

Berlin's Architecture in an Expanded Field: The Politics of Visual Evidence

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"The permanence of form as against changing contents of social functions" characterizes according to the architectural historian Fritz Neumeyer the recent model of the *compact city*, embodied in a particularly succinct way by Berlin.¹ He sees his concept of the urban as a critique of what he conceives of as the modernist cityscapes of the 1920's, a "technological and economical construct without history".² In contrast to this concept of urban form as based on aesthetic perception, the urbanist Thomas Sieverts conceives of it in terms of social production. Using the analytical method of *cognitive mapping*, he insists that global economic and technological restructuring including media such as television, film, and the Internet have not only altered modes of experience, perception and communication, but also the forms of sociation and with this-literally-the form of urban space. Accordingly, he proclaims the "dissolution of the compact historic European city" and the worldwide spreading of a new urban form, the "citified landscape or the landscaped city".³

A more general critique of the concept of form is not new. Applying the concept of the "expanded field" the art historian Rosalind Krauss in the early 1980's claimed to conceive of form less as dependent on a respective medium, be it sculpture, architecture or landscape, but as an element of "logical operations on a set of cultural terms, for which any medium", be it photography, books or other media might be used.⁴ Whereas Krauss used the concept to illuminate the cultural dimension of form relating it to the more general question of the constructed manner of "site", Norman Bryson a few years later used this concept to focus on the political dimension of form relating it to that of the constructed manner of "sight". Claiming that form can't be "sequestered from the social domain", he stressed that the "visual field we inhabit is one of meanings and not just shapes, that it is permeated by verbal and visual

discoveries, by signs; and that these signs are socially constructed as we are".⁵

Since 1996 the critique of urban form effected specialized discourse as well as public opinion. Since 1995 Berlin's ministry of urban development has intended to merge the city of Berlin with the adjacent state of Brandenburg; the primary interest lying in the improvement of the city's isolated economic position by integrating it within the network of European metropolises. A Joint State Planning Department was founded to transform the politics of urban development from the mono-centric model of the 'European city' to the poly-centric one of the 'European metropolitan region'. In 1996 the fusion was voted on by public referendum, but it failed ratification. The primary reason for this outcome lay in the economic disparity between households of the metropolitan center and those of the regional peripheries as well as lingering cultural divisions between the former 'east' and 'west'. Following the failure, further political strategies were implemented that aimed at increasing cultural understanding and economic cooperation. These intentions were most prominently represented in the campaign of *The New Berlin* launched in 1998 by the city's marketing office *Berlin Partner*.

The failed fusion and the recent tendency towards urban strategies of festivalization raise questions about the validity of the traditional instrument of urban development, the *Leitbild* or *guiding image*, and concern the shifting of planning practices from state-planning to city marketing and management. In order to answer these questions, I will present a short discussion on the shift from from the 'European city' to the 'European metropolitan region' and will touch on the concept of "evidence" and the manner in which it can

be used to explain the doubts concerning the effectiveness of the planning instrument.

FROM THE 'EUROPEAN CITY' TO THE 'EUROPEAN METROPOLITAN REGION'

Since 1991 Berlin has been developed as the capital of a re-united Germany in accordance with the monocentric model of the 'compact' or 'European city'. However, in 1993 the increasing importance of the European Union and its anticipated expansion prompted the federal government and the states to work out a plan of urban development in which urban networks were to be established. Not cities, but European metropolitan regions were considered as "engines of economical, social and cultural development", increasing the competitiveness of Germany and accelerating its integration within the European Union.⁶ The plan was under-scored by studies according to which polycentrism "seems to have become one of the defining characteristics of the urban landscape in advanced economies".⁷ Polycentrism was seen as characteristic not only of inter urban, but also of intra-urban patterns and cities which were traditionally considered as monocentric. Based on this, the urbanist Wolfgang Knapp concluded that "the notion of the compact, densely settled and mixed city, which is mostly associated with European (industrial) cities, can today only be related to some parts of the urban landscape".⁸ Given these assessments, it is not surprising that a Federal Government's Guideline for Regional Development confirmed a poly-centric urban development in 1995 and that Berlin's ministry for urban development intended to strengthen the city's economic performance by merging Berlin with the adjacent state of Brandenburg in 1996. The common development plan (*Landesentwicklungsplan*) worked out by the Joint State Planning Department showed considerable changes not only regarding the future urban development but also regarding the interpretation of the city's historical structure. With the *Planwerk* of 1995, in which the "original baroque center" was developed as the "new center", Berlin's ministry of urban development had followed the monocentric model of the 'European city'.⁹ In contrast, with the new development plan, in which the "historically grown polycentric structure of Berlin" was developed according to a "decentralized concentration", the new Department followed the polycentric model of the 'region'.¹⁰

'GUIDING IMAGE' VERSUS 'MENTAL MAP'

This shift raises methodological questions about the validity of the planning instrument related to the

mono-centric model, the '*Leitbild*' or '*guiding image*'. Corresponding to the 'European city' as defined by administrative borders, the '*guiding image*' primarily represents a desired urban typology. In contrast to this form-oriented method, the planning instruments of a 'regional' city represent relational characteristics. The 'institutional region' grasps symbolic characteristics to be represented by *mental maps*. The 'functional region' describes concentrations of employment and population, and the spheres of economic influence. However, the instruments of the *guiding image* and of *mental maps* leave questions unanswered, namely regarding the extent to which the first enables its realization or remains a 'rhetorical device'; and the extent to which the latter can provide clear typologies of urban configurations.

These assessments raise questions regarding the hierarchies in planning, namely the relation between policy making and private or public acceptance. The philosopher John Rajchman has related this question to the concept of 'evidence'. According to him, 'evidence' comes from "*videre*, to see", and "in the course of history [...] acquired the senses of proof, testimony, and clarity or indubitability to the mind".¹¹ Referring to the history of governmental practices, Rajchman claimed that Michel Foucault used 'evidence' in the sense of "self-evidence", related to the "[public] acceptability of the practice".¹² The change in governmental practices meant a "rupture of evidence", showing the ways ethical thought and practice had "conceived of the obstacles one must overcome to be good or do right, the ways it had rationalized a way of dealing with what it saw as wrong, sinful, or evil".¹³ Thus, governmental practices are presented as having been shaped by the legislator and the public, as negotiation and procedure.

Accordingly, the urbanist Gerd Albers in his study on *Urban Development Between Trend and Guiding Image* (1965) defined the instrument of the *guiding image* as functioning according to a "principle of counter current", in which the cooperation between municipal and supralocal planning consists in "searching for a *synthesis* between above and below".¹⁴ However, conceived of as being superior to a "plan of the whole", the *guiding image* "presupposes more than a methodology of technical coordination and requires elaborating criteria and listing a ranking as basis for an overall view of the desirable spatial order".¹⁵ Albers traced this concept back to a functional understanding of the urban developed since 1910, translated in 1928 into the definition of urban planning as "the organization of the functions of community life".¹⁶ He pointed out the conflictual relationship between the *guiding image*,

representing the supposed interests of the common-weal and *trends* created by manifold particular interests. Assuming that the legal implementation of the *guiding image* might hinder individual development, he assessed the instrument as “dangerous”, because it implied the “static concept of an unmitigated image”.¹⁷ He concluded that “one should talk less of a *guiding image* than of a guiding thoughts und methods-as a means of a continuous approximation to an aim, the characteristics of which change in the course of time”, a change which is to be seen as “result of a continuous reassessment on the bases of contemporary criteria, as result of insights and decisions of a responsible society”.¹⁸ The method’s inherent claim to totality was primarily dismissed in the 1970’s and 1980’s. After reunification however, the method again gained ground through the recent emphasis on the “sustainable city”, and served as an instrument for urban development, marketing and management. It became a tool for a “communicative structure of procedures”,¹⁹ addressing a variety of groups and explicitly appealing to aesthetic criteria. In this sense, “*guiding images* today don’t serve primarily to clarify the subject between experts; they address a broad urban public, and [in part] potential investors. Accordingly, the ‘morphology’ of the *guiding images* and their strategies of visual mediation change. The functions ascribed to the *guiding images* vary between a framework of orientation for municipal planning, a formula of consensus for political debates, and a basis for discussion for citizens’ participation. In contrast to former times the current *guiding images* appeal to emotional relations, moods and atmospheres.”²⁰

However, Albers’ critique of the all-encompassing view did not only question the effectiveness of the *guiding image*. Albers and the urbanist Thomas Sieverts played a major role in popularizing Kevin Lynch’s method of *cognitive mapping* in Germany.²¹ Since the early 1980’s, the method enabled the city to be read as a system of signs and codes, since the late 1980’s it served urban geography to map the explicitly spatial dimension of the city, more recently investigating the effects of media representation on urban space, including the analysis of their distribution, reception and consequently their re-production in the city.²² According to Sieverts, the *mental map* is interesting because of its inclusion of both physical and psychological dimensions; the citizens’ ‘inner image’.²³ Given its empirical status, it does not offer an overarching scheme. In contrast, by applying it architects and urbanists accept a localized and limited concept of planning.²⁴

CONCLUSION

From the beginning of the 1990’s until their end the urban concepts applied to Berlin shifted from the mono-centric ‘European city’ to the poly-centric ‘European metropolitan region’. This change in concept was prompted by the impact of the European Union on urban development, leading to increasing competition between cities and regions, and marketing campaigns like *The New Berlin*. This shift to a regional concept of the urban was bound to questions on the validity of the planning instrument related to the ‘European city’, the *guiding image*. Whereas the ‘European city’ was seen as being defined by administrative borders, represented by the *guiding image* in typological terms, the region is seen as being characterized by economic relations and symbolic qualities, represented by ‘*mental maps*’. Although the *guiding image* was adapted in the change from state-planning to city marketing and management, from a *quantitative* to a *qualitative* characterization of the city, it still has its overarching claim. In contrast, the application of criteria derived from cognitive mapping implies the acceptance of a localized intervention of planning.

NOTES

¹ Fritz Neumeyer, “Dem Verschwinden der Stadt entgegengedacht”, in Hans Stimmann (ed.), *Von der Architektur- zur Stadtdebatte* (Berlin: Braun, 2001): 29-34, 33.

² *Ibid.*: 35.

³ Thomas Sieverts, *Zwischen Ort und Welt, Raum und Zeit, Stadt und Land* (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1997): 10.

⁴ Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (1983), (New York: The New Press, 1990): 31-42, 41.

⁵ Norman Bryson, “The Gaze in the Expanded Field” in Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture* (1988), (New York: The New Press, 1999): 87-108, 107.

⁶ Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Umweltschutz und Technologie, Berlin (ed.), *Gemeinsam planen für Berlin und Brandenburg. Gemeinsames Landesentwicklungsprogramm der Länder Berlin und Brandenburg* (Potsdam, 1998): 16.

⁷ Wolfgang Knapp and Peter Schmitt, “Re-structuring Competitive Metropolitan Regions: On Territory, Institutions and Governance RheinRuhr compared with London, Paris and the Randstad Holland” in *European Journal of Spatial Development*, <http://www.nordregio.se/EJSD-ISSN 1650-9544-Refereed Articles Oct 2003-no 6>: 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*: 35.

⁹ Hans Stimmann in: Hans Stimmann (ed.), *Babylon, Berlin etc.: Das Vokabular der europäischen Stadt* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1995): 9.

¹⁰ Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung, Umweltschutz und Technologie, Berlin (ed.), *Gemeinsam planen für Berlin und Brandenburg* (see note 6): 19, 51.

¹¹ John Rajchman, “Foucault’s Art of Seeing,” in *October* 44 (1988): 89-117, 93.

¹² *Ibid.*: 94.

- ¹³ Ibid.: 111.
- ¹⁴ Gerd Albers, *Städtebau zwischen Trend und Leitbild* (Dortmund, 1966): 16.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.: 1.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.: 8.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.: 25.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.: 27.
- ¹⁹ Rudolf Schäfer, "Zukunft der Stadt-leitbildorientiert oder nicht?," in Heidede Becker, Johann Jessen, Robert Sander (ed.), *Ohne Leitbild? Städtebau in Deutschland und Europa* (Stuttgart: Karl Krämer, 1998): 81-108, 108.
- ²⁰ Heidede Becker, Johann Jessen, Robert Sander, "Auf der Suche nach Orientierung-das Wiederaufleben der Leitbildfrage im Städtebau", in *ibid.*: 10-16, 15.
- ²¹ Thomas Sieverts, "Wiedergelesen: Kevin Lynch und Christopher Alexander: Das Aufbrechen und Wiedererfinden der Konvention — auf der Spur des Geheimnisses lebendiger Räume und Städte," in *DISP* 129 (1997): 52-59.
- ²² Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" *New Left Review* 164 (1984): 53-92; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford [u.a.]: Blackwell, 1989); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London [u. a.]: Verso, 1989); Michael J. Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (Oxford [u.a.]: Blackwell, 2000); Michael J. Dear (ed.), *From Chicago to L.A.: Making Sense of Urban Theory* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2001).
- ²³ Thomas Sieverts, "Wiedergelesen: Kevin Lynch und Christopher Alexander," (see note 21): 58-59.
- ²⁴ Johann Jessen, "Stadtmodelle in europäischen Stadtbau-Kompakte Stadt und Netz-Stadt," in Heidede Becker, Johann Jessen, Robert Sander (ed.), *Ohne Leitbild* (see note 19): 489-504, 501.