International Bauausstellung Berlin 1987: Spatial and Temporal Context

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Abstract. Berlin plans an International Architecture Exhibition about the topic: “The urban centre as a place to live”. The centre of the city was going to be preserved as a suitable place to live, renovated and revived. This was the fourth architecture exhibition in Berlin focused on contemporary problems from the perspective of architecture and urbanism. This research analyses and describes the spatial and temporal context of the International Bauausstellung Berlin. It presents the geographical, political and social background that made this exhibition possible and fundamental in West Berlin. It involves the understanding of the urban scope in which IBA’s activity develops: devoted to contemporary architectural and urban problems defined by History. Berlin has always been and still is an exceptional scene of the international architecture, a modern version of locus amoenus. But today it is necessary to discover this beauty among the traces of its destruction and the interventions carried out by an almost complete generation of architects to create the image of a city that was frantically seeking a promising reconstruction. Berlin offers itself to be the spatial framework for IBA. It is a place with a great number of pragmatic variations for the architectural study and the urban development. It is part of Berlin’s tradition to have considerably influenced the changes of urban planning through International Architecture Exhibitions. The idea behind IBA, its program and the results achieved must be seen as a cultural manifestation incorporated in a city that acted as the centre of theoretical controversy regarding the urban issues and the construction according to man and changes in society.

1. Introduction

Berlin seems to be in a constant state of transformation for more than a century. Its political destiny and the desire for change have left their footprints: construction, demolition and reconstruction were carried out according to functional requests and budgetary capacity and, naturally, with the spirit of each age and their corresponding sociocultural impulses.

The nature, the city and the house are man’s vital space. “The urban centre as a place to live”, main topic of Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin, is both a specific and universal problem. The idea of the exhibition, its missions and results are part of a more general context. Nevertheless, Berlin is the real reason and particular background for IBA: a city built in parts and a place of experimentation about the idea of European city. Since the beginning of the 19th century, Berlin has established several events joined in a mosaic that lead to an understanding of IBA ‘87.
2. Berlin as a place of experimentation

Nowadays, Germany, and particularly Berlin, are an extremely important reference for the architectural culture, not only because of the value of some of the episodes of their historical background, but mainly for having been a fundamental field of experience for urbanism and architecture. There are few places like Berlin, where the references of the past, present and future form a more diverse fabric between sadness, love and nostalgia, and a complex system of references that force us to make a permanent effort of new readings and interpretations. The city of heterogeneity is immersed in the search for strategies that meet the new roles and commitments of the future: the process of unification, being Germany’s capital city and a European metropolis, and also remaining the city of experimental vanguard in architecture and urbanism.

After the Second World War, the close relationship between social concepts and political culture as a new urban language in architecture and urbanism is recognised in Berlin. The city is thus open to new social and architectural experiences. Architects and urbanists suddenly become acclaimed stars in society. Their reflections and strategies led to debates in the media and there were many exhibitions and articles about the topic.

Berlin’s urban history is a story about destruction and violent interventions. Its last phase was implemented due to the post-war planification. Since those years, there were a number of different concepts, styles and beliefs on how to fill the empty space of the ruins. By making an effort of renovation, the city is rethinking and recovering the urban qualities of its historical plan and its tradition as a European city, a change that it is also appreciated in the new attention drawn to the centre and its reurbanisation ‘figure 1’. The unification of the city as something that has grown over time and the urban density are to a large extent the foundation of “the city of the future” [1].

![Figure 1. The Karl-Marx-Allee represented one of the first positive examples of reconstruction of destroyed cities. It expressed the willingness to take the workers’ housing directly to the historic centre, East Berlin, 1960 [2]](image-url)
Berlin is a place with a special and strong will to seek new concepts and utopias that are able to respond to the main problems of the construction of the city, clarify the relationship between the centre and the outskirts, old and new buildings, public and private space. The aim is to overcome the past and improve the living conditions in the city. Until 1989, there was a discussion about the future of the city, its general fabric and the City Council’s proposals for the urban planning. The Senate proposes carrying out an international building exhibition in 1987. Berlin steps forward to become a forum for Germany and foreign cities. The understanding of the problems and strategies of planning for international urban tasks will be discussed in public forums and specialised circles and the world’s most famous architects will take part. They were invited to collaborate on the project in order to become a part of Berlin and, simultaneously, to change or interpret the city and Berlin’s features. For them, working there meant the possibility of participating in the creation of a new city, but also in the change of a structure and a pre-existing order.

In 1979, “Bauausstellung Berlin GmbH” would be founded for the purpose of preparing an “Internationale Bauausstellung” (IBA), starring a group of architects led by Hardt-Waltherr Hämer. The group won a competition organised by a neighbourhood association to renovate a block in Charlottenburg since then called Hämer-Block. In a city where IBA had initiated the concept of critical reconstruction in the eighties, it was to be expected that the discussion about the future destiny would include the recovery of the memory itself.

3. Background and formation
Exhibitions have always been an opportunity for self-presentation, union and enrichment for the architectural and urban culture. The nineteenth-century Great Universal Exhibitions brought, according to their contexts, economic and political purposes, not only spectacular but also revolutionary buildings. Joseph Paxton built the Chrystal Palace for The Great Exhibition in London in 1851 and Gustave Eiffel lifted the Eiffel Tower for the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889. More modestly, this tradition continued in the 20th century.

Among others, the following buildings emerged: Konstantin Melnikov’s Soviet Pavilion in the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris in 1925, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s German Pavilion in Barcelona International Exposition in 1929 and Alvar Aalto’s Finnish Pavilion in 1939 during the World’s Fair in New York [3].

However, the most determinant impact on the development of urban and architectural conceptions was made by those exhibitions that brought concrete and built shapes. Despite the different International Technical Building Exhibitions in Leipzig, Darmstadt, Cologne or Stuttgart, we must draw special attention to Berlin during the 20th century regarding architecture and building exhibitions. By virtue of its tradition of the great exhibitions carried out from 1911 to 1957, in three moments respectively, a specific problem has been demonstrated in each period. In 1911, under Werner Hagemann’s general secretary, the International Urbanism Exhibition was carried out with the topic “The organisation of a metropolis”. This was the first exhibition to be decisive for the urban debate of its time. Later, in 1931, the German Building Exhibition took place in Berlin. Under the title “Social aspect of the house”, some houses were built in green areas with a focus on human needs (Hufeisen Neighbourhood or Onkel Tom Neighbourhood). Finally, 1957 brings Berlin’s International Building Exhibition (Interbau). It celebrated the post-war economic recovery and it presented models for the reconstruction of a destroyed city. In Hansaviertel neighbourhood, a modern colony whose motto was “Living in the city of tomorrow” was presented. It was a result of the work of many internationally renowned architects such as Alvar Aalto, Walter Gropius, Arne Jacobsen, Le Corbusier and Oscar Niemeyer ‘figures 2’. 
4. The development of IBA
During the decades of the division of the city, Berlin was the scene of the debate between two systems of planning and architecture. The 1970’s witnessed social protests and conflicts in all districts of West Berlin. The protests led to a greater shift of orientation in the urban policy of Berlin’s history and those conflicts were not a consequence of a war. Initially taking place in Märkisches Viertel, the protests quickly spread to other areas, especially Kreuzberg and Kottbusser Tor ‘figures 3’. Berlin of the past would be transformed to generate the birth of a new era and a new city suitable for the political colour of each part, and for car traffic. In both sides of the Wall, the demolition of buildings continued and only a few years later the refurbishment of old buildings started to be seen as convenient. The demolition as a strategy of development was adopted until late in the 1970’s, when a crisis point had been reached due to its cost and the protests that had caused.

Demolition was used as an excuse for urban promotion of a range of different types until architecture of the period before the modern movement and its criticism developed in the 1960’s and 1970’s, particularly by Aldo Rossi, stressed the importance of maintaining the urban plan of the city and its monuments, in order to open the past to the experience of today’s inhabitants.

Architectural historians Julius Posener y Ulrich Conrads played an important role to promote the end of the process, by presenting the first procedures for heritage protection. The presence of Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, the head of Deutsches Architektur at the time, in the influential field of Berlin’s architectural culture, encouraged the interest in planning radically contemporary interventions in Berlin. The architect, architectural theorist and historian considered that: “European cities, especially West Germany cities, were less destroyed by the war than they were by planners. They have ‘dismembered’ them to a large extent until they turned them into inhospitable and sad places, through their abstract, partial and totalising plans of the city as an additive fabric of quantifiable roles” [5]. For him, the cause of those events in the cities was not the disgraceful “Zeitgeist”, but land speculation, bureaucracy and planners. The result was brutal demolition and new buildings with no relationship with the urban context in which they were placed.
Consequently, Lampugnani made a series of suggestions to IBA’s administration for its future task in planning. Among others, the idea of following the example of the dense and compact “European city” stands out. It meant that it was necessary to fill the empty spaces that covered Berlin’s plots of land with “noble monuments, pleasing houses and clearly defined public spaces, so as to heal the wounds caused by the war and the Wall, and to avoid all kinds of ideological dogmatism” [7].

In this context, modern urbanism should be overcome. It was seen as the author of the multiple actions of destruction that Berlin had suffered after the war. As opposed to the city-suburb of the North American model, Berlin’s intellectuals claimed for their city a dense and compact fabric, corridor streets, functional mixtures, abundance of public spaces and urban life – expecting the city to become the political and economic centre of Europe. The obsession with the “life quality” of cities such as Paris, led the architects to reconsider the bourgeois city of the 19th century as a reference.

As a result, the idea of a New International Building Exhibition in Berlin has grown. This idea was being drawn on a background of a heavily degraded, divided and isolated city, with an intensely complicated urban planning system that stood out. Hans Christian Müller, Senate Building Director, was one of the promoters who was engaged with the idea of improving the urban design of the city. From 1974, the initiative has been formally implemented and for the first time a potential location was found: the famous Diplomatic Quarter. This area presented wide and available lands on the southern border of Tiergarten. The new international exhibition should be a kind of replica of Interbau (1957) and its manifesto should reflect the topic “the urban centre as a place to live”.

Given the history of the architecture and urbanism of Berlin, there was a sudden outcry and it soon became clear that the artificial isolation created in Interbau should not be repeated. The neighbourhood of Berlin, isolated and delimited, was deprived of the intended character of being general and an example, because it established particular conditions for its ends. In this case, it meant abandoning definitively the modern conventions and the ideas of open city that were clearly expressed by Hansa, and that remained in Kulturforum.

In October 1977, Dietmar Grötzebach and Bernd Jansen developed a proposal against the idea of “isolation” in their report on preparing and implementing an International Building Exhibition in Berlin. Among others, Colin Rowe, James Stirling, Carlo Aymonino, Peter Smithson, Aldo Rossi, Wolfgang Pehnt, Heinrich Klotz, Rob Krier, Fred Koetter and Charles Moore took part in the broad and intense debate. In mid-1978, with all this public cultural pressure, the program that aimed to prepare and implement an International Building Exhibition was modified and defined, first in 1884 and later in 1987.
The theses for the International Building Exhibition intended to reinforce the negative idea of pre-established formal concepts in favour of a discussion rich in alternatives and with different thinking processes. The aims and programs suggested that IBA should perform tasks with particular characteristics: the search for ideas and experiments, the selection and decision regarding alternatives, the connection of theoretical bases, ideas concerning the conception and the aesthetics of what was executed, from a technical and financial point of view, and a permanent dialogue with the public opinion. It was the specific planning of an approximate 250-hectare area, almost exclusively inside the city, on which 9,000 houses and their corresponding infra-structures should be built.

5. Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin
The source of the idea behind the International Building Exhibition can only be understood in the context of the series of debates and articles titled "Models for a City". In this series of articles that were published in “Berliner Morgenpost”, some fundamental suggestions for the program of an international building exhibition in the 80’s were presented. This “Morgenpost campaign”, which arouse a considerable interest, played a decisive role in the changes that were beginning and that were later integrated in the new version of IBA program, which was approved in 1978. Three points that represented the core focus of the ideas that were circulating at that moment were established: the need for an integrated approach for the implementation of the urban development policy, more than the concentration on individual projects; the rediscovery of history as a prerequisite to establish a perspective of a sustainable future for the city and urban society; and admitting the importance of social, economic, functional, philosophical and artistic factors in the continuous development of architectural and urban development aspects. These three superposed priorities were of practical relevance and, therefore, they were also relevant in the formulation of a fundamental principle of the program for IBA. The aims of the program concerning urban development were presented to the Senate of Berlin in June 1978.

A quarter-century later, in relation to its immediate predecessor, Interbau (1957), more attention is devoted to the program than to the image, to the inhabitant than to the observer, to the plan than to what is built: “the consumption of architecture managed to achieve the prominence that was previously reserved for the production” [8]. Now the change meant returning to the tradition, recovering the closed and tidy city that characterises the growth of the 19th century. For this purpose, IBA made an enormous effort to organise seminars, conferences and studies carried out by experts, regarding the endowment of specific infrastructure for emigrants, landscaped courtyards, and the supply of heating energy. Furthermore, it also considered the urban renovation and the involvement of the people affected (the results of studies carried out in similar cities of the country and from abroad will also be used, in order to study the funding models for house construction, methods used to evaluate the costs and efficient refurbishment techniques that took the rational use of energy into account). This was the basis on which the differentiated planning of each of the areas of intervention was carried out. Later, contests, some open, others restricted, were organised and announced for particular aspects of each area.

In this context, it was important to see IBA as a new architectural stage that was trying to link the development of the exhibition and the resolution of urban episodes, especially the reconstruction of big empty spaces in the centre of Berlin, which remained a consequence and proof of the devastation of war. The projects should face new architectural theories and aim at a more sensitive treatment of a place and its history.

IBA was divided in two targets that complemented one another: Altbau-IBA (old IBA: careful urban renovation), headed by Hardt-Walther Hämer, and Neubau-IBA (new IBA: critical reconstruction of the city) headed by Josef Paul Kleihues. In both cases it meant preserving the residential sector in the most damaged areas of the urban centre, without destroying the original urban fabric. Altbau-IBA was focused on Kreuzberg district – Luisenstadt and S.O. 36 –, a neighbourhood adjacent to the Wall in a marginalised situation that made it head towards a great physical and social degradation. It involved
above all conserving the existing structures of the 19th century and early 20th century. Hämer adopted an attitude of social responsibility and defined the principles that allowed his working group to recover the abandoned areas, in a permanent close cooperation with inhabitants, owners, companies involved in the refurbishment and architects. The collection of data about each area and the analysis of experiences and models of other European cities, for instance the procedures developed and experienced since 1974 in the Netherlands, especially in Rotterdam, or the cases of Bologna, Stockholm or Helsinki, enabled them to verify that these cities went through the same process of “repairing a broken city” [9] and they achieved their ends with a few new buildings. However, in the areas of urban renovation of IBA other specific aspects should be taken into account: massive construction, where there were 5 or 6-storey buildings with narrow courtyards; and the citizens were mainly foreigners with fewer financial resources.

On the other hand, Neubau-IBA focused on three inner areas of exhibit, Friedrichstadt in the south, the neighbourhood of the zoo, and Prague Square also in the south. Kleihues proposed the term “Critical reconstruction” to define the strategy that should be adopted: rebuilding the previous historical fabric, its urban shape, typologies, traditional scale, but with a contemporary design. Those three areas mentioned above were not only damaged by the 2nd World War. Their real destruction was caused by the radical demolition not only of crumbling buildings able to be rebuilt but also completely undamaged built areas: “It is one of the saddest chapters of the History of the construction of Berlin” [10]. The priority of the plan, the urban design and the construction of the city were part of the theoretical consideration of critical reconstruction of the European city. During this stage of IBA, there was some controversy regarding the choice of the names of architects and urbanists, more than regarding the formalised proposals. Once the international dimension of the exhibition was recognised, mainstream voices linked to Berlin’s culture have deplored the absence of personalities such as Aldo van Eyck or Ricardo Bofill.

Both programs, Altbau-IBA and Neubau-IBA, shared the intention to return to an urban identity given up for lost: making use of the architecture to awake the individual and collective memory through an integrated operation. International Building Exhibition Berlin was the instrument used by the city of Berlin to repair, faultlessly, a piece of the city that was in direct contradiction with the current practice and routine explored in the urban planning. The dialogue between urban planning and architecture, the prescriptions of building laws and regulations, the owners and investors’ desires along with the ones of the corresponding district municipal boards and, finally, the needs of the people affected, will enable intense discussions, so that each project becomes a feasible and adequate piece integrated in the city of Berlin, without detriment to the architectural quality.

6. Man in the city: the urban centre as a place to live

In the seventies, it became obvious that it was not possible to have the desired pace of new constructions, neither was desirable the kind of city that was emerging. There was a shift towards a strategy of refurbishment in the centre and in big greenfield neighbourhoods, with high-rise buildings in the outskirts. Like no other European city, Berlin should prioritise a development towards an improvement of the life quality in the city. IBA proposed facing new architectural theories that aimed at a more sensitive treatment of a place and its history. The purpose of urban planning was to re-establish the centre of the city as a place to live, where the city would take responsibility for treating its urban heritage carefully, regarding its growth and regeneration, always taking its inhabitants changing needs into account. According to these intentions, Berlin should continue to develop its historical identity, particularly as an industrial and working city that seeks the future of urban space.

The city of Berlin preserves qualities that demand some international comparisons. It has the extension and diversity of a region with urban centres, residential neighbourhoods, high-density working-class neighbourhoods and even small villages. ”We want the quality of Western Berlin’s
inhabitants daily life to be as high as possible” [11]. This requires a built city that accommodates
different lifestyles and broadens people’s horizons, which includes every way of life of a multicultural
city that provides a cosmopolitan and liberal atmosphere, a critical and constructive opinion, and a policy
and administration open to discussion.

All cities change every year and these changes reflect the individual problems each one of them
faces: the social, economic and political problems of their inhabitants. With its spiritual, scientific,
artistic and political potential, Berlin can develop new concepts of urbanity and new models of planning
and building through IBA.

7. Conclusions
Through the policy of settlements of “Neues Bauen” in Berlin and in Dessau, Frankfurt and Hamburg,
Germany became a model country for the development of social houses of high urban quality, among
the ones implemented after the Second World War.

IBA’s operation in Berlin was related to the planning and execution of residential buildings that
would simultaneously follow the rules that regulate State-funded houses. The idea of a reintegration of
the residence in the social, functional and formal organisation of the city was one the main impulses of
IBA.

IBA tried to introduce “charm” in the design of the house through the participation of architects of
distinct theoretical and artistic persuasion. The aim was to demonstrate that even in the narrow and
restrictive framework of the State-funded house, it was possible to implement noteworthy ideas in terms
of quality and variety: “We try many things in the projects of social houses of IBA: we try to respect the
problems and current situation and do something valid and with such technical quality and use that it
can suggest new possibilities” [12]. Variety has been supported by the necessary heterogeneity of a
democratic and plural society. After all, IBA was an instrument of coordination for the massive
intervention in terms of the house: more than four thousand greenfield houses were created, and other
six thousand were refurbished. International Building Exhibition in Berlin enabled us to simplify and
unify a whole previous urban management, maintaining a continuous strategy that managed to achieve
formal, urban and architectural aims that for no reason should be excluded from politics.

The need to live the present was almost obsessive in Berlin. Being extreme Europeans in their will
to anticipate, maybe Berlin people have foreseen the house that is still to come: “conventional inside
and renewing in its shape, a usual object in a package of glamour” [13]. It does not seem possible that
IBA could easily have a replica in any other city in the world, but having IBA occurred, “we cannot
complete any major action of urban transformation, being supported by house building, without
studying, adjusting and criticising the process followed by IBA, and the results that it may finally
achieve” [14].

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