Evolving Participatory Design: A Report from Berlin, Reaching Beyond

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Starting from a close-up view of a Berlin site typical in its mixing of top-down and bottom-up cultures, the paper focuses on the increasing informal, situated and everyday urbanisms in Berlin and abroad. It interrogates the strategies of participatory design and spatial appropriation that could help to transform these forces into long term, sustainable and holistic practices. Looking at the artist-squat K77, the research/event/publication, *Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation*, the design/concept Forum K 82—a centre for cooperative, self-determined education and work, and through research on US-American Community Design, the paper argues for bringing activist and architectural practices, university work, political and economic discourse into an immanent and productive exchange that reinforces direct-democratic and sustainable potentials in the built environment

Pointing at Berlins Top-down/Bottom-up Crossroads

Berlin 2007, at Bethaniendamm/Engeldamm looking toward Köpenicker Straße/Schillingbrücke: at one time the green median on which we stand was a canal that led to the Spree River and to this day still divides the neighbourhoods of Kreuzberg and Mitte. Along the same median ran the Berlin wall completely severing one part of the city from the other. The nearby Spree River was continuing this separation to the southeast. That's eighteen years ago now. The Schillingbrücke is now re-constructed and connects the east and west almost as if nothing had happened. However, the surrounding architecture tells another story.

Directly on the left bank of the river, sits the Bundeszentrale der Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft, known as Ver.di (Federal Offices of the Service Industries Union). Red stone encases an office building very typical of Berlin's recent architecture with its huge glazed foyer, having displaced the *Schwarzer Kanal e.V*[1]*.,* one of the city's oldest alternative trailer-parks. On the other side of the river stands one of the countless new hotels—proof of practically the only economic boom in the now almost bankrupt capital. Immediately next-door is the *Maria am Ostbahnhof*, one of the hippest clubs in the city over the past ten years, which as a temporary user occupies the basement level of an otherwise demolished building now completely overgrown with wild city vegetation and more or less hidden from sight. Back on the Kreuzberg side, directly opposite the Ver.di: simple steel and concrete structures from the 1960's and 70's house companies mostly serving the building industry. From Engeldamm, looking in the direction of former east Berlin-Mitte one sees the remaining pre-war *Gründerzeit* tenements (so called 'Wilhelminian' style from the turn of the 20th century)—in many cases renovated for speculative gain in recent years; behind them lies industrial GDR housing from the 1970's and 80's. But it is the lot opposite Ver.di's top-down architecture that stands out from the surroundings.

A dilapidated *Gründerzeit* tenement and the neighbouring impromptu trailer park, *Köpi*—a squatting project known across Europe—there has been a struggle since 1990 for a user-determined development of the city.[2] Significantly, one of the central points of origin of this bottom-up culture lies right around the corner. I'm referring to the former Bethanien hospital at Kreuzberger Mariannenplatz, which was squatted successfully as the *Georg-Rauch-Haus* in the beginning of the 1970's, and is considered a breeding cell of the bottom-up driven city development that still marks Kreuzberg today.

Something else is spoiling the view: directly behind the church on Mariannenplatz, exactly where the Berlin Wall stood, two lots have grown into Turkish 'victory gardens' with accompanying sheds that remind one more of an Istanbul *gecekondu*[3] or shanty than a typically tidy

[1] Cf. www.schwarzerkanalev.de; www.schwarzerkanal.squat.ney; www.wagendorf.de.

[2] Cf. www.koepi137.net; ww.squat.net/de

[3]   In Turkish, *gece* means *night* and *kondu* means *placed* or *put*; thus the term *gecekondu* literally means *placed (built) overnight*. In *Shadow Cities* Robert Neuwirth writes that *gecekondu*-builders are exploiting a legal loophole, which states that if one starts building after dusk and moves into a completed house before dawn the same day without being noticed by the authorities, then the next day the authorities are not permitted to tear the building down but instead must begin a legal proceeding in court (and thus it is more likely one can stay). Neuwirth states also that 'half the residents of Istanbul—perhaps six million people—dwell in *gecekondu* homes'. At present, some *gecekondu* areas are being gradually demolished and replaced by modern mass-housing compounds developed by the Turkish government's Housing Development Administration. Cf. Robert Neuwirth, *Shadow Cities: A Billion Squatters, a New Urban World*, (New York: Routledge, 2005).

Berlin garden cottage. This type of architecture, which in Turkey is built practically overnight is still standing in 2007, eighteen years after the fall of the Berlin wall, having occupied East German territory that ran along the western side of the wall and therefore fell outside of either jurisdiction. Such sets of examples could be extended to include many locations throughout the city, all of which support the thesis that the production and use of space in the capital, at least in most inner districts, has been determined through top-down as well as bottom-up development. It must be said that there is an ambivalent play of power and the tendency at the moment leans away from the bottom-up, alternatively driven potentials, as is often the case.

Generally it must be noted that the characteristic achievements of Berlin's city development are closely tied to the city's history. Berlin has had to re-make itself (politically, economically, socially and finally culturally) repeatedly since the beginning of the 20th century and so it has also had to reconsider it's planning and building on a regular basis. This permanent laboratory situation, some call it "Berlin Transit", cannot be directly applied to other cities. But it does seem attractive, useful and promising for a multitude of objectives.

Fig. 1. (Left) Bethaniendamm/Engeldamm looking toward Köpenicker Straße, Berlin, 2007. Photo: Mathias Heyden. Fig. 2. (Right) Cover: *Bildungswerk Berlin der Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung und Mathias Heyden (Hg.), Berlin - Wohnen in eigener Regie! Gemeinschaftsorientierte Strategien für die Mieterstadt (Berlin – Community oriented Strategies for the Tenants City)*. Design: bildwechsel / www.image-shift.net, Berlin 2007.

Assuming that Berlin's city development is increasingly consolidating itself, in other words 'normalising', one is forced to ask how one can apply the potentials springing from the various exceptional (bottom-up) situations to general planning. At the moment this raises in particular the question of the relationship between the numerous experiments in

temporary urban appropriation and a city development that is increasingly oriented toward capital. In terms of concrete planning, how do the (sub)cultures of 'between-use' affect the general planning and building culture? To what extent is this not becoming or already is a part of the neo-liberal project, when for example, the heart of the 'between-use' culture, the districts of Friedrichshain-Kreuberg *Spreeraum* (a vast tract of inner city vacant land on both sides of the Spree River) are increasingly defined by profit-oriented ventures? In particular, the *Media-Spree*-Development, which is trying to 'integrate' the (sub)culture of the so-called urban pioneers into their agenda.

If one considers in this conjunction recent temporary interventions by architects (events, structures and buildings of a temporary nature in a progressive sense) as a precious field research, must we not then ask how to transform such interventions into a direct-democratic, solid, sustainable and holistic city development? If, as we can see especially in the Berlin context over recent years, architects increasingly collaborate with people from all kinds of (sub)cultural fields, shouldn't they also engage more intensively with politics and law, economics and ecology in order to have an impact on the city as a whole? In consequence: how do we make local-spatial commitments in a world in which time moves with speed and people change places at such a fast rate—*Situational Urbanism* vs. spatial commitment?[4] One example of architectural practice reaching out to some possible answers is the project *K 77* at Kastanienallee 77, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg, which began as a temporary action, as a performance based on an expanded notion of art, but at the same time urged a direct-democratic, solid, sustainable and holistic, approach.

From Squatting—Art—1. Aid to Art. Commune. Capital. 10 Years K 77[5]

The fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 marked the beginning of a process of spatial redefinition for the entire GDR: formerly nationalised property was predominantly transferred into private ownership. Alongside this major shift, the majority of planners thoroughly engaged in the capitalist takeover of previously socialist space (so-called *Volkseigentum*, meaning people's property). The rare chance to create a radical and emancipative system of collective property (ruled by the users instead of anonymous administrations or capital) has rarely been taken advantage of.

On November 24th 1990, following a three-day street battle—after the German Unification Treaty was in full force—twelve squatted houses on Mainzerstrasse in a Friedrichshain neighbourhood were violently evacuated by about 4000, mostly West German police and border officers. As a consequence, a policy was put into action that would immediately suppress any further attempts at occupation. In this situation, a group of students of different disciplines from the University of the Arts

4   Cf. Jesko Fezer und Mathias Heyden, 'Pluralistisch-antihegemonialer Urbanismus, Anwaltsplanung, Partizipative Architektur und Community Design Centre', *Archplus 183*: *Situativer Urbanismus*, (Mai 2007): 92-95; Jesko Fezer and Mathias Heyden, 'The Ambivalence of Participation and *Situational Urbanism'*, in AAA-Peprav (eds.), *Urban/ACT: A Handbook for Alternative Practice*, (Montrouge: Moutot Imprimeurs, 2007), pp. 329-335.

5   Based on a text for the exhibition and catalogue; Axel John Wieder (curator), *Jetzt und 10 Jahre Davor*, (Berlin, Kunst-Werke Berlin, 2004).

Berlin intervened with the *1. Mainzer Kunstausstellung: Vom Eindruck der Staatsgewalt auf die Netzhaut* (1st Mainzer Art Exhibition: From Expression of State Violence on the Retina). The ambivalent strategy made a building intentionally damaged by construction workers (in order to prevent squatters and alike) accessible to the public, as an exhibition, for an afternoon.

Through the following *2. Mainzer Kunstausstellung—Von HausbesetzerInnen und anderen Bösewichtern* (2nd Mainzer Art Exhibition: From House Squatters and other Villains) emerged a long-term artistic/political collaboration. The participants organised a club engaging in various activities for the establishment of joint living and working spaces as laboratories for imagining a future beyond Socialism and Capitalism.

On June 20, 1992, the *NotärztInnen-Team der Vereinigten Varben Wawavox* (Emergency-Doctor-Team of the United Colours of Wawavox) performed a heart transplant in Kastanienallee 77, a historical building in the district Prenzlauer Berg, which had been vacant for six years. Step by step, and in accordance with their expanded notion of art, the group took over *K 77* as a location for non-speculative, self-defined, communal live, work and culture. Against this backdrop, the Emergency-Doctors, at the closing forum of the exhibit *37 Rooms*, positioned themselves explicitly against any kind of gentrification, in particular in the district of Berlin-Mitte. The Kunst-Werke Berlin e.V. (KW Institute for Contemporary Art) facilitated an exhibition—in aid of a permanent installation of 'room 38 to 103' according to the concept *Social Sculpture K 77*.

At this point the *K 77* buildings were not fit for habitation. Engaging in the *Social Sculpture* included construction with found materials, as well as establishing a collective live and work culture. In order to counteract the anticipated raising of rents that followed the trend of condominium apartments, which had happened in quite a few of the former West-Berlin housing projects in the 1980's, the group worked towards a communal, non-property oriented solution. Since 1994, according to a 50 year lease, the lot is owned by the foundation *Umverteilung! Stiftung für eine solidarische Welt* (Redistribution! Foundation for a World of Solidarity) while the projects association owns the buildings. The real-estate interest gained for the use of the lot goes almost exclusively into socio-political projects, both in Berlin and the third world.

Today, the core members of the self-organised project—about 30 adults and children—live together in 'one flat' on all levels of the *Gründerzeit* tenement, and on top of the small workshop-building in the back—at its core is the principle of a 'negotiation of boundaries'. For example every two years, the inhabitants sort out who wants to live where and in which

Fig. 3. (Left) Kunst. Kommune. Kapital. 10 Jahre K 77 (Art. Commune. Capital. 10 Years K 77). Image: Mathias Heyden, Berlin 1992. Fig. 4. Cover: *Stilkamm 5 1/2 e.V und die Vereinigten Varben Wawavox stellen vor: Ihre Geschichte und ihr Konzept für ein Haus zum gemeinsamen Wohnen und Arbeiten (Stilkamm 5 1/2 e.V and the Vereinigten Varben Wawavox present: Their History and Concept for a House of Common Dwelling and Work)*. Design: Mathias Heyden, Berlin 1992.

(inner) neighbourhood, so that the usage and interpretation of available spaces is constantly renewed.

The high quality of the reconstruction of the old structure of *K 77* (1994-1999) was only made possible through a particular public funding program (existing from 1982-2002), and this enormously helped the sustainability of the experiment. In the process-oriented planning and building stage, a broad variety of forms of self-determination and participation came about: the new spaces were largely laid-out through self-built and partially flexible wallboards. Wall partitions were accordingly fitted with omissions. Openings for light, spatial breaks or room connections were designed so that they can be closed and reopened at 'any time'. Overall, design decisions were left to individuals. General questions (like the layout of floor plans and sections, the kind of construction and material, technical infrastructure of the frontage) were discussed and decided in workshops or weekly meetings, following the principle of consensus. The movie theatre and communal kitchen were designed and built through small competitions. After all, the kitchen is the socio-spatial centre of the house. On the same floor there are spaces for dining, living and play, a 'bathing landscape', a 'public' phone booth and Internet-corner, while in addition a washing-machine room, guestroom, library, three yards and three roof spaces are designed, organised and used commonly.

Alongside collective property and to a certain extent a shared economy, and the possibility to change the internal 'neighbourhoods', there was

and still is a strong attempt to overcome particular conditionings of the individual and the self, and this has lead to collective and self-responsible everyday practices.[6]

In this context, the particular architecture of 'negotiated boundaries' can be seen as a social, cultural and spatial manifestation of a broader understanding of self-empowered space. Such kind of design of the built environment goes along with the deep conviction towards an architecture—described more precisely as radical than oppositional— which relies on the ultimate importance of collective economics in space; an architecture of a direct-democratic, **solid, sustainable and holistic** economics **as an emancipative** *Social Sculpture*.

Having been one of the founding members of the project whilst studying architecture, after some time I left school and moved over to the building site: I became an architect through practice, while initiating and experiencing a multitude of strategies of self-determination and participation. The project was an extraordinary opportunity, the best way to become an architect in my opinion. It also drew all available energy into its interior; that is to say that over time we kind of lost the ability to look away from the project. Consequently—after the construction was over—I had the urgent desire to perceive *K 77* as an architect from the outside, to contextualise those experiences in a more general field of design. In order to review my architectural activism, while seeking to expand such beliefs, thoughts, tactics and practices into and against the general development of Berlin and abroad (opposing most top-down driven design), a close research into the broad range of participatory design was desired and necessary. And it became clear to us that if we wanted to spread the agenda of self-determination and participation in the world of planning and building, the education of architects is one of the most important fields to engage in seriously. In doing so, the project *Hier entsteht. Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung* (Under Construction. Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation) emerged and brought me to research and teaching, and to a discourse on such topics in academia.

Under Construction: Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation

From a collaborative seminar at the University of Arts Berlin, the project unfolded into a 14-day building experiment consisting of an exhibition, a lecture series and an open space for spontaneous settlements and unpredictable activities adjacent to the theatre Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin.[7]

The German publication, which followed in 2004, focuses on the viewpoint of planners and architects in the western European context, while relating

[6] Over the years more than 100 people have worked in this space through networks of friends and colleagues towards a self-defined lifestyle. While the first occupants were mostly students who could invest much time in various political, social and cultural non-profit activities, the actors of today are more concerned with earning a living and organising the collective everyday. Still, through the speculation-free lease, district-related and non-profit facilities like a movie theatre, dance and movement studio, artist studios, video, ceramic, wood and bicycle workshops, as well as a natural healing room, can operate at a reasonabe price. And while the thorough restoration and modernisation of the surrounding neighbourhood enforces major gentrification accompanied by the closing of almost every courtyard, the 'Green Oasis' of the front courtyard in *Haus K77* remains open and accessible to everyone.

[7] In cooperation with Jesko Fezer and students of architecture at Universität der Künste Berlin; www. bloccotasti.de/ersatzstadt.

Fig. 5. *Hier entsteht. Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung. Bauexperiment, Ausstellung, Vortragsreihe und offener Raum für Spontanansiedlung und ungeplante Aktivitäten (Under Construction. Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation. Exhibition, Lecture Series and Open Space for Spontaneous Settlements and Unpredictable Activities)*, Jesko Fezer and Mathias Heyden, and Students of the University of Arts Berlin, Department of Architecture. Photo: Mathias Heyden, Berlin 2003.
Fig. 6. Cover: Jesko Fezer und Mathias Heyden (Hg.), metroZones 3, *Hier entsteht. Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung, (Under Construction. Strategies of Participative Architecture and Spatial Appropriation)*, Design: bildwechsel / www.image-shift.net, Berlin 2004 / 2007.

to historical discourses and projects starting from the 1960s and extending to present-day concepts and experiments. The publication works as a scientific reader as well as an easily accessible and useful handbook. It includes an introduction, various edited interviews with biographical notes, project illustrations, and correlated material such as additional texts and images, a guide on participative architecture in Western Europe (1960-1990), and an index of people, projects and material documenting the Berlin event *Hier entsteht* in June/July 2003. The main part of the book, the edited interviews held in 2003/2004, features theories, investigations, tactics and practices on communication, design, planning and building ranging from self-building to CAD; on architectural education as well as on self-empowerment, common property and community building.[8]

The project's outcome was and still is awesome. Students became colleagues as researchers, through co-designing and building the event-structure, as well as organising the event, which evolved as an open and lively space for professionals as well as the interested general public. Some also assisted in the guide on participative architecture in Western Europe . And in a similar way to the event, the publication was and is widely acclaimed by all kinds of people. The drive to implement architectural practices such as *K 77* into research and teaching, and the drive to lead

8   Jesko Fezer und Mathias Heyden (ed.), *MetroZones 3—Hier entsteht: Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung*, (Berlin: B_Books, 2004); www.bbooks. de/verlag/HierEntsteht; for English introduction see; www.metrozones. info/entsteht/index.html.

this emerging intellectual, cultural and in the end architectural work back into Berlin discourses and practices, its society and built environment did prove not just necessary but successful and gratifying.

Urban Pioneers: Neoliberal City-entrepreneurs or Agents Challenging a Sustainable City?

The so-called *Kritische Rekonstruktion* (Critical Reconstruction) initiated by actors predominantly from the West and dedicated to 'reinventing' inner city core districts (mainly in the East) according to neo-conservative ideas on the 'European city', is facing heavy and steady critique. Nonetheless, the major cause for the decreasing popularity of these strategies seems to be a declining building economy since the 1990s. Simultaneously, especially in the southeast along the Spree River (Districts Mitte and Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg), an increasing number of people took over vacant lots and buildings for a variety of temporary purposes, most prominently for clubs, but also other types of self-organised uses (social, cultural and commercial). Contrary to the time between 1989 and 1990, when these spaces were squatted, now the vacant lots and buildings were taken over with legal, but short-term contracts. Until recently, this kind of situational appropriation of space was only taken seriously by some of the younger generation of planners and architects. Today the argument to expand the designer's toolbox with this 'Berlin-type' of informal urbanism is being taken up by the Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung (administration for urban development); this is resulting in promotional agency rather than supporting 'on the ground' initiatives and it is also being taken up by neo-liberal actors, i.e. the *Media-Spree*-Development and its profit oriented ventures.[9]

[9]   Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung Berlin (ed.), *Urban Pioneers: Stadtentwicklung durch Zwischennutzung / Temporary Use and Urban Development in Berlin*, (Berlin: Jovis Verlag, 2007).

In regard to the politics of planning this shift can be seen as positive, at least through the integration of contemporary urban realities in their language, but in the long run questions aimed at strategies for direct-democratic, solid, sustainable and holistic development, remain open. One could say this is reasoned in a kind of politics concerned only with getting from one election to the other. Certainly this is part of the problem, though not the main reason; it is rather to be seen in view of the general flexibilisation and mobilisation of the individual and the self and our societies as a whole. It is to be seen in view of diminishing numbers of employees and a growing number of freelancers; in view of a widening gap in income and the rising price of housing and space for commercial, cultural and ultimately social spaces. And it is finally to be seen in view of a growing individualisation and privatisation of public goods and spaces; parallel to increasing (political and economic) calls to engage in and to extend our civil societies—which seems a serious contradiction.

The myth of the 'creative class' and its adjacent industries as a beacon of hope persists despite the opening up of at least some parts of public as

well private lots and buildings for development. . Furthermore in Berlin, with its high proportion (although decreasing steadily)of vacant lots and buildings, its (sub)cultural entrepreneurs, there is an emerging group of young Berlin architects who predominantly seem to engage in co-operations with these (sub)cultural producers developing temporary 1:1 projects, rather than challenging themselves in long-term commitments and larger-scale developments. This is not a statement made to undermine such (sub)culturally bound co-operations and temporary projects in any way, quite the opposite. The question here, is rather whether we shouldn't challenge trends, and if so, how we could engage ourselves beyond the 1:1 (event-based projects, while still considering these fieldworks as **precious** sources of experience to be taken into long term commitments and larger scale co-operations (i.e. with critical-productive experts in politics and law, economics and ecology).

From a broader perspective one could also ask how to bring activist and architectural beliefs, thoughts, tactics and practices, university work, discourses on politics and law, economics and ecology into a productive exchange around the dealings with vacant property (public as well private, in Berlin and abroad), as potential spaces for a future commons. Relating to these questions, a case study of a former public school in Berlin might be revealing.

Forum K 82—Centre for Self-determined, Cooperative Education and Work

In 2004, and visible all over the city, more than a hundred public school buildings were vacant or about to become so. The *K 82* project developed a concept and design for future self-determined, cooperative uses for the Gustav-Eiffel-Oberschule, a **secondary School in the Prenzlauer Berg quarter.**

The particular neighbourhood, formerly known for its intellectually driven, culturally and politically engaged residents, has—simply said —transformed into an area characterised by 'members of the creative class'. The numerous squatted flats and houses have slowly become legally occupied by those who moved from West Berlin for cheaper rent. Today there are multiple restaurants, bars, coffee shops, and numerous boutique shops and the area is occupied by 'young urban professionals' (an old-fashioned term which may be changed) who are facing increasing rents. The neighbourhood is identified in any tourist guide as a must-see 'alternative Berlin'. The inhabitants however, work hard for their earnings, are active in establishing alternative childcare and education, promote organic food and vote predominantly for the left and the green parties. What they do not do is to communicate and promote these everyday conditions, the flexible nature of their work, the economic and in the end social individualisation process taking place and the problems and potentials they face regarding a common present and future.
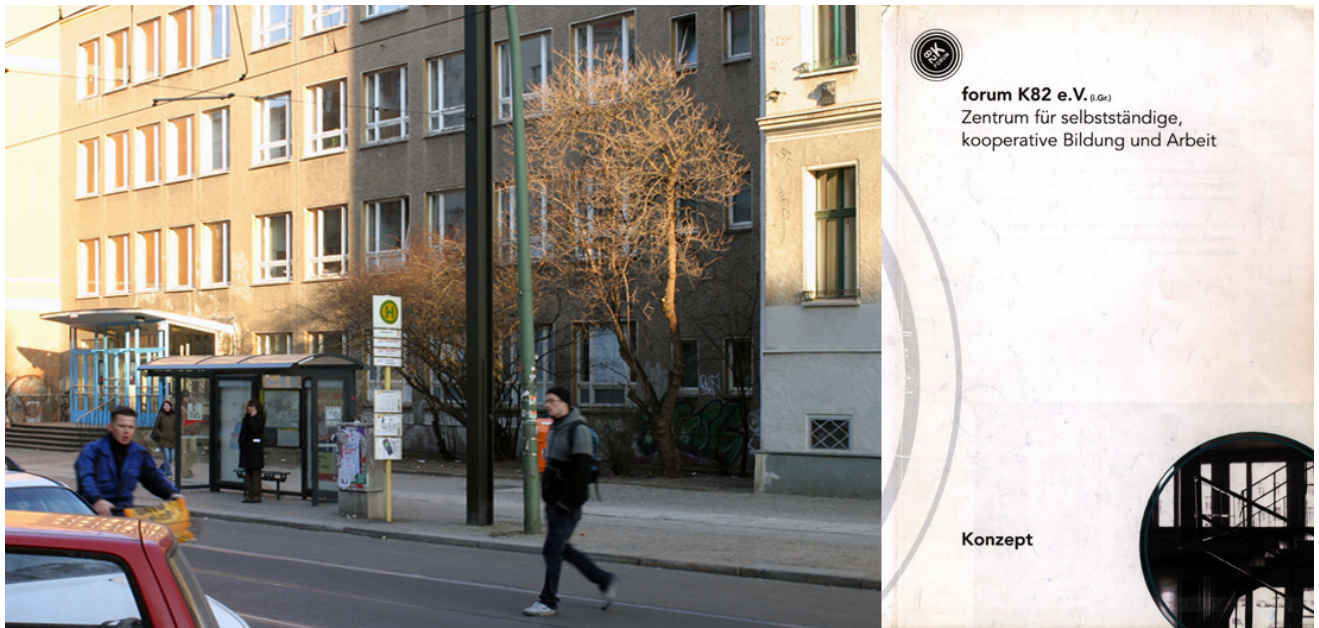
Fig. 7. Gustav-Eiffel-Oberschule (Secondary School), Kastanienallee 82, Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg. Photo: Mathias Heyden, Berlin 2005. Fig. 8. Cover: *Forum K 82 e.V. (i.Gr.). Zentrum für selbstständige, kooperative Bildung und Arbeit (Forum K 82 e.V. (i.Gr.). Center for Self-determined, Cooperative Education and Work)*. Design: Mathias Heyden and Ion Jonas Schmidt, Berlin 2005.

Taking these and other specific aspects of the area into consideration, the design for spaces to communicate and promote the everyday conditions more commonly (in a critical and productive way) in the former Gustav-Eiffel-Oberschule, sprang from an architectural studio at **Kunsthochschule** Berlin-Weißensee **(The School of Art and Design Berlin Weissensee).** The students' design was communicated quite widely through an arts project (by art students of the same school) taking place in the Gustav-Eiffel-Oberschule building for some time. The design was sensitive to the neighbourhood situation and it led to a citizens' initiative, developing a concept for a Berlin centre for self-determined, cooperative education and work, the *Forum K82—Zentrum für selbsbsetimmte, kooperative Bildung und Arbeit* (Forum K 82: Centre for Self-determined, Cooperative Education and Work).[10]

[10] See: www.k82.org

As opposed to temporary projects and uses of space, *Forum K 82* argued for a long-term lease of public property. In doing so the design and the concept promoted more permanent and substantial modes of communication, exchange and cooperation while emphasising the challenges and potentials of changing lifestyles to be promoted; issues which need to be discussed simultaneously with a local and international public. Finally, the design and concept argued that the reuse of the public school could function as an important platform of research by practice looking at our changing societies of today and the ones yet to come. The specific architectural approach was to insist that even when faced with a growing network-society and its particular fragmented dimensions, an

effort to build through a **spatiotemporal engagement, that is to say local** commitment in a spatial sense, must be taken more seriously than ever.

The project failed mainly due to the district's parliament and government, but it also failed because of a lack of awareness and responsibility in the potential civic actors. This statement is not about criticising particular organisations or individuals, but the prevalent lack of preliminary information, knowledge and discussion, and most of all action towards things to come. This must be seen within the context of a society, which still relies on a version of a welfare mentality (and its left-over 'givens') based on the old, paternalistic model. Self determined and participatory design in such a context even with a common ground and institutional implementation still seems to get stuck in structures, rules and regulations, rather than being an example of direct-democracy and active planning. Questions about the current and future forms of our commons should be more critical and productive than vague discussions on 'the German future' or exalted speculations on 'network-societies'.

One could say: 'so what about "community"' and maybe the dealings on this scale of society, could be helped by the Anglo-American definition? Unfortunately these lines won't leave the space to discuss such anticipation adequately. However, at least from my own viewpoint as an architect engaged in the evolving field of participatory design in central Europe, the North American culture of 'Community Design' carried out by planners and architects, seems to offer promising ways forward that are worth considering.

Community Design: On Involvement and Architecture in the USA since 1963

The term community design indicates how participative planning and architecture try to achieve progressively negotiated, **emancipated, just and** sustainable productions of space in the US. Emerging in the context of the civil-rights and grass-roots movements of the 1960´s and therefore close to Paul Davidoff's concept of 'advocacy planning'[11], today about a hundred 'Community Design Centres' and similar actors engage all over the country. Committed to serve the public good they primarily work for and with people and/or on topics marginalised in the prevalent productions of space; accordingly clients are citizens and initiatives, private as well public organisations and institutions on the local, state and federal scale. Predominantly Non-Profit or Not-For Profit organisations, they operate as associations staffed by volunteers, as community affected planning, or architecture firms or increasingly within schools of architecture and planning.

One of the oldest institutions of this kind is the **Pratt Center for Community Development in New York City.**[12] Rural Studio, in Hale

[11] Cf. Paul Davidoff, 'Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning', *Journal of the Institute of American Planners*, 31(4)(1965): 331-338.

[12] Cf. www.picced.org

County, Alabama, is known for its internationally acclaimed 1:1-student-projects and is part of a school of architecture and planning.[13] Also Design Corps is engaging primarily for the underprivileged, but is active all over the county and operates as a small, non-profit architectural firm. Its founder/director Bryan Bell argues vehemently for intervention in the production of space; '98% of which in the US happens without architects'.[14] The **Community Design Center of Pittsburgh focuses on direct** planning and building for and with the citizens of the post-industrial city, characterised by decay and vast amounts of derelict land.[15] Again in NYC, with multi-disciplinarily objectives the Centre for Urban Pedagogy engages in all kinds of schools and universities while researching and communicating a broad range of planning and design topics within diverse urban scenes.[16] All over the country Community Design actors connect and exchange with each other via the umbrella group Association for Community Design[17].

The wide range of such types of engagement are exemplified further in the Hamer Centre for Community Design Assistance.[18] Residing at the Pennsylvania State University, its work varies from theoretical or scientific projects to on-site construction. Within *design-built* projects, teachers and students have been making earth and straw bale constructions for a couple of years, with a community of Native Americans. Practical and scientific work also comes together in a project dealing with the recycling of building materials, accumulated through different causes of destruction (like storms or floods), or building demolitions.[19] The centre's former director, Michael Rios, who understands architecture, city, regional and landscape planning as a political practice, has been researching community design concepts and projects while asking to what extend they do and can contribute to the quality and enforcement of the US-democracy. He stresses that such work shouldn't alleviate the State from its duties and responsibilities, but that community design must be understood as challenging, qualifying and enforcing the potentials of political and public institutions and commons.[20]

The appropriateness and urgency of these positions and practices becomes especially manifest in regard to the reconstruction of New Orleans, where the marginalised needs and interests of underprivileged citizens can be brought to the surface through community design in opposition to top-down planning and building (by the state) or driven by financial interest. In doing so community-design activists on the Gulf Coast engage with inclusive rebuilding projects, against compulsory displacements and the demolition of flood-prone areas, especially if these are undertaken with a racist agenda or labelled ecological for promotional and/or economic reasons only.[21] Accordingly, such community-design can develop as a type of progressive planning, along strong traditions of self-responsibility and self-organisation. It promises concepts and projects for an urbanism of

[13] Cf. www.ruralstudio.com

[14] Cf. www.designcorps.org; Bryan Bell, *Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service Through Architecture*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004).

[15] Cf. www.cdcp.org

[16] Cf. www.anothercupdevelopment.org

[17] Cf. www.communitydesign.org

[18] Cf. www.hamercenter.psu.edu; www.claimingpublicspace.net—the centre's open-source initiative

[19] Cf. www.hamercenter.psu.edu/events_index.htm; www.buildingreuse.org

[20] Cf. Michael Rios, 'Envisioning Citizenship: Toward a Polity Approach in Urban Design', *Journal of Urban Design*, (13)2 (2008): 213-222; P. Aeschbacher and M. Rios, 'Claiming Public Space: The Case for Proactive, Democratic Design', in B. Bell & K. Wake (eds.), *Expanding Architecture: Design as Activism*, (New York: Metropolis Books, forthcoming).

[21] Cf. http://architecture.tulane.edu/programs/tulane-city-center; http://tulaneurbanbuild.com

Fig. 9. *An Architektur 19: Community Design. Involvement and Architecture in the US since 1963*, exhibiton by An Architektur and Mathias Heyden. Photo: Ines Schaber, Berlin 2008. Fig. 10. Cover (forthcoming): *An Architektur 19*, An Architektur and Mathias Heyden. Design: Till Sperrle.

the marginalised and can thus can work critically and productively against domination and segregation in US-urbanism and perhaps even abroad. A careful examination of such strategies seems valuable, at least in order to reconsider the particularities of self-determined and participatory planning and building in (central) Europe. *Community Design. Involvement and Architecture in the US since 1963*, a recent Berlin cooperation with the magazine *AN ARCHITEKTUR. Produktion und Gebrauch gebauter Umwelt*, produced an exhibition and talks with community design actors.[22]

[22]   Cf. www.anarchitektur.com

Also there is a forthcoming bundle of booklets with texts on the history and present, theories and practices, of about fifty *Community Design Centre* and similar actors, which will be presented and discussed. This could be understood as a proposition as well as an invitation to expand the research in and discourse on participatory architecture and spatial appropriation on an international level in order to fully grasp the multiplicity of theories and practices, as well as their implications and potentials on both sides of the Atlantic.

In sum such an event, as well as this essay in particular argues for an in-depth knowledge and know-how of politics and law, economics and ecology, which would be intrinsic to our professions, with an emphasis on direct-democratic, solid, sustainable and holistic societies to come.

Reaching back to Berlin, it is one of the many territories in serious need of a knowledge, know-how and most of all intervention from such perspectives; however, this must be elaborated in another text at

a different time. For the time being I will leave it here, but not without mentioning that one such innovative self-determined and commonly oriented housing project is located where these lines began: at Bethaniendamm/Engeldamm, now looking toward Engelbecken to the left. *Listen to the city!*—Berlin 2008.

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