going back to the question: what does it mean for the contemporary Berlin to be represented by Potsdamer Platz? Let us summarise first what today’s Berlin actually means. It is a juxtaposition of a new-old city that, after the fall of the wall in 1989, had faced a challenge that no other city had faced before by having its area and population doubled in size, literally overnight. In this new-old conflicting urban condition, two opposite worlds reunified with people having differing mentalities: Eastern and Western. Then 2 years later, it was given another challenging task—to become a capital of one of the most powerful countries in the world. None

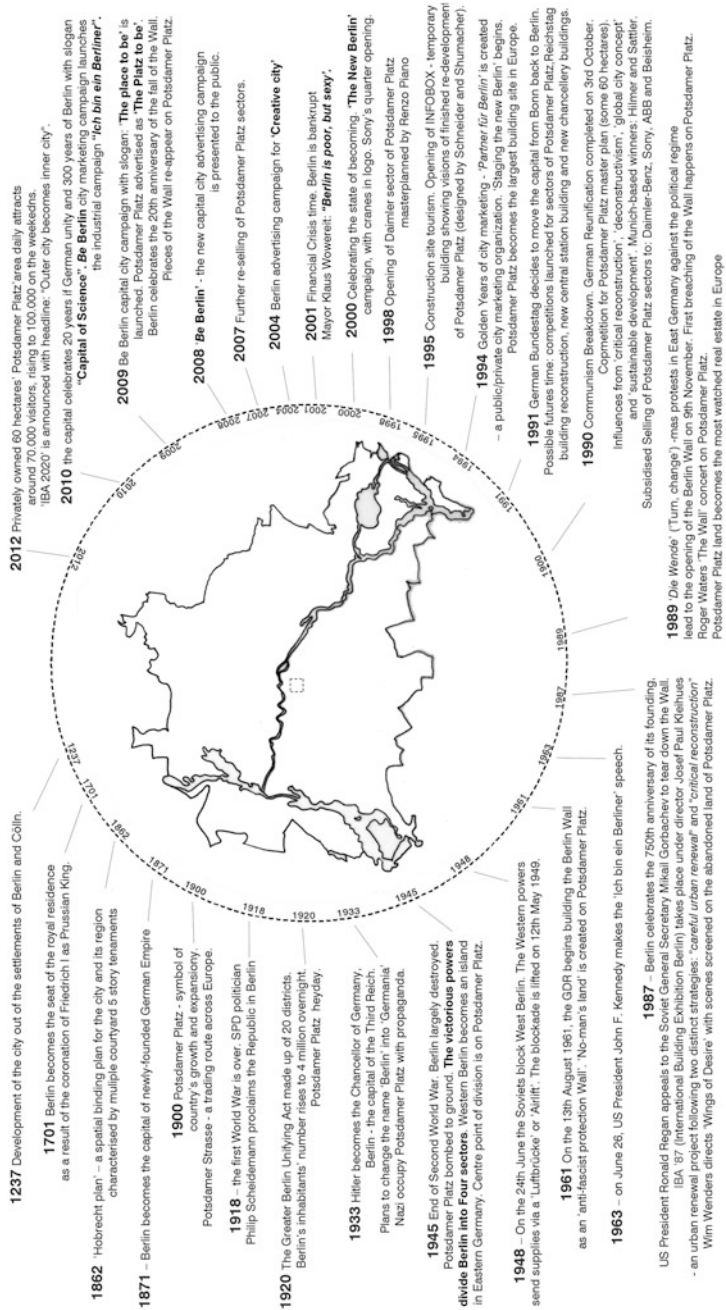


Fig. 5.2 Historical overview of Berlin's and Potsdamer Platz's transformations

of the previous redevelopment projects in urban planning terms can be compared with what Berlin could envision. Perhaps, it was all a bit too much for the reincarnated Berlin. Berlin is fussy, but arguably the city has all reasons to be fussy. And where is Potsdamer Platz in this fussiness? Would Potsdamer Platz possess power to imitate Berlin's bigger intention embedded in the historical past? Or would Potsdamer Platz recreate itself to become a 'transformer' for continuous transformation and mutations to set the rhythm of global change?

Perhaps, it would be pragmatic and timely to leave Potsdamer Platz to set free to choose its own path of 'ideal and ethos of changes' without being succumbed to Berlin's own destiny engulfed by the corporate visions. A little distance is what should be preferable and to be left alone for some time in order to reconcile and reflect on its own past and to look forward with its contextual values. To be—*just!*

When this book goes to print, an announcement of Berlin's International Architectural Exhibition "IBA'202" has already been made. With the theme 'Outer city becomes inner city', architecture critics raise the question for Berlin to have its *de facto* needing another architectural exhibition for constructive criticisms. Berlin's government website promptly answers 'Yes' that, this time, focuses on Berlin's need for attention to '*the natural process of urban development*' (Berlin.de 2013). Potsdamer Platz does not appear to be included in the master plan, which spans the whole of Berlin, similar to IBA'57 and IBA'87; however, as one can predict such important architectural event, inevitably, it is likely to find its way onto the so far most prominent architectural site in the city.

Nevertheless, IBA 2020 leaves an open-ended opportunity to the discussion about the future of Potsdamer Platz and the city itself (Fig. 5.2). Surprisingly and coincidentally, in 1910, Karl Scheffler had already described Berlin's destiny as 'always becoming and never being' (Scheffler 1910); and today, the same statement is meaningfully reverberating with the same ethos and manifestos: *Berlin's appetite for change never diminishes!*

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## Epilogue: Reflections About Potsdamer Platz From Berliners', Germans' and Tourists' Personal Experience

Magdalena Wierietielny, 24, Polish, Anthropology graduate, tourist Opinion after visiting Potsdamer Platz: *To me this place does not really mean anything. It doesn't present any values that I would identify with, not even just as a tourist visiting Berlin, but a European. If I think about it more I can almost say that this place is dead to me. Architecture is of course impressive, new and high rise with glass-and steel modernity notion, but I couldn't find a place to sit. There was no sense of a meeting place, which a centre of a city normally carries.*

Josefine Maaß, 26, German, International Relations master's student in Berlin, Opinion as a German national living in Berlin: *I do not have any opinion on that place really. I have been living in Berlin for 2 years now and I must say that Potsdamer Platz for me functions only as a point 'through', as a connector in the city, which in that sense works great to me. I like the look of the 'New' that it presents, but I never spend my time there, except the 5 or 10 min when I am waiting for my next bus or train.*

Michel Tranter, 22, Scottish, Architecture student visiting Berlin: *I love the Sony Centre, it is really vibrant, but like many of the 'platz's' spaces it is too large and has no focus. The vehicle communication in it is too significant: the roads and car traffic. I also found that there is no real sense of history.*

Rodica Vian, 26, Serbian, Business student on student practice in Berlin. Opinion as a foreign national living in Berlin for 6 months: *I like Potsdamer Platz very much. I find the spirit of that place stimulating. It is new and you can sense that it has been really made from the scratch, with no limitations. I go there to the cinema in the Sony Centre.*

Ralf Zundel, 54, German, international projects coordinator; opinion as a Berliner living in the capital all of his life: *To me Potsdamer Platz is a great achievement. I remember the state of it when the Wall came down. There was nothing and if I compare the present state of that place I am really amazed. On the other hand I do have a feeling of the amount of money and effort that was pumped into it, nevertheless my opinion on it is positive. However it is not a place for me. I guess it is great for business —a field that it was really designed for.*

Gustaw Honke, 42, Polish, lawyer, opinion as a Polish national with business in Berlin: *Potsdamer Platz is a place in Berlin where I take my business partners for meetings and visitors for sightseeing. I never come here on my own. It is too busy for me. It is impressive, yes, for business and modern life style enthusiasts. No historical connotations are visible; no specific group of people is prescribed to be present there. You can be younger, older, from here, not from here, from business background or not. But in fact it does feel very commercial.*

Adrienne Lockens, 50, Scottish, travel agent, opinion about a trip to Berlin completed 5 years ago. *Potsdamer Platz... Well, I think I have been there, but I cannot really remember clearly. It was a while ago. Was it the part with the high rise architecture? Yes, that was impressive, but I almost forgot I have been there.*

Fernanda de la Llosa, 26, Argentinean, Occupational Therapy student, opinion gained during her visit to Europe: *Yes, I was in Berlin in Potsdamer Platz, it was crazy, so big! I love Berlin, but Potsdamer Platz is such a contrast to the rest of the city - new and expensive. It actually reminds me of a business area back home in Buenos Aires. It really could have been anywhere in the world: London, Paris, New York.*

(Names of the interviewers are changed as requested.)



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