Urban identity policies in Berlin: From critical reconstruction to reconstructing the Wall

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ABSTRACT

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the East-Central European cities had to re-invent themselves to quickly adapt to a globalising world. Urban identity production policies were usually geared to connect to a chosen pre-socialist “Golden Age”, ignoring the socialist past as a simple disturbance of a “normal” development path. This story the cities were to tell, however, frequently conflicted with the socio-economic realities of a rather unsmooth transformation process, making the socialist past part of the urban identity. In the case of Berlin, a post-socialist and at the same time a post-western-stronghold city, urban identity production is bound to be more complicated than anywhere else. After the failure of the policy to “critically reconstruct” the cosmopolitan metropolis of the 1920s and thus erasing the past of the divided city, policies developed in the run-up to the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Wall aim at turning the Cold War past into a central element of the story that is to support its urban identity, notably leading to the comprehensive re-emergence of the Berlin Wall in the cityscape. This policy – unmatched in other East-Central European cities – has its origins in a historic struggle for identity, leading to the questionable attempt to make “change” the main story Berlin is to tell. This theme however – in conjunction with the reconstructed Wall as image brand – may fall short of creating an urban identity accepted by large population parts.

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Introduction

In 2009, Europe has been celebrating the 20th anniversary of the end of its division into two worlds. With the Soviet Union gone and most of its former satrap states having become independent nations, integrated into European and NATO structures, the socialist legacy has to a significant degree vanished from the face of the East-Central European cities. In the first place, this is to be seen as the result of a deliberate process to reshape urban space and identity. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, cities became for the first time, after decades, independent self-ruling entities, and had to adapt quickly to the new democratic and market economy structures. However, the de-industrialisation process that followed the collapse of the communist command economy and the entering of those cities into the system of a globalising economy led in most cases to a severe crisis going far beyond economic questions (Tosevics, 2005; Parysek, 2006; Stanilov, 2007). In a time lapse – when compared to the similar but decade-long processes in Western cities – traditional urban structures and milieus lost their meaning and their means of existence, putting for some the promised prosperity and thus legitimacy of the new political and economic system into question. While the phenomenon of increasing disparities between “winners” and “losers” may be seen as one of the most characteristic features of globalisation of spaces in general (Hall and Pfeiffer, 2000; Marcuse, 2004), it led to even deeper repercussions in East-Central European urban societies in which former social values and authorities had to a great extent become meaningless.

The production of “new” urban identities in East-Central European cities is to be analysed in this context. Urban identity – meaning the place identity of a city as a whole – matters in city development policies because it is “identity” that turns an urban space into a distinguishable place. Urban identity is the result of a collective process based on interpretation and narrative rather than on purely design features (Hague, 2005; Weichhart et al., 2006), and this process is subject to manipulation by political decision makers (Smith, 2005). So place identity may to a significant degree become an outcome of urban development strategies; as Hague (2005, p. 8) puts it, “a key purpose of planning is to create, reproduce or mould the identities of places through manipulation of the activities, feelings, meanings and fabric that combine into place identity”. Of special importance here are city marketing policies as they are aiming at the creation of an urban identity in accordance to its two relevant forms (Ebert, 2004; Weichhart et al., 2006): They intend to foster the identification of a city (as a cognitive perception) in the context of attracting e.g. investors.
and tourists, as well as the identification with a city (as an expression of emotional connectivity) in the context of contributing to the creation of a coherent city population. In the sense of urban policies, it is the identification of a city that may be influenced through active measures to change its cognitive perception. This in turn is the prerequisite for a change of the identification with a city.

So from this perspective urban identity becomes a product of deliberate selection processes by urban elites and governments in order to create the intended narrative or story, and that means above all a selection of anything that happened in the past. In her cultural historical studies on “spaces of memory”, which have become widely observed in other disciplines including spatial and geographical sciences, Assmann (2008) has made the distinction between two complementary modes of the cultural memory, i.e. the “active memory”, which takes in what is regarded as important for group belonging, value attachment and future, and the “archival memory”, which is holding everything that has lost its connection to the present. In that, she is drawing a parallel to the psychotherapeutic concept of “story”. This concept denotes that it is only a “small part of our memory that is consciously processed and emplotted in a ‘story’ that we construct as a backbone to our identity” (Assmann, 2008, p. 212). Elements deemed not suitable to this story are simply not incorporated into the “active memory”, yet are forming its background as the “archival memory”. This three-dimensional model helps to explain the convertibility of a conscious memory and thus of a created self-image in accordance to elements picked from the “archival memory”. The notion of “story” draws a direct link to strategic marketing aiming at producing an urban identity, because the designing of communication strategies as well as of urban fabrics is following an elaborated “script” or “story” (Mikunda, 2002; Peca, 2009). It has been stated in numerous studies on Western cities that these “pick and choose” processes concerning the past and its built remnants – due to their intertwined and subjective character – have been frequently resulting in conflicts about the urban identity as interpreted by political decision makers, local elites, and different parts of the local community (see e.g. Holt, 2000; van der Horst, 2003).

In the case of East-Central European cities, the main strategy to be observed since the 1990s was undoubtedly the creation of a “European” identity, aiming at shaping modern, international and capitalist place identities, which meant in consequence the complete rejection of the socialist past (Young and Kaczmarek, 2008). This may be seen in line with the general transformation process of the post-socialist economies and societies in the 1990s. The then dominant neoliberal shock therapy approach praised the destruction of anything from the “bad” socialist area as the quickest and most effective “vehicle for genesis” (Buravoy and Verdery, 1999, p. 5). In the urban context, this included policies of “de-Communisation” of the cityscape by changing street names and toppling statues (see e.g. James, 1999 on Budapest, Light, 2004 on Bucharest) in order to make the urban space represent and legitimate the new political and economic situation by ostentatiously rejecting the old one, or policies of explicit restyling of city spaces in some “westernising” or internationalising way, e.g. by integrating modern places of capital and consumption (Andrusz, 2008, see also e.g. Temelová and Hrychová, 2004 on Prague, Staddon and Mollov, 2000 on Sofia). This transformation approach meant in consequence also “a kind of reversal of history, or going back to the future” (Buchowski, 2001, p. 14), as the socialist period was only interpreted as a “disturbance” of a supposedly “normal” track of development, on which the East-Central European societies have been finally put back. In terms of urban identity, this going back meant the re-discovering and displaying of some glorious pre-socialist “Golden Age” of the city (see e.g. Nyka, 2003 on Gdansk; Murzyn, 2006 on Cracow, Petro, 2009 on Navgorod). This “Golden Age” stands for a prosperous time of the city’s history, to which it is to return, and is to deliver the necessary story ingredients to create the contemporary urban identity (Young and Light, 2006). However, this identity may become contested by the re-emergence of the socialist past, with parts of the urban society – mostly but not exclusively those that are rather unhappy with the new realities – claiming it as part of their identity, which they want to see being represented. Another contender is the growing sector of “Communist heritage tourism”, i.e. the attractiveness of places connected to the socialist past to – mostly Western – tourists. The exploitation of this economic potential requires the visible presence of the socialist past, which poses a considerable challenge to any urban identity construction denying this element (Young and Light, 2006).

The German capital city of Berlin had never vanished behind the Iron Curtain but was exposed right on the front-line of the Cold War and may therefore be seen as a post-socialist and at the same time something like a post-western-stronghold city. Hence, it is a special case of an East-Central European city were the process of identity production is bound to be more complicated than anywhere else. The different layers of history present in its cityscape and their integration into modern Berlin have been the issue of numerous studies (Ladd, 1997; Till, 2005; Roost, 2008; Schalenberg, 2009), as have the complicated processes to define a “mission” or an urban identity for this city in an increasingly difficult socioeconomic situation (Cochrane and Jonas, 1999; Kratke, 2004; Häüßermann and Kapphan, 2005). There are also numerous studies on how, in central places, the past of the Cold War period was meant to give way to a reinvented cosmopolitan Berlin, and how this urban identity production failed as the remnants of socialist and Wall times remained for multiple reasons – economical, political, social – visible (Luescher, 2002; Girot, 2004; Liebhart, 2007; Wilhelm, 2008; Sigel, 2009).

This article, however, will discuss a recent turn – developed in the run-up to the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Wall – of dealing with the past from this historical period by making it a central element of the story that is to contribute to the creation of an urban identity. This policy is notably to lead to the comprehensive re-emergence of the Berlin Wall in the urban space. In this, the past of the Cold War times is dealt with in a way unprecedented in other East-Central European cities. As will be shown, this policy has its origins in a historic struggle for identity during the whole of the last century, as well as in the 1990s, in a completely unexpected difficult economic situation, leading to the questionable attempt to make “change” the main story Berlin is to tell. It will, however, be argued that this story theme – in conjunction with the reconstructed Wall as image brand – may fall short of creating an urban identity accepted by large parts of the population.

The split identity of a divided city

One may argue that the quest for an urban identity was an open issue in Berlin long before the Cold War, i.e. after Prussia had been absorbed by the newly-founded German Empire in 1871. Berlin may have risen to be the capital of Germany and a metropolis of world standing, yet it never became a source of identity for the German people, and thus somehow remained “without a firm shape or definition – an unfinished capital in the middle of an unfinished nation” (Engert, 1985, p. 150). In addition, with the shift of the border between Poland and Germany in 1945, as a result of the Second World War, this until then East- rather than West-looking city lost its ancestral hinterland (East Prussia, Silesia, Pomerania), which was once the predominant source of its population and vitality. The capital itself, surrounded by the Soviet occupation zone, became divided into four occupation sectors (a US, UK,
French, and Soviet sector). This was followed by a quick sequence of dramatic events: the establishment of an ill-fated four-power control structure, the blockade of West Berlin by the Soviet Union and the Airbridge by the Western forces, and the following years with West Berlin being a front post of Western democracy in the Cold War as well as an open door in the Iron Curtain. So it was not until after the closing of this door – the construction of the Wall on 13th of August 1961 – that something like normalcy set in. Yet, as Merritt (1985) rightly points out, this was no returning to a former state, but a new state being created after years of hyper-excitement. It meant that in divided Berlin, through a process of “adaptation and repression” (Flemming and Koch, 2001), people in East and West had no option but to accept the realities and to organise their personal life in their respective halves of the city by turning their backs to the Wall and anything behind it. Still, there can be no doubt that it always dominated people’s minds – it simply was not possible to think “Berlin” without thinking “the Wall” at the same time, and so “the Wall became inseparable from the city’s identity” (Ladd, 1997, p. 20).

With the construction of the Wall, the identity search for Berlin turned into a permanent cause. As Engert (1985, p. 153) described it back in the 1980s: “Today the city is looking for a function. It knows what it was, but it still does not know what it is, let alone what it will be.” This split identity is perhaps best reflected in the contemporary ironic notion of “Halbweltstadt Berlin”, which may be read in German as “half a cosmopolitan city”, as “city of the demimonde”, or as “semi-cosmopolitan city”. This was also a consequence of the utterly different and in addition over time changing stories the Wall was telling to different groups. In the perception of a “front city” of Western democracy, the Wall was originally interpreted as a defeat: Western powers had not raised a finger to stop this violation of human rights. Yet over time, Berlin and the Wall developed into a symbol of justice for the cause of German unity. The interpretation was that it was only by force, i.e. by a cruel and absurd structure, that the “unnatural” division of Germany could be upheld, and thus the “natural” state of Germany was that of a single nation (Ladd, 1997). Berlin and the Wall signified both division and unity, of Germany as well as of Europe. At the same time, however, it was also a symbol of shame, and not only from the Western perspective for the East German regime that had to wall in its citizens. The city’s division was a result of the Second World War, which was a result of Nazi Germany’s aggression. From this perspective, the Wall told the story of German megalomania. In addition, the Wall was guarded not by Red Army soldiers, but by obliging Germans. And there was a significant East–West ambiguity of perception of the dividing line. Westerners could physically interact with the Wall, e.g. by touching it, painting on it, walking along it, looking over it, or travelling through it. The latter was even a familiar part of life to every West Berliner when using the transit routes to West Germany. By contrast, for Easterners even the territory adjacent to the border was a no-go area. To them, the very existence of the Wall seemed unreal, just as the existence of a land beyond it. And on both sides there was what Feversham and Schmidt (1999, p. 124) describe as “emotional comfort in relation to the Wall”: The Wall did not only define the margins of one’s space in a physical way, but in a psychological...
sense it stood for clear parameters and gave orientation in space as well as in life.

“Critical reconstruction of a golden age

With the decision of the East German government to open its checkpoints on that evening of 9th November 1989, the Berlin Wall lost its brutal function. In the euphoria that followed, the city’s reunification accompanied a strong belief that Berlin was now back on its “natural” way to become again a major metropolis, the capital city of the biggest European national economy and possibly the third European Global City after London and Paris. This conviction was broadly based on the role Berlin played in the 1920s, before the “natural” development path had been interrupted by the Nazi regime, the Second World War, and the division. So as in other East-Central European cities, a “Golden Age” was defined, and the “re-creation of hip, cosmopolitan Weimar Berlin” (Till, 2005, p. 194) was the target. This was put into an urban development policy under the catchphrase of “Critical Reconstruction”. “Critical Reconstruction” – aiming for the creation of an urban diversity by a mixture of functions and of new urban structures oriented along traditional settlement forms – selected in effect the remains of pre-war and pre-Nazi legacy to become elements of the “story” of new, 21st-century Berlin. This policy determined the planning strategy for the inner city of Berlin in the boom years of the early 1990s, when Berlin was the arguably busiest real estate investment theatre in Europe. It is rewarding to briefly look at the thinking of one of the main protagonists of “Critical Reconstruction” here, the city’s then Director of Urban Development Hans Stimmann. To him, the memory of the city was contained in its urban structure determining its physiognomy, and post-war Berlin had lost “a large proportion of its memory” by the time of reunification, as urban development had been a “systematically carried out dissolution of vast parts of the Berlin inner city” (Stimmann, 2001, p. 24). So he saw his task in detecting historical traces from pre-war and pre-Nazi times and to re-interpret them. In consequence, the restoration of old street and square outlines and the adaptation of new buildings to the existing ones, in form and architecture, dominated the guidelines for the numerous urban competitions and workshops concerning key city areas, and eventually also the “Inner City Planning Framework”, the overall strategic planning document for downtown Berlin adopted in 1999.

“Critical Reconstruction” – which has often been criticised as an unreasonable attempt to turn back the clock (Ladd, 1997) – inevitably aimed at excluding the legacy of socialist East Berlin and notably of divided Berlin from the new urban identity. In consequence, the draconic fortification edifices of the Berlin Wall were step by step removed. This was seemingly based on a general consent: most people just wanted to get rid of the hated Wall as quickly as possible, and that was what happened. Any proposals to preserve parts of it for future generations or to mark its former course in the city received little support. It appears that again, the physical disappearance of the border strip was seen as just a “natural” process leading to normalcy. It is noteworthy in that context that the Berlin Senate decided in 1992 explicitly against the elaboration of any strategic planning document for the former border...
strip as a whole, even though by that time numerous renowned architects and urban planners – notably in the course of an exhibition organised in 1991 by the Museum of Architecture in Frankfurt-upon-Main – had already developed alternative design visions such as turning the whole strip into a public precinct (Lampugnani and Mönninger, 1991).

The arguably best-known symbol of divided Berlin (if not Europe) – the Brandenburg Gate in the middle of annihilated Pariser Platz – is a splendid example for this “return to the future” policy. The design guidelines defined a historic restoration of the square space itself and a height limitation deriving from the pre-war conditions for the adjacent buildings to be constructed. Hence, no one visiting this vibrant place today is likely to experience much of its dramatic history as a border space. Illustration 1. The same may be said about the most prominent urban project in reunified Berlin: the twin squares of Potsdamer Platz and Leipziger Platz. However, here the political guidelines to design these places in accordance with their pre-war function and character were significantly weakened by the economic boom processes of the early 1990s. The urban layout – apart from the octagonal form of Leipziger Platz – and functions are different from those of the pre-war times, and public life has largely shifted from public places to malls and plazas (Wilhelm, 2008, p. 287). The urban design, however, again reveals nothing of the history of an annihilated and divided city space; e.g. the once famous “Last House on Potsdamer Platz” has become integrated in such a way that it is hardly perceptible at all.

Towards a post-socialist and post-division urban identity

The wished-for new urban identity of a metropolis of European standing, however, started increasingly to clash with reality. At the latest, at the end of the 1990s, it became clear that Berlin was a world apart from “retaking” its seat between the European Global Cities of London and Paris. It rather struggled hard to compete in economic terms even with West German regional centres like Stuttgart or Düsseldorf. Berlin became characterised by a massive de-industrialisation, increasing urban poorness, a still existing mental and socioeconomic East–West divide, a dramatic situation of the city’s budget, and the absence of any decisive economic effects deriving from the return of the German government (Krätke, 2004; Häußermann and Kapphan, 2005). This lead to a growing dissatisfaction by large parts of the population that could not identify with the existing realities, and the initial euphoria about having become one unified people again was increasingly replaced by a growing sense of difference between Easterners (“Ossis”) and Westerners (“Wessis”).

Looking at the policy of “Critical Reconstruction” from this perspective, it is no wonder that the devaluation of post-war urban structures – even though it was in essence a swan song to modernist urbanism and applied to both parts of the city – became a strong conflict point in former East Berlin as it was seen by many as yet another attempt to eradicate East Germans’ past and identity. Yet also, the legacy of the divided city that had been extinguished from the city’s new identity re-emerged. In urban development
terms, there is one prominent place in which the “Critical Reconstruction” concept clashed sharply with the legacy of the Wall: the former Checkpoint Charlie on Friedrichstraße, often cited as a “focal point of the Cold War” where American and Soviet tanks confronted each other at gunpoint in October 1961. This is also the location of the private museum “House at Checkpoint Charlie,” whose exhibition displays since 1962 the brutal history of the construction of the Wall as well as imaginative escapes. The museum continues to attract large crowds, while any remains of the East German checkpoint have vanished.

The ground had been sold to an investor who wanted to use the well-known location to create an “American Business Center” there, yet because of financial difficulties some lots of this “critically reconstructed” area remain undeveloped (Luescher, 2002). References to the border situation have been reduced to a double line of cobblestones that mark the Wall’s course and a replica of the former U.S. army checkpoint, as well as some information boards. In 2004, the “House at Checkpoint Charlie” stirred public upheaval by implementing an art project next to its premises consisting of the erection of a Wall replica – yet on an empty lot where the Wall never stood – and of 1065 black crosses – one for each recorded victim of the German-German border. While most passers-by and notably tourists liked this form of making history felt in the urban space, the not coincidental allusion of this Wall memorial to the Holocaust memorial made it unacceptable for the official Berlin as well as most media commentators as any equation of East German crimes against humanity with Nazi atrocities was regarded as intolerable (Liebhart, 2007). In 2005, the memorial was finally abolished by the Berlin municipality – against loud protests of former East German political prisoners.

This erasure of a private object evidently disturbing the “critically reconstructed” new identity has also been justified by the argument that by that time Berlin already had an official Wall Memorial. Its history started back in 1990 when the German Historical Museum fenced off a 200-m-long section of the border fortifications at Bernauer Straße. Once an ordinary street with typical five-storey tenement houses on both sides, it became world famous because of pictures taken there on 13th August 1961, showing people jumping out of upper windows of East Berlin houses situated right at the demarcation line into rescue nets of West Berlin fire brigades while lower windows were hastily being bricked by East German border units. During the 1960s, all houses were torn down, leaving only the bricked ground-floor front façades that served as the Wall, as well as the inaccessibly situated Church of Reconciliation. Bernauer Straße was visually the most brutal example of the Wall, until in the 1980s the facades were replaced by the standard concrete Wall construction – and the neo-Gothic church was blown up.

During the 1990s, with the Wall progressively more disappearing from the cityscape, increasingly heated debates on how to remember the years of division focused on this street and on the plan to keep parts of the former fortifications there. Some were still...
against preserving anything of the former Wall at all; others wanted to solemnly commemorate the Wall’s victims or all of the victims of East German human rights violations. Finally, a 60-m-long death strip with all fortification items was reconstructed between two gigantic steel oblongs (inevitably reminiscent of the Iron Curtain from the outside). Intentionally, this memorial constitutes “an emotional rather than antiquarian object” (Feversham and Schmidt, 1999). Opened in 1998, the Wall Memorial is part of an ensemble including the tiny clay structure of the Chapel of Reconciliation built on the site of the former Church of Reconciliation, as well as a Documentation Centre for the History of the Wall in the former congregation house built in 1965 for the Western parishioners of the divided congregation. The Wall Memorial was meant to become the official place for commemorating the Wall in a cosmopolitan city in which no further traces of the times of division would exist Illustration 3.

Reconstructing the Wall

Public discussions about the Wall Memorial, which then somewhat escalated in the context of the Checkpoint Charlie debate, were a clear indicator that the Wall was an issue that needed to be addressed rather than ignored in the context of urban development and identity production policies. In 2001, the Berlin Senate had decided to protect any still existing remnants from the border defence system and had a group of experts elaborate an extended documentation on what physically still remained of the Wall. This led in 2004 to the creation of a working group by the Berlin Senate with the task to elaborate what was finally called an “Overall Concept of Memorial Plans for the Berlin Wall: Documentation, Information, and Remembrance” (Gesamtkonzept, 2006). This document aspires to set the ground for connecting the existing remains and places associated with the Wall in substantive terms by allocating to each of these places specific meanings complementing one another. The working group defined its mission in the context of the general issue of reflecting the legacy and remains of the East German regime, and of a growing awareness that the youngest generation had an appalling low knowledge about the times of German and European division (Schmidt, 2009). Yet there was another aspect openly addressed in the “Overall Concept”: Constant complains of tourist organisations that next to nothing had been left of the Berlin Wall (Gesamtkonzept, 2006). Undoubtedly, the demolition of the Wall meant the destruction of Berlin’s most famous structure (Ladd, 1997). With tourism being one of the few economic growth sectors in Berlin, these aspects had to be taken seriously when producing a new urban identity. The story to be told to tourists is not Berlin as a historic capital – as this is closely connected with both Nazi and Communist dictatorship – but rather Berlin as a city making history, which is more connected with the constant changes in time and with the visibility of those changes in the cityscape (Hurtado, 2005). So, not coincidentally, the start of the new image campaign of Berlin (under the slogan “Be Berlin”) in 2008 had been directly linked to the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Wall which was to make Berlin “a symbol of change” (Lisiak, 2009). It is, by the way, quite telling for the identity problems of Berlin that it had taken the city nearly two dec-

Illustration 5. Rebuilt Potsdamer Platz. The place’s history told on reinstalled Wall fragments. “East Berlin visa” being sold to tourists.
ades to replace the little inspiring “Berlin makes you feel good” slogan created back in the 1980s for West Berlin.

The mission of the “Overall Concept” may figuratively be interpreted as searching the Berlin Wall out of the “archival memory” and turning it into a vital part of the identity-forming life story of the city. It is in essence a strategy to reconstruct the Wall as a visual perceptible element giving meaning to central urban spaces, and in that it may be read as the script to the story these spaces have to tell, thus forming the narrative for the new post-Wall urban identity of Berlin. The mission of Bernauer Straße is to be the central place – by far, however, not the only one any more – of commemorating the Wall and its victims. The Wall Memorial ensemble is to be significantly enlarged by pavilions as entrance portals, the integration of further former borderland, and two trails telling the history of the place. Here, as in other places, the emphasis is to lie on “giving remembrance names”, that is, to reconstruct personal biographies of people who lost their lives at the Wall and to tell their stories in the public space. By contrast, Checkpoint Charlie is seen as the place to document the Berlin Wall in terms of world politics and notably the Cold War between two superpowers, possibly in the form of a new museum. The Potsdamer Platz in turn is to stand for “regained urban density”. By expelling and reinstalling the few modest remaining items of the border control system, the place is to expel the transformation from pre-war to cold-war to post-Wall Berlin.

Another famous tourist spot – a section of the original Wall fenced off at Niederkirchnerstraße – is to represent “historical layers”: The Wall remains owe their protection to their location next to the ruins of the former Gestapo headquarters (former Prinz Albrecht Palais) and to the continuous public discussions about the future shape of this site, currently used by a temporary exhibition under the title of “Topography of Terror”. In turn, “East Side Gallery”, a 1.6-km-long piece of a higher-than-usual hinterland wall along a busy six-lane street in the district of Friedrichshain (parallel to the Spree river constituting the actual border line) that was turned into a gallery of over 100 murals by international artists in spring 1990, is to represent “Wall Art”, while the so-called “Palace of Tears”, the former control hall of the border checkpoint at Friedrichstraße Station – situated in former East Berlin but offering train and underground connections to West Berlin – will stand for the absurdity of having two worlds within one city. Those different places and their stories are to be linked by a Berlin Wall Trail with quadrilingual (not coincidentally German, English, French, and Russian) information, and the double line of cobblestones that started since the middle of the 1990s to mark the Wall’s course in the inner city is to be extended. While the example of “Critical Reconstruction” has in principal not been abandoned, the “Overall Concept” proposes in same places also the up-keeping of the former border patrol path as a public trail, allowing for new buildings to be erected along it only in a way displaying this special history. Another proposal is a permanent open air exposition of different border types – evolving over time and in dependence of the topographical situation – on 14 spots along the former Wall strip. The acknowledged challenge of this didactical motivated proposal will be to avoid the impression of a “Wall Folk Park” as well as of false authenticity. Moreover, the Wall legacy is to be told in urban places apart from the former death strip, such as the former “ghost stations” (East Berlin underground stations that were passed with-
out calling by West Berlin trains), the main motorway checkpoint on the former transit routes to West Germany, or the central sanctuary for East German refugees in West Berlin.

Hence two decades after the Wall came down, the past as a divided city has not only become integrated in the urban identity production process, but has even taken centre stage. In effect, the Wall is to re-emerge even in such prominent places as the Brandenburg Gate or Potsdamer Platz, from where the original edifice had been deliberately removed traceless. The sublime intention to streamline information, documentation, and remembrance is clearly intertwined with the economic target of catering to tourists, for whom the identity of Berlin is above all that of the Wall city. In that, the Wall – by simply reducing its meaning to the process of overcoming the division, in other words by focusing its story on the “happy ending” – has even converted into a positive theme. This spin has allowed for using the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Wall to stage a city festival under the title of “20 Years of Changing Berlin”. Its agenda proposed different cultural events in places all over Berlin combining significant places of the Wall history with completely unrelated urban development projects ranging from the new International Airport to the renovation of tenement areas and pre-fabricated housing estates. The positive connotation also morally allows tourists to take their happy snapshots with the Wall’s installed remains in the background – possibly in the arm of an actor dressed in the uniform of one of the West Allied forces, of the Red Army, or of the East German border troops. Trips along the Wall are offered on rented bikes as well as in East German Trabant cars. While the “Overall Strategy” seeks to explicitly avoid any form of – in its own wording – “hollywoodisation” of the Wall heritage, there can be no question that exactly something like this is – literally – taking place. Due to its significant economic potential, the growing use of the socialist past in the form of “Communist heritage tourism” has interfered in many East-Central European cities with created modern and very past-excluding urban identities (Young and Light, 2006). However, it is fair to say that Berlin is an example of how the socialist past has become a central part of the story the city is to tell, an effect so far not observable to such an extent even in cities that have played a major role in the resistance fight against communist rule and have decided to make this legacy an important part of their city’s narrative (see e.g. Coles, 2003 on Leipzig, Tölle, 2008 on Gdansk) Illustrations 5 and 6.

Conclusions

Similar to the development policies in other East-Central European cities, Berlin intended in the 1990s to re-invent itself as a “Western” metropolis that had its urban identity based on some “Golden Age” of the city, i.e. the cosmopolitan metropolis of pre-Nazi and pre-war times. And again, similar to other East-Central European cities, the anticipated return to the “normalcy” that had been disrupted by the Second World War and communist rule did not materialise. With the failure of the German capital to re-emerge as a European world metropolis – or at least as the dominant city of Germany – the policy of reviving the Berlin of the 1920s in a “critically reconstructed form” and thus erasing from its story the past of division has been proven not viable. However, unprecedented is the radical u-turn in the urban identity production policy, making the period of the Cold War an integral part of the story to be told. While of course the everyday life of millions of people in Berlin will not interact with the reconstructed Wall, and while there are also other themes and tourist trails presenting different aspects of the history of Berlin, there can be no doubt that the story of the Wall is to dominate the urban identity of the city.

It appears that the city has – once more in its vicissitudinous history – no clear idea of its current identity and its future, and therefore it returns to what it is most famous for: change. The city-scape is to tell this constant story of transition, which requires the display of former situations of different places. In that, it is the Wall that is offering the most impressive images, and moreover is the best-known object connected to the identification of Berlin outside the city. One may, however, strongly question whether it will also be a product fostering identification with the city by its inhabitants. The Berlin Wall is certainly a prime example for a past differently interpreted by different groups, as the perception of the Wall differed utterly not only between East and West, but also between people loyal to the East German regime and those oppressed by it, people with contacts to the other side and those without, people suffering under the border regime and those becoming indifferent. Even though, after more than two decades, emotions are not going high anymore and the approval of the “Overall Concept” went rather smoothly, the clashes have all but disappeared. So the idea to create an urban identity for Berlin based only on the “happy ending” of the bitter decades of division is bound to fail, and it remains to be seen whether this will again – as in the case of the prior complete denial of this past – lead to conflicts in the urban space and society.

Berlin may be seen, to a certain degree, as a typical example of an East-Central European city basing its urban identity policy on a chosen “Golden Age.” The “Westernised” identity, however, is in this special case also based on the history of West Berlin as a front post of the Western world whose identity – blurred as it might have been – was certainly based on dismissing anything “Eastern”. This westward-oriented perspective prevailed in the concept of “critical reconstruction” of the third (Western) European cosmopolitan metropolis. Its failure and the production of an urban identity based also on the legacy of the Cold War helped redirect this perspective towards the Eastern “fellow” post-socialist cities and – acknowledging finally the physical closeness of the city to the German-Polish border – led amongst other ventures to the initiation of what is now the “Oder Partnership”, a German-Polish macro cooperation area including the metropolitan areas of Berlin, Dresden, Szczecin, Poznan, and Wroclaw. In this respect, an integration of a post-Cold War Central European identity may after all contribute to innovative urban development and cooperation policies, while an urban identity based on “change” appears to be rather meaningless.

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