

Meanwhile in Berlin: A short Case Study

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Introduction

The two day tour of Berlin, organized by the Urban Design group in March 2010 focused on deciphering and exploring the contrasting architecture, the historical and political history of the city and the initiatives to stitch the troubled urban fabric together.

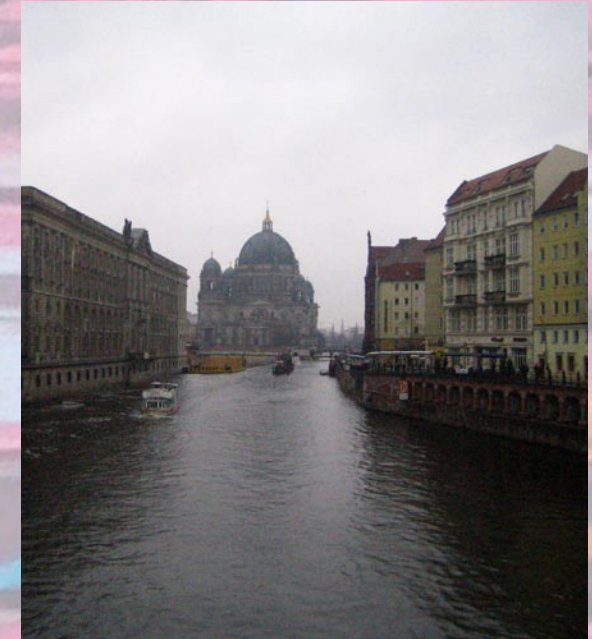
Berlin today is known for its festivals, diverse architecture, nightlife, contemporary arts, public transportation networks and a high quality of living. During the 1920s, Berlin was the third largest municipality in the world, but after World War II, the city was divided; East Berlin became the capital of East Germany while West Berlin became a de facto West German exclave, surrounded by the Berlin Wall (1961–1989). Following German reunification in 1990, the wall fell and many areas that were previously on the edges of East and West Berlin were suddenly close to the new city centre. A huge population growth from 2 million was anticipated following the fall of the wall and ambitious city-wide plans were drawn up to accommodate this growth. However, this never happened and the influx was much less dramatic than expected, with only half a million population increase in the years after 1990. The residents of Berlin are apathetic about the wall and very little evidence remains of its location. Nowadays tours and souvenirs exist purely for tourists, however a severe scar remains; in places it is narrow where buildings face away from the former physical boundary and in others quite vast areas of site lays vacant, occasionally with unknown or abandoned ownership.



Norman Foster building

Currently, 3.4 million people live in the city and its economy is primarily based on the service sector, encompassing a diverse range of creative industries, media corporations, congress and convention venues. The standard of living in the city is very high, with a strong, reliable transport system, very large living accommodation (typically 25m² for a bedroom and apartments of 5-6 bedrooms are not uncommon) and as each neighbourhood has it's own attractions, people have a broad choice of where to live. The costs are kept low (around 200 euro /month) as everyone is required to register and centrally declare the rents, which is then freely available to flat hunters.

Berlin has now evolved into a global focal point for young individuals and creatives attracted by a buzzing lifestyle and modern zeitgeist.



view from the boat tour

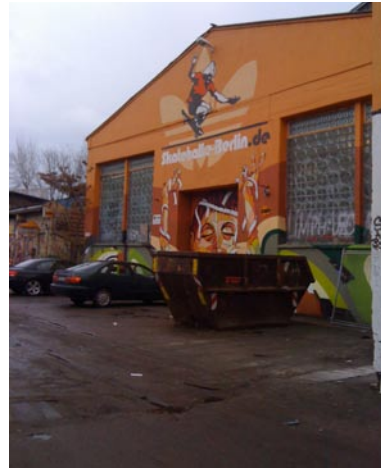


Compare & Contrast

Germany has been at the forefront of temporary uses for decades. Berlin, following the decades of conflict and the desertification this caused, has benefited from colossal vacancies (both in quantity and scale) resulting in a unique position to promote temporary uses in the city. This is a situation the UK is unlikely to see as property in the areas close to the wall was deserted and often abandoned permanently by owners, so it was not discouraged when people began to inhabit the vast industrial spaces informally for creative uses and activities.

Many of the occupants live in the spaces and run activities from them for the local communities. This is often encouraged by the owners (where they exist) to promote positive activity where demand for property is low and to aide re-population. Grants to repair buildings and run activities are frequently available from EU funding.

There is a different attitude to ownership in Germany to the UK, in that it is considered those who occupy and contribute to a place over time are as much the 'owners' as those who hold the deeds. Their thoughts are taken into account much more and the process for moving projects on is carefully considered. This may well be something that changes however, if the demand for property and land increases to a level similar to that in the UK.



From top: wall climbing; skatepark; music venue on the RAW temple site

The Planning system has an official name for temporary uses: 'Zwischennutzung' which means interim use, and is defined as 'temporary and flexible use of rundown areas, which can be implemented with minimal investment'. The German planning law is not as rigid and strict as UK planning law and as such 'Zwischennutzung' is not a law or planning guidance, merely a tool or an approach to development that is widely recognized and promoted to:

- encourage participation and discussion in urban development
- test uses that are rooted in real needs
- create self-employed jobs
- eliminate vacant space and prevent damage

Meanwhile in Berlin (visited)

RAW site in Berlin-Friedrichshain. Constructed in 1867, this 10ha site was the largest and oldest German railroad-repair shop. In the late twenties service accommodation was built for the workers as well as a kindergarten, hospital and cultural institutions. For 60 years after the Second World War, 1200 people were made to work here by the German Democratic Republic government. After reunification in 1991, almost all were released and the area degenerated into wasteland until the socio-cultural association RAW temple made an agreement with the landowner (the rail company) to use the site. 45 projects now use the



four houses on the street for work, social projects and cultural events like theater, concerts or lectures and over time other buildings have been repaired and adapted to house a skate park a circus school and a climbing wall. Many physical improvements have been made to the site and now people travel from all over Berlin to use the activities.

This was viewed by RAW temple as offering the opportunity to bring a process-oriented, sustainable development into motion, however the site has since been sold to developers who now wish to redevelop the newly desirable destination for apartments and relocate the projects further down the site. Discussions are ongoing with RAW temple who feel they have been guardians and instigators of the change in perception for this previously unattractive location and have issues with the developers making profit from their investment in the site and buildings.

The Jewish Memorial

Temporary commercial units housing offices, restaurants and shops have been constructed on one side of the Jewish Memorial square. The site has been earmarked for development in the future but the demand is not present at the moment so the temporary structures test the proposed uses (at ground level) until the required



Above: Jewish Memorial. Below: temp uses adjacent; major site with plans for a museum now being prepared for interim use



demand has been reached at which point the site will be redeveloped to include residential apartments as well. This is an approach that is being promoted in the city, while it works hard to attract a new population

Berlin Boxhagener Platz

Local businesses in Berlin Boxhagener Platz have joined forces to create an online platform (www.Boxhagenerplatz.de) to promote their activities and vacancies as they become available. Temporary uses are welcomed and also promoted.





Why is this possible?

The Senate Department (local government) has had little involvement with temporary uses in the city, preferring to be aware of the activities and passively supporting them as positive approaches to development and re-population rather than taking a top-down approach to controlling interim uses.

The unique opportunity in Berlin to occupy large derelict sites has generated a popular and accepted interim uses movement. Meanwhile uses are generally viewed by communities, landowners, and the public and private sector as delivering services and acting as local community forums through which people can have the opportunity to actively shape their neighbourhoods.



Looking forward

The Senate Department have previously not been involved with individual projects or wider regulation on interim uses. However following issues surrounding ownership and future use of the RAW site and others, they are beginning to initiate using formal agreements for temporary uses.



There are many sites that are sited in the vicinity of the wall and elsewhere in the city that are now earmarked for future development, but the demand is not yet there. These sites are often in prominent locations and for now are given over to temporary uses and temporary structures that are often of an extremely high standard. See units adjacent to the Jewish Memorial, which will become commercial and residential space once demand is high enough.



Top: Interim urban gardens are less popular than projects in buildings; Former route of the wall, with buildings facing away (above) and another awaiting development (left); Right: temporary building on another site along the route of the wall



Other resources

German sites can be partially translated using Google's translator tool.

<http://www.template.com> Temporary use portal which provides case studies of relevance. Under project pool – boxion is an example of supporting start-ups

<http://www.raumlabor.net/> Raumlabor_berlin is engaged with temporarily transforming locations

<http://stadtentwicklung.berlin.de/bauen/baulueckenmanagement/> As part of its strategy for marketing vacant inner-city building plots, the Senate Department of Urban Development lists on its site their location, size, field part number, potential use, a city map, photos of the neighbourhood, mandatory building requirements and contact addresses for building advice).

Private agencies - In Berlin a number of private agencies compile lists of available spaces and mediate between property owners and temporary users. A further part of their overall agenda of revitalising areas with high vacancy levels is to initiate their own temporary projects and to offer advice on all aspects of temporary use

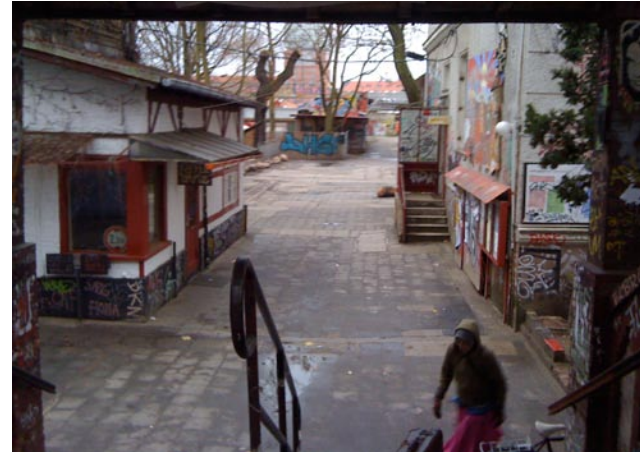
www.spielheld.net

www.josettihoeft.de

www.zwischennutzungsagentur.de

The following study maps the official and unofficial (temporary) creative producers in Berlin and gives an indication of what a masterplan that incorporates temporary uses may look like.
www.kreativwirtschaft.nrw.de/kongress2007/STADTart.pdf

The Senate Department have commissioned many other reports including the Urban Pioneers: Temporary Use Manual, which outlines a variety of case studies, regulations, models, tools and cultural/social/economic implications.
Available at www.jovis.de/index.php?lang=2&idcatside=489



Left: Entrance to the vast RAW temple site; Below: innovative uses of space above the bin sheds

