

REBUILDING OF THE WESTERN PART OF BERLIN, GERMANY. REVITALISATION OF BROWNFIELDS IN THE TIME OF ECONOMICAL BREAKTHROUGH

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Abstract

The paper is a brief report on the ongoing activities in the inner-city area of Berlin. There several districts in the western part are planned as future spaces for revival process. The brownfields are confronted now with the need of urban and economical development. The aim of the paper is to present today's challenges for the spatial situation in Berlin. As original appears here the way of revitalization of the wasted former industrial sites. The results show negative and positive features of the upgrading processes undertaken in the capitol of Germany in the last decade as well as the planned one.

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest krótkim sprawozdaniem na temat aktualnych procesów przebiegających na śródmiejskich terenach Berlina. Kilka dzielnic w zachodniej części miasta ma zostać przekształconych podczas przyszłych procesów rewitalizacji. Tereny zdegradowane konfrontowane są dziś z potrzebą rozwoju przestrzennego i ekonomicznego. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie współczesnych wyzwań dla sytuacji planistycznej w stolicy Niemiec. Nowym aspektem w temacie okazuje się sposób przekształcenia dawnych obszarów przemysłowych. Wyniki ukazują pozytywne jak i negatywne cechy procesu adaptacji miejskiej, podjętego w Berlinie w okresie ostatniego dziesięciolecia oraz procesu planowanego na terenach zdegradowanych.

Keywords: Revitalisation, Transformation, Brownfields, Economical and spatial breakthrough, Western part of Berlin.

1. INTRODUCTION

The present cities in Europe, formerly of industrial functions, which started in 19 century and developed in 20 century are confronted today with increasing number of brownfields.

The word "brownfield" describes neglected built land of no function in contrary to greenfield, meant as useless green open areas. On these neglected spaces the industrial buildings exist often as old destroyed structures. These buildings possess in many cases, historical values and create a specific genius loci of the urban space.

In Switzerland such sites are called as "romanticism of ruins" [2].

Similarly in Berlin, here along the Spree River Area in

the western part of Berlin, in Kreuzberg there exist many old industrial buildings surrounded with open space, which since about 2000 are being transformed into informal recreation zones. There, almost in the heart of the city, are beaches with sand being created. Small houses with restaurants are becoming lively places for young people. The accompanying former factories look like intentionally built castles with their chimney stacks as "towers". One can also find some green areas here. Trees and grass are cut in an artistic way.

Such, almost wild-use of industrial wastelands is one of the methods for spatial revitalization: the contrastful conversion of dirty and noisy production into clean recreation space, where a reggae music smoothens the sharp memories of the industrial past (cf. Figs. 1-3).



Figure 1.

The renovated public open space on the former industrial land in Berlin-Kreuzberg: For a few years people have been using these spaces as beaches, since the area along the Spree River is covered with sand. In the summertime the deck chairs are enabling the recreation or use of the riverside (compare Figs.2-3). Photo: The author



Figure 3.

The old chimney-stack and the out-of-work factory accented with the coloured light. This kind of attraction is to be seen in summer season as a sign of renewed public use of the area. Photo: The author



Figure 2.

Green space of the former industrial area: A tree decorated with old-fashioned lamps. A chimney-stack and an old factory hidden behind the tree.

In front: Properly cut grass and people sitting under the tree as a sign that here the space can be used for recreation. Photo: The author

2. THE SITUATION OF BROWNFIELDS IN BERLIN

The economical and technological breakthrough since 1989 is of importance for Berlin. After 1990 over 250.000 of employees were released in the western and eastern part of the city [3]. Empty industrial spaces, called in German “Brachflaeche” (brownfields) are connected with this process. These are sites of no use and of economical decline. They dispose with old factories which with time turn into ruins. The old industrial functions are retreated into cheaper peripheries [4]. The new open spaces of these brownfields become the urban obstacles for the neighbourhoods, which function usually as living and working sites.

Another additional problem increasing the creation of the empty areas is the historical background. Berlin was for many decades divided into two parts. This artificial division accelerated the constitution of neglected spaces, since the urban and landscape conditions had distinctively changed. It is to mention, that if on such destroyed lands exists no “self-expression”, that could lead to their development, then cooperation of public and private actors is needed [3].

As example of this process the unused rail stations can be mentioned.

Many problems related to this issue have existed for a long time. One of them is the present city structure. The new Programme “Rebuilding of the Western Part of Berlin” exists in the German capitol [3]. The

main purpose of this programme is to activate the unused spaces in order to strengthen the economical development of the inner-city. Such development is necessary for ensuring the future of the city (cf. Figs. 4-16).

Of importance are as well the means of revitalization for the public open space and for the public infrastructure.

The programme shall ensure the increase of the industrial brownfields quality development. It is lead by the public actors. Each of neglected areas possess a specific city-space and character, and they shall be revitalized in a common way [3]. Here the key for their treatment is the consideration of all chances and potentials concerning the urban features. There are several zones (districts of Berlin) being analyzed in the research of "Rebuilding..." Programme: Tiergarten, Kreuzberg, Schoeneberg, and Neukoelln. Increasingly more of neglected land has appear in this districts since 1990s. These sites were placed in the past near to the boarder of the former East Germany. Now comes the time for researches of their spatial situation and of the challenges connected with their history and present position.

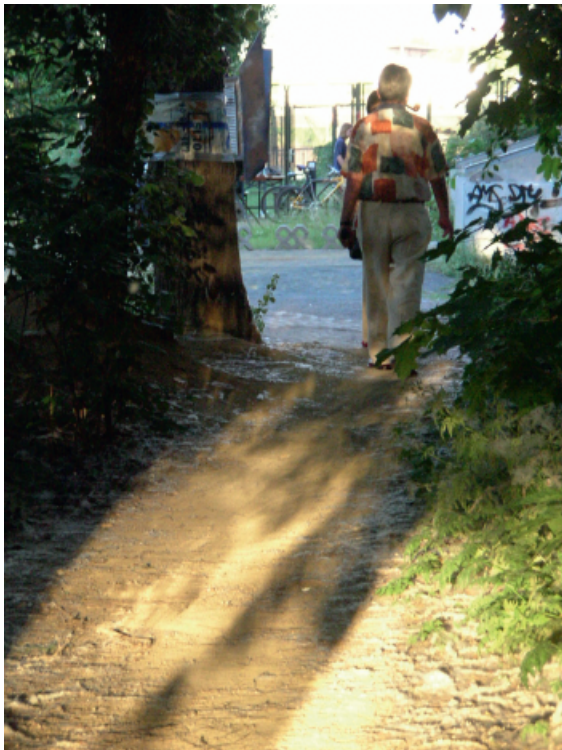


Figure 4.
The informal path, where pedestrians find their ways to get to restaurants, youth-clubs and open spaces along the Spree River in Kreuzberg, in the western part of Berlin. Photo: The author

For the districts placed next the former country boarder the problem is the urban connections such as the railways, streets, and the river [4], which cross and divide the industrial spaces [1].

Though, there are means, which can connect the districts with each other and with their neighbourhoods. One of them is the new order of some of mentioned connections and the use of the potential of public open space, as for example opening of the Spree riverbanks [3]. These are often the decisive conditions for the adaptive re-use of the wastelands.



Figure 5.
Informal use of green spaces along the western riverbank of the Spree River: Self-creation of short ways by inhabitants. Photo: The author



Figure 6.
Re-used public open space between the Spree River and old historical buildings used by young people. Functions: Restaurants on the terrace, bicycle routs, recreation. Photo: The author



Figure 7.
On the right in the background: The artistic way of shaping the former brownfield - the new sculptures made of old materials: Photo: The author



Figure 10.
Historical buildings by the Spree River re-used today for service and office functions. Photo: The author



Figure 8.
The new function of recreation introduced in the old concrete area: The terrace with sitting places along the river in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Photo: The author



Figure 11.
Brownfields in the western part of Berlin: The old industrial buildings by the water stream free to sell or hire today. Photo: The author



Figure 9.
Another open space along the Spree River in Kreuzberg: Restaurants, sitting places under trees, cycling routes along the riverbank. Photo: The author



Figure 12.
The rearrangement of old buildings: New plants on the balconies of living apartments – the house is placed near the Spree River in Kreuzberg. Photo: The author



Figure 13.
Plants (climbers) as one of revitalization methods for old buildings in Kreuzberg. Photo: The author



Figure 14.
An example of rebuilding of the western part of Berlin: The new image of old inner gardens in-between living houses. Photo: The author



Figure 15.
The symbol of industrial changes: Today the recreational function (of the river and on the former industrial land) is distinctive. In the background the industrial cityscape can be seen: The historical factory and the chimney-stack (compare this cityscape with Figs 1-3). Photo: The author



Figure 16.
Present image of the Spree River Area in Berlin – the cityscape boarder between the two districts Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg: The view in the evening. On the left: Still existing old chimney-stacks in the former industrial areas in Kreuzberg. Photo: The author

3. SUMMARY

Many brownfields exist in Berlin especially in the district of Kreuzberg (western part of Berlin) and Friedrichshain (eastern part of Berlin), placed next to each other. There is a Spree River Area, a part of the city built up with block buildings with work functions. As a contrast to this modern architecture old factories and their nearest surrounding since the year 2000 have been revived as recreation zones along the Spree River. Characteristic here is the view and the genius loci of these functionally alternative spaces.

On the one hand, the presently well functioning and popular “city beaches” and the old industrial “castles” since 2012 will not exist any more, as the above mentioned new structures with office use will be built in their place. In this case the investor will describe the urban conditions.

On the other hand, the positive feature is the new revitalization programme, which leans on the re-use of neglected sites by the means of their connection with public open spaces, in some cases already realized, along the Spree River.

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