Careful Urban Renewal in Kreuzberg, Berlin: International Bauausstellung Berlin 1987

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Abstract. International Architecture Exhibitions reinforce the negative idea of pre-established formal concepts in favour of a discussion rich in alternatives and with different thinking processes. 'Behutsame Stadterneuerung' – 'careful urban renewal' – was established after a long conflict between the political and administrative systems in power and construction cooperatives, which had its decisive moment in 1975. The urbanism of the Modern Movement started to be abandoned and the building industry connected to the promotion of houses, often closely related to political parties, started to decay. The refurbishment and revival of a very specific neighbourhood with a significant plan in Berlin – Kreuzberg – called for measures to interweave and reorganise the old and the new, but also houses and industries. In this area, there was a proposal to create a better ecological quality that preserved the traditional atmosphere and sought ways to incorporate the political efforts to integrate foreign families. The 'careful urban renewal' programme was seen as a planning in close connection to the local situation to harmonise total and individual conditions. The conditions related to the urban space and the built should be connected to the social assumptions of daily life. This research is focused on the process developed in Kreuzberg and provides a general account of the difficulties that occurred in the framework of the 'careful urban renewal' programme. This big district of Berlin used to be a central area of the city but it became a peripheral area of West Berlin due to the political division of the city. The neighbourhood would become one of the areas appointed for IBA, whose role was to regenerate and revive the old substance of Kreuzberg and to rebuild the urban fabric, particularly building houses and social amenities.

1. Introduction

For a long time, the outdated structure of the Kreuzberg neighbourhood had been overcrowded and neglected, accommodating both residential and industrial activities that were often incompatible.

The devastation during the Second World War, the division of the city, and the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 were the determining factors in the decline of Kreuzberg. The Wall pushed an area that used to have a central location to the outskirts. Consequently, there was a cut in the traditional connections between the centre of the neighbourhood and the workplaces and recreational areas of the Southeast of the city.
On the other side, traffic plans for the whole city were drawn up in the 1950s and 1960s. These included a vast motorway network, where southern and eastern sections crossed Luisenstadt ‘figure 1’. The urban renovation planning followed the traffic plans: the industry would be re-established near the motorways, and the old blocks should be pulled down and replaced by long rows of high-rise blocks – the plans of roads brought consequences for the vicinities in the eastern part, where inhabitants began to leave. Considering these prospects, old corporations of houses redevelopment and private real estate agents began to buy buildings with a view to ‘renovate through demolition’: property speculators let houses fall into total decay hoping they would have the permission to demolish them and build a new profitable property. The consequences were obvious: a large number of long-time residents were expelled; movable classes moved to another part; the elderly, the poor, the unemployed, and an increasing number of immigrants stayed and moved to the flats that were vacant and became ‘provisional tenants.’

In Kreuzberg, the negative effects of these unidirectional measures taken on a strictly theoretical basis by those responsible for the planning were beginning to be felt when IBA [Internationale Bauausstellung – International Building Exhibition Berlin] was founded. The demolition and sometimes the construction of new buildings with the support of the new process of planning and property speculation had already begun to turn intact neighbourhoods into poor neighbourhoods.

2. The punished neighbourhood and its recovery
The wounds Kreuzberg district had suffered for more than fifteen years of large-scale redevelopment had reached alarming dimensions. This district has a peculiar and painful history: it was threatened and destroyed by politicians, planners, and investors. More than 7,000 flats were demolished, more than 5,000 people had left the district permanently, while almost double that number had to abandon their houses and find new ones.

There were numerous reasons to explain why the biggest area of urban development in West Berlin had been a mistake. The growing lack of public funds no longer allowed the preceding thorough
destruction of the existing fabric in the city and the construction of the new city – in the plans of the past, designs had been carried out without considering the economic reality. Therefore, it was suggested that emphasis should be put on developing a new historical understanding and recognising that social, functional, and technical interconnections and their consequent life quality, depend on built examples that should neither be ignored nor torn down naturally. It was very important to preserve the remains of Berlin, the most important city in the world at that time, in Mietskasernen.

In the early 1970s, daily life in one of the oldest neighbourhoods of Berlin was a context full of aggression and tension. The issues on urban renovation were mainly constrained by the social situation of those affected, ‘to which we can only respond with a methodically differentiated and careful programme of renovation’ [2]. It is a change of mentality, like a nostalgic look towards the image of the old capital before being ravaged, which entailed an increasing criticism about the construction of the city and the house after the war.

The work of Bauausstellung Berlin GmbH in the defined areas for the renovation of Kreuzberg began in 1979, in a moment when the practice of redevelopment had stopped completely. The model project of the renovation had to change preserving one of the only typical working-class neighbourhoods and the blend of work and residence side by side. This preservation and vitalisation could only be achieved on the basis of the offer of additional free space, different standards, and rental levels – housing, modernisation, and new buildings – considering the close proximity between houses and industries through spatial designs.

It was also necessary to keep developing the existing urban and construction elements. This approach matched the idea of conservative renovation: modernisation of the edges of the blocks, decrease in the density of construction on the inside of the blocks, and facade renovation. New construction aimed to be based on historical aesthetic principles related to the structure of the facade and its plasticity – maintaining alignment and height.

The works in Kreuzberg aimed at achieving consistency of relationships in general and in particular terms: the decisions about the urban space and the buildings. It was proposed an ideologically forward-thinking refurbishment, based on ecological assumptions, regarding the network of nineteenth-century patios, the existing vegetation, the handcrafted traditions, and especially the vital social issues: the provision of affordable housing, the preservation and improvement of workplaces, the facilities in schools and kindergartens, and the coordination of development in urban structures.

3. The first changing ideas
When the Kreuzberg district began a massive political opposition against the destruction of what had been the house of so many people for years, it was also considered that the sensitive way of cooperation and consultation with local people was impossible, according to the political circles of Berlin. As a response, between 1965 and 1975, corporations of property reurbanisation began to be created – the houses were demolished and the tenants were reaccommodated.

The construction of the ‘new centre of Kreuzberg’, the concern over preserving the streets external appearance, the demolition of the buildings inside the blocks, the replacement of many old buildings by new ones that were placed in its surroundings, and the modernisation of some houses that involved the application of the rules for new buildings has changed the image of a neighbourhood whose recovery few people believed ‘figure 2’.

The decision taken by Berlin’s House of Representatives in 1978 to prepare the international exhibition under the motto ‘careful urban renovation’ included the intensive participation of local people. This was one of the first signs of a mindset shift. ‘The urban centre as a place to live’ was the
topic of IBA and its aim was to deal with the problems of the redevelopment areas in Kreuzberg and to develop concepts for the urban renovation. However, the problems were not exclusively a question of presenting a ‘plan’, but carrying out an urban renovation program to be developed with local people.

Figure 2. Lausitzer Platz, more space for pedestrians and less space for traffic, 1982-1985 [3]

From the beginning, IBA supported requests from groups of tenants that defended that cheap housing should be preserved and urban renovation should be implemented in a socially acceptable way. It took years for people to understand the concept of ‘careful urban renovation’. The measures taken in the district to have the residents trust were only implemented in February 1981, when Berlin’s House put an end to the eviction of tenants and provided the funds for the renovation works, which would not cause rent increases. The protest movement against the urban renovation activities gave rise to big electoral gains for the new party ‘Alternative List’ in 1981.

Between 1980 and 1982, actions of preservation in many existing buildings began, including some located on the inside of the blocks. The social structure was taken into account, different rules were applied to the renovation and modernisation works, and in many cases, the occupants were starting to renovate the flats that were empty due to the planned renovation measures.

4. Urban renovation principles
Urbanism began to move towards new directions as a result of the increasing public resistance to the destructive practices of urban renovation. With the support of Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin, basic principles for the careful treatment of the city were developed and approved on March 17th, 1983 by the councillors of the Kreuzberg district, the Building Senator, and the Berlin Parliament. The basis of an urban renovation should be the best possible understanding between the inhabitants, the artisans, and those responsible for the planning. In this way, an attempt is made to reach an agreement with the complex fabric of problems of the city and to develop solutions that everyone agrees with.

Initially, it was necessary to consider Kreuzberg’s neighbourhoods as they were, taking their houses and streets into account, their inhabitants and users, with their own interests and possibilities. ‘Only a project that alludes to the particular conditions of the neighbourhood, uses the existing structures and is supported by its inhabitants will enable the belief in a better future for the endangered areas in Kreuzberg’ [4]. The inhabitants’ behaviour, their imagination, and trust in the future would become determining factors in the process of renovation.

The ‘desire to stay’ in the neighbourhood shown by the residents was a challenge for the urban renovation. This was the prerequisite for a renovation programme that is oriented towards the residents’ needs, who should participate in the process of planning. The residents in urban reurbanisation areas were exposed to insecurity and fear. Trust and security should prevail, especially
in the contracts of enjoyment and rent. The attempts on the reurbanisation should be achieved in phases of carefully stipulated time – any experience with new lifestyles introduced in a house project should be carried out with precaution.

In the renovation process, formulated and carried out for many years, priority was given to the preservation of the existing structure ‘figure 3’. As a general rule, under no circumstances should buildings that had some useful value be demolished: ‘renovation takes priority over modernisation, and modernisation over the construction of new buildings’ [5]. The experience of the past – preservation of the existing fabric and buildings –, has demonstrated that the existing buildings offer more quality at lower costs than new buildings, because, in the work of renovation that was denied for years, the changes made to the buildings are practical, they are not too expensive and they meet the tenants’ desires. Careful urban renovation is a programme that saves money.

![Figure 3. Interior patios of blocks, before and after the rehabilitation in Kreuzberg][6]

Based on the different ‘states of ruin’ in the Kreuzberg district, three types of adapted intervention were developed, respectively, in three different areas of Kreuzberg. The first one was named the remodelling section, located in the north of Skalitzer Straße, from Kottbusser Tor to the Wall, and it was the most affected by the process of change. The new centre of Kreuzberg ‘figure 4’ was implemented here, and it caused the relocation of inhabitants and the disappearance of some industries. Regarding the remodelling sector to the south of Skalitzer Straße, as far as Landwehrkanal, it was already free from tenants and big areas of blocks had already been torn down in preparation for an entirely new construction. Finally, the sector called ‘Kreuzberg strategies’ – area S.O. 36 –, to the east of Manteuffelstraße, between the river Spree and the bend of Landwehrkanal, there were fears that the situation could reach a similar deterioration to that of the remodelling sector, where an avalanche of evicted people came from. This area was not classified as a renovation sector according to the 1971 Law (Städtebauförderungsgesetz: Law for the promotion of urban activity). However, it has been affected for decades by the renovation carried out in the area bordering Kottbusser Tor. Pending its classification as a renovation area, the buildings were abandoned and occupied by tenants who had been evicted in other renovation processes. The different ‘states of ruin’ in these sectors are the result of the damage caused by the war and the marginalised situation caused by the Wall, but also the consequences of the highway network planning and the different sanitation phases derived from it in the 1960s.

While during the phases of remodelling up to now the industrial buildings placed in the blocks of old construction disappeared, and consequently the jobs, the new urban renovation challenges placed great emphasis on the preservation of the historical ‘Kreuzberg blend’ of industries and houses. This multiplicity refers to the use of the block – living and working – and the mix of different types of
construction – rented houses with front or side façade, patio buildings, and commercial buildings of all shapes and sizes –, and the ethnical variety of the residents, with their different ways of life and commercial activities. The preservation of the ‘Kreuzberg blend’ made low rents possible – the low renovation costs are an important precondition for moderate rents – and it offered the security of ensuring the local commerce would not be taken out of the neighbourhood. Shared facilities were renovated and even expanded according to the needs; kindergartens were incorporated in the existing residence blocks, and public amenities in squares or old garages.

Figure 4. Construction of the new centre of Kreuzberg (NKZ) in Skalitzer Straße, 1971 [7]

Preserving, stabilising, and developing the existing social and functional structures were the essential tasks in a careful urban renovation. This was only possible by acting with great precaution and making those affected participate intensively in all decision plans. The urban renovation exceeded, at all levels, the number of measures envisaged by the Council, according to the original commission. Those measures should ensure, beyond the year 1987, the implementation of an urban reorganisation that took all these concepts into account.

5. Participation of local people

The principle adopted and followed by IBA for the urban renovation was simple: the inhabitants present their ideas and claims in tenant meetings and neighbourhood renovation committees; the experts, urbanists, and architects are tasked with finding and proposing the solutions.

The urban renovation required a structure of social planning measures that controlled the rights to participate and the material rights of those concerned. These showed an enormous willingness to collaborate. Motivated by the need and desire to stay in Kreuzberg, after agreeing on some measures, two-thirds of the residents even accepted to live in the houses during the works. In all cases, the tenants had the opportunity to discuss the concepts and express their own ideas: a careful urban renovation required a specific understanding of the realities of each case, and this can only be given by the people who live there.

Since the end of the 1970s, many young people settled in Kreuzberg. An alternative network of small companies was created, gathering places and cultural activities increased. Since gradual renovation schemes meant intense work, renovating existing buildings offers long-term work for local commerce and entertainment possibilities for young people. On that basis, many centres were created to fight the high rate of youth unemployment in the area: ‘there are three or four times more unemployed young people in Kreuzberg than the average in Berlin, and the “training workshop” of renovation for the preservation offers an opportunity to obtain a qualification through training for a profession – training programs for young people’ [8].
The area of reurbanisation in Kottbusser Tor, which includes Luisenstadt, had been under considerable pressure. This led to the creation of very different social characteristics since 1980. About 25% of the population in this area of Kreuzberg were German people who could not move away from the decaying district or wanted to stay and live in Kreuzberg. This social class lived to a great extent in households of one or two people on low incomes and almost half of them were elderly people. On the other side, about 20% were young German people who had moved to the neighbourhood for the purpose of leading alternative lifestyles. The biggest group of people, 50%, are foreign families, mainly Turkish, with many children. They were forced to move to unfinished properties as a temporary measure, but they have settled in Kreuzberg – the restoration of buildings was considered in cooperation with the social groups that had gradually occupied the abandoned houses. Things developed differently in the eastern part of Kreuzberg. This area was not under such severe pressure to be redeveloped in the following years.

In Kreuzberg, there was an attempt to carry out a rehabilitation that would be able to attract a middle class eager to return and live right in the historic centre, without evicting a population composed mainly of young people of alternative cultures and emigrants of Turkish origin. Hämer said that the renovation process of a city starts in people, more than in architecture: ‘we always work with a built city and in collaboration with its inhabitants, rebuilding the city is a question of intention, defining how you want to do it. It is not only a matter of building but knowing what people who live here want and how they want to use their city’ [9].

6. Rules of new buildings
Past mistakes have led to empty flats and abandoned houses. The renovation and modernisation of houses and buildings should be made in stages and carried out after consultation with tenants. Basic standards, technical improvements, toilet, bathroom, insulating glass, or shower should enable the possibility of improvement later in other refurbishment works. Given the high running cost of central heating, heaters are generally maintained at the request of tenants. Rent increases are in line with the extent of modernisation: someone who tiles his/her own bathroom pays a lower rent – it was better to renovate more houses at a low cost than a certain number of houses at a high cost.

Repairing 100-year-old structures at reasonable costs was considered impossible. In contrast to the modernisation that was usual in the past, and that had devoured between 70 and 100% of the costs of new buildings, more than 3,000 flats were modernised at a 35 to 60% lower cost than new construction. The list of measures developed in the renovation programme included a number of activities and the modernisation of old flats. The facades that reflected the new ability of spaces to become interior will be renovated: patios full of vegetation which varied the hierarchy of the atmosphere from public to semi-public and private area. This enabled the use of patios as an exterior living space and to build structures with playing areas for children or studios there. In all these measures there were possibilities for new uses through the connection between new and old buildings.

In these residential complexes, not only the landscape changed but also the feeling of what it means to live in a city. Streets will become crowded with a colourful blend of immigrants, young people of all social classes who found a place of active participation in Kreuzberg, or simply a shelter, and elderly people whose familiar neighbourhood has been preserved. The gradual restoration of public spaces, streets, squares, green spaces, should enable better use and contribute to the improvement of the environment. The urban image was thus improved through specific and occasional intervention: minimal demolition, creation of green spaces within the blocks, and facade renovation ‘figure 5’.
The technicians involved in the intervention in this sector of IBA developed an archive of construction solutions based on the maximum use of existing structures and the need to facilitate the process with a programme of works from the outside to the inside and from the general to the particular. Rehabilitation manuals began to be published, either to service users themselves or as part of the information the architects employ to write the project documents.

The legacy of IBA was a reference work for architects and authorities. The programme was documented through design experiments to project, implement, and emphasise special solutions. For example, particular forms that would meet the needs of an elderly person or a person with disabilities; communities of young people; the design of gardens and parks, within the framework of the projects and their integration in the urban structure. For IBA, what is important is a public planning process that can provide practical evidence to demonstrate that even in areas with high-density construction it is possible to install essential facilities, without recourse to generalised evictions and massive destruction.

7. Conclusions
Careful urban renovation in Kreuzberg led to the questioning of whether the implementation of some urban proceedings could have been directly transferred to other places: ‘but the parameters of such work vary too much from country to country, city to city, district to district, area to area, house to house, flat to flat’ [11]. A careful urban renovation requires a specific understanding of the realities of each case, and this can only be given by the people that live in the city under intervention.

All over the world, there are similar problems of urban destruction to the ones found in Berlin. The attempt to solve these problems unilaterally causes unpredicted secondary effects and sometimes much damage: since the completion of the new centre of Kreuzberg, there will be repeated requests for the demolition of the whole complex. The intervention was seen as a symbol of wrong planning, which was built based on the theory that all old buildings in Luisenstadt would be demolished, in order to connect to a future highway. So Adalbertstraße was built over it, Dresdner Straße was cut and the ‘the whole district was reduced to the state of a rear patio’ [12].

The strategies adopted in Kreuzberg are, in many aspects, very different from the methods of urban
renovation implemented so far: *in situ* training, employment in the neighbourhood, restoration and revival of architectural environments and public spaces, dense cultural life as a driving force for new types of solidarity. There is not a definition of a final conventional state, but the presentation of means of action that enable the solution of consecutive problems, especially regarding the execution of the works, the participation of those affected, and social planning. Therefore, it is not about imposing a thoroughly defined plan, but to solve the problems within a general agreement.

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