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Preserving the Modern

New Perspectives on Postwar Modernist Architecture

Katharina Frieling and Markus Kip (Eds.)

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“Preserving the Modern.
New Perspectives on Postwar Modernist Architecture”
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Preface

Having been widely discarded as monotonous or boring since about the 1980s, postwar modernist architecture has attracted increasing interest among urban scholars and practitioners in recent years. Preserving modernist architecture, however, is still a controversial topic in international urban development and planning.

In order to investigate how the built legacies of modernist architecture and urban planning are being dealt with today, the workshop “Preserving the Modern: New Perspectives on Postwar Modernist Architecture” was held on June 26 and 27, 2017 at the Faculty of Architecture, Technical University Darmstadt. It brought together around 30 scholars from different disciplines, including architecture, urban planning, history, geography, and sociology. In this publication, we document five of the contributions.

The first contribution “Sites of Controversy: Postwar Public Squares and the Reassessment of Modernist Architectures” by Markus Kip situates the design and conjunctures of appraising the urban landscapes of Western European postwar modernism in the context of the welfare state. It focuses on the historical development of public squares from the 1960s and 1970s and shows that the spectrum of developments ranges from complete demolition and renewal to preservation. The fate of postwar urban design and whether it finds a more positive assessment leading to its preservation thus remains controversial.

The following four essays entail thematic case studies. Beginning in the east, with a case of Minsk, Oxana Gourinovitch unveils the layers of modernist buildings in her contribution entitled “The White Face of Soviet Modernism. On the Current State of Soviet Modernist Architecture in the City of Minsk”. As part of the former Soviet Republic, architecture in the “most socialist

city” covered the surfaces of the construction with finishing in contrast to the Brutalist style prevalent in Western Europe. In recent years, the renovation of these buildings entailed a new white coating and Gourinovitch draws parallels in the history of modernism elsewhere.

Lukas Vejnik presents the Hotel Obir in Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla in southern Austria as a “contrapuntal architecture in the village”. This piece draws attention to modernist architecture outside of the metropolises, but which nevertheless became a landmark of the region and was interwoven in rather surprising ways with the history of the region. In fact, it is the result of an international exchange across the Iron Curtain involving actors in Austria and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, most notably the architect Ilija Arnautovi. Vejnik argues for the preservation of this architecture, but the political economic situation has been unfavorable and the building is in decay.

Le Havre is the center of attention in the German-language piece by Pedro Gomes (“Die von Auguste Perret umgebaute Stadt“). Gomes discusses the story of the rebuilding of Le Havre following the heavy war damage of World War 2. The role of Auguste Perret and his unique approach to urban design is presented, in order to help understand how the rebuilt city center eventually became UNESCO World Heritage in 2005. Gomes then highlights aspects of Perret’s design and approach, that embody social and spatial values that we might appreciate still today.

With the most Western case study, Birmingham, Katharina Frieling presents her analysis in “No(n) Place like Bullring: Modern Identity and Retail-led Regeneration in Birmingham”. Drawing on the notion of non-places by Marc Augé, Frieling discusses the large postwar redevelopment of the former marketplace “Bull Ring” to a modern and large shopping mall that opened in 1961 but quickly proved to be an economic failure and fell into disrepute. Frieling draws a parallel between this clean-sweep approach and the more recent one in 2003, that swept the brutalist monster away and replaced it with a post-modern retail-led regeneration, removing a large piece of postwar legacy and merely sustaining a non-place.

This selection of case studies illustrates the different fates that postwar architecture and urban design have undergone in Europe until today. To make sense of this unevenness, we need a clearer understanding of the differences that histories of modernist architecture and urban design entail in cities and countries. The case studies suggest that the architectural design from this period has become a hot-button topic in urban politics. The question of what to do with the architectural artifacts of this period confronts cities from Eastern to Western Europe. The answers, of course, differ. Future research should elucidate how conditions and actors explain different outcomes across time and space. Today, various actors recognize the historical, social and aesthetical values attached to these architectural artifacts and landscapes, from UNESCO World Heritage to professional associations, and to an interested public. It remains to be seen, to what extent these new perspectives enable the preservation of these buildings. As we learn throughout the contributions to this collection, besides historical and aesthetical appreciation, questions of sustainability also challenge efforts of preservation.

Two main strategies might be taken for the sake of preservation. The first strategy focuses on selling the uniqueness of postwar architecture and urban design in a quest for city branding and

global competitiveness for investments and members of the “creative class”. Postwar modernism thus is reduced to the register of style, a style that today might be counted as “edgy”. If such style is packaged as a commodity with a price higher than the alternative of demolition and redevelopment, the designs might be preserved. The second strategy is to dig up the often-forgotten histories and longings that postwar design once sought to embody. This might help to tell a counter-story to the current state of affairs in postmodern architecture and neoliberal urbanization, a story that tells of the social aspirations of the architecture and the various actors involved in their production and consumption. In many ways, such story is connected to the projects of social engineering and the paternalist welfare state. However, discarding such urban design single-handedly as a failure overlooks the original aspirations and drives behind several postwar modernist developments. Without necessarily approving the approaches that were taken or the results that ensued, it is the endeavor to tell a story of a socially engaged urban design and architecture that runs throughout these contributions.

The conference and this publication would not have been possible without the support of the Graduate School of Urban Studies (URBANgrad) and the Faculty of Architecture at the Technische Universität Darmstadt, particularly through a “Seed Fund” in 2017. Thank you!

Katharina Frieling and Markus Kip



Alexanderplatz, Berlin (East) 1970. Source: Fortepan.hu; ID: 00411; Creative Commons: CC-BY-SA-3.0

Sites of Controversy: Postwar Public Squares and the Reassessment of Modernist Architectures

Markus Kip

The question of preserving postwar urban design has become a controversial issue in urban development in Western Europe. In this contribution, I focus on the controversies around public squares built between the 1960s and the 1970s. What makes this inquiry particularly interesting is that the fate of public squares from this period is undecided as empirical evidence suggests. Today, the spectrum of experiences ranges from complete demolition and redevelopment to preservation of the design. Assuming a sociological perspective, I suggest that the contestation about the future of public squares is particularly fierce since it not only addresses questions of aesthetics and the historical appreciation of that period but also conflicting political ideas about public space and the use of urban land.

First, I review how postwar architecture in Western Europe has been reassessed over the past decade. The section concludes that the reappraisal of urban design from the period has not received the same kind of attention as individual architectural objects. Next, the urban designs of the 1960s and early 1970s are analyzed in the political-economic context of the welfare state. I consider the role of public squares in the decades following World War II and how planning and design discourses have shifted for the past 50 years. Today, given different interests and perspectives on these squares, the fate of the postwar design of public squares is undecided as I illustrate by looking at three squares in Western Europe.

Re-assessing Postwar Urban Design?

When referring to “postwar” modernism or architecture in the following, reference is made to the period from 1945 until 1975. This period has been coined as the *Trente Glorieuses* by economist Jean Fourastié (1979) originally in reference to France, but the term has also been applied to Western Europe (Swenarton et al. 2014). It is particularly the legacy of the architectural styles and urban design of the second half of this period, i.e. the 1960s and early 1970s that only recently have received academic attention (Lange 2003; Eckardt et al. 2017).

Today, from a perspective of preservation, the dilemma of urban architecture of the 1960s and early 1970s is, that it is viewed as “aging, but not yet historic” (Escherich 2012). Postwar modernist design thus is faced in several cases with demolition for redevelopment, even though resistance and calls for preservation have increasingly been taken up (Elser et al. 2017). As the German National Committee for Conservation (Deutsches Nationalkomitee für Denkmalschutz) already noticed in the late 1980s, “the historical legacy of the immediate past is generally faced with a lack of appreciation due to the generation gap and thus becomes more easily a disposable matter for today’s building industry” (quoted in Präsidium des Deutschen Nationalkomitees für Denkmalschutz 2003: 5, my translation). As with other postwar modernist architecture, there is much uncertainty whether central public squares of the period will be preserved. In this respect, Aidan While warns against assumptions that architectural styles go through cycles of fashionability, eventually leading to their rehabilitation. Aidan While (2007: 647) notes that “there are no guarantees that this will happen with all styles (or for all buildings from a particular era)”.

In recent years, a renewed societal interest in postwar architecture can be discerned (Falbe et al. 2017; Harnack 2012; Elser et al. 2017; While 2006). Braun (2015) observes that postwar modernism has been until recently “a pet issue of architectural enthusiasts”, but it is increasingly a topic of wider public and academic debate. The growing interest in the architecture of the 1960s and early 1970s has also become visible through contemporary initiatives (such as the campaign #SOSBrutalism) and exhibitions (such as “Save the Concrete Monsters!” at the Deutsche Architekturmuseum in Frankfurt in 2017/2018 (Elser et al. 2017), “Radical Modern: Urban Planning and Architecture in 1960s in Berlin” in 2015 (Köhler/Müller 2015), and “Futures Found. The Real and Imagined Cityscapes of Postwar Britain” in 2016/2017 (Hopkins 2017)).

The professional and academic working group DOCOMOMO (International Working Party for Documentation and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement) founded in 1988 to research and educate about the cultural significance of modern architecture, has also turned its attention to the postwar period and its continuities to the first half of the 20th century (Heuvel 2008). Moreover, the professional association for the protection and conservation of cultural heritage sites, ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) has also paid attention to the issue of preserving postwar architecture through conferences (such as “Dangerous Liaisons: Preserving postwar modernism in city centers” in 2001) and publications (such as Lange 2003; ICOMOS – Hefte des Deutschen Nationalkomitees, Volume 58 (2013) and Volume 63 (2017)). The Wüstenrot foundation has declared one of its main goals to protect landmarks from the postwar modernist period because “society still



Figure 1: Sergelstorg i Stockholm med „plattan“ sommaren 2008 | Av Holger.Ellgaard - Eget arbete, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4418840>

quarrels with them, they have no broader lobby – and are thus threatened the most” (Wüstenrot Stiftung 2017). In Great Britain, a postwar listing program has contributed to a re-appreciation of postwar modern architecture as Aidan While (2007: 659) claims. Moreover, since the start of the new millennium, developers in cities like London and Manchester have turned to reuse and refurbish postwar tower blocks rather than tearing them down (Allan 1998). In her research less than a decade ago, Maren Harnack (2012) finds that among certain social milieus (highly educated, well-off and young inhabitants) the postwar towers of Ernö Goldfinger have gained a caché.

For the most part, research and re-assessment of postwar modernism so far concern individual architectural objects. There are some indications that postwar city designs have also been revalorized in recent years, but no systematic research has been conducted so far (Plymouth City Council 2008; While 2006, 2007). Overall, it has been noted that there is little effective protection for the morphology or street design of the 1960s and 1970s (While 2007: 658; Braum/Welzbacher 2009: 100). From the current state of the art, it remains unclear how the re-appreciation of postwar modernist aesthetics affects the view on the urban design from that period.

Urban Design and the Welfare State

As Swenarton et al (2014: 2) assert, “the planning of the built environment ... was one of the key areas in which the welfare state sought to achieve its ambitions.” The contribution of their book is to relate Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s (1990) analytical framework of *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* with historical studies of architectural design of the Trente Glorieuses. The three-part welfare typology distinguishes among welfare states by the degrees to which social policies are aimed at decommodification, defined as “the degree in which [the regimes] permit people to make their standards independent of pure market forces” (Esping-Andersen 1990: 3) and the degree in which redistributive policies are aimed at fostering socio-economic equality among citizens. A question that results from this perspective is to what extent the design of public squares reflects the commitment to equality and decommodification, i.e. the intent to keep market forces at bay in the development and the usage of these squares.

The welfare arrangements that Esping-Andersen researched until the late 1980s to produce his typology, however, have been starkly transformed since then. Much has been written about the neo-liberalization of the welfare state regimes, in which market logics have increasingly invaded the spheres of the state and civil society (Jessop 1999). Concerns of the state are said to have moved from a paternalistic-managerial governance towards one that relies on the entrepreneurial spirit of the population (Jessop 2002). Concerns with socioeconomic equality through redistributive policies have been increasingly replaced by a focus on security and policing (Wacquant 2009).

David Harvey (1990) claims that the shift from a Fordist-Keynesian to a post-Fordist-neoliberal mode of production and social regulation corresponds to a transformation from modernist to postmodernist aesthetics. Changes in design thus are not merely an issue of fashion but also reflect how individuals are socialized under different conditions and react to them. Harvey’s argument can also be understood to mean that aesthetical choices have political economic implications. In this way, it is possible to make sense of the severity in which postwar modernist aesthetics have become ridiculed as ugly and dysfunctional in the decades following the 1980s (Siedler et al. 1964). Since then, critical voices for demolition and redevelopment of postwar urban design have found a strong resonance in public discourse. Yet, at the same time, advocates for preservation have also made themselves increasingly heard in recent years (While 2006, 2007; Larkham/Adams 2016; Leslie/Reimer 2003). Harvey’s account, however, begs the question how the growing interest in modernist aesthetics since around the early 2000s could be explained.

On this background, it is less than trivial to ask how the architectural remnants that once symbolized the aspirations of a welfare state are negotiated today (Swenarton et al. 2014; Mattsson 2010). So far, there has been no exploration of how the growing interest in modernist architecture and its preservation fits with Harvey’s account. Is it possible to detect similarities in Western European cities dealing with the legacies of postwar public squares? Given the diagnosed convergence among different welfare states towards a (neo-) liberal model (Handler 2003; Trickey 2001; Starke 2006), it might be assumed that today there is an emerging common trend in thinking about and designing public squares, namely towards less open space, more commercialized usages and a greater concern for policing.

Envisioning Public Squares: Then and Now

Focusing on the role of the built environment “from new towns, to social housing, to schools and universities, hospitals and health centres, to leisure and sports complexes, to arts centres” in the welfare state, the edited volume of Swenarton, Avermaete, and van den Heuvel (2014: 1) neglect to consider the significance of public squares in city centers. The review of the contemporary literature on preserving postwar modernist design shows that a systematic consideration of today’s perspectives on postwar public squares has yet to be done (but see also Kip et al. 2015). This omission is striking given the unique role that public squares have played in the redevelopment of postwar cities and the strong pressures of redevelopment that are often present at these central sites.

The envisioned role of central public squares in the 1960s and 1970s was part of a centralized pattern of urban development, the aim of differentiating urban functions in space, an idea that was strongly influenced by Le Corbusier’s Athens Charter. Up until the 1950s, controversies about decentralized and centralized patterns of urban development finally congealed to a common understanding among postwar planners and architects that (in the terminology of the CIAM 8 in 1951) a “Heart of the City” needs specific attention in urban development (Tyrwhitt et al. 1952; Domhardt 2012; Mumford 2000). The squares under consideration in the proposed study were part and parcel of a sweeping redevelopment to revitalize existing cities in conformity with the urban functionalism espoused by the Athens Charter (Le Corbusier 1973, orig. 1943) see also Giedion 2008, orig. 1941). The demolition of the war was experienced as an opportunity to build at large-scale in cities (Düwel 2011; Durth et al. 1995; Durth et al. 2007; Düwel/Gutschow 2013; Herold/Stefanovska 2012; Sächsische Akademie der Künste 2014). However, the efficacy of such a sweeping approach also guided the reconstruction efforts in cities that were not destroyed during the war (Haumann 2014; Gullberg 2002). Sweeping efforts to redevelop city centers in the postwar years were seen to require a strong leadership of the state to provide for the common good of all (Scott 1998).

Berthold Lubetkin’s idea of the “spatial vectors” developed in the 1950s and 1960s offers an interesting perspective on the design principles of these squares. The design of large open squares was to be “not enclosed but suggested, not compartmentalized but continuous“, moreover, to “exhibit purpose and resolve among gigantic stores of energy... [d]irection, drive, and momentum” (Deckker 2000: 116). The separation of pedestrian and car-traffic served not only an improved and unimpeded mobility for cars but also the safety for pedestrians who had often become victims of traffic accidents (Adams 2013). At the same time, the largeness of the public square of this time was designed emphatically to render them into people’s arenas, reflecting republican ideals of civic engagement, political participation and citizens’ equality (Franzén 2009). In fact, the open squares often functioned as sites for public events, such as celebrations, but also for demonstrations and rallies giving the opportunity to raise controversies in public.

Jane Jacobs’ (1961) consequential criticism of urban renewal in the U.S. that followed modernist planning precepts emphasized the undemocratic planning of public spaces (Sandercock 1997, 2004). The criticism had a strong imprint on the protests in other countries that confronted

similar modernist redevelopment of public spaces (Mitscherlich 2008; Siedler et al. 1964). Until today, several opponents of preservation for postwar urban design, criticize postwar urbanism as “dehumanizing” or “inhospitable” (Braun 2015). Generic assessments such as that “modernist ideology has a tendency to foster placeless settings lacking in vitality, security and comfort and appeal for pedestrians” (Natrasony/Alexander 2005) continue to hold sway.

Today, influential accounts for public space design criticize the postwar examples for a lack of concern for the perspective of its everyday users (Gehl 2011; Karssenberg et al. 2016). Following the legacy of research on public spaces by William F. Whyte (1980) and Jane Jacobs (1961), public square design with large open spaces is not considered to foster social encounter and interaction, but rather anonymity and isolation, thereby allowing illicit activities from happening unnoticed and conveying feelings of insecurity (Newman 1972; Raman 2008). From such perspective, the failure of the modernist design of public spaces was a lacking concern for creating intimate space. Heights and widths were too great and therefore inhibited visual connections between pedestrians. Further, facades were viewed as too boring and lacking visual diversity. Last but not least, there was an insufficient concern about street furniture to allow for sitting and resting (Karssenberg et al. 2016). Concerns have been raised that particularly at night when businesses closed down in city centers, the public squares were left all but deserted (Franzén 2009). Given functionalist ideas of urban design, very few inhabitants lived in the central city areas and residential areas were instead built in the suburbs.

The German Institute for Civic Art (Deutsches Institut für Stadtbaukunst) expressed strong criticism against postwar public squares in the photo-exhibition “Squares in Germany” that traveled to various cities in Germany from 2013 to 2016 and in the accompanying publication edited by Christoph Mäckler and Birgit Roth (2016). Architectural critic and a contributor to the edited collection, Dankwart Guratzsch concludes from the development of squares after World War II: “the urban square as a site of human encounter no longer exists” (Guratzsch 2016: 42, my translation). And further, “functions have become more important for city building than the human scale, feelings of harmony and morality, ideals of commonality, of togetherness, of conversation” (Guratzsch 2016: 39, my translation).

At the current juncture, such concerns of aesthetic and civic character have resonated with market and state actors’ interests. Central public squares continue to be symbolic and highly prized places in the city, particularly in post-industrial countries as these spaces are valued in policy strategies focused on consumerism (Low and Smith 2005). Several studies have described how city administrations considered removal of postwar urban design as a necessary part of an urban renaissance (Bodenschatz 2005; Higgott 2000). In this context, postwar public squares constitute controversial sites in cities for their relative spaciousness, criticized as a waste of space and for the failure to generate rent (Franzén 2009; While 2006: 2401). Moreover, these open squares have often attracted marginalized populations that settled in their niches or appropriated the space, particularly during off-hours for activities usually not considered as properly public: sleeping, hanging out, partying, selling/buying drugs, using drugs and other illicit activities (Wright 1997; Weszkalnys 2007; Mitchell 2003). David J. Madden (2010) argues that today’s design approaches of public squares are driven by concerns about regulation, particularly potentially unruly social groups. The result is a re-articulation of

“public space”, a meaning that is increasingly detached from democratic government. Until now, believed to be unfashionable or dysfunctional (Higgott 2000; Hubbard et al. 2003) postwar squares have rarely been considered to fit the “tourist gaze” on heritage and thus as assets that could be turned into profit (Urry 1990, 1992). Aidan While and Michael Short (2011) find for Manchester that certain postwar architectural elements fit into the overall production of the image of a post-industrial city. In recent years, landmarking agencies, such as in Berlin have also aroused public controversy with assigning landmark status to postwar buildings at Alexanderplatz square that give testimony to an ambivalent and controversial aspect of German history.

A Spectrum of Fates

Comparing three case studies of postwar central squares in Birmingham, Berlin (West) and Stockholm suggests that similar squares undergo strikingly different fates today, ranging from encompassing preservation, to moderate changes, and to complete redevelopment. What these squares had in common was that they were designed in the 1960s, significantly altering the previous urban shape of the area. The redesign of these squares was a major effort to redevelop the city center by removing at least some of the older housing settlements while creating new housing in the suburbs. Commercial, cultural, administrative and civic functions were concentrated in the city center, and the squares were designed as a transportation hub. All of these squares entail open pedestrian-only public squares that are encircled by buildings. Motorized transportation flows (particularly large roads for automobile traffic as well as railroads) are orchestrated around them and the interaction between these modes of traffic operate on several different levels. The size of the redevelopment area and the size of the cities (Birmingham, Stockholm and Berlin West) are relatively similar with a population in the metropolitan region ranging in between 1 Million and 2 Million inhabitants. In all of these cases, there has been considerable debate over the years about preservation and redevelopment of the public squares in parts or their entirety.

Birmingham’s Chamberlain Square opened in 1974 as part of the finalization of the Birmingham Central Library development, known as the Paradise Circus. The design of the 1960s for the library precinct was chosen after a long-winding discussion about the redevelopment of central Birmingham that had suffered significant bombing in World War II (Larkham 2016). The library was the largest non-national library in Europe at the time and was constructed in a Brutalist aesthetics. The square was designed as a civic square leading to the library and became a popular public square. The square has a direct connection to the Victoria Square of the 19th century. When the ring road bridge was built in 1988, it became more significant as part of the through route from the city center to symphony hall and International Convention Center (Fig. 2). As calls became louder to redevelop the Paradise Circus and the Brutalist architecture was decried, there were significant attempts to list the library and its urban design as a monument. Particularly in the early 2010s, heritage associations, architects and civic organizations including English Heritage, Twentieth Century Society, the World Monuments Fund and the local “Friends of the Central Library” rushed in support. In a controversial move, Birmingham City Council and the Minister of Culture prevented such listing and demolition began in 2015 and the area is currently undergoing complete redevelopment (Larkham/Adams 2016; Fig. 3).



Figure 2: Chamberlain square in 2007 prior to redevelopment | Source: Erebus555 - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2408106>



Figure 3: Chamberlain Square in 2016 | Source: Graham Beards - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=50249268>

By contrast, Stockholm's Sergels Torg (Fig. 1), built in 1968 and finalized with the House of Culture ("Kulturhuset") and the fountain monument in 1974, largely remains in its original shape until today (Olgarsson 2009). Its creation was part of an encompassing endeavor to remodel the city center (that had suffered no bombings in World War II) according to functionalist ideals (Gullberg 2002). It functioned as an important traffic hub in the city and became popular as a meeting place for demonstrations, but also for celebrations of national sports teams. Already since the 1970s, it also became known as a space of petty crime, particularly related with the heroin drug scene. In order to address the tarnished image, calls emerged to redevelop the square according to commercial interests. In particular, this proposal sought to bring the sunken square up to the street level in order to decrease the possibilities for secretive activities. The redevelopment attempts, however, have not been successful in the political arena in the early 2000s (Franzén 2002). In 2015, large areas were undergoing renovation and, in 2017, an architectural assessment was commissioned in preparation for a preservation concept for the square (Ulvsgård and Ek 2017).

The construction of Breitscheidplatz (Fig. 4, 5) square of Berlin West was finalized in 1965. The square also became a popular public space of Berlin West, functioning also as a central traffic hub in conjunction with the main train station Bahnhof Zoo (Bodenschatz 2005). In World War II, the area that was heavily bombed, with the ruins of a bombed church now at its center as a memorial. It was designed in direct competition with the Alexanderplatz of Berlin East (Berlin. de 2017; Kip et al. 2015). Subsequently, the area of the square was enlarged and rendered more attractive for pedestrians by the closing of streets in 1978 and further modified in 2006. In 2008, the decision to tear down the so-called Schimmelpfeng buildings from 1960 – that had already been listed – provoked controversy, with several advocates seeking their preservation against the building of new high-rises in its stead. One of these highrises built on the site was designed by the aforementioned critic of postwar public squares, Christoph Mäckler. Demolition began in 2008 and the new high-rises "Upper West" were completed in 2017. At the same time, the shopping mall, the so-called "Bikini" building from 1957, was refurbished between 2010 and 2014 into a shopping mall, hotel, and cinema complex.

Concluding Notes

The fate of postwar public squares today seems to be decided mainly between two interests that appear frequently to enter into conflict. On the one side, the current trend to reassess postwar modernist architecture could also go along with a growing interest in preserving public squares from the period for their historical and aesthetic values. Moreover, considerations of sustainability, namely to reduce the use of energy and material resources, could align with the interest in architectural preservation. On the other side, the pressure to redevelop central sites in the city to maximize economic returns is particularly stark on open squares in the city. Future research could investigate how these conflicting interests are negotiated in individual cases. Another aspect that has not received consideration so far, is how the postwar design of squares is believed to foster or inhibit civic communication. A large open public square might be understood to signal a commitment to keep market forces at bay in order not to commodify every square meter for commercial purposes. Is there a direct relation to the welfare regime type and its policies of decommodification?



Figure 4: View on church ruin at Breitscheidplatz on 1960
Source: Willy Prager, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=36982725>



Figure 5: View on Breitscheidplatz with new high-rise construction in the background in 2015
Source: Sebastian Rittau - Eigenes Werk, CC-BY 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=62390741>

Markus Kip holds a PhD in sociology from York University, Toronto. He was postdoc at the Graduate School of Urban Studies (URBANgrad) at TU Darmstadt until June 2018. Since then, he works as a researcher at the Georg-Simmel-Centre of Metropolitan Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin. He is a co-editor of “Urban Commons: Moving Beyond State and Market” (2015) published in *Bauwelt Fundamente* and of the special issue on “Modernism and the (Post-)Socialist City” (2015) in the journal *Europa Regional*.

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Residential buildings before and after renovation works. Source: Oxana Gourinovitch

The White Face of Soviet Modernism

On the Current State of Soviet Modernist Architecture in the City of Minsk

Oxana Gourinovitch

During the last decade, a uniform whiteness has concealed the original surfaces of numerous architectural monuments of Soviet Modernism, scattered over the “most socialist city”, the Belarusian capital Minsk. The beaming white of shiny aluminum panels, insulation foams and coats of polycarbonate paint covered weathered Soviet finishes – which disappeared unresearched, undocumented, unappreciated, vanishing not just from the sight, but from the mind -- to great satisfaction of the city community. The purpose of the transformation was a utilitarian one: buildings of Soviet Modernism underwent their first *kapitalnij remont*, a major renovation, since their inauguration 30-40 years ago. The extent of erratic *remont* ventures would considerably differ, ranging from basic repair and repaint to energy-saving reconstruction and modernization; the uniform finishing in some shade of white would lead the uncoordinated undertakings meanwhile to a remarkably coherent result. (Fig. 1-4)

In November 2017, while most of the *remont* works in Minsk had just been or were about to be completed, the young Spanish architects Anna and Eugeni Bach staged an experiment in a very different part of Europe: they covered an icon of Classic Modernism, Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion, in white. For a week an opaque whiteness concealed the flamboyant gathering of materials, which had been painstakingly restored some years earlier. White vinyl



Figure 1: House of Planning Organisations Gosstroj BSSR, architect V. Malyshev (1978). Source: Author

Figure 2: Service facilities of a residential block, architect G. Syssoev et al. (1967-76). Source: Author



Figure 3: Hotel Belarus, architect L. Pogorelov (1975-87)
Source: https://img-fotki.yandex.ru/get/6823/22264419.1c5/0_82b18_8d09765c_XXL.jpg © Борис Мавлютов

sheets veiled travertine from Italian Tivoli, dark-green marble from Greece, green-veined marble from the Aosta valley, honey-colored ‘onyx doré’ from the Bou Hanifia quarry in Algeria (Solà-Morales/Cirici 2000). A thin uniform layer obscured the bright luster of brass chromium plating and reflections on colored glass sheets.

By turning a pavilion into a white 1:1 abstract model of itself, the Bachs aimed to bring attention to a topic, too often neglected in the architectural history of modernism: the relationship between architecture and materiality. They criticised historiographical “whitewashing”, which generically dematerializes modernist architecture, ignoring a long evolution of its relationship with materiality, one of whose twists and turns the Barcelona Pavilion so poignantly marks (Peluso 2017).

Unwittingly their experiment re-contextualized the recent conversion of Minsk modernist buildings, transforming it into an unplanned collateral event: Minsk’s uniform white re-addressed the same questions to a different modernist epoch. The bold whiteness, which swallowed with disappointing ignorance the historical substance, became an invitation to scrutinize the Soviet chapter of the relationship between materiality and modernist architecture. The oddly similar outcome of undertakings in Minsk and Barcelona evoked the deeply rooted interconnectedness of apparently distant Soviet and Classical Modernisms. One was a temporary condition caused by a playful artistic experiment while the other one a prosaic dead-end *kapitalnij remont*. Nevertheless, their shared whiteness implied, that a contemplation of the current state of modernist architecture in the “most socialist” city should not forgo its affiliation to the global Modernist Movement.



Figure 4: Residential building, architect A. Belokon (1986)
Source: Author

“The Most Soviet” City

“Minsk is one of the most boring cities in the world” — in 1955 Bertold Brecht joked, that Soviet Realism could not begin before a book, opening with this sentence, was written (Heym 1965). The Belorussian capital at that point was about to complete its major reconstruction project, the socialist-realist Lenin Avenue, rising from the ashes after Nazi occupation, which left in 1944 barely 50,000 of its 250,000 pre-war inhabitants living and less than 10% of building stock undamaged (Bohn 2008). This pompous classicist ensemble first gave Minsk its “most socialist” moniker: the Lenin avenue is considered today the largest coherent socialist-realist architectural complex still in existence.

The decades following Khrushchev’s reforms of 1954-62 galvanized the “most socialist” title. Minsk turned into a bustling industrial and scientific site and a demographical supernova, bursting with a “quicksand society” (Lewin 1985) of a displaced rural population moving into the cities. Already by the 1970s, the city’s population had bypassed the one million mark. Big construction volumes, economic well-being, self-management within the Soviet political confines, made Minsk an exemplary ground for Soviet modernist architecture and city planning.

Minsk remains singular and persists as the „most socialist“ city in post-socialist Europe: the independent Republic of Belarus sees itself continuing the socialist tradition of its predecessor. As the socialist epoch has not officially passed, the socialist architectural body, to a significant extent still state-owned, lacks the prerequisite historical closure to be considered historical heritage. Minsk’s architecture endures as a part of a perpetuated socialist present, escaping the usual post-socialist fate of modernist buildings: neither abandoned and dismantled, nor musealized and reverted to its inaugural state. Minsk’s modernist architecture co-evolves with the political system in a life cycle, prolonged by political will.

Putting on a Face

Most of the modernist buildings in Minsk were designed by architects from the major planning organization *Institut Minskproekt*, founded as a 300-head-strong *Minskgorproekt* in 1959 and employing 1,200 architects and city planners at its apogee in the early 1980s (Fig. 5, 6). Coinciding with the time of the Institute’s foundation, reinforced concrete became the major building material produced in the Soviet Union (Davies/Ilic 2011:221). Both events resulted from the implementation of reforms, introduced by Nikita Khrushchev’s government after the death of Stalin in 1953. The course of the reforms reorganized building industries (hence concrete), decentralized architectural production (hence local planning institution) and re-established Modernism as a mainstream architectural style in the Soviet Union.

Despite the common connotation of Soviet modernism with “concrete deserts”, exposed concrete surfaces in Minsk architecture remained elusive. A screen of finish always separated the concrete structure of modernist buildings from the public eye: ubiquitous granite or marble split on grey cement supplied the infamous greyish look; ceramic or clay tiles, glass mosaics, plasterwork or a coat of paint indulged with a glimpse of color and pattern. The irregularity of natural stone, the tangible scale of tiles or the cheerful appeal of ornament softened the bold visual message of bearing parts.



Figure 5/6: Institut Minskproekt, architect L. Pogorelov (1975) The office high-rise, initially grey, emanates the renovation whiteness. The granite-sand-finish of the meeting hall extension still withstands to a certain grade, absorbing the white paint. Source: Author



Figure 6: Institut Minskproekt, architect L. Pogorelov (1975) Source: Author

One of the terms, which Russian construction terminology provides for a layer that masks the load-bearing structure, is *oblitsovka*. It literally means “putting-on-a-face”— a verdict, demoting the structure beneath as faceless and aesthetically insignificant. It empowers an external surface, the boundary, to manifest the architectural form.

While concrete endured as the main construction material of Soviet Modernism, the *oblitsovka* became the dominant preoccupation of its planners. The protocol of the meeting on 2.3.1971 of the BSSR Ministry of Building Materials and BSSR Ministry of Architecture (BGANTD, f.68) provides an insight into architects’ material semantics: They pleaded for a wider range of interior and exterior decorative tiles, durable synthetic paints and modern interior and exterior plastic coatings, requested improvement of builders’ plastering skills – while failing to mention any wishes regarding the quality of the major construction materials, like concrete, steel, brick or wood. Surfaces, not solids shaped the spatial realm of Belorussian modernists.

Such superficial inclination strikes as anachronistic considering the zeitgeist of the time when it was voiced. Contemporary architecture all over the world, from Algiers and Brazil to Yugoslavia and Zambia, indulged in exposed materiality and savored gravity. The New Brutalists conceived the “appearance of the untreated” as essential: “untreated brick, untreated concrete, untreated steel, untreated paint, untreated gold, untreated lacquer,” and aspired to the “as found” state of materials, like “the woodiness of wood, the sandiness of sand” (Deschermeier 2017). Paragons of Brutalism, the Smithsons, emphasized the material qualities of architecture and considered the aspects of process and making as inherent in architectural construction (Heuvel 2017:31). Producing the perfect concrete was on its way to becoming “modernism’s philosopher’s stone” (Forty 2014:25), while publications in Playboy profiled carnal, seductive qualities of modernist architecture (Jacobs 2016).

It does not mean though, that the Soviet architects were unaware about contemporary developments abroad. Magazines from socialist countries, as well as *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui*, *Architecture Abroad*, *Architecture of the USA*, *Architectural Forum*, and *Domus* were easily accessible in libraries and available for subscription. Soviet periodicals and books, as well, kept their readers posted about architectural tendencies in front and behind the Curtain. Moreover, architects were encouraged to critically use the Western experience, being reminded of Lenin’s legacy, as for example in a manual on architectural aesthetic (Tsirkunov 1970:195):

Without capitalist cultural heritage, we can’t build socialism. There is nothing else to build communism from, but capitalism’s leftovers.

The Brutalist aesthetic even had its own Soviet apologists, like Dr. Alexandra Suzdaltseva. On the pages of *Architecture of the USSR*, she propagated the psychological superiority of concrete tectonics over novel finishing materials. Her studies and research trips around the Soviet Union and Eastern and Western Europe were granted by the Ministry of Building Materials of the USSR and culminated in two books extolling the virtues of *liquid stone*, published in 1972 and 1981 (Suzdaltseva 1972; 1981).

Few architects shared her enthusiasm though. The Brutalist material of choice for Minsk planners became the exposed brick, while concrete surfaces remained concealed by at least a coat of paint.

In an attempt to match the style that celebrated the substance of untreated constructive materials, the Soviet modernists came up with a perplexing solution: they applied an *oblitsovka* to depict it. A coating, which basically enacted its own absence, became ubiquitous. Brick-sized ceramic tiles, dark-red to sandy-yellow, called *cabantchik*, or “piglet”, due to their reverse side’s resemblance to a pig’s snout, mimicked exposed brick walls throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. The *cabantchik* was not well suited for the continental climate. After a few winters, condensation frozen in the mortar peeled off considerable amounts of tiles (Fig. 7, 8). The real brick walls of Soviet “Brutalism” were exposed not due to the embracing of their physical presence, but out of ignorance to its physical qualities. Soviet architects were obviously inclined to take the “putting-on-a-face” materials literally at their face value – the appearances, not the substance, were the decisive matter of architectural consideration.

Indeed, the reluctance to immerse into the objective reality of construction materials can be explained with their infamously inferior quality. Architects commonly attributed a failure to produce an architecture “as it should be” (*kak dolzhno*) or “as the others do” (*kak u drugix*) to a poor performance on the side of their nemesis, the construction industry.

Their discontent was mutual. Architects’ alienation from the realities of the construction industry provoked contemporaneous diatribes from the latter. The previously mentioned protocol of the meeting between the BSSR Ministry of Building Materials and the BSSR Ministry of Architecture (BGANTD f.68) holds a long record of complaints from construction sector deputies about architects’ notorious disinterest in the product range they offered. The architects’ specific demands for modern looking coatings and a routine disappointment with delivery were accompanied by a remarkable disengagement with the making processes, local manufacturing possibilities, and resources.

The Body of Work in the Eye of Beholder

In postwar global modernism the breach of the Brutalist materiality was perceived by the contemporaries as an intense bodily assault, which the very first feedback reflects: Colin Rowe was terrified by the “absence of a facade” at the La Tourette complex, which he saw as monstrous body with eyes at the front (Rowe 1987:187); Adrian Stokes’ shocked response to the early works utilised the vocabulary of bodily violence: cold shoulder, gashed by slots, injuries of time, inflicted by maker scars (Stokes 1978:243); Vincent Scully contrasted “dangerous” and “hurting” concrete forms, “slotted and bashed” surfaces of Paul Rudolph with the “cradled” and “lovingly cared for” ones of Le Corbusier (Scully 1964:332).

The contemporary practices of confrontation with architecture were no less personal and physical: An encounter *in persona* and *in situ* was at the time an established mode of engagement with architecture. Reyner Banham, who announced the “New Brutalism” in 1955 – at the time when Khrushchev’s reforms were reinstalling international informational conduits – insisted on not talking about a building that one has not seen for oneself (Vidler 2014:43). Nikolaus Pevsner’s iconic writings on buildings of England (1951-1974) with accompanying photos were a guide to, not a substitute for, the direct objective encounter. This attitude endured for decades. Even in the 1990s, Beatrice Colomina’s approach to discussing the work of two twentieth-



Figure 7: During reconstruction works on the cinema "Electron" (serial project, built in 1981) missing tiles, mimicking brick, were replaced by an imitation themselves: the peeled off areas (on the right of the Electron-sculpture) were covered with plaster, onto which a tile pattern was marked. Source: dariuss, <https://dariuss.livejournal.com/509940.html>



Figure 8: The peeled-off tile cladding of the cinema "Sovremennik" (built after a serial project in 1971), imitating exposed brick, reveals the real brick wall beneath. Source: dariuss, <https://dariuss.livejournal.com/500994.html>

century architects entirely in terms of photographs of their buildings caused a lot of irritation among architects and critics alike (Hultzsch 2014:37).

However, for the Soviet architects, who seldom traveled, photographs served as the main source of architectural information. The moiré of low-raster images was a medium, which sufficiently supplied the Soviet modernists with new ideas on striking outlines and silhouettes, failed to communicate the physical essence of constructions, which so much preoccupied their colleagues elsewhere. The majority of Soviet architects never had a physical encounter with the presented appearances to connect to their photographic depiction.

Retinal Architecture

It was, of course, not just the acquaintance with current architectural events via magazine photographs, that conditioned the Soviet architects' alienated attitude towards material substance. The immaterialization stance left a long trail in the history of the Modern Movement.

Parting from physical reality was initially considered programmatic for the experience of modernity: Marx's "All that is solid melts into the air" verbalized its basic spatial concept, valid through the first quarter of the 20th century (Heynen 1999). Six ephemeral surfaces defined the ideal architectural space, the "box", of Purists, led by young Le Corbusier. A similarly abstract spatial agenda was set by avant-garde Russian and Soviet artists and architects. So, the constructivist leader Moissei Ginzburg declared:

Every architect works with separate surfaces and planes (walls) and their spatial complexes. Therefore, the limits of his agency oscillate between surface and space (Ginzburg 1929:76).

However, the programmatic outlook of Western modernism evolved during the late 1920s and the early 1930s. An abstract geometric realm of Heroic Modernism made way for the vital sensations of objective reality: Rationalism called for a down-to-earth common sense, "lucidity and wisdom" (Frampton 2007); the buildings of the New Objectivity movement made the mundane constructive solutions and building process evident; The Barcelona Pavilion celebrated in 1929 the end of the reign of concealing plaster surfaces and a return of material sensuality in architectural space.

Already by 1936, Le Corbusier himself boasted about his unwillingness to indulge in abstractions. He called for an "essentially concrete and realistic" art and started applying boulder stones and exposed wood in his works (Heer 2009).

In 1932 Soviet architecture started to operate under premises of "socialist realism", too. The name, however, was a misnomer: Soviet architecture remained within the confines of abstract form-giving and concealing plaster surfaces. It welcomed an aptitude of "ocularcentric metaphysics" to dominate, secure, and control (Kleinberg-Levin 1993). The socialist-realist aesthetic dogma of a hypocritically prudish high-culture, of eternal and sublime beauty, considered an objectification of aesthetic experience vulgar. The virtue of applied materials defined not their profane physical substance, but their symbolic content.

Khrushchev's modernization reforms, introduced in the mid-1950s, did not challenge the existing aesthetic paradigm. While brutalist and empiricist derivatives of Western postwar modernism conquered architectural minds across the continents, the revived modernism in the Soviet Union basically dwelled on the abstract spatial concepts from the 1920s, whose evolution had remained frozen in time by an imposed state control since 1932. Moreover, the dozen years of socialist-realist aesthetic dogma cultivated a deep disregard of everything mundane, utilitarian or technical. Soviet architects, bred with a beauty doctrine of the sublime and the exclusive, could not possibly empathize with the valorization of the trivial, down-to-earth and pragmatic by their foreign colleagues. The architects, who strived to produce architectural shapes corresponding to the international zeitgeist, were incapable of accepting either the egalitarian ethics or the "as found" aesthetics that formed them.

The conflict of the aesthetic doctrine with the challenges of new Khrushchev's programs, which targeted the rapid industrialization of architectural production, was never resolved. Soviet architecture continued seeing itself as a part of a sublime cultural sphere rather than of a profane rationale of the construction industry. Building materials, modern technologies, traditional crafts or other objectivities rested therefore on a rather peripheral position in the Soviet modernist architectural outlook. The volume "On Aesthetic Nature of Architecture", published in 1970 by the State Committee for Construction in the USSR, put it clearly:

The most important aspect of the creative process of architectural works is not their materiality, but the ideal statement ..., the technical forms and methods, used for the realisation of the idea, are auxiliary agents in the artwork of architecture (Tsirkunov 1970:138).

While the Western colleagues embraced the materiality with a postwar élan, Soviet modernist architects aimed for an outcome, that Juhani Pallasmaa, the first Director of the Finnish Architectural Museum, envisioned - to great acclaim - as the doom of modern architecture. "Retinal" architecture, disconnected from the language of the body, isolated in the cool and distant realm of vision, was for him disturbing "image products detached from existential depth and sincerity" (Pallasmaa 2007:30). "The detachment of construction from the realities of matter and craft", he lamented, "turns architecture into stage sets for the eye, into a scenography devoid of the authenticity of matter and construction" (Pallasmaa 2007:31). This detachment, I would argue, became one of the most distinguishing features of mainstream Soviet modernist architecture.

Masses, Brought Together in Light

*As far as he could see lay fields of the snowgrass, white and shining.
There were groves of white trees, with white leaves growing on them.
The sun shone, and it was windless, and everything was white.
Ursula K. Le Guin The Left Hand of Darkness (1969)*

The white polymers, which conceal today the already forgotten original surfaces of modernist icons like Hotels Belarus and Yubileiny, the Sports Palace, the House of Fashion, the Exhibition Pavilion, the Market Hall or the Musical School No.1 were greeted with enthusiasm by their

surviving creators. Igor Yesman, the architect of the 15th Corpus of the Polytechnic Institute, was commissioned to supervise renovation works on his building, probably the only Soviet modernist edifice ever praised by an American president (Fig. 13,14). He quit the contract early, annoyed by mismanagement on the site. Nevertheless, he did not fail to express his appreciation of the "mesmerising new finishings" (Selitskaja 2010).

The architect of the Hotel Belarus (Fig. 3), Lev Pogorelov, publicly referred to reconstruction measures, which left nothing original on the whitened building but the hotel's silhouette, as its "salvation". The hotel administration claims the building remains "the most recognisable architectural object of the Belorussian capital" (www.hotel-belarus.com).

The new white surfaces strip materiality from the Soviet modernist buildings with the power of 21st-century technological know-how. Their radiant brightness brings architecture into close proximity of the transcendental "magnificent play of masses brought together in light", envisioned almost a century ago by Le Corbusier (Le Corbusier 1923). Whether regrettable or not, the white metamorphosis magnifies the inherent quality of Soviet Modernism -- its paramount estrangement from architectural materiality.

The Soviet Modernist architecture is obviously in no need of historiography or critical artistic gestures to strip itself of material reality: Western historiography reduces the representation of the modernist movement to a short initial period, distinguished by the dematerialising attitudes; Soviet modernism, apparently, never saw its spatial paradigm evolve much beyond this basic modernist experience. The evolution of the relationship of mainstream Soviet architecture with materiality was effectively interrupted by the imposed socialist-realist dogma in 1932 and appears not to have regained its momentum since then. As the Khrushchev reforms of 1954-62 re-introduced Modernism, they failed to restore the arrested relationship with materiality, which remained within the confines of the socialist-realist sublime paradigm. The reopened information channels – predominantly printed periodicals with photographs as their main medium – could not help the Soviet architectural community to join the zeitgeist of infatuation with a material substance. The illustrations in magazines became an excellent mediator of modern shapes and inspired many spectacular constructions all over the Soviet Union. The formalistic attitude, however, disabled the majority of Soviet architects from appreciating the ethical and aesthetic principles behind those shapes. The prevailing doctrine programmatically alienated architects from the realities of the mundane construction process and seriously handicapped the search for reasonable and cost-effective solutions. Though it was in a remarkable dissonance with the official goals of optimization of architectural production, the contra-productive paradigm was never successfully challenged in the modernist architecture of the "most socialist city". The common approval of the current white state of Minsk modernist buildings suggests that the next generation uncritically accepted the attitude towards materiality inherited from the Soviet predecessors.

The disappearance of the old Soviet coating materials, however, offers a rare chance to challenge this ongoing suppression of engagement with the material reality of architecture. The new whiteness spotlights the objects, which had to become invisible to get noticed (at least by this research): the systematically overlooked Soviet building materials, in their physical substance,

with their own history of production, transport, application, geographical origins, chemical composition, mechanical qualities, technological conditions (Fig. 9-13). No longer existing as an image on a retina, they are ready for an objectification.

Oxana Gourinovitch is a fellow at the Graduiertenkolleg “Identität und Erbe”, Technische Universität Berlin. After working as an architect in Berlin and Amsterdam, she researches for her Ph.D.-project on postwar Soviet architecture. Her main areas of interest are architectural history and heritage studies.



Figure 9: The 15th Corpus of the Polytechnic Institute, architects I. Yesman, V. Anikin (1975-83), before renovation.
Source: Anonym, <http://www.times.bntu.by/faculties/294-istoriya-15-go-korpusa-bntu>



Figure 10: The 15th Corpus of the Polytechnic Institute after renovation..
Source: Maria Krupskaya, http://www.websmi.by/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/IMG_7183-e1499444504360.jpg



Figure 11: This building corner offers a retrospective of Soviet Modernist coatings: concrete construction is covered by granite sand and light-yellow matt ceramic tiles, both partially missing; several shades of paint on the balcony screen of, probably, asbestos; blue glazed ceramic tiles decorating the street-level-wall; recent overpainting with light colors.
Figure 12: Aluminium-coated panels. Source: Author



Figure 13: Overpainted mosaic tiles.
Source: Author

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Central staircase in the Hotel Obir. Source: Gerhard Maurer

Hotel Obir: Contrapuntal Architecture in the Village

Lukas Vejník

In 1977, Hotel Obir, a modernist tourist accommodation, that landed in the middle of a gable roof landscape of a remote village in southern Austria, opened its doors to the public. Designed by Ilija Arnautovic, a well-known architect who worked in Tito's Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the project was a rare example of an early cross border joint venture. Hotel Obir became a meeting place in the bilingual region around Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla. In this piece, I seek to explain how the cooperation between an Austrian communal administration and an architect from Yugoslavia became possible, more than a decade before the fall of the iron curtain. Furthermore, I will discuss what is special about the architecture of Hotel Obir. Why should this building be considered as part of the region's heritage but also why is it closed since 2003? Is special about the architecture of Hotel Obir, why should this building be considered as part of the region's heritage, and finally why is it closed since 2003?

An extraordinary cross border Joint Venture

Ilija Arnautovic is in his late forties when he gets the approval to build a new hotel in Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla, the southernmost village in Carinthia/Austria, in 1971. Based in Ljubljana, Arnautovic, a former student of Edvard Ravnikar, is already known for his contributions to the Yugoslav social housing sector.¹ In today's capital of Slovenia he was responsible for the

¹ Mercina, Andrej: Arhitekt Ilija Arnautović - socializem v slovenski arhitekturi, 2006, S.11

construction of the iconic BS3-towers, in Belgrade he was part of the architects' committee for the planned city Novi Beograd, where he realized the so-called Televizorke housing project. The complex consists of two slabs, which are made of prefabricated concrete elements. It received its name from the expressive TV-shaped window frames. Arnavotic's architecture is characterized by a playful-rationalism, where the functional meets the expressive. The project in Austria was not just his first commission outside the federal republic of Yugoslavia, but also his first draft for a hotel to be realized.

How did this cross-border joint venture between an architect from Yugoslavia and an Austrian village become possible? In Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla, more than one-third of the population is part of the ethnic group of the Carinthian Slovenes. For centuries, the region has developed trade relations to Kranj, the neighboring district in today's northern Slovenia. With the task to build a tourist accommodation that provides 60 beds and a hall to host events with up to 300 guests, the Posojilnica, a bilingual cooperative bank, bought the piece of land in the center of the village.² This plot was designated for a future hotel by the local administration. In fact, the Posojilnica was the only applicant for this building task. For the purpose of the construction, the South Carinthian Tourist Society was constituted.³ In the beginning, Alpetour, a travel agency from Ljubljana was also among the investors. The investment was less driven by the desire to bring tourists from Yugoslavia to Austria than to deepen the economic relations between Kranj and southern Carinthia. Six years later, in 1977, the Hotel Obir, named after the local mountain Hochobir, opened its doors to the public. The initial amount of beds, desired by the client, almost doubled throughout the planning process. At the opening, 120 beds were available.

Face to Face with the Clock Tower

The result was a piece of modern architecture in a rural setting, a counterpart to the adjacent clock tower of the village church and the traditional gable roof landscape in the center of Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla (see image 1). But Hotel Obir seems out of context only at first glance. Arnavotic's draft reacts to the neighboring buildings and the topography of the mountain village with great care. The one story high base of the building steps back from the street, leaving space for a passage and a front yard next to the main entrance. At the backside, a spacious terrace is hovering over the parking lots. The ground floor offered smooth transitions between reception, TV-room, coffee house, terrace and event space. The latter could be partitioned into three sections with foldable walls, in contrast when folded, passers-by can look through the building. In contrast to this playful transparent public area, the hotel rooms have been arranged in a rational cross-shaped structure that stands on a concrete shaft, leaving a gap between the ground and upper floors (see images 2, 3 and 4). The area for guests is distributed among four floors – organized around a central winding staircase. When standing in front of a guest room, visitors are able to see parts from the floors below and above. Corner windows are giving the 48 rooms a distinctive appearance from the outside. From inside each room is characterized by a special view, either to the center or the nearby mountain range.

² Schabus, Robert: Hotel Obir (movie), 2008

³ Wurm, Willibald: So entstand Hotel Obir (movie), 1977



Image 1: Hotel Obir in the early 1980s. Photograph by Peter Jenko

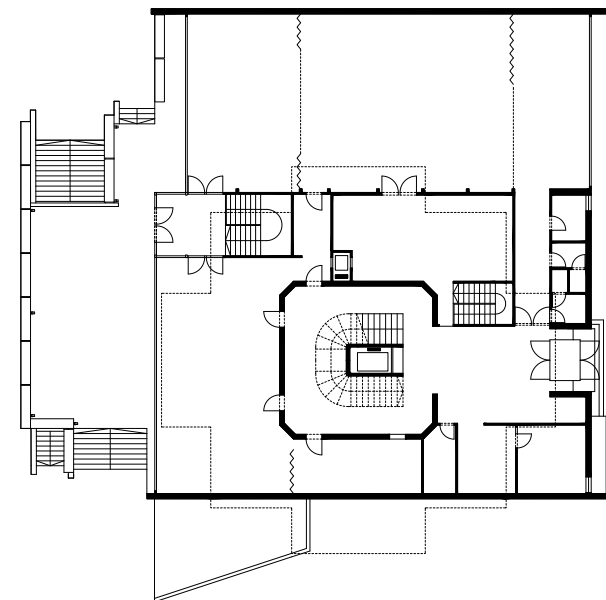


Image 2: Ground floor plan of Hotel Obir

When standing on one of the steep slopes that surround Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla, Hotel Obir can be seen as a modernist counterpart to a homogenous historical village core. Thus, from the steep slopes around, it looks like an implant, whereas from the center it was meant to be interwoven with the village and its surrounding landscape.

Times are changing

During the almost thirty years of its operation, this modern implant became a central meeting point in the region. Almost everybody who lived in Eisenkappel/Železna Kapla, or visited the village between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 2000s, has a story related to the building. From the musicians who were playing at weddings or carnivals, to the young generation growing up in the eighties that went to the hotel discotheque on weekends. Even though the village is in a remote location, it prospered for a long time. There was a vital wood, pulp, and basalt production ensuring job opportunities in the region. As mentioned above, the support was less driven by the incentive to bring tourists from Yugoslavia to Austria, than to deepen the economic relations between Kranj and southern Carinthia. All these industries have vanished over the last four decades, causing an exodus that could be witnessed in many Austrian rural areas. First, the pulp mill closed down, followed by the basalt quarry and the biggest sawmill. Their significance cannot be underestimated for the largest hotel in the village. In 2003, the South-Carinthian-Tourist-Society originally constituted for the purpose of developing the Hotel Obir, finally sold the property to one of the former managers. In 2006, due to a tragic accident of the owner's son, who was supposed to run the Hotel, the building again changed ownership. Ever since it has been part of an Italian investor's portfolio. Initial plans for a basic renovation failed. Until today, Hotel Obir remains vacant and since 2012 the investor wants to get rid of the building again. In the meantime, half of the former shops and bars of Eisenkappel's main square have closed down. In this context, Hotel Obir is just the most prominent symbol for ongoing decay in the region – a monument of the rural exodus.

Between Authenticity and Decay

If one compares postcards from the early 1980s with the current appearance, it seems as if nothing has changed. In the almost thirty years of operation, the coffee house was the only part of the building, that became subject to a minor transformation. By moving the facade, the guest area was enlarged and the entrance direction on the riverside changed. Everything else is in its authentic state. The historical value of the Hotel Obir cannot be overlooked. It was the only building realized by Ilija Arnautovic outside of the territory of former Yugoslavia. It is a built example of a cross-border cooperation long before Austria and Slovenia became members of the European Union and more than a decade before the fall of the iron curtain. Thus, Hotel Obir represents openness between neighbors which is a timeless message that is especially relevant in times of growing fences in other EU border regions. Furthermore, since the closure in 2003, the community lost an important space to host events in the center of the village. While the future of Hotel Obir remains unclear, time is limited for further action. At the 40th Anniversary of the opening, the roof is leaking, causing water to enter the concrete core. Traces of rust and moist appear on the walls and the edges of the ceilings. The brutalist terrace is falling apart. Roots are blowing up the washed concrete slabs and plant troughs will fall off

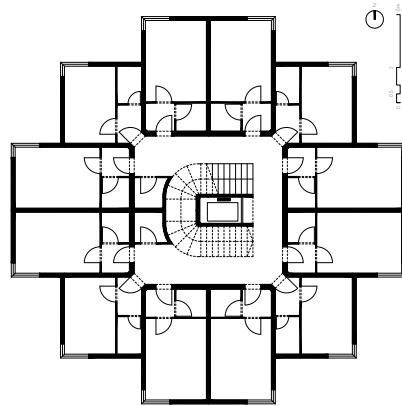


Image 3: Typical upper floor plan of Hotel Obir

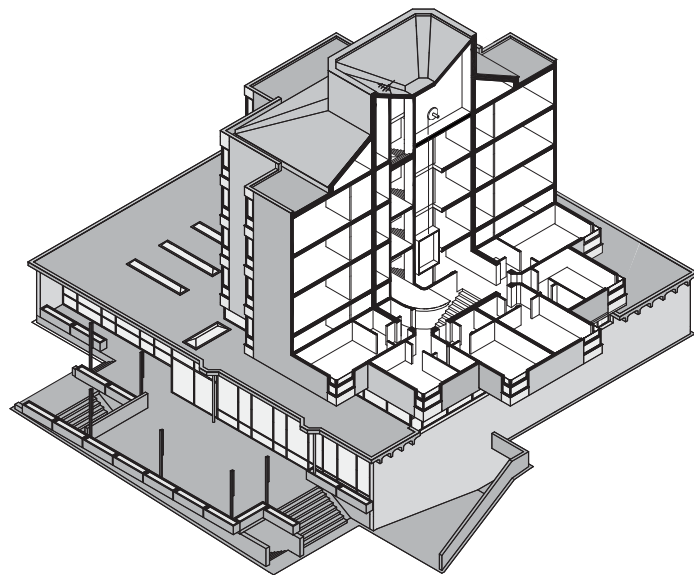


Image 4: Axonometry of Hotel Obir

soon. For the rehabilitation as a hotel, it seems too late, because water ingress may have already caused irreversible damage. Perhaps the only option that remains for this unique contrapuntal architecture is to support it on its transformation to become a picturesque ruin.

Lukas Vejník is a University Lecturer at Technical University of Vienna's Department of Architecture and Spatial Planning. He is part of the 'Initiative zur Erhaltung des Hotel Obir' ('Initiative for the Preservation of Hotel Obir'). Through interventions and exhibitions, the transdisciplinary initiative raises awareness for this unique piece of architecture. For further details and a virtual tour through the building visit www.hotelobir.at



Perret's urban ensemble with church in the back around Oscar Niemeyer square before renovation in 2011.
Source: Katharina Frieling

Die von Auguste Perret umgebaute Stadt Welchen sozialen und räumlichen Mehrwert hat „Le Havre“ heutzutage?

Pedro Gomes

Die Stadt Le Havre, am Ärmelkanal in der Normandie, wurde während des Zweiten Weltkrieges schwer bombardiert. Die zerstörte Fläche wurde nach dem Plan eines Teams des Architekten Auguste Perret, von 1945 bis 1964 umgebaut. Unter vielen Wiederaufbauten ist Le Havre bekannt für seine außergewöhnliche Einheit, was ein maßgeblicher Grund für die Prämierung zum UNESCO Welterbe war. Die anderen Aspekte waren die hervorragenden Beispiele einer Gebäudeart, die architektonische Anordnung, wie auch die Landschaftsplanung und der bedeutende Einfluss auf die Entwicklung der Architektur. Die Planung verbindet die Überlegung der alten Stadtstruktur und der existierenden Geschichte mit den neuen Ideen der Stadtplanung und Bautechnik. Sie ist ein hervorragendes Nachkriegsbeispiel der Stadtplanung und Architektur auf Grundlage der Einheit der Methodik und der Verwendung von vorgefertigten Bauelementen, der systematischen Nutzung eines modularen Rasters, als auch der innovativen Nutzung des Betons. Mit einer Gesamtfläche von fast 150 Hektar und über 12.000 Wohneinheiten, kommerziellen, administrativen oder religiösen Gebäuden gehört dieses Stadtzentrum mit zu den kohärentesten der modernen Architektur der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts.

In dieser Arbeit wird auf die Genese und das städtebauliche Konzept der von Auguste Perret wiederaufgebauten Stadt eingegangen. Sodann wird der Verlauf dargestellt, in dem Le Havre

zum Weltkulturerbe ernannt wurde und eine kurze Einschätzung des bleibenden Mehrwerts von Perrets Le Havre begründet.

Die Stadtplanung in der Nachkriegszeit in Frankreich

Bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg war die Stadtplanung in Frankreich eine Aufgabe der lokalen Kommune unter der Aufsicht einer vom Präfekten ausgewählten Person. Während der Wiederaufbauzeit, die von 1945 bis 1975 verlief, jedoch hatte der französische Staat das Sagen über Initiativen und Planungen. Der Staat wollte durch diese Alleinherrschaft versuchen dem enormen Bedarf an Wohnungen gerecht zu werden. Die Planungsgesetze dieser Zeit waren das Ergebnis einer Ausnahmesituation, die durch das Ausmaß der Zerstörungen des Zweiten Weltkrieges entstand.¹

Nach der Eroberung im Jahr 1940 hatten die Deutschen die Kontrolle über die strategischen zivilen als auch militärischen Anlagen. Dadurch blieb den Alliierten keine andere Wahl als diese in Luftangriffen zu bombardieren. Darüber hinaus wurden viele Städte wurden im Zweiten Weltkrieg durch die systematischen Zerstörungen, der sich zurückziehenden deutschen Wehrmacht vernichtet.

Im Zweiten Weltkrieg war Frankreich das am zweithäufigsten von Bombardements der Alliierten getroffene Land und zählte mehr als 60.000 Opfer durch Luftangriffe. Nach dem Krieg stellte sich die Frage des Wiederaufbaus - wird die alte Stadt rekonstruiert oder eine neue Stadt gebaut, die sich nach modernen Bedürfnissen ausrichtet? Durch die Zerstörungen und der nicht mehr erkennbaren alten Stadtstruktur, standen diese Städte vor einem sehr tragischen Moment, aber auch vor einer einmaligen Gelegenheit. Unter den betroffenen Städten zählte man Saint-Dié-des-Vosges, Saint-Malo als auch Le Havre zu den drei größten Projekten des Wiederaufbaus.

Die alte Stadt Saint-Malo wurde zu 80% zerstört.²Für den Wiederaufbau waren der Stadtplaner Marc Brillaud de Laujardière als auch der Architekt Louis Arretche zuständig. Während des Wiederaufbaus wurde Saint-Malo auf Grundlage der alten Stadt rekonstruiert. Nach der Befreiung der Stadt Saint-Dié-des-Vosges wurde Le Corbusier als Berater für den Wiederaufbau ernannt. Seine Pläne für die moderne Rekonstruktion galten als unrealistisch und wurden somit nicht realisiert. Erst nach mehreren Überarbeitungen wurde der Wiederaufbau genehmigt.³Der Architekt Auguste Perret war zuständig für die Stadt Le Havre. Er plante einen rationellen Wiederaufbau nach den Theorien des strukturellen Klassizismus auf einem Raster von 6,24 m als architektonisches Gesamtkunstwerk. Aufgrund der Umsetzung rationalistischer Prinzipien in der Planung, als auch wegen der innovativen Art Beton einzusetzen, gilt Le Havre als ein Vorbild für den Wiederaufbau in Frankreich.

Die Stadt Le Havre in der Nachkriegszeit

Während des Zweiten Weltkriegs wurde Le Havre regelmäßig bombardiert aufgrund des strategischen Charakters seines Hafens. Die wiederholten Angriffe hatten am 5. September 1944 ihren Höhenpunkt erreicht, als innerhalb einer Stunde das Stadtzentrum und die Umgebung durch eine noch nie zuvor gesehene Bombardierung komplett in Schutt und Asche



Bild 1: Zerstörtes Zentrum von Le Havre 1944

Quelle: <http://deuxiemeguerremondia.forumactif.com/t461-st-lo-apres-bombardement>



Bild 2: Blick auf die „rue de Paris“ in Le Havre im September 1944. Quelle:<http://www.lefigaro.fr/histoire/2014/09/05/26001-20140905ARTFIG00276-70-ans-apres-le-havre-s-interroge-toujours-sur-sa-destruction.php>

gelegt wurden (siehe Bilder 1 und 2). Als die Stadt am 12. September von den Alliierten befreit wurde, ist die Bilanz tragisch. 5.000 Bewohner Le Havres wurden während des Krieges getötet, 12.500 Gebäude wurden zerstört und 80.000 Menschen hatten kein Dach mehr über dem Kopf und waren somit schutzlos.⁴

Der Minister des Wiederaufbaus und der Stadtplanung, Raoul Dautry, ernannte Auguste Perret für den Wiederaufbau von Le Havre. Zuvor hatte sich Perret bereits mit einem Entwurf an dem Wiederaufbau eines Turmes für den Platz Alphonse-Fiquet in Amiens beteiligt. Außerdem war er einer der einzigen Architekten der zu dieser Zeit ein Team von Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern zur Verfügung hatte. Diese zwei Gründe erklären, warum das MRU (Ministère de la Reconstruction et de l'Urbanisme - Ministerium für Wiederaufbau und Städtebau) Perret als Architekt für den Wiederaufbau von Le Havre ausgewählt hatte.⁵

Auguste Perret und sein Team

Um den Wiederaufbau von Le Havre gut zu verstehen, ist es vor allem wichtig den Chef-Designer kennen zu lernen. Auguste Perret war zu dem Zeitpunkt bereits international bekannt. Er war in intellektuellen Kreisen etabliert und wurde in den späten 40er Jahren der unbestrittene Meister des Betons. Seine Architektur lässt sich in zwei Perioden gliedern. Die Zeit von 1900 bis 1930 stellen die großen Jahre Perrets dar. Dies verdankt er seinen ungewöhnlichen Konstruktionen. Erwähnenswert ist der Gebäudekomplex in der Franklin Straße in Paris (1903), das Champs-Élysée Theater (1913), die Notre Dame du Raincy Kirche (1922) und das Museum von „Travaux Publics“ (1936). Zugleich war Perret Leiter eines Architektenbüros und bildete viele Architekten aus, einschließlich Le Corbusier für eine kurze Zeit. Auguste Perret lehrte ebenfalls in mehreren Kursen und wurde somit der „Meister“ einer ganzen Generation.⁶

Auch wenn Perret ein Modernist war, der sich stark für den Beton einsetzte, blieb er dennoch dem klassizistischen Stil verbunden. Er versuchte die große französische Architekturtradition, die aus der Renaissance stammte, zu bewahren und zu interpretieren. Auguste Perret war somit ein „gemäßigter Modernist“⁷ mit unbestreitbarer Berühmtheit, die ihn vor Kritik bewahrte und ihm seinen Platz im Wiederaufbau Frankreichs sicherte. Perret passte in das gesuchte Profil des MRU, da er sich einerseits einen schnellen Wiederaufbau für Frankreich wünschte und andererseits versuchte dem Land den Ruhm als große Macht wiederzugeben.

Auch wenn Perret unter diesen Gesichtspunkten als ein geeigneter Architekt für die Leitung des Wiederaufbaus in Le Havre erschien, wollte er sich anfangs nicht um diese Position bewerben. Dazu bewegen ließ er sich letztlich erst unter dem Druck seiner Genossen in der Werkstatt, welche später für den Wiederaufbau von Le Havre zuständig waren. Die Gruppe der Mitarbeiter und Mitarbeiterinnen bildete eine echte Kampfgruppe für die Lehre Perrets. Dieses Team war vor allem mit einem übereinstimmenden und einzigartigen architektonischen Denken ausgestattet. Mit dem Wiederaufbau von Le Havre hatten sie die Gelegenheit die konstruktiven Ideen des alten „Meisters“ auf den Maßstab einer ganzen Stadt umzusetzen.⁸

Das Projekt von Auguste Perret

Der Masterplan entstand im Zusammenhang mit Überlegungen zur Typologie des Wohnens und modernen hygienischen Anforderungen. Diese Reflektionen beschäftigten die meisten Architektur-Bewegungen in Europa. Zu diesen zählte man unter anderen den Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) als auch die De Stijl-Bewegung in den Niederlanden. Dennoch war es Perret wichtig nicht nur modern und revolutionär zu wirken, historische Bezüge sollten auch in seiner neuen Architektur, der „Modernen Architektur“ zu finden sein. Perret behielt die alte Stadtstruktur der Vorkriegszeit mit seinen Hauptverkehrsachsen und ihren Nutzungen bei. Dabei wollte er eine klare Trennung schaffen zwischen Hauptstraßen, die von Fahrzeuge befahren werden, und den Nebenstraßen, die als Fußgängerstraßen dienten. Dem Handel wurde sein Platz hauptsächlich in den Nebenstraßen zugewiesen. Das Stadtzentrum bekam seine zerstörten Straßen und Denkmäler wieder, aber Perret und sein Team legten es in einem rechtwinkligen Raster an (siehe Bild 3). Dieses wurde von Bebauungen, die den Krieg überlebt haben, häufig unterbrochen. Das monumentale Dreieck der drei Hauptachsen verband die drei wichtigsten Orte miteinander, nämlich das Rathaus, die Tür zum Ozean und die südliche Strandpromenade (siehe Bild 4). Von nun an, bekamen diese drei Orte in der Stadt eine andere Bedeutung. Die Idee dahinter war, dass die Modernität nicht fremd wirken sollte, die Einwohnerinnen und Einwohner sollten ihre Vorkriegserinnerungen in der neuen modernen Architektur wiederfinden können.

In diesem Raster entstanden geschlossene Wohnblocks mit Innenhof, um die Raumnutzung zu rationalisieren und die Ausrichtung der Fassaden zu vereinfachen. Perret wählte ein Modul aus, welches ihm erlaubt den Raum, vom Maßstab der Stadt bis zu den einzelnen Wohnungen zu harmonisieren. Das verwendete Modul entsprach damals der idealen Spannweite eines Stahlbetonträgers von 6,24 Metern. Dies erleichterte die Vorfertigung und brachte die ganze Stadt somit in eine Einheit. Basierend auf dem Raster und der Vorfertigung, entwickelte das Team von Perret maximal optimierte Wohneinheiten, die sowohl rational waren als auch nach den hygienischen Bedürfnissen der Zeit (mehr Licht, mehr Luft und mehr Sonne in jeder Wohnung) geplant wurden. Die Verringerung der Flächen und das Optimieren der Wohnungen als auch die Verwendung von vorgefertigten Bauelementen ermöglichten die Reduzierung der Baukosten. Die stilistische Einheit, die Modernität der Wohnungen und die vorgefertigten Bauelemente, die in einem städtischen Maßstab verwendet wurden, machen aus dem Stadtzentrum Le Havres einen einzigartigen Entwurf.

Le Havre heutzutage: Weltkulturerbe und Probleme

Die Rekonstruktion durch Auguste Perret ermöglichte einen neuen städtischen Wohlstand. Dennoch wurde die Stadt seit den 1970er Jahren von dem relativen Rückgang des Handels, der Deindustrialisierung und der Ölkrise in eine schwierige Lage gebracht. Seit 1975 erlebt die Stadt einen bedeutsamen demographischen Wandel, welcher durch den Abzug der Industrie verursacht wurde. Die Stadt wurde wirtschaftlich geschwächt und hatte Probleme international wettbewerbsfähig zu bleiben.

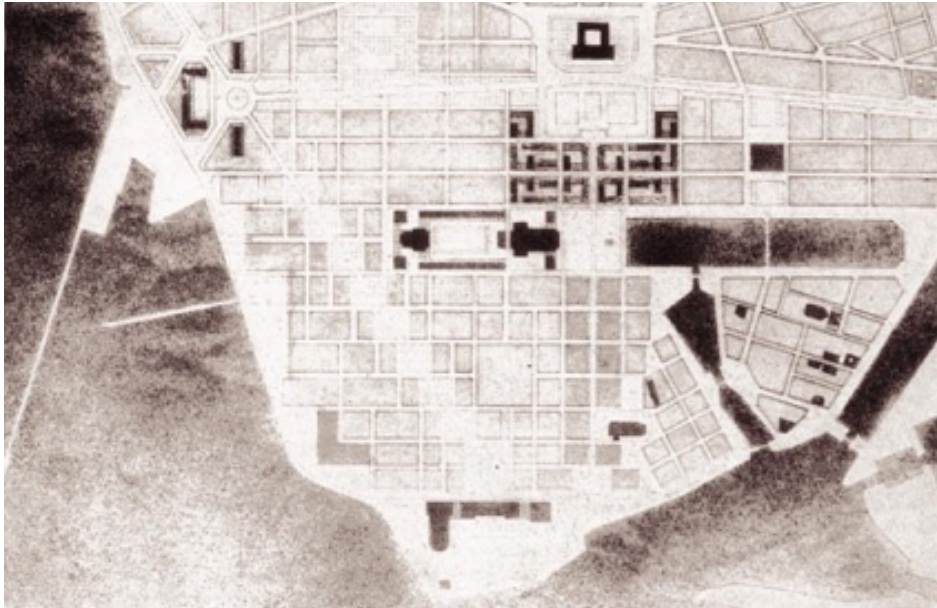


Bild 3. Planung von Auguste Perret im Januar 1946
 Quelle: <http://unesco.lehavre.fr/fr/comprendre/le-plan-general>

In der Zeit nach dem Wiederaufbau erbt die Bevölkerung aus Le Havre eine monumentale und moderne Stadt, deren strenges Raster von den Menschen jedoch schon bald als unschön empfunden wurde.⁹ Dies war insbesondere auch dadurch begründet, dass damals noch keine Bäume zu sehen waren. Es ist daher wichtig, die nackte Landschaft dieser 80 m breiten Avenue am Ende der 1950er Jahre mit der heutigen Landschaft zu vergleichen, deren Baumwipfel über die Dächer der 6-stöckigen Gebäude hinausragen. Darüber hinaus waren für weite Teile der Bevölkerung die architektonischen Absichten und die Qualität der Anordnung, sowie die Zusammenführung der öffentlichen Räume und der Blöcke nicht klar. Die Inszenierung der Stadträume wie des Rathausplatzes „Porte Océane“ (Tor zum Ozean), der Strandpromenade oder der Wasserbecken sind nicht sofort offensichtlich, und die Sehnsucht nach der alten Stadt blieb lange sehr verbreitet in der Bevölkerung. Diese bestand auch fort, obwohl der neue Komfort und die klare Sicht auf die städtische und maritime Landschaft geschätzt wurden. Im Kreis der Architektinnen und Architekten, die sich für Stadtgeschichte und Architektur interessieren, wurden die städtebaulichen Qualitäten allerdings schon früh anerkannt.¹⁰

Der Wiederaufbau führte zu einem sozio-demographischen Wandel. Die umgebaute Innenstadt, welche vor dem Krieg 46.000 Einwohner besaß, zählt heutzutage nur noch 20.000 Menschen. Mehrere Faktoren trugen zu diesem Phänomen bei. Die lange Dauer des Wiederaufbaus, der fast 20 Jahren betrug, war ein Grund dafür, dass die früheren Bewohnerinnen und Bewohner andere Wohnungslösungen außerhalb des Stadtzentrums suchten. Hinzu kam, dass die gestiegenen Mietpreise des neuen Zentrums mit ihren modernen Standards, eine direkte Konsequenz auf die sozio-demographische Verteilung hatten. Junge Familien mit mehreren Kindern hatten Schwierigkeiten ausreichend großen und günstigen Wohnraum in diesem modernen Stadtteil zu finden und mussten in den sozialen Wohnungsbau ziehen, der in der Peripherie der Stadt aufgebaut wurde. Das Stadtzentrum, das jetzt gewissermaßen dezentralisiert wurde, indem Perret die Hauptachsen nicht mehr durch das Stadtzentrum durchgehen ließ, verlor einen Großteil des Pendlertransits und der Dynamik der städtischen Begegnungen.

Dennoch entwickelte die Bevölkerung von Le Havre langsam ein Zugehörigkeitsgefühl zum Wiederaufbau von Perret, der zusehends als kulturelles Erbe anerkannt wurde.¹¹ Dieser Prozess war nicht zuletzt auch der Renovierung der Fassaden zu verdanken, im Zuge derer die Qualitäten dieser Gebäude öffentlich thematisiert wurden.¹³ Eine Wiederbelebung auf nationaler als auch internationaler Ebene fand durch mehrere Aktionen statt. Im Jahr 1983 nahmen Vertreter der Stadt Le Havre am ersten internationalen Kolloquium rekonstruierter Städte in Brest teil. Neun Jahren später nahmen sie auch an der Ausstellung des Symposiums der DOCOMOMO (Document and Conservation of Buildings, Sites and Neighbourhoods of the Modern Movement) teil, eine nichtstaatliche Vereinigung mit Vertretern aus mehr als 40 Ländern. Im Jahr 1994 wird der Wiederaufbau von Le Havre in Tel Aviv im Rahmen der Weltkonferenz zur Architektur des „Internationale Stils“ vorgestellt.¹⁴

Schließlich wurde das rekonstruierte Zentrum durch die Gründung eines Rechtsschutzrahmens, welches unter dem Namen Zone de Protection du Patrimoine Architectural Urbain et Paysager de la Reconstruction (ZPPAUP) bekannt ist, im Jahr 1995 offiziell geschützt. Dazu regte die Stadt Le Havre verschiedene Studien zu dem städtebaulichen Erbe an. Im Jahr 2000 schrieb der französische Staat das Zentrum von Le Havre auf die Liste der Kulturgüter Frankreichs.



Bild 4. Planmodell von Le Havre
 Quelle: <https://imagesduhavre.wordpress.com/le-havre-de-la-reconstruction-maquettes-et-film/>

Später wurde es der UNESCO vorgelegt für die Einstufung als Weltkulturerbe.¹⁵ Die Einstufung der Stadt zum Weltkulturerbe wurde für ihre Berühmtheit und die Identifizierung der Einwohner mit ihrer Stadt bedeutsam. Die wirtschaftlichen und touristischen Auswirkungen auf lokaler, nationaler und internationaler Ebene waren immens. Insbesondere lockte die Einstufung neue Investoren und schuf Arbeitsplätze im Bereich des städtischen Tourismus.¹⁶¹⁷¹⁸ Als UNESCO Weltkulturerbe wurde Perrets Verwendung von neuartigen Materialien gewürdigt und deren Einfluss auf die moderne Architektur.¹⁹

Le Havre wurde auf die eingeschränkte Liste des Weltkulturerbes eingetragen, da es drei Kriterien erfüllte, die für die UNESCO von zentraler Bedeutung sind²⁰:

1. Auguste Perret gilt als einer der bedeutendsten Architekten des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts.
2. Seine Ideen haben die französische Architektur durch die Erfindung der Bewegung des Stahlbetons revolutioniert
3. Die Einheit seiner Stadtstruktur macht es zu einer exemplarischen Stadt, die im Europa der Nachkriegszeit wiederaufgebaut wurde.

Nach langen Debatten war die Einheit der Methode und der Vorfertigung, die systematische Nutzung eines modularen Rasters und die innovative Nutzung des Betons das entscheidende Kriterium für die Aufnahme von Le Havre als Kulturerbe im Jahr 2005.²¹

Diese Einschätzung von Perret's Le Havre jedoch war und ist umstritten. In der Bevölkerung wurde Le Havre als zu stark betonierte wahrgenommen.²² Heutzutage sogar noch mehr als vor Jahren, v.a. wegen der Debatte der ökologischen Sorgen am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts. Der Beton gilt als ressourcenverschlingend und wirft im Bau Probleme bei der Wärmedämmung auf. Aufgrund der Einstufung als Kulturerbe wurde es schwer angemessene Änderungen und ökologische Anpassungen in dem wiederaufgebauten Zentrum von Le Havre durchzuführen. Dazu gehört es Wärmedämmung und natürliche Lüftung zu gewährleisten; in einigen Gebäuden ist zudem Asbest noch vorhanden. Obwohl die energetische Einstufung dieser Gebäude sehr schlecht ist, befinden sich die Eigentümer in der hoffnungslosen Situation keine Veränderungen an der Fassade vornehmen zu dürfen.²³ Die Einwohnerinnen und Einwohner dieser Gebäude werden somit mit hohen Elektrizitäts- und Gasrechnungen konfrontiert.

Darüber hinaus gilt es heutzutage als schwer, für Familien mit mehr als zwei Kindern in die modernen Gebäude einzuziehen. Obwohl die von Perret geplanten Gebäude für junge Familien gedacht waren, sind die Wohnungen heute für deren Bedürfnisse zu klein, da die Flächenansprüche deutlich gestiegen sind. Trotz der Immeubles Sans Affection Individuelle (ISAI)²⁴ die von Auguste Perret geplant wurden, sind weitere Habitation à Loyer Modéré (Sozialwohnungen), nördlich als auch östlich der Stadt Le Havre, gebaut worden, um dieses Problem zu lösen. Familien mit mehreren Kindern trafen deswegen oft aus Gründen des Platzmangels die Entscheidung, außerhalb des Stadtzentrums von Le Havre zu wohnen.²⁵ Der Wiederaufbau des Zentrums richtet sich somit an junge Paare und kleine Familien, und nicht wie vor dem Krieg an Großfamilien.²⁶

Fazit

Seit der Gründung im Jahr 1517, wurde das Wachstum Le Havres von großen Planungsprogrammen beeinflusst. Nach der Katastrophe des Zweiten Weltkrieges wurde der Wiederaufbau der Stadt dem Architekten August Perret und seinem Team anvertraut. Bei der Rekonstruktion von Le Havre hatte Perret die Möglichkeit seine Theorie, die „Stadt als Architektur“ zu verwirklichen. Die systematische Anwendung von vorgefertigten Bauelementen auf Grundlage eines strukturellen Rasters führte zu einer außergewöhnlichen Qualität der Stadträume. Dennoch wurden diese Qualitäten von der Bevölkerung anfänglich nicht anerkannt. Der strenge, moderne Wiederaufbau führte zu einem Unverständnis der Bevölkerung, die die Sehnsucht nach ihrer alten Stadt hatte.

Erst durch den Prozess, der 2005 zur Einstufung von Le Havre als Weltkulturerbe geführt hat, entstand eine Sensibilisierung für die Qualität des geplanten Wiederaufbaus. Heute gilt Le Havre als architektonisches und urbanes Ensemble als Ikone für den Wiederaufbau des 20. Jahrhunderts. Somit werden bauliche Eingriffe mit großer Sorgfalt und mit hohem Respekt vor den bestehenden Gebäuden durchgeführt. Dementsprechend mussten die Farbanstriche, mit denen man glaubte den Sichtbeton zu schützen, wieder entfernt werden und die strukturierten Betonoberflächen mussten sorgfältig gesäubert werden. Dadurch kamen die besonderen Eigenschaften von Perrets Entwürfen wieder zum Vorschein.

Die großen Achsen, die von Perret geplant wurden, bieten einen interessanten Raum für Fußgänger. Auch für den Ausbau von öffentlichen Transportmitteln stellen sie einen Vorteil dar. Die Höfe der Häuserblocks bieten Aufenthaltsräume für die Bewohner und Belichtung für die Gebäude. Somit kann man sagen, dass die Planung mit den erwünschten Effekten von Perret die Zeit überdauert hat. Durch hinzugefügte Grünflächen gewannen die städtischen Räume zusätzliche Lebensqualität und mit dem Ausbau von den öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln in Le Havre bekommt die Stadt eine neue Attraktivität. Dennoch konnte Perret die zukünftigen Bedürfnisse von Familien oder ökologischen Anforderungen nicht vorhersagen. Trotz dieser Schwächen kann der Wiederaufbau von Le Havre als Erfolg angesehen werden und ein räumlicher Mehrwert ist bis heute erkennbar.

Pedro Gomes finished his master's degree in architecture at Technische Universität Darmstadt. Before attending university, he was enrolled as a soldier at the Luxembourgish army for 4 years. Growing up in a multilingual country like Luxembourg, he is fluent in French and German amongst others. He spent his first three years of studies in France before moving to Germany. His main areas of interest are: urbanism, temporary architecture, sports and travelling.

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The Demolition of the Bull Ring. Source: Luke Unsworth

No(n) Place like Bullring: Modern Identity and Retail-led Regeneration in Birmingham

Katharina Frieling

In the years following the end of World War II, cities in Europe realised bold reconstruction and transformation schemes according to modernist visions. Ambitions were high and the eradication for functional and modern redevelopment was in some places vast. The destruction was in every way a challenge yet at the same time a chance for decision-makers and planners to materialise a modern built environment and lay the foundation for a new socio-spatial order. Hans Scharoun¹ suggested in 1946:

“The mechanical relief of congestion through bomb war and final battle gives us now the opportunity for a spacious organic and functional renewal” (Scharoun 1946, my translation).

In Britain, there was an early and widespread public enthusiasm to rebuild bombed cities in the light of the City of Tomorrow. The new civilisation paradigms of life and its physical surroundings were anticipated in debates about an “opportunity provided by destruction” (Gutschow 2013:273), which soon exceeded the circles of experts and reached the public interest. Whereas in some countries, including Germany, the massive destruction was proclaimed as chance in

¹ In 1946 Scharoun was head of the municipal planning and building control office in Berlin. He held a speech in the 9th meeting of the construction committee in the planning department of the municipality. Available from <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/wiederaufbau-der-staedte/64357/grundlinien-der-stadtplanung>

the years following World War 2, in Britain, war damage was already seen as an opportunity in the very first days in 1940 after bombs were falling on British soil (Ibid.). There were numerous public reports and exhibitions which announced a spirit similar to the first thematic exhibition “Britain at War” of New York City’s MoMA in 1941, which inaugurated with the statement: “every bomb that falls is a stimulus to creation”². Such phrases also imply a sense of prevalent shortcomings in the early 20th-century spatial order of industrialised cities.

The city of Birmingham is representative for spacious clearance and comprehensive rebuilding through large-scale changes to its urban structure in the postwar period (Jones 2008). In this period Birmingham consisted of the largest number of buildings representing the modern style in the UK (Little 1971). Only a few decades later, however, it represented all that went wrong in modern cities, it was “dull, grey and inhumane” (Parker/Long 2004:16). The consequences of the comprehensive redevelopment, thus, are felt until today. After postwar modern architecture changed the historical map tremendously, the buildings from this period are nowadays being swept away or threatened by demolition. This paper critically discusses the transitions in the centre of Birmingham, the Bull-Ring area, from times of postwar clearance to the current 21st-century clean sweep approach of the postwar legacy. Therefore, it critically engages the current modus operandi in dealing with disregarded heritage and reiterates the need for sensible consideration of place and context in regard to comprehensive redevelopment and regeneration. In this sense, the paper underlines the concept of non-places by Marc Augé in juxtaposing two inner-city shopping malls that were in the same place at different times: The Bull Ring Shopping Centre, that utterly replaced the historic urban fabric in the 1960s city centre of Birmingham, was later sacrificed for the 2003 pioneer of retail-led urban regeneration, the Bullring Centre.

Non-Places in Supermodernity

Marc Augé (1995, 2012) claims that the contemporary world, with its overabundance of events, an excess of time and space on a shrinking planet, suffers from the collapse of the idea of progress and is transformed into supermodernity as the escalation of postmodernity. The globalised places of communication, transport and consumerism are the non-places of supermodernity. Augé (1995:111) states:

“Since non-places are the space of supermodernity, supermodernity cannot aspire to the same ambitions as modernity. When individuals come together, they engender the social and organize places. But the space of supermodernity is inhabited by this contradiction: it deals only with individuals (customers, passengers, users, listeners), but they are identified (name, occupation, place of birth, address) only on entering or leaving.”

According to Augé (2012), non-places are not characterised as empty or abandoned, but rather as places that lack identity, relation and history. In contrast to this, a place is the economic, social, political and religious geography of a group. Its spatial imprint reveals the identity of a group and the place’s history becomes evident (Ibid.) It is a collective and unique space that creates belonging in an urban society.

² Werner Durth (1981:378 cited in Gutschow 2013:268) cites from the exhibition catalogue of “Britain at War”, the first American exhibition held in The Museum of Modern Art, in New York, from May until September 1941

Non-places constitute large parts of our cities at present. Many of them are of a highly functional nature, resulting in the temporary and transitional use of the individual and creating a global exchangeability. Those places hardly ever make any local, organically grown social imprint to identify with. They are comparable to a city that was planned from scratch, in contrast to an evolved one. In any case, non-places constitute large parts of our cities at present. For this reason, it is worth consulting Augé’s concept to reflect on the development of public spaces and urban structures in general. Due to the concept’s strong emphasis on the interrelation of history and identity, it can capture the value of postwar heritage in focusing on the identification of citizens with the built environment of this younger history. Postwar structures, that overwrote their preceding history for better or worse, have become narratives of the European City by now. Their preservation could foster an urban identity and stability by drawing on a familiar environment and the existing history. In contrast, their demolition urges a new urban story and the reinvention of the identity of place. Furthermore, this paper reflects upon Augé’s concept to support a realistic perception of sustainability measures in retail-led urban regeneration strategies. It could highlight the negative effects of such strategies on inclusive social development and social cohesion, since economic factors, entailed in the planning and operation of inner-city shopping centres, are the focal point of such projects. Because of their semi-private spaces, such centres do not welcome everyone and could segregate social groups.

In a simplified evaluation of Augé’s concept, the vacant 1960s Bull Ring Shopping Centre could have counted as non-place in the late 20th century, due to its abandoned site and its empty shell in decay that deserved no monumental value. Its disposal in 2000 and its substitution with a whole new scheme, thus, could have been conceived as a relief for the urban fabric of Birmingham. The removal of ill-maintained and vacant building stock often functions as a generic legitimisation for the eradication of many postwar structures today. Postwar legacy could be meaningful in a socio-cultural sense in today’s cities. They could be places, at least according to their immanent history, because it would be likely that residents did relate to or identify with these structures in the course of time. Their physical presence, representing an obsolete urban model, could still create identity and relation embedded in its local context. The removal of such spatial legacy, by contrast, may erase a piece of the place’s history and identity, which could be important for the foundation and cohesion of a social group.

According to Augé (1995), the identity of a place dissolves if the landmarks of a territory disappear. This could apply to postwar structures as well. Their replacement with ‘accidental non-places’ in globalised modes of practice, could increase monotony and exchangeability of urban space and thus create similarity of the individual and isolation in the collective (Ibid.). Gebauer et al. (2015) suggest that non-places represent fundamental features of modern life, yet they are not constituted to satisfy important human needs. Places and non-places, by far, do not alternate or replace each other in our cities. Rather they overlap and infuse each other in some way. Augé (1995:79) describes places and non-places as opposed polarities and states, that “the first is never completely erased; the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relation is ceaselessly rewritten”. If a place is permanent or not, its historical features can never entirely be erased, and a non-place is symptomatically never finished (Augé 2012).

The proliferation of such places and the increasing amount of everyday life spent in them are the real problems in times of growing efficiency, speed and acceleration of daily practices. The global replaceability of functional and context-less places is striking. Humans need time to establish relations to a place, and after some time it could happen, that “the individual tends to mould the non-place into a place” (Gebauer et al. 2015:10). Postwar built environment was alleged to create non-places, that seemingly denied prior history and were simply functional. Even though the aesthetical value of postwar structures in inner cities is controversial in the individual case (but so are postmodern structures too), those structures could become places in time.

Modern Identity in Birmingham

Due to its industrial production, Birmingham was a strategic target for the Luftwaffe in World War 2 and was hit by a series of heavy bombing (Adams 2011) (Fig.1). Nevertheless, the scattered layout of industry diminished the overall severity of destruction and although many buildings were damaged or even destroyed, the street pattern remained more or less intact (Adams/Larkham 2013). For several reasons, including also slum clearance, rebuilding changed this pattern dramatically in the years to follow and postwar Birmingham was broadly redesigned (Little 1971). First of all, war damage was seen as an opportunity by planners in the U.K. too, secondly the city’s decay of housing and building stock already generated pre-war plans for a bold slum clearance, and thirdly the person responsible for postwar development, Herbert Manzoni, was ambitious and radical in thrive for modernisation (Adams 2012, Parker/Long 2004). Since 1935, Manzoni was in charge as the City Engineer and Surveyor and was involved in the initial planning to overcome the deterioration around the centre before the 2nd World War (Adams 2011). In comparison to other cities, the ambitious goals for postwar reconstructions did not follow a master plan or an overall strategy (Adams 2012, Adams/Larkham 2013). The City Council saw no need for an overarching reconstruction plan since plans for redevelopment dated back to 1913 already. The lack of a comprehensive plan also impeded public engagement (Adams/Larkham 2013) and supposedly this participation was not welcome in the vision of the societal cure through modernist planning.

As a result, Birmingham became famous for its tremendous spatial redevelopment and an example of the rise and fall of high-modernist planning (Adams/Larkham 2013). Adams (2011, 2012) depicts this development through oral histories of residents, who were affected by postwar construction efforts, and architects, who were engaged in them. The 1960s press coverage and oral history interviews show that there was also early criticism and no public consensus about the redevelopment plans (Adams 2011, Adams/Larkham 20013). Residents, however, did not object to the rebuilding of Birmingham and looked forward to a progressive centre. In the 1960s redevelopment in Birmingham was generally perceived in a positive manner (Ibid.). The postwar years of recovery and austerity, as well as the immense publicity for the *City of Tomorrow*, fostered this opinion and the common enthusiasm diminished not until a few decades later. Eventually, in the early 1970s many people did regret the loss of older buildings, that have been demolished for renewal. The centre had been transformed extensively with two underlying principles: the segregation of vehicular traffic from pedestrian precincts and the elaboration of spaces for leisure activities, in this case, shopping (Adams 2011) (Fig.2, 3).

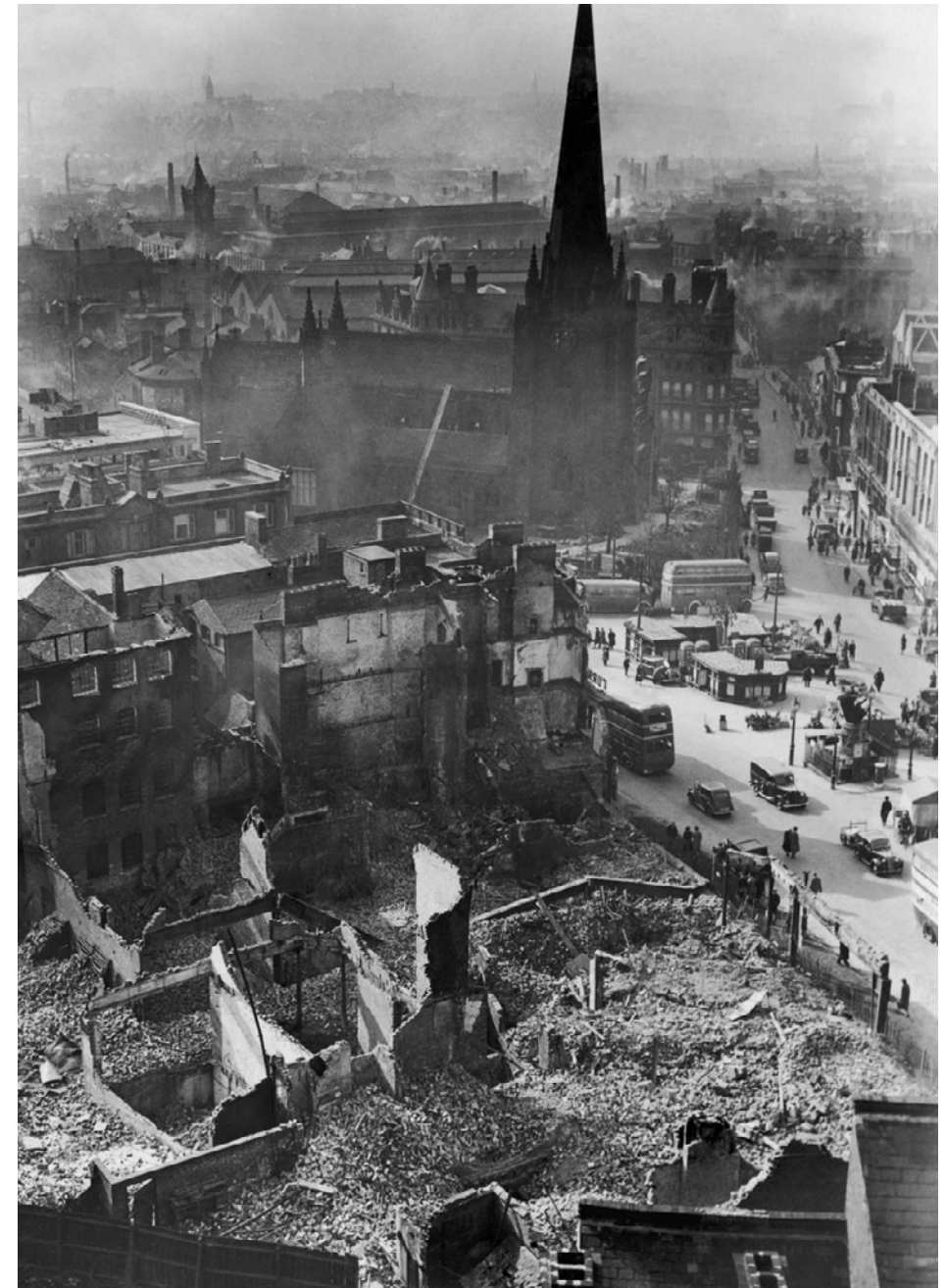


Figure1: Aerial view showing bomb damage around St.Martin's Church in the Bull Ring in April 1941 Source: Mirror-pix, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/nostalgia/gallery/darker-days-birmingham-blitz-10035547>

The alteration of the Bull Ring area – the ‘historic heart’ of the city – forced people to find their way through the centre during construction and later. The planners’ conception of a functional space with uninterrupted flows turned out to be inconsistent with the way it was previously used, at least by pedestrians. Herbert Manzoni had envisioned Birmingham as a machine in the style of Le Corbusier’s concept of the functional city (Adams/Larkham 2013). The “clean-sweep approach” inspired Manzoni and his team to come up with the Inner Ring Road (Ibid.: 141) (Fig.3). The finished road network generated many underpasses that were discomforting to pedestrians (Fig.4). Subsequently, the large scale of redevelopment around the Bull Ring area and the construction of the Ring Road resulted in frustration and resentment, because residents and other city users could not move on the street level anymore (Adams 2011, 2013). Adams and Larkham (2013:144) cite the critique of contemporary architectural critic and at that time head of Birmingham School of Planning, Leslie Ginsberg, who designated the Birmingham road network “[...] the greatest traffic and town design tragedy yet to afflict an English city”. The engineering genius of Herbert Manzoni and his team created a city of circulation and flows, mainly encouraging economic prosperity. In the following years, however, a trend towards a car-free precinct design formed the centre of Birmingham to foster shopping as a major activity for leisure (Adams 2011, 2013).



Figure 3: The Bull Ring under construction in 1963 with the finished road network and the old market hall still in place
Source: <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/nostalgia/gallery/50-amazing-nostalgic-images-bull-7719182>



Figure 2: Artist's impression from the early 1960s.
Source: The Geoff Thompson Archive <http://www.photobydjohnorton.com/NewBham/NewBham15.html>



Figure 4: Underpass in the Bull Ring in 1970
Source: <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/nostalgia/gallery/50-amazing-nostalgic-images-bull-7719182>

From Bull Ring to Bullring

“What is seen by the spectator of modernity is the interweaving of old and new. Supermodernity, though, makes the old (history) into a specific spectacle, as it does with all exoticism and all local particularity” (Augé 1995:110).

The central location around the historic St. Martin’s Church became not just a trading point for bulls in 1166 but also the general centre for the movement of goods in Birmingham. The first roofed market hall was built in the 13th century in the market area. Although its walls survived World War 2 and were subsequently still used in the early postwar years, the market hall was demolished for the renewal. The 1960s Bull Ring Shopping Centre was the centrepiece of urban redevelopment in Birmingham. Britain’s first air-conditioned indoor shopping centre, that opened doors to the public in May 1964 (Moran 2009) (Fig.5). The multilevel mall paired shops for groceries, clothes and other goods under one roof and included a bus station and car-park for easy accessibility to the centre. The Bull Ring was the fortress of pedestrianisation in a vehicular friendly postwar city and meant to reconcile residents with the constraints they had to tolerate during the re-planning phase. It was inspired by American malls with the additional feature of an inner city location.

The floor plan of the Bull Ring Centre tried to mimic the old street pattern that dissolved in the course of development (Moran 2009). In an elusive attempt of the architects, the floor plans turned out to be confusing for this very new type of a covered civic space. Many shops remained closed or vacant on the opening day and in the years to follow, shops were notably hard to let (ibid). The internal complexity of the five-level layout was difficult to manoeuvre and the centre’s external anonymity with its concrete aesthetics was problematic for the public (Parker/Long 2004). Bryan Little (1971) discussed the important architecture of Birmingham in his book *Birmingham Buildings: The Architectural Story of a Midland City* and criticised the Bull Ring’s interior too, yet at the same time he honoured the architecture:

“The Bull Ring Centre has a sad, confusing, unattractive interior. Its planning by Sidney Greenwood and T.J. Hirst is ingenious, and the notion of so comprehensive a shopping place with an adjacent bus station and many-tiered car park, tunes in with modern ways of movement and circulation. But the cavernous interior, from which egress always seems difficult, is less helpfully thought out than such covered precinct should be” (Little 1971:43)(Fig. 6).

The 1960s’ shopping dream proved to be rather a failure. Its concept and design soon displayed many shortcomings and decay became visible already after the first decade in operation, because of the false conception of highly functional plans (Parker/Long 2004). The shops in the upper floor were harder to let and the car park closed down after five years of operation, because women, who were the main customers, hardly had access to cars back then (Adams/Larkham 2013). After three decades of a hardly successful shopping mall, the city of Birmingham certainly needed a strategy for regeneration in the city centre. The mismanagement of the controlling state paired with a lack of private investment hindered maintenance and regeneration for years, and the result was a “watered down modernism” in “rain-stained concrete” (Jones 2008:359). The Bull Ring Centre was sold in 1987 and experienced a decade of changing owners, dismissal



Figure 5: The Bull Ring Shopping Centre in June 1964
Source: <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/gallery/bull-ring-sculptures-10614722>



Figure 6: The interior of the Bull Ring Shopping Centre with American mall design after its opening in 1964. Source: English Heritage. John Laing Collection <http://www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/web/he/searchdetail.aspx?id=11163&crit=&large=1>

of plans and numerous debates about development (Brinkmann 2003, Emery 2006). Rivalling concepts encountered public resistance that was led by a group of residents called Birmingham for People which existed between 1988 and 1998 (Holyoak 2004). The group proposed an alternative development plan in 1989 – The People’s Plan for the Bull Ring included “a mixture of land uses, the shaping of a traditional marketplace enclosed by buildings, medium-sized blocks of buildings, conventional outdoor streets, and all pedestrian and vehicular movement at ground level” (Ibid.). However, their endeavours did not change the developers’ visions for the Bull Ring.

Before the Bull Ring was finally demolished in 2000, it gained status as the national joke situated in the heart of a Midlands city (Moran 2009). Birmingham itself was thus, until recently “the butt of metropolitan jibes for exemplifying the worst excesses of bastardized architectural modernism and the failures of utopian planning” (Parker/Long 2004:3). Sir Herbert Manzoni himself exerted great influence in this development. However, postwar buildings – besides all others – are hardly the result of a single person’s aspiration (Adams 2012). Certainly, the modernist vision of a new order and the functional city existed in the minds of other officials in the City Council as well.

Already in 1999, the Bullring Alliance was established by three investors, Hammerson, Land Securities and Henderson, who designed the retail-led urban regeneration. This second clean sweep after only 40 years presented itself as a participatory approach, and to avoid any criticism over the negligence of historic value or other heritage issues, the development plans included massive excavations on site (Patrick/Chadwick n.d.). However, plans in general rather privileged the medieval history than postwar structures in the Bullring layout. Since 2003, the new Bullring project aims to compete with the nearby suburban malls by offering 146 shops on 110.000 m2 retail space (Brinkmann 2003). The shops have been arranged on three levels in two facing constructions, completed with 3200 parking lots. The urban development was conceptualised by Benoy studio³ and supposed to revive the historic street patterns. The newly formed square at the feet of the Rotunda adds a new centre for Birmingham (Brinkmann 2003). The flanking streets are developed as partially internal and external radial rays directing from Rotunda through the Bullring. The central one is formed by St. Martin’s Walk, the new urban walkway which broke up the barriers of the ring road. The walk slopes down between the two buildings leading to St. Martin’s Church and thus forming St. Martin’s Square by surrounding the church in a semicircle (Ibid.) (Fig.7, 8/then and now; Fig. 9). The initial design intended to open up a square around St. Martin’s Church, yet this space was cramped with the extension for the historicising resurrection of Spiceal Street⁴ today.

The scheme was sustained from the very beginning by two major tenants: Debenhams and Selfridges (Emery 2006). The Bullring’s urban design dazzled with the icon building of Selfridges as a crucial part of the shopping ensemble. Future Systems, the responsible architects, definitely designed a building to debate and to remember. The landmark architecture is the “biomorphic update of a sixties-department store” with a certain “barbapapa-reminiscence”

3 For more information, visit: <https://www.benoy.com/projects/bullring/>

4 <http://visitbirmingham.com/spiceal-street/>, described on the webpage as: “the city’s newest dining destination, Spiceal Street is steeped in history. Spiceal Street is in the heart of the city and complements the beautiful architecture surrounding the square”.

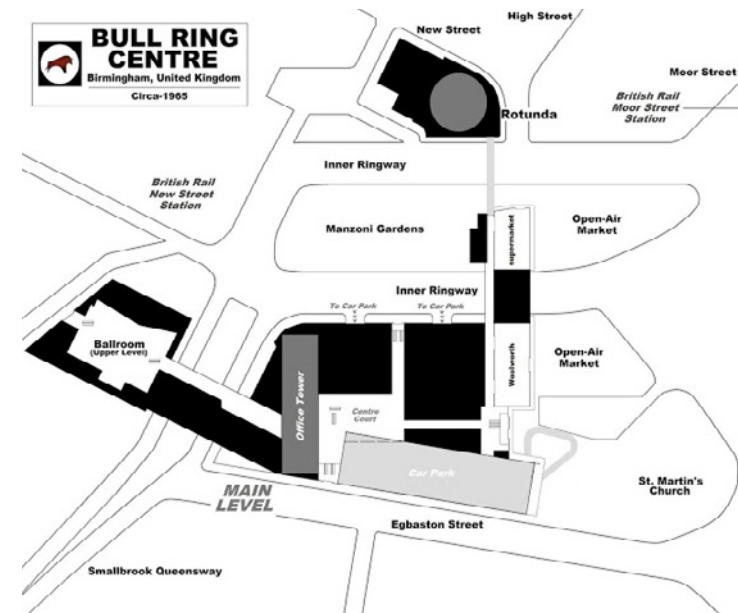


Figure 7: Layout of the Bull Ring Centre, circa 1965
Source: <http://shoppingmallmuseum.blogspot.com/search/label/Birmingham%20UK%27s%20Bull%20Ring%20Centre>

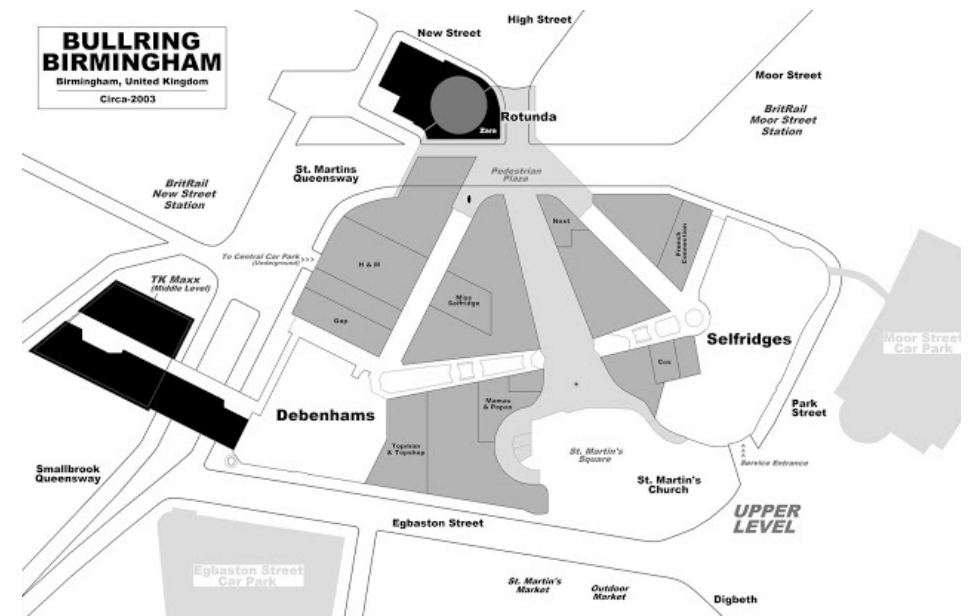


Figure 8: The Bullring’s retail-led regeneration layout with remaining structures in black.
Source: <http://shoppingmallmuseum.blogspot.com/search/label/Birmingham%20UK%27s%20Bull%20Ring%20Centre>

(Brinkmann 2003:26, my translation), which is a legitimate connotation considering that it was elected the ugliest building in the UK (McCarthy 2008) (Fig.10). In the Bullring, architecture has been realised, that was initially designed for inner-city shopping and yet offers nothing for pedestrians, because it simply lacks shop windows and a proper street level (Brinkmann 2003, Parker/Long 2004). The edge of the Selfridge building opposite to St.Martin's Church could have framed the prominent square. Strikingly, it opens the way into a parking garage instead, whereas the shop's entrance is located on a balcony covered with flooring that resembles a drained swimming pool in a strong contrast with the church (Brinkmann 2003) (Fig. 11, 12). The façade consists of an overflow of overhang discs, a shiny and futuristic feature, that offers multiple options to dump waist behind them (Ibid.) (Fig. 12). In effect, Selfridges in the Bullring is a landmark building for globalised commercialism, rather than an identifier for the people of Birmingham.

The wider concept also comprised the conversion of the Rotunda. The preservation of the cylindrical landmark tower, originally designed by James Roberts and probably the city's only remaining identifying imprint of the postwar development, was beneficial for the developers since the former office space was converted into high-end apartments. The 1960s architect Roberts welcomed the re-design by Glenn Howell and Urbansplash as a match with his initial design idea for the Rotunda (Tobin 2012). However, the new evolving Rotunda Square at the base of the building is just another pseudo-public square in the heart of a city (Brinkmann 2003). The phenomenon with "pseudo" public spaces, actually being private properties, is comparable to Augé's emphasis on the contract that is embedded in the use of non-places. The user is in a contractual relationship with the powers that govern the place. He/she is controlled on entrance or exit (through camera surveillance, tickets, ID control, payment) and, if approved innocent, may fulfil the purpose of the place (shopping, travelling, ...) in an adequate behaviour (Augé 1995:101,102).

Shopping Centres and the Heart of the City

"So the mall may not be regarded as an extension or replica of the High Street, the mall does not simulate the city, but both are different types of places used differently – spaces of different quality" (Legnaro 2015:60).

In the case of the Bullring Centre, this statement seems to ignore the comprehensive 21st-century retail-led urban regeneration schemes, which desperately try to deliver what the high street did before. The urban design concept of the Bullring, by all means, was invented to rethink the heart of a city (Emery 2006). A shopping mall would be the new heart of Birmingham (Fig. 9), yet to simulate an urban place – at best with relation, identity and history – the developers needed to impose an immense program for its public space. This approach contained a public art program of installations retelling the cultural and historical heritage of the place, many events and the mascot Bully (Ibid.). Nevertheless, the users of such a shopping space will act unconsciously in a controlled social behaviour in a governed pseudo-public space. The whole development was determined and there was literally no place for unplanned growth left, that could have sooner or later created a place of individual interest and collective interaction – a place of identity and relation.



Figure 9: The Bullring Centre encircling St.Martin's Church. Picture was taken before Spiceal Street was built
Source: Webbaviation https://www.e-architect.co.uk/images/jpgs/birmingham/bullring_wa271108.jpg



Figure 10: Selfridges flagship in the Bullring
Source: Britain Visitor <https://devonvisitor.blogspot.com/2014/10/selfridges-birmingham.html>



Figure 11: Contrasting neighbours - Selfridges and St.Martin's Church.
Source: 2017 Google, taken by the author on Google Earth

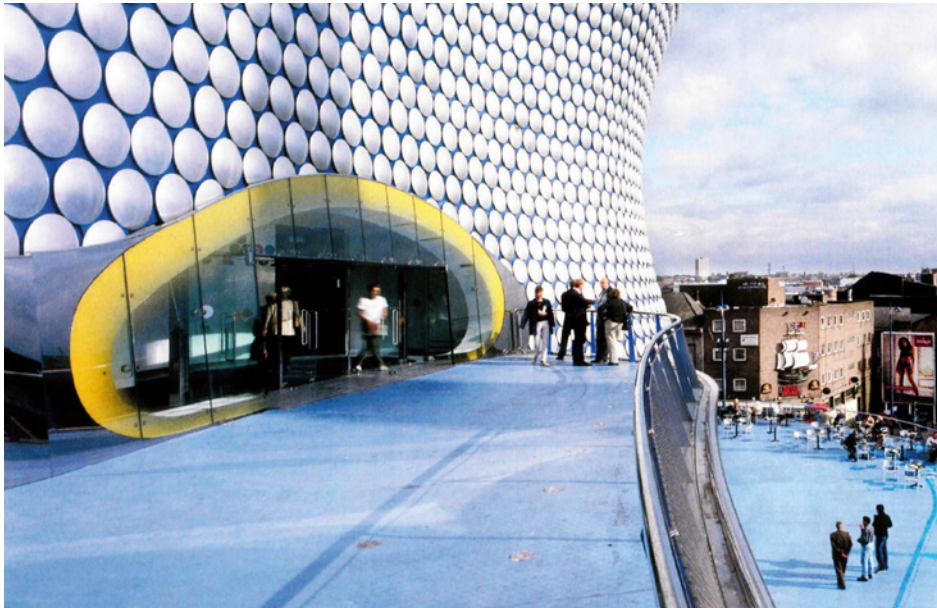


Figure 12: Selfridges' entrance on a blue balcony
Source: Udo Meinel (Berlin) in Bauwelt 46, 2003, page 24/25

In comparison, the 1960s Bull Ring Shopping Centre was a comprehensively planned space too and did hardly show consideration for its buried physical heritage. Then the focus of planners was on a whole new vision of life. However, people did not easily relate to or identify with the de-contextualised architecture of the concrete box. The tabula rasa of postwar regeneration in Birmingham was highly problematic and certainly not justified by war damage. Nevertheless, its physical output was the reality of mid-20th-century cities and a whole new generation grew up with postwar architecture and urban planning. This younger generation, in one way or another, certainly related to or identified with places such as the Bull Ring in Birmingham (Parker/Long 2004), since over time individuals could generate places from non-places.

The identification with the postwar city centre and the Bull Ring might have appeared only in times of extended demolitions that pushed the reworking of postwar Birmingham (Parker/Long 2004). The Bullring redevelopment, however, completely omitted the 30 years of the Bull Ring Shopping Centre, degrading postwar structures as incompatible for 21st-century urbanity. Nonetheless, history can never entirely be buried in a place, but the identity, that links place and people, can be completely lost by repeatedly superimposing new urban imaginaries onto the urban design of a lived space, that nurture aspiration and yearning for something else (Parker/Long 2004). Phil Jones (2008) highlights the similarities in the UK's urban redevelopment today and in postwar years and criticises the repeated clean sweep approach.

“Planning has absorbed the language of sustainability, but its institutional structures still tend towards a rather simplistic, modernist-influenced, vision of how regeneration should be carried out. As a result, the temptation to completely destroy an area and remake it remains strong – ‘failed’ cultural as well as physical landscapes can thus be swept away, just as they were during the postwar clearances. Ultimately this may be an example of the state destroying what it seeks to realize; having something quirky and different about a development makes for a more interesting city” (Jones 2008:370).

Retail-led urban regeneration schemes are mimicking places all over the world, staying replaceable in their overtrumping landmark architecture and their global store chains. The globalised architecture and its generic outcome hardly add distinctiveness to a place. Moreover, such non-places are solely designed to satisfy temporal consumerist's aspirations for those who can afford them. Augé's assertions about shopping centres as non-places are legitimate since exclusions are made for those who do not fit the common imperatives. Such schemes have the power to create non-places of monitored homogeneous collectives, while users still feel addressed in their individual needs. Yet, places with meaning usually trigger organically grown features, while non-places have adherent rules and make agreements with users on their entrance, deliberately or not (Augé 2012). Such pseudo-public non-places situated in the city centres could create urban cleavages (Legnaro 2015:64). In the new “shopping capital of Europe”, Birmingham, the prevalent distance of the retail-led regeneration to its ordinary people is obvious (Brinkmann 2003:17).

The Bullring, like many others, has been realised to revitalise and upgrade a deteriorated inner city (Geyer 2011). Such initiatives have proliferated in the UK since the implementation of containment policies, which should prevent the negative effects of peripheral shopping centres

on the economy of inner cities. In contrast, retail-led regeneration pushes small and medium enterprises retail out of the city centre and the claim to deliver benefits for the local economic community is controversial. At the same time, however, restructuring and marketing the city can deliver strategic benefits and therefore become at least equally important in retail-led regeneration (Ibid.). Striking about both shopping centres in the Bull-Ring area is the targeted marketing and branding, that was fostered by developers now and then. The publicity was strategic in the 1960s as well as today (Parker/Long 2004). The 1960s Bull Ring was “the epitome of development” (Adams/Larkham 2013:147) while the new 21st-century Bullring was designated “Birmingham’s city pride” (Emery 2006). According to time and context, the branding for the retail-led urban regeneration of Bullring was considerably larger in scale from the very beginning: Site tours, extensive media coverage, community and art programmes, exhibitions, excavations and above all comprehensive historical rehabilitation (Emery 2006; Patrick/Chadwick n.d.). The marketing strategy facilitated the new urban imaginaries such as the convenient individual shopping experience in a safe surrounding. John Emery, Head of Development at Hammerson, responsible for the redevelopment of the Bullring Centre on behalf of the Birmingham Alliance, outlines the achievements of such imaginaries: “to transform a neglected part of the city centre into Europe’s most vibrant quality retail environment, as well as a meeting point and a new civic heart for the city” (Emery 2006:126). Nonetheless, marketing to foster retail-led urban regeneration does not, under any circumstances, add value to the urban quality of a place simultaneously (Geyer 2011).

The 1960s Bull Ring Shopping Centre became the city’s most notorious eyesore (Emery 2006). The new Selfridges’ flagship in the Bullring, which embodies the official image of the new Birmingham (Parker/Long 2004:15), is likely to experience the same situation. This could happen when style changes and the formal-aesthetic appearance, which renders any kind of patina impossible, becomes another eyesore for people. The Bullring landmark building is symptomatic for the imaginary of contemporary urban regeneration and it might be truly a last “cheerful Fuck-off” from the architects to all of those, who talk about the principles of the European City and at the same time build inner-city shopping malls (Brinkmann 2003:24, my translation).

Concluding Notes

At present, postwar constructions are heavily discussed in all kinds of disciplines, debating the visual value, structural capacity, and above all the heritage status of buildings and ensembles in our cities. Today, however, it becomes a tedious practice to debate postwar structures (and its heritage status) when they are literally moulding our post- or supermodern cities. We actually have to work with them. Given the concept of non-places, postwar buildings might share a common fate: The refusal of the old – of any tradition or history, and their highly functional spirit that was superimposing the design, left people struggling to identify with and to relate to them. It seems that the average postwar buildings, that were able to escape demolition, could do so solely because a collective shares a relatively young history with them and they are embedded in a context welcoming for contrast. Augé (2012) highlights the issue of the changing context in his epilogue and refers to Rem Koolhaas’ declaration fuck context, which could be increasingly symptomatic for 21st-century urban landmark architecture in supermodern times.

In the UK there is a broad research interest in the postwar modernist era and the way it shaped cities and society since English cities such as Birmingham are rules rather than exceptions. Ever since the rebuilding of postwar Birmingham, the city experienced a series of radical changes to its urban structure, executed with no external consultants, no overall reconstruction plan or a comprehensive plan for the city centre. The Birmingham Plan 2031⁵ stipulates a development that is constituted in sustainability and recognizes other development paths than the past ones, such as the Local Development Orders (LDOs) to provide site specific development and the support for Neighbourhood Planning and other local initiatives. However, this recent promise was not on the table when the Bull Ring Shopping Centre was obsolete and “the mistakes of the past”, were replicated with the defining principles of past times in early 2000:

“[E]xtreme exemplification of current planning orthodoxy; the desire to be the biggest and best in Europe; a series of piecemeal developments anchored by a large iconic building juxtaposed with non-descript shopping centre building masses; a pragmatic public-private partnership of local government and property developers; the creation of an easy-to-age, hard-to-maintain structure” (Parker/Long 2004:16).

This makes it hard to believe that the new heart of Birmingham can grow into a place. Whereas over time, the Rotunda became a building that enabled people to identify with the modern city, the new Bullring Centre could be a non-place like everywhere else in the world. In this case, retail-led urban regeneration hardly benefits a local community to experience relation, identity and history. It rather makes way to import those features, when they are lacking or need to be polished for city branding. On the one side, retail-led urban schemes can either be praised by those who expect economic benefits or those who are superficially satisfied with consumerism. On the other side, in most cases, critics are concerned with the lack of a people-centred urban development and a sense of place.

Katharina Frieling worked as architect before she continued her studies in Integrated Urbanism and Sustainable Design at Stuttgart University and Ain Shams University in Cairo. She was research assistant at the University of Applied Science in Wiesbaden and TU Darmstadt. In October 2018 she proceeds to research at RWTH Aachen and starts her PhD.

⁵ The Birmingham Development Plan (BDP) 2031 was adopted by Birmingham City Council on 10 January 2017. The BDP sets out a spatial vision and strategy for the sustainable growth of Birmingham for the period 2011 to 2031 and will be used to guide decisions on planning, development and regeneration. https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/20054/planning_strategies_and_policies/78/birmingham_development_plan/1

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