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# The Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum: Urban Planners, Property Developers and Fractious Left Politics in West Berlin, 1963–1974\*

Tim Verlaan

## I. Introduction

‘Will the people recognize the area afterwards? Barely!’<sup>1</sup> Writing in 1963, West Berlin’s Senate, the city’s municipal government, was eager to promote its urban renewal operations in Kreuzberg. Its plans for the borough—which was effectively sealed off from East Berlin with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961—entailed the comprehensive redevelopment of large swathes of the local building stock. The tenement houses from the *Gründerzeit* (1850–1914) were to be replaced by spacious blocks of flats and expansively planned expressways, providing local residents with a lush and carefully organized environment suited for modern living. Whilst this agenda was formulated long before the Second World War, political turmoil and lack of funding had prevented elected officials from implementing such schemes. Tides changed with the rapidly growing affluence of the 1950s, which led to ever-rising planning ambitions. In the case of West Berlin, 430,000 dwellings dating from the 1850–1920 period were considered ripe for either demolition or extensive refurbishment; equalling 45 per cent of the city’s total building stock. Not even the war had brought so much destruction.<sup>2</sup>

When the redevelopment agenda for West Berlin was announced in 1963, it was not entirely clear who was responsible for its execution. Initially, public officials aimed to keep private interests out of the redevelopment process, making government-owned housing corporations responsible for the clearing of future building sites, the construction of new flats and the rehousing of tenants. However, the same officials soon realized West Berlin needed specific treatment if it were to survive the separation from its hinterland. Fearing economic decline and urban decay, the West German government adopted the *Berlinhilfegesetz* (the Berlin Aid Act), which offered generous tax breaks and favourable conditions to companies operating in West Berlin.<sup>3</sup> Especially after the Berlin

\*The author would like to thank Moritz Föllmer, Simon Gunn, Celina Kress and Lisa Vollmer for their useful comments on an earlier version of this article. Special thanks go out to the Institut für Raumbezogene Sozialforschung in Erkner, Monika Motylinska and Christoph Bernhardt in particular, and the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung for supporting the research stay in Berlin during which the article was finished.

<sup>1</sup>‘SOS für SO36’, *Der Spiegel*, 13 (1977), p. 220.

<sup>2</sup>H. Suhr and D. Enke, ‘Die Phase der Sechziger Jahre’, in *Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen, Stadterneuerung Berlin: Erfahrungen, Beispiele, Perspektive* (Berlin, 1990) pp. 26–44, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>B. Stöver, *Geschichte Berlins* (Munich, 2010), p. 102.

wall's erection, this support measure became a lucrative investment tool for entrepreneurs in the local building trade.<sup>4</sup> Between 1960 and 1970, the volume of commercially developed real estate in West Berlin almost tripled, signifying a growing interest in the commercial execution of redevelopment schemes drawn up by municipal planners.<sup>5</sup>

Through adopting a case-study approach, this article argues that private entrepreneurs played an instrumental role in the postwar redevelopment of West Berlin. To understand how this agenda was formulated, executed and eventually contested, it is essential to investigate the partnerships between property developers and public officials, the building typologies they introduced and their business strategies and financing models, as well as those groups in society that rose up against urban redevelopment.

From the early 1970s onward, West Berlin was becoming a hotbed of social and political activism. As working-class families were fleeing for the freshly erected suburbs of Gropiusstadt and Märkisches Viertel, inner-city districts saw a rapid influx of Turkish 'guest workers' and young adults from other parts of West Germany. The latter group of urbanites in particular organized in the youth wings of political parties and community action groups and were hostile towards West Berlin's redevelopment efforts. Municipal planners were said to be insensitive to the existing social and physical fabric, whereas elected officials were accused of operating hand in glove with private enterprise. Previously, from the mid-1960s, a younger generation of architects, planners and preservationists had begun questioning the intellectual foundations of urban redevelopment, instead pleading for the rehabilitation of already existing structures. By the early 1970s these combined factors resulted in a motley crew of protesters fiercely attacking West Berlin's redevelopment agenda for its capitalist underpinnings and its destruction of a dilapidated yet functioning living environment.

As tensions in West Berlin's inner-city districts were mounting, an ambitious group of private developers and architects presented their plans for the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum, a vast residential and shopping complex situated near Kottbusser Tor. The loosely modernist scheme, erected between 1969 and 1974, was seen by the Berlin Senate as the clarion call for further redevelopment of the south-eastern section of Kreuzberg. Eventually, the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum encompassed 300 apartments and 15,000 square metres of shopping and office space situated in a ten to twelve-storey structure, replacing a vast number of tenement houses dating from the *Gründerzeit*. For Kreuzberg's burgeoning alternative scene, the scheme came to represent all the wrongs in urban redevelopment. Soon the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum became a rallying point for critical media outlets and public demonstrations. Even today, the building is denounced as a concrete eyesore and a focal point of the local drug trade, making it one of the most notorious housing estates in Germany.<sup>6</sup>

Despite its infamous construction history and ill-fated reputation, the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum has been largely neglected by historians. The small body of literature mentioning the building was mainly published during the 1980s, at which point

<sup>4</sup>A. Richie, *Faust's Metropolis: A History of Berlin* (London, 1998), p. 800.

<sup>5</sup>'Berlin-Förderung: So exzessiv und schamlos', *Der Spiegel*, 22 (1973), p. 41.

<sup>6</sup>'Kottbusser Tor: Alter, was geht?', *Die Zeit* (28 Apr. 2016).

earlier redevelopment practices in West Berlin were extensively reviewed. Within this decade—and to a lesser extent more recently in the work of Stephanie Warnke and Andreas Schmidt—historians predominantly focused on grass-roots protests by examining the perspective of the architectural and planning professions and their media outlets. This has left little room for considerations regarding the private initiators of redevelopment schemes such as the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum.<sup>7</sup> From an even broader perspective, academic research into the divided city's postwar history is still in its infancy,<sup>8</sup> whilst the involvement of private players in the field of urban planning and their partnerships with public officials are underexamined in both German and international contexts.<sup>9</sup> Notable exceptions concern monographs by Karl Christian Führer and Peter Kramper, who focus respectively on postwar property speculators and the Neue Heimat construction company and housing corporation.<sup>10</sup> The prewar period has received more attention from historians interested in market mechanisms and private entrepreneurship, most notably in the work of Christoph Bernhardt, in addition to that of Wolfgang Schäche, Daniel Ralf Schmitz and David Pessier.<sup>11</sup> Despite this, the lacuna is remarkable, recently leading urban historians such as Peter Shapely and Rosemary Wakeman to call upon their colleagues to shift their focus towards the intrinsic relations between public and private bodies.<sup>12</sup>

This contribution heeds the call of Shapely and Wakeman by investigating the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum as the focal point of arrangements and interactions between West Berlin's public officials, private developers and critical citizens. In heeding this call, questions as to how and why a conflict situation arose between these groups of actors will be tackled, thus shedding fresh light on Berlin's recent planning history. Through the examination of press releases, official reports and transcriptions of meetings held by the Berlin Senate and by the Kreuzberg borough council, as well as articles from mainstream and alternative media outlets, this contribution will examine the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum as an important case study of postwar urban redevelopment.

<sup>7</sup>K. H. Fiebig, D. Hoffmann-Axthelm and E. Knödler-Bunte (eds), *Kreuzberger Mischung: Die innerstädtische Verflechtung von Architektur, Kultur und Gewerbe* (Berlin, 1984); H. Bodenschatz, *Platz frei für das neue Berlin! Geschichte der Stadterneuerung seit 1871* (Berlin, 1987); J. F. Geist and K. Kürvers, *Das Berliner Mietshaus 1945–1989* (Munich, 1989); S. Warnke, *Stein gegen Stein: Architektur und Medien im geteilten Berlin 1950–1970* (Frankfurt/Main), A. K. Schmidt, *Vom steinernen Berlin zum Freilichtmuseum der Stadterneuerung: die Geschichte des größten innerstädtischen Sanierungsgebietes der Bundesrepublik. Wedding-Brunnenstraße 1963–1989/95* (Hamburg, 2008).

<sup>8</sup>S. Eisenhuth and M. Sabrow, 'West-Berlin: eine historiographische Herausforderung', *Zeithistorische Forschungen/ Studies in Contemporary History*, 11 (2014), p. 165.

<sup>9</sup>T. Verlaan, 'Producing Space: Post-War Redevelopment as Big Business: Utrecht and Hannover 1962–1975', *Planning Perspectives* 34, 3 (2019), pp. 415–37.

<sup>10</sup>K. C. Führer, *Die Stadt, das Geld und der Markt: Immobilienspekulation in der Bundesrepublik 1960–1985* (Berlin, 2016); P. Kramper, *Neue Heimat: Unternehmenspolitik und Unternehmensentwicklung im gewerkschaftlichen Wohnungs- und Städtebau 1950–1982* (Stuttgart, 2008).

<sup>11</sup>C. Bernhardt, *Bauplatz Groß-Berlin: Wohnungsmärkte, Terraingewerbe und Kommunalpolitik im Städtewachstum der Hochindustrialisierung 1871–1918* (Berlin, 1998); W. Schäche, D. R. Schmitz and D. Pessier, *Berlin und seine Bauherren: als die Hauptstadt Weltstadt wurde* (Berlin, 2018).

<sup>12</sup>R. Wakeman, 'Rethinking Postwar Planning History', *Planning Perspectives*, 29, 2 (2014), p. 160; P. Shapely, 'Governance in the Post-War City: Historical Reflections on Public-Private Partnerships in the UK', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37, 4 (2013), p. 1288.

The scheme's construction history additionally provides a fertile testing ground for theories of urban governance. Whilst the majority of these theories were formulated during the 1970s and 1980s—thus validating them also as primary sources of the struggle over urban redevelopment—they offer valuable insights when combined with more recent postwar histories of Berlin. According to David Harvey, property investments become more appealing at times when governmental bodies guarantee long-term investments in the built environment: West Berlin's redevelopment agenda and subsidy law are prime examples.<sup>13</sup> Harvey emphasizes how local governments act not only as initiators of redevelopment schemes but also as the facilitators of private forces operating within such schemes.<sup>14</sup> In line with this observation, Harvey Molotch coined the term 'growth machines' to examine the postwar convergence of governmental and commercial forces pushing for local economic growth.<sup>15</sup> Distinguishing between the use and exchange values of urban land, Molotch argues that the 'activism of entrepreneurs is, and always has been, a critical force in shaping the urban system'.<sup>16</sup> Whilst Harvey and Molotch both focus on case studies located in the United States, their work can provide us with a critical lens through which to investigate the Western European context—in particular as historians have rarely tested those theoretical reflections against empirical evidence.

## II. Towards a Functionalist Borough

The postwar period was not the first time West Berlin's densely built-up inner city was targeted for redevelopment. Its *Mietskasernen*, mostly five-storey apartment blocks erected during the latter half of the nineteenth century to house the expanding industrial workforce, had been a thorn in the side of planners for decades owing to their monotonous facades and lack of basic human comforts. An absence of sunlight, fresh air and public space made living conditions inside the blocks cramped and squalid. Between 1860 and 1880, the average number of inhabitants per building lot in Berlin rose from 45 to 60, as compared to 20 per lot in contemporary Paris and 8 per lot in London.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the buildings' inner courtyards were occupied by numerous small factories and craft shops, adding noise and smell pollution to the daily grievances of local residents. Whilst the *Mietskasernen* were already loathed during the German Empire, it was during the 1920s that German architects and planners eventually proposed radical measures.<sup>18</sup> In 1930, famous city planner and architecture critic Werner Hegemann discarded the built legacy of the *Gründerzeit* as the product of short-sighted bureaucratism and money-grabbing land speculation.<sup>19</sup> Whilst the National Socialists displayed utter contempt

<sup>13</sup>D. Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital* (Oxford, 1985), p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>D. Harvey, 'From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation of Urban Governance in Late Capitalism', *Geografiska Annaler*, 71, 1 (1989), p. 6.

<sup>15</sup>H. Molotch, 'The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place', *American Journal of Sociology*, 82, 2 (1976), pp. 309–32.

<sup>16</sup>J. Logan and H. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley 1987), p. 57.

<sup>17</sup>D. Clay Large, *Berlin* (New York, 2000), p. 11.

<sup>18</sup>H. Bodenschatz, 'Die "Mietskasernenstadt" in der Kritik des 20. Jahrhunderts', *Senatsverwaltung für Bau- und Wohnungswesen, Stadterneuerung Berlin*, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup>W. Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin: Geschichte der Größten Mietskasernenstadt der Welt* (Braunschweig, 1988), pp. 207–57.

for the urban modernism of the Weimar era, they were equally critical of Berlin's built environment, designating numerous working-class districts as redevelopment areas.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, modernist and Nazi architects were united in their hatred of the haphazard growth of the nineteenth-century metropolis.<sup>21</sup>

When the Berlin Senate announced its comprehensive redevelopment scheme in 1963, the main objectives of German planners could no longer be attributed to the destruction and housing shortages caused by the Second World War. A rapidly growing economy had engendered ever-expanding state budgets for social-welfare policies and a continuous search for better living conditions, heralding a golden age for urban planning.<sup>22</sup> Real wages doubled between 1950 and 1960, and subsequently tripled between 1960 and 1973. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) averaged 6.5 per cent growth per year during the same period, as society experienced near to full employment.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, planners could afford to become increasingly comprehensive and ambitious in determining the future of West German cities. The booming economy simultaneously enabled and compelled them to step up their pace, and signs of rapid change were discernible in all major conurbations. Around this time, it was not uncommon to plan suburbs of more than 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>24</sup> During the 1950s professionals had mostly focused on building as many flats as possible, predominantly on the outskirts of cities and towns, whereas from the early 1960s onward their attention shifted towards the quality of the outdated housing stock in central districts.

The shift from quantity to quality was clearly discernible in the 1963 scheme. Its spiritual fathers had singled out the south-eastern part of Kreuzberg—affectionately known by its postal code, SO36—for special treatment, owing to its heavy intermixture of tenement blocks and light industry.<sup>25</sup> Whilst some areas of Berlin had been flattened, SO36 had survived the aerial bombardments and street fighting of the Second World War remarkably well, with only 43 per cent of the borough's housing stock affected by acts of war. One of the first areas to be earmarked for redevelopment was the Kottbusser Tor, a large traffic junction in the heart of the borough intersected by two metro lines. Half of the 37,000 people living in the redevelopment area's 16,000 flats were employed by local retailers, workshops and craft establishments—often located within the inner courtyards.

Senate planners emphasized that this so-called *Kreuzberger Mischung* (Kreuzberg blend) was jeopardizing the mental and physical health of residents, while businesses were prevented from expanding their activities. The local housing stock, of which 75 per cent had been constructed during the *Gründerzeit*, was considered unsuitable for

<sup>20</sup>Geist and Kürvers, *Das Berliner Mietshaus*, p. 551.

<sup>21</sup>B. M. Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918–1945* (Cambridge MA, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup>S. V. Ward, *Planning the Twentieth-Century City: The Advanced Capitalist World* (Chichester, 2002), p. 249; G. Albers, 'Urban Development, Maintenance and Conservation. Planning in Germany: Values in Transition', *Planning Perspectives*, 21, 1 (2006) p. 56.

<sup>23</sup>H. U. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte 1949–1990* (Munich, 2008), p. 55.

<sup>24</sup>J. Düwel and N. Gutschow, *Städtebau in Deutschland im 20. Jahrhundert: Ideen—Projekte—Akteure* (Stuttgart, 2005), pp. 189, 198.

<sup>25</sup>D. Hoffmann-Axthelm, 'Geschichte und Eigenart der Kreuzberger Mischung', in Fiebig, Hoffmann-Axthelm and Knödler-Bunte, *Kreuzberger Mischung*, p. 9.

modern living—in particular with regard to hygienic conditions. In fact, in 1963 only 15 per cent of dwellings within the Kottbusser Tor area featured separate bathrooms, while 66 per cent of its residents had to use a shared toilet.<sup>26</sup> In response to these conditions, Senate planners put forward an unnegotiable set of criteria for redevelopment. Renewal was required when an area did not have adequate amounts of public space; when traffic or light industry caused noise or pollution; when the entanglement of living and working hindered either one of the two; when plots were occupied by ‘unplanned’ buildings; or when plots were so densely built-up that illumination and ventilation were insufficient.<sup>27</sup> These criteria were easily met in the Kottbusser Tor redevelopment area.

As a solution to the inhabitants’ dire living conditions, the Senate planners proposed to rehouse residents in modernist high-rises set within a green environment and to regroup manufacturers in specially designated areas where they could not affect quality of living. An additional feature was the construction of an inner ring road connecting Kreuzberg with the other Berlin boroughs, including the ones on the other side of the wall.<sup>28</sup> This modernist agenda of urban redevelopment had mostly been laid out during the 1920s, but only rose to prominence in Western Europe during the 1945–1973 era of economic prosperity. During this period, the consensus amongst urban planners was that the outdated housing blocks and industrial infrastructures of the nineteenth century had to be eradicated. The chaotic city of earlier epochs, its unruly traffic streams and mixed urban functions were to be reordered and tamed until not much of the old fabric was left. Johannes Göderitz, one of the more renowned West German planners working in the modernist tradition, stated in 1957 that lack of sound urban planning had resulted in long, tiring commuting distances, massive overcrowding and severe allocation problems.<sup>29</sup> As a solution, he proposed to ‘loosen up’ existing cityscapes, which often equalled their annihilation. In a similar vein, well-known traffic engineer Hans Reichow called for ‘car-centred’ cities in 1959. Small chirurgical interventions did not suffice any longer: the time was ripe for more radical measures.<sup>30</sup> Thus, by the early 1960s urban modernism was clearly reaching its zenith in West Germany.

The implementation of redevelopment schemes depended on political goodwill. As in most West German cities around this time, the Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) dominated politics in West Berlin. In 1963, the local branch won the municipal elections with a solid 62 per cent of the votes. Mayor and future chancellor Willy Brandt had made urban redevelopment a top priority during his term in office, from 1957 to 1966. In his policy declaration, Brandt announced the demolition of 56,000 dwellings over a timespan of ten to fifteen years.<sup>31</sup> The mayor found Senator for Construction and Housing Ralf Schwedler on his side, according to whom urban redevelopment was a process in which the old

<sup>26</sup>T. H. Elkins and B. Hofmeister, *Berlin: The Spatial Structure of a Divided City* (London, 1988), p. 189.

<sup>27</sup>Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen, *Erster Bericht über die Stadterneuerung in Berlin* (Berlin, 1964), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup>Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen, *Erläuterungsbericht zum Plan der Sanierungsgebiete. Ergänzungsplan zum Flächennutzungsplan für die Bezirke II, III, VI, VII, XI, XIV, XX* (Berlin, 1963), p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>J. Göderitz, R. Rainer and H. Hoffmann, *Die gegliederte und aufgelockerte Stadt* (Tübingen, 1957), p. 9.

<sup>30</sup>H. B. Reichow, *Die autogerechte Stadt: ein Weg aus dem Verkehrs-Chaos* (Ravensburg, 1959), p. 5.

<sup>31</sup>Geist and Kürvers, *Das Berliner Mietshaus*, p. 585.

was continually replaced by the ‘time-justified’ new.<sup>32</sup> During his term in office, from 1955 to 1972, the ambitious senator frequently accused his critics of conservatism and backwardness.<sup>33</sup> Such accusations signify that the redevelopment agenda was not only geared towards improving living conditions; it served a political purpose as well. In a 1964 communiqué, the SPD invoked its ‘ideological duty’ to clear the inheritance of land speculation dating from the German Empire.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the sense of urgency in such statements, the redevelopment of West Berlin was a fragmented, painstakingly slow process, with a wide range of participants involved. Planning outlines were drawn up by the Senate, refined by borough planning departments and finally approved by borough councillors and senator Schwedler. Only after publicly owned housing corporations had bought out private landlords and building sites had been cleared could the execution of a redevelopment scheme begin.

### III. Defending Home Ground

In his seminal work on transatlantic urban-renewal practices, Christopher Klemek paints a picture of obedience and orderliness in the West Berlin of the 1960s: ‘Quiescence was characteristic, even among residents directly affected by redevelopment schemes, all of whom vacated without any legal pressure or formal eviction proceedings. Despite the lack of any advocacy for relocated tenants, civic opposition was simply absent.’<sup>35</sup> Indeed, during most of the 1960s, the Senate plans stirred little discussion among residents, though criticism was looming in professional circles. As in other Western European cities around this time, the forces protesting against redevelopment constituted a broad coalition of preservationists, architects and planners, who all had different reasons for being critical. Their publishing platforms concerned newspapers, booklets and professional journals; only when local residents chimed in were voices of dissent taken to the street.

Two rather conservative critics fired the starting shot. In 1964, journalist Wolf Jobst Siedler published a widely read pamphlet against urban redevelopment, lamenting the ‘anonymous and faceless’ qualities of modern living environments.<sup>36</sup> Siedler not only lamented the loss of historic cityscapes; he also protested against the widespread practice of chiselling the facades of nineteenth-century buildings.<sup>37</sup> In 1965, these aesthetic critiques were complemented by Werner March, architect of Berlin’s Olympiastadion and a number of other sports arenas, who had interviewed Kreuzberg’s residents about their surroundings and quality of life. Contrary to findings by Senate planners, March concluded that SO36 had retained a ‘remarkable’ dynamism, despite its paralysing

<sup>32</sup>Deutscher Verband für Wohnungswesen, Städtebau und Raumplanung, *Stadterneuerung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Cologne, 1966), p. 52.

<sup>33</sup>Bodenschatz, *Platz frei für das neue Berlin!*, p. 179.

<sup>34</sup>Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen, *Erster Bericht*, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup>C. Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago, 2011), p. 226.

<sup>36</sup>W. J. Siedler and E. Niggemeyer, *Die gemordete Stadt: Abgesang auf Putte und Straße, Platz und Baum* (Berlin, 1964), p. 9.

<sup>37</sup>H. G. Hiller von Gaertringen, *Schnörkellos: die Umgestaltung von Bauten des Historismus im Berlin des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 2012), p. 257.



vicinity to the Berlin wall.<sup>38</sup> During a borough council meeting, Schwedler dismissed these observations, stating that they were based on unfounded and subjective opinions from individuals who had no knowledge of the conditions in which they lived.<sup>39</sup> Eventually, such technocratic and insensitive responses became a major point of contention for professionals and for the residents who joined them.

During the late 1960s, around the same time as the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum appeared on the drawing boards, debates over the redevelopment of Kreuzberg intensified. In 1969 the influential *Bauwelt* journal ran a series of opinionated articles on the topic, introduced by editor-in-chief Ulrich Conrads. The renowned architecture critic stated that West Berlin's housing corporations did not understand the people they were working for, whilst the Senate mistook urban planning for statistics.<sup>40</sup> Architect Hans-Joachim Stegemann criticized the monopoly position of housing corporations, their emphasis on technological and economic processes instead of human behaviour and the lack of differentiation in new housing types.<sup>41</sup> The fiercest attack however came not from an architect but from a local priest. Thirty-four-year-old Klaus Duntze praised the merits of high building densities and the intermixture of living and working in his borough, pleading for retaining these local characteristics from a social perspective: 'What makes the urban environment "home ground" is the possibility for residents to identify with it.'<sup>42</sup> The series of engaged articles triggered a contemptuous response from a group of West Berlin architects led by Hartmut Frank, who accused the authors of the *Bauwelt* articles of a bourgeois fascination with the working class combined with ignorance regarding its living conditions: 'When Meier on the other side sneezes, Müller falls out of bed.'<sup>43</sup>

The debates in *Bauwelt* reflected the changing tides in the field of architecture and urban planning at the time. During the latter half of the 1960s, urban modernism came under attack from a younger generation of professionals, who were educated in an increasingly politicized climate. West German academic discussions, including those on the built environment, were influenced by the work of sociologists Hans Bahrtdt, Jürgen Habermas and Herbert Marcuse.<sup>44</sup> The work of Bahrtdt in particular, who called for an interdisciplinary approach to urban studies, was devoured by architecture students. In his recommendations for 'habitable' cities, he strongly disapproved of urban redevelopment: 'We accept the metropolitan forms of life as developed in the Western world over the course of centuries. Not accepted are those planning conceptions that consider cities as a necessary evil, and aim to build cities without urban or metropolitan features.'<sup>45</sup> Whilst Bahrtdt and the sympathizers of Duntze embraced immaterial values and refused to equate well-being with prosperity—expressing heartfelt emotions about

<sup>38</sup>W. March and I. Balg, *Umsetzung von Gewerbebetrieben im Sanierungsgebiet Kreuzberg von Berlin: 4. Zwischenbericht einer wirtschaftlichen und soziologischen Untersuchung* (Berlin, 1965), p. 2.

<sup>39</sup>Bezirksstadtrat Meyer, *Zur Beschlussfassung für die Sitzung des Bezirksamtes Kreuzberg am Montag, dem 25. Januar 1965* (Berlin, 1965), p. 4.

<sup>40</sup>U. Conrads, 'Planung als Statisterie', *Bauwelt*, 41 (1969), p. 1385.

<sup>41</sup>N. Adrian and H. J. Stegemann, 'Experimentierfelder der Stadterneuerung', *Bauwelt*, 41 (1969), pp. 1400–6.

<sup>42</sup>K. Duntze, 'Sanierung muß ihre Kriterien aus der Gegend selbst gewinnen', *Bauwelt*, 41 (1969), p. 1398.

<sup>43</sup>H. Frank *et al.*, 'Gründerzeitmuseum und Bildungsfelder: Alternativen zur Senatssanierung in Berlin-Kreuzberg', *Bauwelt*, 47 (1969), p. 1690.

<sup>44</sup>Klemek, *Transatlantic Collapse*, p. 107.

<sup>45</sup>H. P. Bahrtdt. *Humaner Städtebau* (Hamburg, 1968), p. 14.

the imminent loss of a still-functioning living environment—the group represented by Frank continued to believe in benefiting the common good through urban redevelopment and ‘rational’ planning procedures.

What bound the *Bauwelt* contributions together were their frequent use of imagery and their discussions on democratic representation. Whereas articles by the opponents of redevelopment featured images of bustling street scenes, playing children and suggestive juxtapositions of old and new urban environments, supporters of redevelopment utilized pictures of boarded-up tenement houses, old-fashioned interiors and dilapidated public spaces. These conflicting representations of the same reality demonstrate that ways of seeing—and practices of looking—shape how people understand and engage with urban environments.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the first tangible results of urban redevelopment gained an added symbolic value during the late 1960s, about which Samuel Zipp has observed: ‘Urban renewal projects and other like-minded attempts at city remaking on a grand scale are first imagined, designed, planned, and built. But then they are represented and used, and thus reimagined, and so, in a symbolic sense, rebuilt.’<sup>47</sup>

A second recurrent theme in the *Bauwelt* issue was the question of who could and should represent local residents. Should residents be given a voice in the planning process themselves, as Duntze suggested, or was urban redevelopment too complicated for participation by laypeople, as put forward by Frank? This question lay at the heart of a simultaneously published article series in *ARCH+*, a critical journal for architecture and planning founded during the turmoil at West German universities in 1968. Pleading for more transparency, a group of PhD candidates posited that value-free planning was impossible. Inspired by the work of Paul Davidoff,<sup>48</sup> Klaus Pfromm urged planners to empower underrepresented groups in society and to curb the influence of private developers.<sup>49</sup> In line with this last point of advice, Stephan Brandt confessed he had little confidence in the planning apparatus, stating that it was too much aligned with capitalist interests. Indeed, participatory planning was nothing but a sham, hampering genuine democratic behaviour.<sup>50</sup> Echoing the ideas of the Frankfurt School, in particular the work of Habermas, his colleague Andreas Strunk called for revealing the suppressing nature of capitalism through ‘provocacy’ planning—a wordplay on provokingly advocating for participatory planning.<sup>51</sup> While scholars have recently downplayed the technocratic nature of postwar planning,<sup>52</sup> for these contemporaries the battle over the right to the city had only just begun. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the issue of who actually initiated and steered redevelopment schemes and for which reasons was firmly placed on the planning agenda.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup>M. Delmont, ‘Urban Sights: Visual Culture and Urban History’ in *Urban History* 43, 4 (2016), pp. 635–8.

<sup>47</sup>S. Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York, 2010), p. 6.

<sup>48</sup>P. Davidoff, ‘Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning’, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 31, 4 (1965), pp. 331–8.

<sup>49</sup>K. Pfromm, ‘Advozierende Planung: Versuch zur Stadtplanungstheorie’, *ARCH+ Studienhefte für architekturbezogene Umweltforschung und Planung*, 8 (1969), p. 30.

<sup>50</sup>S. Brandt, ‘Zur Demokratisierung des Planungsprozesses’, *ARCH+ Studienhefte für architekturbezogene Umweltforschung und Planung*, 9 (1970), pp. 19–44.

<sup>51</sup>A. Strunk, ‘Provocacy Planning’, *ARCH+ Studienhefte für architekturbezogene Umweltforschung und Planung*, 10 (1970), p. 57.

<sup>52</sup>S. Haumann, ‘Participation and the Modernization Process’, *Planning Perspectives*, 26, 1 (2011), pp. 1–2.

<sup>53</sup>L. Burckhardt, ‘Wer plant die Planung?’, in W. Pehnt (ed.), *Die Stadt in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Lebensbedingungen, Aufgaben, Planung* (Stuttgart, 1974), p. 478.

In addition to growing criticism in professional circles, urban redevelopment was facing a backlash as a result of changing demographics in local constituencies. During the second half of the 1960s, West Berlin had become a popular destination for young adults owing to its academic climate and status as an Allied protectorate—which meant that conscription did not apply.<sup>54</sup> Kreuzberg particularly experienced a rapid influx of rebellious young people, attracted by cheap rents and a lively anti-establishment scene.<sup>55</sup> In 1964, the *Berliner Morgenpost* already described the borough as being full of promise and possibilities for the young.<sup>56</sup> The tenement blocks of the *Gründerzeit*—threatened but yet untainted by modernity—provided young West Germans with a refuge from an increasingly technocratic and bureaucratic society.<sup>57</sup> As the younger generation was moving in, older residents kept moving out, with Kreuzberg's population dwindling from 213,000 in 1952 to a mere 158,000 in 1970.<sup>58</sup>

By renovating, restoring or at least making inhabitable their newly found homes and mobilizing remaining residents, the relatively small number of newcomers became a powerful counterforce to urban redevelopment. Whilst many West Germans believed Berlin to be caught up in an unstoppable spiral of urban decay, the new cohort of students, artists and young professionals saw the city as a vibrant place in which to stage critique and live an alternative lifestyle outside of mainstream culture.<sup>59</sup> According to Barbara Lang, these bohemians came to SO36 because of, not despite, its built environment.<sup>60</sup> In their view, what remained of Kreuzberg's social and physical fabric was an authentic living environment worth fighting for, or as Manuel Castells has observed on the relationship of youthful social movements and an aging urban environment: 'Only in the secrecy of their homes, in the complicity of neighborhoods, in the communication of taverns, in the joy of street gatherings may they find values, ideas, projects and, finally, demands that do not conform to the dominant social interests.'<sup>61</sup>

Owing to its politicized nature, urban redevelopment quickly gained the interest of political youth movements as well.<sup>62</sup> As Schwedler and his planners were working out West Berlin's redevelopment agenda, the SPD party ranks underwent a remarkable rejuvenation. Between 1963 and 1972, the percentage of new party members younger than thirty-five grew from 49 to 65. By the early 1970s, almost two-thirds of the SPD membership had joined the *Jungsozialisten*, abbreviated as *Jusos*.<sup>63</sup> On their long march through the institutions, these young radicals—mostly hailing from the ranks of the disintegrating *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*—preferred extra-parliamentary

<sup>54</sup> Clay Large, *Berlin*, p. 482.

<sup>55</sup> Geist and Kürvers, *Das Berliner Mietshaus*, p. 599.

<sup>56</sup> B. Lang, *Mythos Kreuzberg: Ethnographie eines Stadtteils 1961–1995* (Frankfurt/Main, 1998), p. 117.

<sup>57</sup> M. Föllmer, 'Cities of Choice: Elective Affinities and the Transformation of Western European Urbanity from the Mid-1950s to Early 1980s', *Contemporary European History*, 24, 4 (2015), p. 588.

<sup>58</sup> Lang, *Mythos Kreuzberg*, p. 112.

<sup>59</sup> E. Pugh, *Architecture, Politics and Identity in Divided Berlin* (Pittsburgh, 2014), p. 202.

<sup>60</sup> Lang, *Mythos Kreuzberg*, p. 118.

<sup>61</sup> M. Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 70.

<sup>62</sup> Warnke, *Stein gegen Stein*, pp. 219–72.

<sup>63</sup> D. Süß, 'Die Enkel auf den Barrikaden: Jungsozialisten in der SPD in den Siebzigerjahren', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 44 (2004), p. 68.

opposition to engagement with local and national elections.<sup>64</sup> Inspired by student revolts in Paris and other Western cities, the *Jusos* rebelled against society's status quo and those who upheld it.<sup>65</sup> Democratic reform was a recurring theme, or, as they demanded at a conference in 1969, 'removal of all unchecked, illegitimated forms of power, the participation in society of every single person, more possibilities for self-development and the elimination of powerful ties between commercial and political interests'.<sup>66</sup> These demands clearly reflected the urban agenda of the New Left, which was spear-headed by local politics and community work.<sup>67</sup> For the *Jusos*, the deficits of the welfare state were most tangible on the local level.<sup>68</sup>

#### IV. The Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum Takes Shape

Should existing structures be rehabilitated and preserved in close consultation with long-time residents, as advocated by the New Left and a younger generation of architects and planners, or should West Berlin continue down the road of comprehensive redevelopment? As this question seeped into the political arena, a group of private investors launched their plan for the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum. While the Senate had designated non-profit housing corporations for the execution of its plans, it also welcomed the involvement of private developers.<sup>69</sup> The *Berlinhilfegesetz* was instrumental here. The law turned urban redevelopment into a lucrative business, stipulating that investors could write off 20 per cent of their construction loans while reclaiming 30 per cent of their investment costs. This condition attracted speculators who mostly stood to gain from the exchange value of real estate projects and who had little to no interest in their use value for future residents.<sup>70</sup>

Notwithstanding the strict regulations under which developers could apply for financial support, the incentives resulted in an unprecedented building frenzy. Between the end of the Second World War and the end of the 1960s, a quarter of all housing projects in West Berlin were built by private developers, for whom new construction was financially more appealing than renovation of the existing housing stock.<sup>71</sup> In addition, the decade saw the erection of commercial landmarks such as the Europa-Center near Kurfürstendamm, the Springer headquarters just off the Berlin Wall and the Steglitzer Kreisel—buildings that might never have been realized without West Berlin's generous investment conditions. Because of the involvement of public money, local officials developed strong ties with the private sector. In his examination of public-private

<sup>64</sup>P. Jochen Winters, 'Die Stadt der Vier Mächte auf der Trennlinie zwischen Ost und West', in R. Dietrich (ed.), *Berlin: Zehn Kapitel seiner Geschichte* (Berlin, 1981), p. 293.

<sup>65</sup>P. Lösche and F. Walter, *Die SPD: Klassenpartei, Volkspartei, Quotenpartei. Zur Entwicklung der Sozialdemokratie von Weimar bis zur deutschen Vereinigung* (Darmstadt, 1992), p. 269.

<sup>66</sup>Zustand und Aufgabe der SPD: Beschluß des Bundeskongresses der Jungsozialisten in München vom 5.–7. Dezember 1969', cited in S. Miller and H. Potthoff, *Kleine Geschichte der SPD* (Bonn, 1991), p. 434.

<sup>67</sup>W. Roth, *Kommunalpolitik—für wen? Arbeitsprogramm der Jungsozialisten* (Frankfurt/Main, 1971), p. 15.

<sup>68</sup>E. P. Müller, *Jungsozialisten: zwischen Reform und Revolution* (Cologne, 1974), p. 200.

<sup>69</sup>R. Bohne and E. Zint, 'Praxis der Altbauerneuerung heute', in Arbeitsgruppe Stadterneuerung, *Stadterneuerung in Berlin-West: Perspektiven einer Bestandsentwicklungspolitik* (Berlin, 1989), p. 43; Bodenschatz, *Platz frei für das neue Berlin!*, p. 176.

<sup>70</sup>Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, pp. 31–6.

<sup>71</sup>Pugh, *Architecture*, p. 205.

partnerships in postwar Britain, Peter Shapely suggests that it was an unequal relationship: ‘Faced with the promise of new investment, and backed as it was by technocrats, it is little wonder that local councillors agreed to numerous schemes, many of which have since been heavily criticized.’<sup>72</sup>

While there was no official public-private partnership underpinning the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum, the Senate and borough council supported its initiators financially, legally and publicly. A central figure in the construction history of the complex was Heinz Mosch, one of West Germany’s most prolific building contractors.<sup>73</sup> Within five years of his entry into West Berlin’s real-estate market in 1963, his firm had developed properties valued at a total of 283 million DM, of which one third was realized in Kreuzberg. The area around Kottbusser Tor was of special interest to him, since the 1963 Senate scheme had designated this traffic junction as the borough’s future commercial core. With renewal in sight, local landlords refused to sell their plots at market value, demanding compensation for the expected rise in land values.<sup>74</sup> Their stance was enabled by the strong legal position of landowners in West Germany: during the 1960s critics frequently lambasted landowners’ self-serving behaviour.<sup>75</sup> Mosch had to pay three to five times more for plots surrounding Kottbusser Tor than for comparable plots elsewhere—effectively elbowing housing corporations out of the bidding process.<sup>76</sup> Eventually, this proved to be one of the main obstacles to a swift execution of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum scheme.

The project Mosch envisioned was to be one of his company’s flagship projects. However, the financing model and design of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum were not solely his initiative. In 1968, the 44-year-old developer was approached by 28-year-old real-estate agent Günther Schmidt and 33-year-old architect Johannes Uhl, who respectively provided him with the financial strength and design skills needed to turn his dreams into reality. Half of the investment costs were to be acquired from individuals, who were lured by the favourable conditions of the *Berlinhilfegesetz*.<sup>77</sup> Mocking the subsidy law, Uhl and his co-architect Wolfgang Jokisch claimed that the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum would be funded by West German dentists who would rather see their savings flow into West Berlin than into the pockets of tax collectors.<sup>78</sup> This coming together of private entrepreneurship, design skills and financial assets emphasizes that, in the words of David Harvey, ‘the real power to reorganise urban life so often lies ... within a broader coalition of forces within which urban government and administration have only a facilitative and coordinating role to play’.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Shapely, ‘Governance’, p. 1292.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Letzter Akt des Mosch-Dramas’, *Die Zeit* (8 Nov. 1974).

<sup>74</sup> Senator für Bau- und Wohnungswesen, *Stadterneuerung in Berlin. Zweiter Bericht an das Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin* (Berlin, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> A. Mitscherlich, *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte: Anstiftung zum Unfrieden* (Frankfurt/Main, 1965), p. 22.

<sup>76</sup> Institut für Wohnungsbau und Stadtteilplanung, *Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum: eine tierische Sanierung* (Berlin, 1982), p. 10; T. Winters, ‘Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum: ein Neubau muß erneuert werden’, in Arbeitsgruppe Stadterneuerung, *Stadterneuerung in Berlin-West: Perspektiven einer Bestandsentwicklungspolitik* (Berlin, 1989) p. 76; ‘Grundstücke zu teuer eingekauft: Kreuzberger Zentrum noch nicht als Sanierungsgebiet anerkannt’, *Der Tagesspiegel* (2 Feb. 1971). Cf. Molotch, ‘The City as a Growth Machine’, p. 310.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Wir bauen das Neue Kreuzberger Zentrum: Sie können sich mit 200 % Steuervorteil beteiligen’, *Die Welt* (18 Dec. 1970).

<sup>78</sup> P. Behrbohm, *Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum* (Berlin, 2012), p. 27.

<sup>79</sup> Harvey, ‘From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism’, p. 6.

After two years of real estate transactions and rumours, in December 1970 the troika of young entrepreneurs presented a scheme encompassing 300 one to three-room flats, 15,000 square meters of shopping space and 700 parking spaces, at a total cost of 73.2 million DM.<sup>80</sup> The Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum was an atypical product of postwar architecture and planning, paying lip service both to urban modernism and to the *Kreuzberger Mischung* (see Fig. 1). Several flats featured ateliers to cater to the local bohemian scene, whilst the public squares in front of the building were enclosed by cafés and two-floor shopping corridors leading to the modern version of a Kreuzberg courtyard.<sup>81</sup> If it had been up to Uhl, the area surrounding his design would have been even more extensively redeveloped.<sup>82</sup> The half-circle shape of the building with its plain northern façade was thought of as a concrete wall protecting Kottbusser Tor from noise and exhaust fumes produced by the future inner ring road, which would intersect at the nearby Oranienplatz.<sup>83</sup> Although the reunification of Berlin—a precondition for construction of the ring road—seemed far-fetched at this time, and despite growing criticism of the car-centred city, the Senate held fast, sticking to its original visions.<sup>84</sup>

The way in which the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum took shape, in particular its backing by a growth coalition of public officials and private entrepreneurs, is exemplary for postwar Western European governance. Molotch's observations on the political economy of place prove useful here: 'We need to see each geographical map ... not merely as a demarcation of legal, political, or topographical features, but as a mosaic of competing land interests capable of strategic coalition and action.'<sup>85</sup> The Senate and its planning department, on the one hand, and the troika behind the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum, on the other, aimed at securing the preconditions for economic growth. Besides favourable tax conditions and planning permissions, the project required convincing West Berliners of the importance of growth to their personal well-being.<sup>86</sup> United in their zeal for economic growth, Kreuzberg's elected officials initially embraced an ideology of 'value-free development' by claiming that the work of property developers was only benefiting the public good.<sup>87</sup> Advertisements and positive news coverage hailed the achievements of Mosch, most notably in the government-run *Kreuzberger Echo*. Newspaper headlines such as 'Mosch is increasingly committing himself to Kreuzberg', 'Together with Mosch into a new future' and 'What takes a while, must become good' left little doubt about the strong public-private ties.<sup>88</sup> At first,

<sup>80</sup> 'Am Kottbusser Tor entsteht das', *Berliner Morgenpost* (3 Dec. 1970).

<sup>81</sup> 'Riesenprojekt am Kottbusser Tor: Beletage der Industrie', *Der Abend* (3 Dec. 1970); 'Wohnungen im Maisonettenstil', *Telegraf* (3 Dec. 1970).

<sup>82</sup> J. Uhl, *Zeichnungen zum Zwecke Architektur* (Berlin, 1975), pp. 92–6.

<sup>83</sup> 'Hochhausring Kottbusser Tor', *Der Tagesspiegel* (3 Dec. 1970).

<sup>84</sup> H. Stimmann, 'Die autogerechte Stadt', in J. Boberg, T. Fichter and E. Gillen (eds), *Die Metropole: Industriekultur in Berlin im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1986) p. 312.

<sup>85</sup> Molotch, 'The City as a Growth Machine', p. 311.

<sup>86</sup> A. E. G. Jonas and D. Wilson, 'The City as a Growth Machine: Critical Reflections Two Decades Later', in A. E. G. Jonas and D. Wilson (eds), *The Urban Growth Machine: Critical Reflections Two Decades Later* (New York, 1999), p. 8.

<sup>87</sup> A. Harding, 'Elite Theory and Growth Machines', in D. Judge, G. Stoker and H. Wolman (eds), *Theories of Urban Politics* (London, 1997), p. 42.

<sup>88</sup> 'Mosch engagiert sich noch stärker in Kreuzberg', *Kreuzberger Echo*, 3, 10 (1968), p. 13; 'Mit Mosch in eine neue Zukunft', *Kreuzberger Echo*, 4, 14 (1969), p. 9; 'Motto des Neuen Kreuzberger Zentrums: Was lange währt, wird gut', *Kreuzberger Echo*, 7, 25 (1972), p. 8.



**Figure 1:** Street view of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum. Source: Landesarchiv Berlin F Rep. 290

national media outlets also wrote favourably about the plans for the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum, with *Die Welt* even calling the building a *Glitzerding*, a shiny bauble—a reference to the luxurious new developments going up around Kurfürstendamm.<sup>89</sup> However, such admiration proved to be short-lived owing to the emergence of citizen journalism and growing local opposition, which revealed the brutal working methods of Schmidt and his partners.

### V. *Das ist unser Haus* – That’s Our House

In November 1970, one month prior to the presentation of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum, Kreuzberg saw the founding of the community newspaper *Kreuzberger Stadtteilzeitung*. In their first editorial, the founders unequivocally denounced urban redevelopment: ‘Renewal does not mean serving the needs of the working classes by offering healthy and human living conditions—it means profit-making by house owners and landlords.’<sup>90</sup> From this opening statement onwards, the *Stadtteilzeitung* criticized the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum as a money-driven project with alienating effects on its surroundings, nicknaming the curved building a *Profitwurm* (literally, a profit worm; see Fig. 2). The alternative newspaper was the mouthpiece of a broader social movement, which campaigned for the legalization of squatting, an immediate stop to demolition works and greater public participation in the redevelopment process. While the *Stadtteilzeitung* was mostly catering to a hardcore group of activists and

<sup>89</sup> ‘Das Dach des Kreuzberger Zentrums wird ein grüner Parkwall krönen’, *Die Welt* (3 Dec. 1970).

<sup>90</sup> ‘Kommentar’, *Kreuzberger Stadtteilzeitung*, 1 (Nov. 1970), p. 18.



**Figure 2:** Aerial image of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum. Source: Landesarchiv Berlin F Rep. 290

did not necessarily represent the views of Kreuzberg's silent majority, its calls to arms were taken seriously by the local authorities—not least owing to the high visibility of the newspaper's political base. To make themselves heard and seen, *Stadtteilzeitung* editors organized rallies and performances in Kreuzberg's public spaces, thereby physically claiming their right to the city. In the words of David Harvey, this was not merely 'a right of what already exists, but a right to change it after [their] heart's desire'.<sup>91</sup>

In addition to this mounting criticism from below, Schmidt and his allies were encountering diminishing political goodwill. Because they had exceeded fixed land prices in buying up plots, senator Schwedler decided to temporarily withdraw prospective funding from the *Berlinhilfegesetz*. In July 1971 this dramatic turn of events was fiercely debated during a meeting of the SPD-dominated borough council. Hans Baltruschat, councillor for local planning affairs, proclaimed that taxpayers should not be forced to bail out failing entrepreneurs. His political superior, Borough Mayor Günther Abendroth, castigated Schmidt in even stronger terms, stating that public authorities 'had not, could not and would not' be made responsible for his mistakes. In order to overcome the feelings of powerlessness amongst local residents, Councillor Hans Jörg Strahlendorf proposed careful consultation. Eventually, the borough council agreed to push the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum through, albeit by forcing Schmidt to make several amendments and not selling him the building plots remaining in public hands, thus pausing construction. As the *Berliner Morgenpost* concluded, the decision was

<sup>91</sup>D. Harvey, 'The Right to the City', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27, 4 (2003), p. 939.



a half-hearted compromise to please both local residents and middle-class investors from other parts of West Germany.<sup>92</sup>

While the council's decision did not prevent Schmidt from continuing demolition works, his presence in Kreuzberg was met with increasing hostility over the summer of 1971. According to the *Stadtteilzeitung*, Schmidt was using brutal eviction methods to clear his future building plots.<sup>93</sup> These claims were confirmed by evictees, or, as one of them complained in the *Berliner Morgenpost*: 'What we want is honesty and clarity, so that we know what our fate is. They cannot always propagate help and friendliness without practising it.'<sup>94</sup> The *Stadtteilzeitung* summoned residents to remain in their flats at all costs, a call which mostly fell on deaf ears, whilst accusing Schmidt of being a *Schreibtischtäter*, a bureaucrat who had his employees do the dirty work.<sup>95</sup> The developer, not much older than his adversaries, was cynically described as the prototype of a successful young entrepreneur: 'Who can possibly have something against a young man with good manners and a decent business tone?'<sup>96</sup> Unsurprisingly, the borough council's decision to put the plans on ice temporarily was met with suspicion as well: 'Completely unimportant details were discussed in a language the councillors could hardly understand themselves. In short, this borough council is a farce.'<sup>97</sup>

As these excerpts exemplify, the contents of the *Stadtteilzeitung* were an odd mixture of agitation and information, in which both private and public actors were accused of disregarding the people's will. References to the Second World War were employed to raise suspicions about the founders of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum, whilst calls for a better understanding of the plight of local residents echoed the article series in *Bauwelt* and *ARCH+*. It was expected that the redevelopment machine could only be stopped by direct action and inflammatory rhetoric.<sup>98</sup> This clash over urban redevelopment has often been explained as a generation gap between a postwar cohort of politicians and professionals taught in the modernist tradition, on one hand, and a baby boom generation of progressive urbanites born after the war, on the other.<sup>99</sup> In the case of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum this explanation does not apply, as at least two of its initiators were roughly the same age as their opponents and its design was in fact trying to weave in the older urban fabric.

To arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the conflict, we need to consider other local expressions of discontent. From the early 1970s onwards, young Germans in Cologne, Frankfurt am Main and West Berlin increasingly resorted to squatting as a means of obtaining roofs over their heads. In August 1971 one still-occupied tenement house standing in the way of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum was stripped of its front doors, windows and utility pipes. Whilst Schmidt's intention was to avert

<sup>92</sup>'Pläne für das NKZ wurden auf Eis gelegt: Bürgervertreter wollen städtebauliches Gesamtkonzept abwarten', *Berliner Morgenpost* (10 July 1971).

<sup>93</sup>'Verwaltung schickte Einbrecher!', *Kreuzberger Stadtteilzeitung*, 4 (Mar. 1971), pp. 13, 20.

<sup>94</sup>'Vorwürfe gegen private Baugesellschaft: Überhöhte Grundstückspreise Am Kottbusser Tor', *Berliner Morgenpost* (11 Apr. 1971).

<sup>95</sup>'Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum?', *Kreuzberger Stadtteilzeitung*, 5 (June 1971), p. 6.

<sup>96</sup>'Zum Beispiel', *Kreuzberger Stadtteilzeitung*, 5 (June 1971), p. 16.

<sup>97</sup>'Bebauungsplan aufgeschoben', *Kreuzberger Stadtteilzeitung*, 6 (July/Aug. 1971), p. 10.

<sup>98</sup>Klemek, *Transatlantic Collapse*, p. 246.

<sup>99</sup>D. Ley, *The New Middle Class and the Remaking of the Central City* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 175–221.

squatting, his eviction methods actually provoked such action.<sup>100</sup> Multiple young socialists moved in to repair the damage done, simultaneously winning a lawsuit in which Schmidt was accused of harming the physical and mental wellbeing of his tenants.<sup>101</sup> In support of another squatting action nearby, local rock band Ton Steine Scherben even wrote a popular but controversial protest song against Schmidt and his allies.<sup>102</sup> The commotion did not go unnoticed by the developer's investors, who urged senior SPD members to stop the allegedly unlawful actions and slander immediately. Thus, in their longing for political authenticity, the *Jusos* put their political elders in an awkward position, taking their claims about democracy at face value by probing the gaps between official policies and everyday realities.<sup>103</sup> Despite their shared critical stance, the *Stadtteilzeitung* editors remained suspicious of the young socialists owing to their links to the local SPD, which prevented collaboration between the two collectives.

The strategies employed by the *Stadtteilzeitung* and *Jusos* in their fight against urban redevelopment are best understood in light of the relationships they built with the already existing social and physical structures of the city. From the late 1960s onwards, the individualization of West German society had brought about a quest for engagement and new convictions, preferably with an exalted ideal, leading to the politicization of human relations and the urban environment. The squatting actions were more than just the (re)claiming of properties. According to Alexander Vasudevan, the postwar squatting movement 'reimagined the city as a space of necessity and refuge, experimentation and resistance'.<sup>104</sup> Even more so, squatting could provide one with a new personal identity, or as Emily Pugh has observed: 'Where in the city, in what type of structure, and with whom one lived were choices that reflected an individual's social, political, and economic values.'<sup>105</sup>

An important side effect of the squatting actions and the burgeoning citizen journalism was a growing concern about the future of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum amongst regular media outlets and local politicians as well. The *Berliner Zeitung* described the complex in 1971 as a financial phoenix rising from the surrounding ashes; an 'El Dorado' from which gold was only flowing into the pockets of anonymous investors.<sup>106</sup> Such opinionated comments exemplified the growing polarization of West German media during the early 1970s.<sup>107</sup> In the spring of 1972, the Berlin Senate finally agreed upon a new master plan. Most importantly, the complex was to accommodate social housing units instead of flats at market value, as well as a retirement community.<sup>108</sup> In addition, the plan was to be partially executed by a non-profit

<sup>100</sup> 'Ringsum barsten Fenster und Türen. Abbruch in noch bewohntem Haus—Protest der Mieter in Kreuzberg', *Der Tagesspiegel* (7 Aug. 1971).

<sup>101</sup> 'Auflagen zugunster der Mieter', *Der Tagesspiegel* (11 Aug. 1971).

<sup>102</sup> K. Sichtermann, J. Johler and C. Stahl, *Keine Macht für Niemand: die Geschichte der Ton Steine Scherben* (Berlin, 2003), pp. 90–4.

<sup>103</sup> T. S. Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties: The Antiauthoritarian Revolt, 1962–1978* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 28.

<sup>104</sup> A. Vasudevan, *The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting* (London, 2017), p. 9.

<sup>105</sup> Pugh, *Architecture*, p. 211.

<sup>106</sup> 'Berlin: Wie es baut und blecht. Heute: Das Neue Kreuzberger Zentrum', *Berliner Zeitung* (16 Nov. 1971).

<sup>107</sup> K. H. Stamm, *Alternative Öffentlichkeit: die Erfahrungsproduktion neuer sozialer Bewegungen* (Frankfurt/Main, 1988), p. 33.

<sup>108</sup> 'Stadtviertel mit neuem Gesicht: BVV beschloss den Bebauungsplan für das Neue Kreuzberger Zentrum', *Der Tagesspiegel* (20 May 1972).

housing corporation.<sup>109</sup> Under the stipulations of the *Berlinhilfegesetz*, 8 million DM were allocated to Schmidt's construction company—one quarter of the Senate's yearly allocation budget for construction works. After the green light was given, Schmidt and his partners went ahead with construction at an astonishing pace. By the summer of 1974, the first tenants moved in, meaning the developers could finally lay claim to public subsidies.<sup>110</sup> However, the tight building schedule had resulted in poor construction quality as well as alterations to the original design. Soon enough, journalists began drawing links between the building's design and its popularity amongst local drug dealers and loitering youths.<sup>111</sup> Denunciations in newspaper articles from the 1980s ranged from a 'dirty monster' to a 'stake driven into Kreuzberg's older urban fabric'.<sup>112</sup>

Such observations attest to the unfolding paradigm shift that was taking place in urban planning. The reappraisal of existing cityscapes, already advocated from the mid-1960s onwards by a minority of experts, went hand in hand with the implementation of more democratic planning laws and consultation events.<sup>113</sup> In West Berlin, early criticism of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum became a starting point for alternative forms of urban redevelopment. From the mid-1970s onwards—under the banner of 'cautious renewal'—existing street patterns were retained, once-despised tenements modernized instead of torn down and inner courtyards relieved of their outbuildings. This new agenda however was too little too late for the Kottbusser Tor area, which had lost 81 per cent of its fabric around this time, together with 40 per cent of its inhabitants and 70 per cent of its businesses.<sup>114</sup> In 1972, a few years before the new planning practice gained a foothold in Kreuzberg, Schwedler left office.<sup>115</sup> His successor, SPD senator Harry Ristock, was much more in tune with the practice of cautious renewal. Whilst Schmidt and Mosch continued their work in the construction industry, they were not able to obtain any orders on the scale of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum, which had come about as an unwanted compromise of welfare capitalism.

Driving the nail into the coffin of a swift and sound execution of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum was the 1973 oil crisis and its bleak economic prospects. The increasing outflux of West German jobs to low-wage countries, the automation of production processes and the disappointing growth in West Berlin's tertiary sector hampered growth in wages, whilst construction costs exploded, leading to rising rents for a target population of tenants who were already experiencing difficulties making ends meet.<sup>116</sup> Protesters in favour of a new approach to SO36 Kreuzberg and similar neighbourhoods were emboldened by these structural economic changes and the new

<sup>109</sup>Winters, 'Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum', p. 77.

<sup>110</sup>'Die ersten Mieter ziehen schon ein', *Der Tagesspiegel* (25 Aug. 1974); 'Viele Bürger fanden eine neue Wohnung', *Kreuzberger Echo*, 8, 34 (Dec. 1974), p. 6.

<sup>111</sup>'Teils leere Geschäfte, viel Unrat und auch Zerstörung', *Der Tagesspiegel* (31 July 1980).

<sup>112</sup>'"Zynisch, absurd": Empörung über Abriß-Idee', *Der Tagesspiegel* (10 Mar. 1998).

<sup>113</sup>Düwel and Gutschow, *Städtebau*, p. 248.

<sup>114</sup>Elkins and Hofmeister, *Berlin*, p. 191.

<sup>115</sup>R. Vierhaus and L. Herbst, *Biographisches Handbuch der Mitglieder des Deutschen Bundestages 1949–2002* (Munich, 2002), p. 806.

<sup>116</sup>H. Bodenschatz, V. Heise and J. Korfmacher, *Schluss mit der Zerstörung: Stadterneuerung und städtische Opposition in West-Berlin, Amsterdam und London* (Berlin, 1983), p. 39.

paradigms in politics and planning. Suddenly, it seemed that their work had not been in vain.<sup>117</sup> The developments of the 1970s culminated in the International Building Exhibition Berlin of 1987, which aimed to integrate small-scale buildings into the older urban fabric instead of clean-slate urbanism.<sup>118</sup> Not only did this new practice have more appeal to existing inhabitants, it was also more cost-effective and less disruptive than the redevelopment processes of the 1960s.<sup>119</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

The preconditions for constructing the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum were set by a thriving West German economy, a strong consensus on the merits of urban redevelopment and ultimately the financial backing of private enterprise by state institutions—which in the case of West Berlin were extremely generous. This illustrates why historians, in line with the work of social scientists such as Harvey and Molotch, should focus on the interplay between political and commercial powers underpinning urban redevelopment instead of its physical outcomes. As the recent reappraisal of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum demonstrates,<sup>120</sup> aesthetic taste changes over time and is therefore a less consistent—and probably less relevant—topic of study than the political and financial context in which our living environment is shaped. The cooperation between private developers and a Berlin Senate dominated by the SPD exemplifies how left-wing politicians accepted the market for reasons of efficiency, economic expansion and job growth—even at a time when the welfare state was firmly established. This situation was no different from the public-private partnerships forged in other Western European cities around this time,<sup>121</sup> demonstrating that we should be careful to draw a clean line between the golden age of state involvement in urban planning from the end of the Second World War to the economic crises of the 1970s and the laissez-faire capitalism and neoliberal policies of the 1980s.

To understand how the conflict over urban redevelopment emerged in Kreuzberg SO36, this contribution has focused on the involvement of private entrepreneurs. While it is difficult to ascertain how dissonant voices related to one another, a few decisive moments can be highlighted. First, the evident lack of public participation in the planning process and unquestioned financial backing of non-local actors made for a bad start. Secondly, changing conceptions of urban planning were already traceable in the professional criticism that emerged during the latter half of the 1960s, which was perfectly applicable to the developing situation at Kottbusser Tor. Thirdly, this criticism was amplified as a result of the influx of young adults and Schmidt's eviction methods and financial models, which made the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum infamous even before the first scaffolding was erected. This course of events led in turn to the local press outlets changing their position from appreciative to rejective. Whilst Senate and

<sup>117</sup>Lang, *Mythos Kreuzberg*, p. 128.

<sup>118</sup>Richie, *Faust's Metropolis*, p. 801.

<sup>119</sup>Elkins and Hofmeister, *Berlin*, p. 192.

<sup>120</sup><http://www.exberliner.com/features/zeitgeist/loving-the-mess/>.

<sup>121</sup>For the example of public-private partnerships in the Netherlands see T. Verlaan, *De Ruimtemakers: Projectontwikkelaars en de Nederlandse Binnenstad 1950–1980* (Nijmegen, 2017).

borough council officials were not deaf to the criticism uttered by the *Stadtteilzeitung* and *Jusos*, it proved difficult to deviate from earlier arrangements.

Thus, the battle over urban redevelopment in Kreuzberg was much more complicated than suggested by the current historiography, in which tightly organized local residents are pitted against a uniform block of staunch technocrats. This article has revised this powerful yet oversimplified image. From the July 1971 council meeting onwards, when the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum was sent back to the drawing board, opinions within the SPD began to diverge. Younger party members and borough councillors, who stood in closer contact with local residents than with senator Schwedler, pressured the Senate to amend the scheme. The blurred lines of division within the opposed blocs can also be observed in how the *Jusos* and *Stadtteilzeitung* opposed the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum. Whilst the former called for more public participation and indirectly contributed to the SPD's changing stance in this field, the latter steadfastly refused to cooperate with Kreuzberg's authorities. Thus, not only was West Berlin's redevelopment agenda subject to an interplay between differing political forces, as opposed to two homogeneous camps, it also became the testing ground for a generational renewal within the city's Left.

### Abstract

During the early 1960s, elected officials and urban planners designated large swathes of West Berlin as redevelopment areas, most notably the district of Kreuzberg SO36. With the help of private developers, an underexamined group of stakeholders in urban planning, local residents were to be rehoused in spacious apartment blocks equipped with modern facilities. The construction history of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum housing complex is a classic yet understudied example of how public and private actors attempted to work together in the field of postwar urban planning. Soon after the plan was publicly announced, the public consensus on urban redevelopment altered. Criticism came from young professionals in the field of architecture and planning as well as neighbourhood action groups, who were eventually followed by public officials. This article investigates how and why the mood changed inside and outside the field of West German architecture and urban planning. Current historiography tends to neglect the role of private entrepreneurs in urban redevelopment efforts. By examining the politics leading up to the construction of the Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum, this article sheds a fresh light on the *modus operandi* of the West German welfare state on the local level and how it responded to bottom-up demands for democratization and transparency. The interaction between local authorities, commercial interests and the public is innovatively brought together into a single analytical framework by consulting a wide array of primary sources, most prominently articles by West Berlin's alternative and mainstream press, architecture and planning journals and minutes from official meetings.

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