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The 'Hobrecht Plan' (1862) and Berlin's urban structure

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ABSTRACT: The Hobrecht Plan of 1862 is the framework for Berlin's urban development. The changing assessments of this plan over the past 150 years can be followed using contemporary evaluations of street and park layout and the *Mietskaserne* (tenement). Following early suggestions that it was authoritarian, and persistent criticism that it was responsible for bad housing, it later came to be seen more positively, as renewal and conservation took over from clearance and when reunification highlighted its significance as a common factor in the new capital city.

Few native Berliners view their city as a whole. Even after the reunification, they think of themselves as Charlottenburgers, Spandauers or Köpenickers. The city's image is fragmentary, incomplete and local. Thus it is easily forgotten that there have been and still are elements which enable one to appreciate and experience the capital as a whole.

The Hobrecht Plan, an urban planning design from the year 1862, was the foundation of modern Berlin. Today, people are gradually beginning to take a fresh look at the plan in term of its aesthetic, developmental and functional qualities. This article will examine people's shifting perceptions of these qualities in their historical context. This will be done from two points of view: the design of streets and public squares, and the use of green areas within developed neighbourhoods. Then it examines both how historians of urban planning of the past 150 years have taken widely divergent positions in regard to the plan and also the process which was required before Berliners could once again look back objectively to Wilhelmine Berlin.

Background to the plan

Hobrecht lived from 1825 to 1902. After having taken two master builder examinations in 1856 and 1858, hard on the heels of an 11-year course of practical training, he became involved in railway construction in Brandenburg. After only a few months he was entrusted by the police president with the task of creating a new Berlin street plan. As 'commissioner for the preparation of a construction plan for the environs

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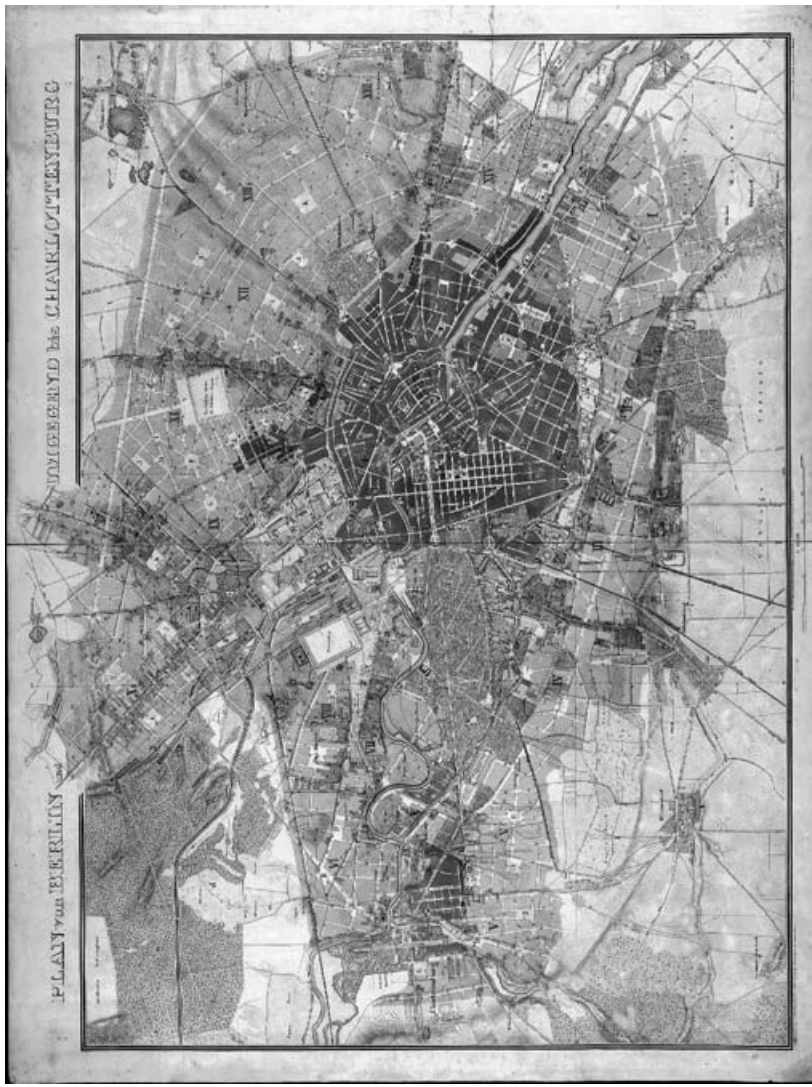


Figure 1: The fourteen sections of the controversial Hobrecht Plan, printed in 1862

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of Berlin' he was placed in charge of a small team which had already been examining urban development issues since the mid-1850s. Despite the unusually brief time of his appointment between February 1859 and December 1861 – including absences because of trips abroad[1] – he ended up planning an area which was twice as large as the existing developed urban space. The plan which bore his name would come to have a powerful influence on the city and its environs. An urban planning discourse was set in motion.

Planning could not be developed on a theoretically based foundation because urban planning had not yet been invented as a scientific discipline.[2] In a formal legalistic sense the new plan was conceived as a 'compendium of local police regulations determining which lots were to be developed with buildings on the outskirts of the city, and which lots were to be classified as public streets and squares and thus left undeveloped'.[3] The preparation of these regulations fell under the responsibility of the building police, a department of the Berlin police presidium which answered to the Prussian Interior Ministry, which in turn was under the influence of the king. Paragraph 7 of the 'Decree Relating to the Creation of Urban Building and Restoration Plans' provided for the involvement of the municipal authorities in the planning process. Thus, according to paragraph 59 of the Prussian City Code of 1853, a commission was established in which a city official named Heinrich Köbicke was active.

This commission was the successor to a similar institution which Köbicke had also led together with the Privy Government Building Councillor Rothe and which had been entrusted with revising the inner city 'Schmidt Plan'.[4] Because of the increase in building activity in the late 1850s a revision was decided upon, but it could not be completed due to Köbicke's serious illness. In the end, the idea of a revised Schmidt Plan was dropped and a new plan was called for in which Köbicke's preliminary work was to be included.

Hobrecht had already familiarized himself with the commission as Köbicke's deputy. He was appointed as director of the new commission by the Prussian commerce minister Von der Heydt. All the commission's results had to be presented and defended before the city council, as well

[1] Hobrecht undertook a three-month business and research trip to the pioneer cities of modern urbanism: Hamburg (particularly because of its sewers), Paris (because of the boulevards) and London (because of its squares); J. Lubowitzki, *Der Hobrechtplan* (Berlin, 1990), 53. Hegemann's claim that Hobrecht only travelled to London *after* completing the plan (W. Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin* (Berlin, 1930), 232), is inaccurate and gives the impression that Hobrecht had no first-hand knowledge of foreign conditions.

[2] H. Matzerath, 'Berlin', in A. Sutcliffe (ed.), *Metropolis, 1890–1940* (London, 1984), 289–318, 105; B. Ladd, *Urban Planning and Civic Order in Germany, 1860–1914* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 77–110.

[3] *Obertribunalentscheidung* of 1869, in T. Striethorst, *Archiv für Rechtsfälle*, 3rd ser., 1 (Berlin, 1870), 217–18. All translations from German by the author.

[4] The Schmidt Plan is considered to be the first street map of the city. It was produced from 1827 to 1830; Lubowitzki, *Hobrechtplan*, 50, 56 and 61.

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as before the Prussian Ministry for Commerce, and even before the police presidium.[5] Afterwards, each individual district plan had to be submitted to the king for his personal approval. There were fourteen districts whose territories were located around the Berlin city limits of 1861. According to an 1855 decree of the Ministry of Commerce, the fourteen district plans had to be published at scales of 1:4,000 and 1:6,250.

Commerce Minister Von der Heydt issued instructions which Hobrecht's team were expected to follow to the letter. Creativity and room for manoeuvre lay beyond the Prussian officials' realm of possibility. The following were required according to the instructions: first a summary of the existing plans; secondly the documentation of the existing buildings and streets; thirdly consideration of the planned sewer system.[6] These regulations now appear minimal. The plan was firmly rejected by both conservatives and liberals because of its 'wide-ranging impositions' and 'disruptive individual regulations'.[7] In the eyes of many real estate speculators, the plan was an impediment and a first step toward an eventual restriction of free enterprise. By contrast, social reformers thought the plan's regulations did not go far enough.

The plan's aesthetic structure: streets and green space concepts

Because of the conditions under which they are prepared, development plans are forced to contend with design alternatives along aesthetic and ideological lines. There is no such thing as an aesthetically neutral plan. Comment here is confined to two elements which significantly affected aesthetic perception: *streets* and *green spaces*.

The Hobrecht Plan was integrative (of previous work), variable and adaptable. The commission members were aware that they lived in a time of great urban transformation. They designed their plan accordingly to allow for growth and movement. The needs of industry and the railways were taken into consideration by locating them as near to the periphery of each plan area as possible. These industrial areas were then provided with only one main street in order to keep them free for future development. Their inner portions were only to be structured as actual need arose.

The development plan was above all a street building plan with two dominant themes.[8] First, an attempt was made to establish housing blocks of approximately the same size without right angles. Second, orbital

[5] E. Heinrich, 'Der Hobrechtplan', *Jahrbuch für brandenburgische Landesgeschichte*, 13 (1962), 41–57, 41.
[6] J. Geist, *Das Berliner Mietshaus*, vol. I (Berlin, 1980), 485f.
[7] Cf. 'Stadtplaner August Orth, Gustav Assmann und Wilhelm Boeckmann im Architektenverein Berlin', in H. Hammer-Schenk (ed.), *Architektur* (Stuttgart, 1985), 157f.
[8] A building plan determines separate building lots within a block; see Heinrich, *Bebauungsplan*, 42. The term 'building plan' is actually misleading when applied to the Hobrecht Plan since actual construction was only indirectly regulated.

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distributor roads were laid out.[9] These were designed to connect the main radial roads, particularly in the eastern part of the town. Any existing urban structure was to be retained wherever possible, not out of respect for tradition but rather to avoid conflicts. Thus the integration of existing streets, bridges and existing scattered construction made it possible to avoid resorting to expropriations, for which no specific legal framework existed.[10]

The relationship between street widths and building heights was determined by the Prussian building code (*Bauordnung*). There was little room for aesthetic guidelines. However, aesthetic matters were not particularly relevant to Hobrecht, since he merely sought to develop a pattern for use in further city planning. According to Hobrecht's statements, aesthetic design was not a task of planning or of the public sector in general, but was to be left to individual architects.[11] This forsaking of design on the part of the plan thus arose from a liberal attitude which left aesthetic details to private builders and to potential future legal regulations. Demolition of historic buildings, when it occurred, was the result of urban economics, not the plan. Nor did the plan require six-storey *Mietskasernen*[12] ('rental barracks' or tenements), a term which Hobrecht himself already used, and which came to epitomize a typologically defined planning which cannot be restricted to Berlin.[13] By 1880 it was also in use in Leipzig, Dresden, Cologne and Vienna, all cities which were not planned by Hobrecht.[14]

[9] The models for these distributor roads were the 16 Prussian 'Ruthen' (rods) of Unter den Linden (one Ruthe = 3, 76 m).

[10] The Prussian constitution guaranteed the free disposal of land property. A legal initiative in favour of easing state intervention had already been under discussion since 1850, but was viewed as 'unrealistic'; Heinrich, 'Hobrechtplan', 54. Only land for roads and streets had to be yielded without compensation, L. Demps, 'Hobrechtscher Plan', *Berlin-Lexikon* (Berlin, 1987), 60–1. Originally, the plan's initiators had foreseen further distributor roads within the large building lots. However, since 1875 the costs for the construction of streets and squares had had to be paid by the city of Berlin, which thus abandoned the construction of residential streets because of financial reasons; cf. E. Kaeber, 'Werner Hegemanns Werk', *Mitteilungen des Vereins der Geschichte Berlins*, 67 (1930), 101–14, 113.

[11] See defence speeches by J. Hobrecht and G. Assmann: J. Geist, *Das Berliner Mietshaus*, vol. II (Berlin, 1984), 158; K. Strohmeyer, *James Hobrecht* (Potsdam, 2000), 52.

[12] The view of Berlin as a garrison city can look back on a long tradition. It is worth asking why a term was selected whose connotations were not negative in the nineteenth century, particularly not in Prussia. For example, Eberstadt wrote in 1909 in his *Handbuch*, 202: 'He [the resident of the *Mietskaserne*] on the other hand is not comparable to the resident of the military *Kaserne*: the latter knows that he is fulfilling an ethical duty which is considered to be the noblest within state society.' For further reading B. Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin* (Chicago, 1997), 100f.

[13] On the link between building speculation and the *System Mietskaserne* cf. C. Bernhardt, *Bauplatz Groß-Berlin* (New York, 1998), 35f; and Ladd, *Urban Planning*, 80–1.

[14] In terms of architectural history, the characteristics of this building style can be traced to the 'Feilnersche Haus' (Berlin, 1828) reconstructed by K.F. Schinkel. The number of floors, the design of the ground plan and the 'Berliner Zimmer' represent its central characteristics; D. Heyer, *Unterschichten und Wohnungsbau* (Berlin, 1979), 8.

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The plan did not determine the design forms of façades, squares or boulevards. The splendid representative boulevard 'Generalzug' was created upon the express wishes of King Wilhelm I. In 1844 and 1853, Lenné had already designed a boulevard system for the Prussian capital, and this remained as an urban beautification measure. But it was not given close consideration until the fiftieth anniversary of the Wars of Liberation in the 1860s. Because of previous construction, particularly of factories, railway facilities and cemeteries, it was no longer possible to construct a complete ring around the entire city. In this sense, Berlin differed from Vienna, where the creation of the celebrated Ringstrasse in 1857 followed old city walls. In Berlin, only a five mile section, which was named after field commanders, could be completed. This 'Generalzug' consisted of Hardenbergstrasse, Tauentzienstrasse, Kleiststrasse, Bülowstrasse, Yorkstrasse, Gneisenaustrasse with its squares Breitscheidplatz, Wittenbergplatz, Nollendorfplatz and Wartenbergplatz.

The requirements which Hobrecht had to follow were not free of contradictions. Thus he was ordered to avoid obtuse and acute angle block corners. But whilst the general street system was to run north-east–south-west and south-east–north-west, there were also to be east–west streets. In addition, the layout was to be oriented toward conspicuous buildings and continue the already existing street system.

The often expressed claim that the street system was essentially lifted from other contemporary metropolitan designs led to an evaluation which was only based on the shapes.[15] It does not do justice to Hobrecht's integrative understanding of the city. Positive aspects of the plan – generous green spaces and multifunctional squares – have not been viewed as an independent achievement of Hobrecht but rather as an imitation of Paris, London or North American cities. Negative aspects – monotony, speculation and alienation – were all too quickly blamed on Hobrecht without reference to similar problems in the same cities. For a long time Werner Hegemann's view that the plan was a mindless imitation of the redevelopment of Paris under Napoleon III dominated. Block size, street width and building height in Berlin nevertheless show clear differences from other metropolises and have their own character, what can be demonstrated in the green space concept.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the American Jules Huret admired Berlin's green appearance, the beauty of its decorative squares, the trimmed roses, geraniums and petunias.[16] The large number of squares in the Hobrecht Plan provided for a variety of green spaces. The broad streets lent themselves to planted central strips, and existing green spaces could be transformed into public parks. These are no small results when

[15] On the often superficial comparisons which have been made between Berlin and other metropolises in regard to the plan, cf. Heinrich, 'Hobrechtplan', 51, and D. Radicke, 'Planung und Eigentum', *Die Metropole* (München, 1986), 182–9, 186.

[16] J. Huret, *Berlin um 1900* (Berlin, 1909), 29.

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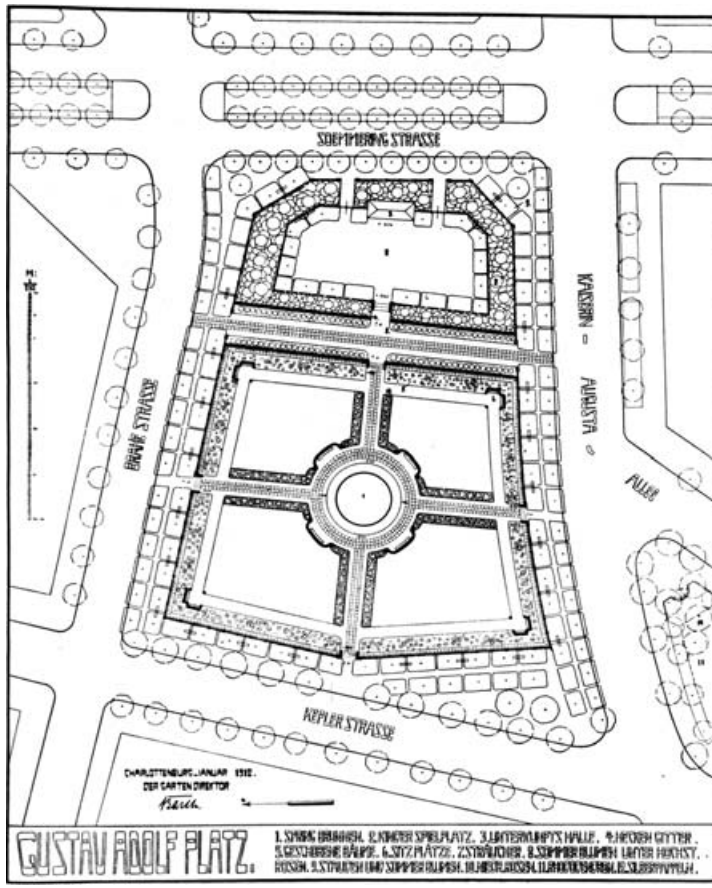


Figure 2: Gustav Adolf Platz (former place A, section VI of the Hobrecht Plan, today Mierendorfplatz), an example of spacious green areas within the inner city

one considers that the planning instructions did not include attention to green spaces and that their financing was often problematic.[17] To some extent it was possible to rely on the wealthy classes' willingness to finance decorative green spaces with an imposing character. For example Hobrecht decided that streets whose full width had not been used should be supplied at least temporarily with green front gardens.[18]

[17] Criticism that the plan did not provide for public green spaces, as in E. Bruch, *Berlin's bauliche Zukunft und der Bebauungsplan* (Berlin, 1870), 80, and Hammer-Schenk (ed.), *Architektur*, 154, were erroneous.

[18] Geist, *Mietshaus*, vol. I, 502, and vol. II, 153f. Hobrecht presented his green space ideas in greater detail in his partially published statements on the 14 districts, Radicke, 'Planung', 185. Front gardens can still be found at a few places within the S-Bahn ring, for example in the Hornstrasse (Kreuzberg) or the Knorr-Promenade (Friedrichshain).

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Figure 3: The Gustav Adolf Platz around 1912 with a central fountain, illumination and specially designed benches

Hobrecht's vision of green spaces as sites of relaxation in the urban centre was not fully realized in the plan's execution. Thus it was intended to locate a square on only one side of a street in order to create a quiet space through widening, or else to place squares between two parallel streets so that a relatively quiet space could be created. In a comparison of the 1862 plan with its later implementation it is evident that these 'restful' squares were generally not constructed, probably because they threatened to restrict the flow of traffic. Others were reduced in size, in one case by 50 per cent.[19] At a discussion in the Berlin Architectural Association in 1871, Hobrecht explicitly pointed to existing squares in Berlin upon which he was basing the new ones, both in form and number.[20] If the intended number of squares had all been built, then Berlin would today possess twice as many as it actually has. Yet the plan's critics have consistently equated the actual number of green spaces with the plan itself without taking these decisive disparities into consideration.

From its perspective, the planning commission thought that living conditions would benefit from the large construction lots with interior planting, the construction of numerous squares, a climatically favourable design and, finally, ample street widths.[21] Creating a salubrious city was not just left to the later classical social reformers like Ernst Roscher, Adolf Damaschke or Franz Oppenheimer, but was already an aim of the Hobrecht Plan. According to a letter from the police presidium, the lots were to be designed as generously as possible. This was to occur not only out of consideration for the expected land needs of industry, but also for health reasons.[22] Sufficient air and light should be guaranteed, two demands which shortly after the completion of the plan were still viewed by the reformer Julius Faucher as 'the only path to the improvement' of catastrophic living conditions.[23]

Because of its lot size, reformers held the plan responsible for the 'inevitable' construction of *Mietskasernen*.[24] Nevertheless, the open development of the Kielganviertel (north of Nollendorffplatz), with its generous use of green spaces, and the quarter around the Albrechtshof prove that block size did not stand in the way of reform. It was precisely this varied construction that Hobrecht intended, since breaking the city up into various kinds of development areas was simply the extension of the

[19] In relation to *Boxhagener Platz* see Landesdenkmalamt Berlin (ed.), *Bezirk Friedrichshain* (Berlin, 1996), 49.

[20] Hammer-Schenk (ed.), *Architektur*, 160; P. Clauswitz, 'Bau- und Bodenpolitik . . . ', *Erforschtes und Erlebtes aus dem alten Berlin* (Berlin, 1917), 29–48, 40.

[21] Assmann, in Geist, *Mietshaus*, vol. II, 150. Since 1777, there has been evidence of extremely dense construction in Berlin with back courtyards, wings and sheds; Lubowitzki, *Hobrechtplan*, 22.

[22] Lubowitzki, *Hobrechtplan*, 74.

[23] The reformer Julius Faucher in 1867, in G. Fehl, 'Berlin wird Weltstadt', *Städtebaureform* (Hamburg, 1985), 101–52, 134.

[24] Eberstadt, *Handbuch*, 61–2.

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attempt to bring various social classes together under one roof. It did not lie in the interest of property owners, who hoped for optimal rental income from multistorey construction and a maximum use of their lots. But the co-operative and health reform-oriented building associations found that it was easier to implement such ideals as green spaces and good lighting on large lots rather than on small ones.[25]

The first generation of plan critics: the reformers Ernst Bruch and Rudolf Eberstadt

The street plan, which has gone down in history as the 'Hobrecht Plan', has remained a controversial design ever since it went into effect through a cabinet order of 26 June 1862. Within a short time, the originally positive evaluation from among building owners and landowners was drowned in devastating criticism.

The statistician Ernst Bruch is regarded as the first critic of the Hobrecht Plan.[26] In his early 1870 essay 'Wohnungsnoth und Hülfe' (Housing distress and improvement) he showed restraint. But, because of the financial difficulties of the editor, Hermann Schwabe, and a printers' strike, it could only be published with considerable delay in 1872.[27] This meant that his later monograph on the future of Berlin had already appeared. The essay on housing distress appeared to offer readers nothing new and was thus generally ignored by scholars. In Bruch's liberal perspective, the Hobrecht Plan was a hindrance to further construction activity: 'The desire to build is often hampered by such plans, and building co-operatives and societies are subject to entirely unnecessary restrictions.'[28] In some places Bruch actually issued praise, for example with regard to the integration of existing streets into the plan. Bruch's greatest objection was to the over-long validity of the development plan, a point which makes little sense as by this time the plan had already been revised several times. It is therefore scarcely possible to speak of 'a rigid scheme', one of the main charges of the time.

[25] Added to this was the possibility of using large projects to build more cost-effectively, to build large inner courtyards, to administer the blocks profitably and to include social facilities, as did the architect Alfred Messel for the *Berliner Spar- und Bauverein*. On the development of residential blocks in reform-minded housing construction, cf. C. Bernet, 'Konflikte und Lösungsversuche', in A. Nothnagle and C. Holmberg (eds.), *Auf freiem Grund mit freiem Volke* (Berlin, 1999), 11–53, 46f; Ladd, *Urban Planning*, 179f.

[26] Eberstadt, *Handbuch*, 221.

[27] Of the six issues of the yearbook *Berlin und seine Entwickelung* not a single one managed to appear on time. Because of the war and the resulting paper shortage, long articles were particularly affected, and at 70 pages Bruch's contribution was one of the longest ever to appear in the yearbook. Like many other publications, the yearbook also ceased to publish reviews which, however, were announced in the index. Only after the signing of the peace treaty were reviews published again. But none appeared in response to Bruch's 1870 work, which fell victim to a war-related 'review gap'.

[28] E. Bruch, 'Die Wohnungsnoth und Hülfe', *Berlin und seine Entwickelung*, 6 (1872), 14–85, 43.

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However, his late 1870 monograph *Berlin's Planning Future*[29] represents an entirely different Bruch: as an enthusiastic friend of Vienna's urban physiognomy, Bruch developed a positive model against which he attributed all of Berlin's negative developments to the Hobrecht Plan. He rejected all of the plan's aspects with statistical precision. He also rejected Berlin's excessively wide streets, which he compared unfavourably with Vienna's street system. In this monograph and elsewhere he developed a sweeping critique, which, while encountering a powerful response among other critics both in Germany and abroad, was merely noted in passing by the Berlin Senate and had not the slightest influence on later planning practices.

No further influential critique appeared until Rudolf Eberstadt's study of 1909, whose polemical language reached a broader public in the guise of a scholarly study. In addition, Eberstadt's writings appeared in large editions. Eberstadt, one of Germany's leading housing reformers, particularly criticized the allegedly authoritarian Berlin administration; its actions were dictated by legalism and a lack of alternatives. He rejected the plan as a *foreign element* which had been forced on to the public. His claim that the plan possessed 'no evolutionary foundations' but instead represented an 'arbitrary administrative creation'[30] is understandable with regard to its administrative origins, but it fails to recognize Hobrecht's efforts to integrate existing structures.

Also in 1909 there appeared a little known design album by the Berlin architect Albert Gessner. He summarized the previously stated critiques of the design plan, but was also particularly concerned with façades of Berlin, where building clients 'glue upon the same old skeleton the most remarkable forms which have no connection whatsoever with the actual organism of the house'.[31] In fact, the design of the façades was by no means as unconnected and arbitrary as the architect Gessner claimed. It is not true that façade design denied social differences. Not only were there differences from one neighbourhood to another, but for example, less expensive apartments had lower ceilings, a fact which was clearly visible because of the correspondingly smaller windows. Even the different building materials used in the different floors of the same house revealed social differences. It was only through the absolute standardisation of modern construction in the 1920s that all social differences were rendered invisible – although whether or not these differences still existed was another question altogether.

[29] The book had been distributed in the form of a series of articles throughout 1870 in the *Deutsche Bauzeitung*; W. Istel, Raumplanung für Groß-Berlin, *Raumplanung Berlin – Brandenburg* (München, 1992), 1–76, 10.
[30] Eberstadt, *Handbuch*, 62.
[31] A. Gessner, *Das deutsche Miethaus* (München, 1909), 12 and 26.

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Hegemann's struggle against Wilhelmine building and planning culture

In the architectural and planning community, the negative criticism of the street plan and apartment house building as well as their assumed link to one another had asserted itself by 1910 and had assumed a dogmatic character. While during the Weimar Republic, the Nazi era and the FRG/GDR the conditions and targets of planning activity were varied and to some extent contradictory, there was still a consensus with regard to the blanket, emotional and unchallenged condemnation of the Hobrecht Plan.[32] Basing his argument on Bruch and Eberstadt, Werner Hegemann above all popularized a crushing verdict which was considered definitive for at least half a century. For Hegemann, Bruch was 'the best critic of the design plan', although he did not use all of his points and in some areas even contradicted them.

Hegemann, Germany's most international city planner and, following Camillo Sitte, editor of *Der Städtebau* spoke out vehemently for a reformed urbanism and socially oriented administration. His model was the modern American city, like Philadelphia or New York, which he both thoroughly admired and studied. His contemporaries could see Berlin as Europe's most American capital, while Hegemann could not. As the general secretary of the Berlin Urban Planning Exhibition of 1910 and as a participant in numerous reform-oriented projects and organizations, Hegemann also possessed a practical influence which was taken even further by his successful book *Das steinerne Berlin*. Already in 1911 he had summarized his basic criticism and by 1930 he had expanded it into an unparalleled diatribe. Hobrecht had indulged in 'social political quackery', his plan was 'an act of monumental dim-wittedness', a 'high-handed artistic fantasy', even 'a crime'.[33] The plan was also made solely responsible for building speculation since it cheated property owners.[34] In his sweeping criticism, whose sharpest weapon was exaggeration, the 'enemy' grew to limitless proportions. The historical development assumed a sort of compulsive-fatalistic quality in the way that the contemporary city planning situation was presented as the sole logical and inevitable consequence of Frederician and Wilhelmine mortgage regulations.

Only a few people wanted or were able to avoid this verdict. One of the few, now forgotten, was Ernst Kaeber, the former director of the Berlin municipal archive. In 1930 he responded to Hegemann's second edition

[32] This rejection of Hobrecht and his work is summed up in the comment that for years Hobrecht was 'the incarnation of the evils of urban development'; D. Hoffmann-Axthelm, *Die dritte Stadt* (Frankfurt a. M., 1993), 194.

[33] All quotations from Hegemann, *Berlin*, 330, 297 and 298. The Austrian admirer Hegemann, who, like the Austrian hater Adolf Loos, spent a long period of time in the USA, modelled his comments on Loos' writings in regard both to content and particularly to language.

[34] Hegemann, *Berlin*, 224.

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with a detailed review which essentially amounted to a full vindication of the Hobrecht Plan. The archivist was irritated not only by Hegemann's biting and wounding scorn, but by his historical inaccuracy. One central point of Kaeber's criticism was that Hegemann had not been aware of the book *Bau- und Bodenpolitik*, an important publication containing archival material of the building administration from 1913.[35] In this publication it had been proven that it was not the plan which was the cause of housing problems, but rather the building code.[36] The text's author, Paul Clauswitz, pointed out that unforeseeable developments were also to blame and not the plan itself: 'No one imagined such a growth in population as eventually occurred during the validity of the building code [of 1853], nor the dangers of speculation.'[37] Already in 1913, Clauswitz emphasized street planning as being among the plan's positive, forward-looking aspects. He rightfully pointed out that street planning had been Hobrecht's main task. In comparison with previous development plans, which had led to expensive street reconstruction in the area of the Luisenstadt, the Hobrecht Plan proved to be the better thought out. Clauswitz stressed the practicability of the radial streets, which had been recommended in a programme for a model development plan by an architectural committee for Greater Berlin, of which Hegemann was a member.[38]

Three years after the appearance of *Das steinerne Berlin*, the Nazis banned all of Hegemann's writings. In the post-war period respect for Hegemann was as strong as ever and served as a theoretical justification for the defenders of large-scale demolitions in Wilhelmine residential districts, seen as slums and relics of a vanished era. In 1963 Hegemann's *Das steinerne Berlin* was added to the recognized and well-known series 'Bauwelt-Fundamente'. It has been reissued and reprinted many times since.[39] Slightly abridged editions were complemented with a foreword by Walter Benjamin, which praised the book but, amazingly enough, also praised the subject itself, namely the *Mietskaserne*! As a flaneur and Marxist urban romantic, Benjamin viewed the result of the Hobrecht Plan as a petrified extract of 'soil, landscape, climate and above all people'.[40] He even spoke of a 'beauty of appearance', for which the 'prophets of historical physiognomy' – by which he probably meant Hegemann, among others – have no sense whatsoever. With his demand for the consideration of artistic

[35] Kaeber, 'Werk', 113.
[36] Clauswitz, 'Bau- und Bodenpolitik', 40; Heyer, *Unterschichten*, 33f (1979). Eberstadt already in 1909 pointed to the fact that the street plan cannot be made directly responsible for the building of apartment houses, since a link between plan and building form is only created by the *building code*; Eberstadt, *Handbuch*, 245.
[37] Clauswitz, 'Bau- und Bodenpolitik', 42.
[38] *Wettbewerb Gross-Berlin* (Berlin, 1911).
[39] New editions 1976, 1979, 1988; reprinted 1984 and 1992.
[40] Foreword by W. Benjamin in: W. Hegemann, *Das steinerne Berlin*, 4th edn (Braunschweig, 1988), 1–4, 4. The text appeared for the first time on 14 Sep. 1930 under the title 'Ein Jakobiner von heute' in the *Literaturblatt* of the *Frankfurter Zeitung*.

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effects, the literary figure Benjamin above all demanded an aesthetic re-evaluation which would not come about for many years.

Hegemann's verdict links the criticism of the late Wilhelmine period, the Weimar Republic, National Socialism and the early developmental years of the two German states in regard to the *Mietskaserne* with Hobrecht, its alleged father. New arguments were added after 1945. No interest whatsoever was shown in Hobrecht's person and his work. Because of a lack of discourse, even such polemical tracts as 'Fifty years of struggle against the *Mietskaserne*' could not mount a viable critique.[41] Instead, all that is left is a monotonous repetition of the familiar accusations against the Wilhelmine city, which should be subjected to large-scale demolition programmes. The anti-urbanism was further confirmed by the experience that during wartime the back courts had become death traps in times of aerial bombardment.[42]

A historical view of the Hobrecht Plan: new research and reassessment

With the establishment of city planning as a separate field of study alongside architecture in the late 1960s and early 1970s, scholars began posing questions of historical planning from a different perspective. City planners became interested in history. In their evaluation of the Hobrecht Plan, early city planning studies revealed uncertainties, since they could not draw upon historical planning documentation. The achievement of re-evaluating the Hobrecht Plan is attributed to the historian Ernst Heinrich. He drew attention to the hundredth anniversary of the Hobrecht Plan in 1962 by demanding that the Berlin apartment building and the plan itself should be 'thoroughly examined' before subjecting either to further criticism.[43] The ensuing purely architectural research on the Berlin apartment building did not yet challenge the by now formulaic condemnation of the plan. Thus Alfred Schinz stated in 1974 that the Hobrecht Plan 'created the possibility that only the question of accommodating the largest number of apartments became the basis for

[41] A. Dallmann and H. Schulze, *50 Jahre Kampf gegen die Mietskaserne* (Berlin, 1947). The critique of the *Mietskaserne* was radicalized by wartime bombings: now the world would see whether the authorities would make 'correct' use of this destruction or whether they would once more fall victim to the old extravagant building style of before. Incidentally, the book's title refers to the 1911 municipal programme of the Social Democratic Party of Prussia, in which the struggle against the *Mietskaserne* represented a separate item on the agenda. Bruch had already declared 'war on the *Mietskaserne*' in 1870 (Bruch, *Zukunft*, 49). Hegemann later felt himself to be called upon to wage this war. As early as 1930 Hegemann prophesied that 'long struggles' would be necessary in order to liberate oneself from rental housing (Hegemann, *Berlin*, 24). Elsewhere he estimated it would take several centuries to eliminate all *Mietskasernen* (Hegemann, *Berlin*, 283). This period, however, was then greatly reduced by the actual war damage.

[42] J. Geist and K. Kürvers, 'Tatort Berlin, Pariser Platz', in Akademie der Künste (ed.), *1945. Krieg – Zerstörung – Aufbau* (Berlin, 1995), 55–118, 108.

[43] Heinrich, 'Hobrechtplan', 56.

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development'.[44] By reducing the Hobrecht Plan to the housing question, Hobrecht's ideas on aesthetic street design, green space, sewers and the integration of existing structures fell out of view. Otherwise, this reversal of criticism was first usually concentrated on the main thoroughfares, which previous critics had claimed were too wide and which now, because of the rapid increase in vehicular traffic, were credited with 'prescient modernity'.[45]

Another 20 years would pass before, as part of a comprehensive study (*Das Berliner Mietshaus*, 3 volumes, 1980–9) under the direction of architectural historians Johann Friedrich Geist and Klaus Kürvers of the Technical University of Berlin, a new understanding of apartment house construction also revised the former view of Hobrecht. Parallel to this a change of perspective occurred which now placed value on everyday life. The long neglected research on everyday life, the working classes and their milieu initiated by Lutz Niethammer, Dieter Langewiesche and Adelheid von Saldern examined the *Mietskaserne* from within and became an extension of Geist's and Kürvers' work.[46] In three bulky volumes, student seminar groups of Geist and Kürvers collected material from archives in order to make possible a history of the apartment house through the publication of previously inaccessible sources and images.[47] Together with the Berlin Academy of Arts, an exhibition was organized. With regard to the Hobrecht Plan, four previously neglected aspects were re-evaluated: the development of sewers, the consideration of structural elements, the question of design models and the distribution of traffic.[48] Above all the manageable size of the apartment blocks was positively evaluated. Compared with the large-scale housing projects of the 1970s, the earlier buildings appeared as lively, innovative and human alternatives. As a result, the analysis of the qualities of Wilhelmine apartment house construction showed that the separation of 'basic functions of existence' as laid out in the Athens Charter could no longer be justified. Prophetically, the term *Mietskaserne* was now applied to the prefab *Plattensiedlung* of the time: 'Perhaps modern new construction districts will one day

[44] A. Schinz, 'Das mehrgeschossige Mietshaus von 1896 bis 1945', in *Wohnungsbau* (Berlin, 1974), 1–38, 2.

[45] Heinrich, 'Hobrechtplan', 50; Lubowitzki, *Hobrechtplan*, 69. Whether street width was really intended to facilitate military parades and whether street breadth can be interpreted as evidence of militarism (Geist, *Mietshaus*, vol. II, 145) are questions which could only be answered after making a comparison with other garrison towns.

[46] L. Niethammer and F. Brüggemeier, 'Wie wohnten Arbeiter im Kaiserreich?', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 16 (1976), 61–134; L. Niethammer (ed.), *Wohnen im Wandel* (Wuppertal 1979); D. Langewiesche (ed.), *Arbeiter in Deutschland* (Paderborn, 1981); D. Langewiesche, *Arbeiterkultur in Deutschland* (Hamburg, 1984); A. v. Saldern, 'The worker's movement and cultural patterns on urban housing estates . . . ', *Social History*, 15, 3 (1990), 333–54.

[47] This student 'Schriftstellerkollektiv' later brought forth a number of well-known urban building researchers such as Erika Hausmann, Dieter Rausch and Martin Kieren.

[48] Geist, *Mietshaus*, vol. I, 496ff.

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be "rehabilitated" or torn down because they are considered to be *Mietskasernen*.'[49]

Such a trend started in the 1980s with the International Building Exhibition (IBA) with its aim to rebuild single lots within surviving districts of *Mietskasernen* instead of continuing to demolish them totally.[50] The Kreuzberg district in particular became a model of how restoration of *Mietskasernen* could be effective and that new buildings could be inserted among them. Public opinion has moved in the direction of a more positive attitude towards Berlin's architectural heritage.

The actual living conditions in the *Mietskaserne* had in fact changed. Where 250 people had lived in one building, now not more than 50 lived. Buildings once called barracks became the preference of students because of low rents and the promise of unrestricted freedom. Here there were experiments in new residential arrangements such as communes or single-person flats. Leftists believed that the neighbourhoods of *Mietskasernen* might nurture anti-authoritan countercultures in West Berlin.[51]

A detailed examination of the constants and variables of the Hobrecht Plan was presented by Jutta Lubowitzki.[52] She maintained that many pre-existing elements and structures were integrated into the plan and some options were consciously left open. Thus the plan's quality lies in that it permitted the development of urban form which moulded and transformed Berlin's special identity from that of a small town in the Brandenburg sand to that of a distinctive metropolitan area. Essential characteristics of its distinctiveness were traced to the cohesive sequence of street space and squares, the broad thoroughfares and narrow access roads, as well as the grid structure of individual city districts.

This archive-based documentation of Geist, Kürvers and Lubowitzki was complemented by a small Reclam volume called *Architektur*, which was produced under Harold Hammer-Schenck in the Department of Art History at the Free University. In connection with Berlin's 750th anniversary celebration, an essay appeared in the exhibition catalogue by Dieter Radicke in which the author responded to Heinrich's 1962 call for detailed studies with one of his own set in the district of Wedding.[53] For this area, Radicke demonstrated that privatized land was the driving force of urban development and that the speculation of the Wilhelmine era had already had a century-long head start. A few pages further on, Goerd Peschken wrote in the same catalogue: 'Today people try to tell us

[49] Heyer, *Unterschichten*, 3 and 119.
[50] J. Boberg *et al.* (ed.), *Die Metropole. Industriekultur in Berlin im 20. Jahrhundert* (München, 1986); *IBA Berlin 1987. Exhibition Areas* (Berlin, 1987); J.P. Kleihues, 'Die Renaissance des Baublocks – Beispiele für eine neue Entwicklung', in D. Guratzsch (ed.), *Das Neue Berlin* (Berlin, 1987).
[51] Ladd, *Ghosts*, 105f and 230.
[52] First as an MA dissertation under the Berlin historian Wolfgang Ribbe at the Free University, and later published by the Historical Commission of Berlin.
[53] Radicke, 'Planung', 182.

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that housing misery was the fault of the houses' – a pointed jab at the polemical rhetoric of authoritarian whole-scale redevelopment.[54]

During the anniversary celebrations, a memorial plaque programme was approved, to recognize a series of previously unacknowledged Berlin personalities with porcelain plaques with their names and dates. The city's Historical Commission recommended preparing such a plaque for James Hobrecht and it was placed at Hallesches Ufer 78 (at a waterworks constructed by Hobrecht).

In the GDR, the regime's dogmatic rejection of capitalist building practices prohibited the emergence of any particular interest in their presumed and actual authors. There were no independent research projects concerning James Hobrecht's plan, and judgements were based on pre-war literature. The phalanx of housing reformers and Marxists produced a critique of the capitalist housing market and its visible result: right up to the last years of the GDR, Wilhelmine districts were viewed as representing capitalism *par excellence*. The government planned to eradicate them.

Individual Wilhelmine streets, such as Husemannstrasse in Prenzlauer Berg, were to be preserved as documents of worker culture, i.e. as a sort of inhabited monument. In his analysis of the GDR's urban planning theory, Thomas Hoscislawski noted the close link between the original urban structure on the basis of the Hobrecht Plan and the later development based upon it. Even if the passionately propagated demolition fantasies of the 1950s had been implemented, 'the replacement of this building stock nevertheless would not have meant transformation into an entirely new city'.[55] It was only in the final years of the GDR, which coincided with both a wave of nostalgia and new attitudes towards urban planning, that the plan itself was viewed from a more balanced perspective. In a Berlin encyclopaedia, which appeared in the East on the occasion of the 750th anniversary, there is a surprising commentary: 'This generally successful plan, which was based on English models, has been unjustly maligned. The formation of urban quarters allowed land speculators to undertake the densest possible exploitation of the lots. This was facilitated by the plan, which did not, however, impose such practices.'[56]

Reunification: the Hobrecht Plan as the common factor between East and West

Following reunification, there was a construction boom and a public debate about a unique 'Berlin way of building'. The plan's aesthetic axioms again took centre stage when rebuilding was proposed in areas planned by Hobrecht. There were studies on decorative forms, on the sustainability of Wilhelmine building stock and on its conservation.

[54] G. Peschken, 'Wohnen in der Metropole', in *Die Metropole* (München, 1986), 208–19, 213.
[55] T. Hoscislawski, *Bauen zwischen Macht und Ohnmacht* (Berlin, 1991), 92.
[56] Demps, 'Hobrechtscher Plan', 61.

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Popular new literature about the construction of Berlin draws two contrary sketches: a negative image portrays the living conditions of the lower classes and a positive image shows the living conditions of the upper class. However, this split into opposing stereotypes leads to distortions which are particularly questionable with regard to the lower classes. In the evaluation of the Hobrecht Plan as 'jointly responsible for a progressive impoverishment in housing',[57] Hegemann's fallacy (Hobrecht Plan = *Mietskaserne* = impoverishment) was revived once more, but the thesis of a 'progressive impoverishment' of the general population in no way reflects current knowledge of Wilhelmine housing conditions.[58]

In the past ten years, non-university urban history studies – such as those of the Geschichtswerkstatt, the Berliner Stadtforum and also local history research – have drawn upon the findings of Harald Bodenschatz, Geist and Kürvers, and recently Christoph Bernhardt and Ludovica Scarpa, for their own treatment of urban history. This has occurred most noticeably with regard to aesthetic re-evaluation, and ultimately in regard to social issues. With numerous exhibitions, visitors' pavilions and street plaques an attempt is being made to implant a 'new Berlin' within public awareness.

More than any other city in Europe, the city of Berlin has declared itself to be an object of exhibition and research. In a street exhibition on *Unter den Linden*, the Hobrecht Plan is presented to residents and visitors as evidence of the 'liberal notion of equality' – as a kind of precursor to the creation of equal living conditions in the east (Prenzlauer Berg) and west (Wedding).[59] This interpretation comes from Dieter Hoffmann-Axthelm, who credits Hobrecht with having avoided the partition of Haussman's Paris into splendid boulevards up front and wretched residential districts behind, as well as the monotony of Ildefonso Cerdà's Barcelona.[60]

[57] W. Brunner, *Verblichene Idyllen* (Berlin, 1996), 25. On page 28 the reader finds the well-known bias that the Hobrecht Plan was responsible for the small size of the courtyards. Structural conditions are linked to social evils in such a way that the reader gains the impression that 'diseases, high infant mortality, and suicide' were an inevitable result of the former. It is also untrue that the apartment blocks were built at 'the lowest possible expense' (26), since not even the poorest neighbourhoods failed to include a stucco façade on the street frontage – as questionable as such a façade might be. Even the simplest stairwells displayed an at least minimal show of design and decoration. At the same time, even on the top floor the ceiling height was not brought down as far as 'the lowest possible expense' would have demanded.

[58] On the potential and efficiency of the imperial building trade see Burckhard, *Bauplatz*, passim, and the Berlin exhibition catalogue *Stadt – Haus – Wohnung* (Berlin, 1995) with contributions from D. Hoffmann-Axthelm and L. Scarpa; Ladd, *Ghosts*, 101f.

[59] L. Scarpa, 'Berlin und seine ersten Bauten', in Stimmann (ed.), *Stadt – Haus – Wohnung*, 62. Hobrecht's conception is also made use of in regard to the (alleged) social, cultural and ethnic 'mixture' of the district of Kreuzberg, which is known as the 'Kreuzberger Mischung'; Strohmeyer, *Hobrecht*, 54.

[60] Hoffmann-Axthelm, *Stadt*, 195. Whether the striving for uniformity and the rejection of highlights dominated Hobrecht's interests so distinctly that he *intentionally* projected an inner ring road on to a railway site in order to prevent this undesired project (!) remains open to question.

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On the occasion of reunification, an interdisciplinary colloquium at the Technical University of Munich presented a work on the historical relations between the city of Berlin and its environs. Here the Hobrecht Plan plays a central role. In the chapter 'The path to the Hobrecht Plan and criticism of the plan' there is an interesting section on the garden city movement and the demographic development of individual districts. The authors show that Hobrecht cannot be presented as a direct opponent of reform efforts. In a proposal for the future which is presented at the end of the text, the urban planner Wolfgang Istel recommends reviving the (assumed) Hobrechtian centrality through the 'overcoming of the dual polarity of the city deriving from the political west–east separation and the creation of a new centre'.[61] These findings were already included in the first draft of a 'plan for Berlin's inner city' in 1997, in which 'urban repairs' and 'densification' are recommended in keeping with the Hobrecht Plan.[62]

The *Denkmalschutzbehörde* (agency for protection of historic buildings) has now also acknowledged the Hobrecht Plan as being worthy of protection. It recognizes the fact that 'the urban outlines, block and lot divisions, streets and squares, or local structural typologies in themselves possess an expressive value for historical building and lifestyles, and also possess a high historical identification value for people in the region'.[63] In the course of this re-evaluation of aesthetic and urban planning typologies, the individual apartment house has become an object of conservation. Such a policy has arisen from the experience of wide-scale demolitions in the 1960s, when first attempts were made to place more residential buildings under government protection – buildings which ranged from ostentatious structures to street ensembles to simple workers' districts. The upgrading of the image of Berlin's apartment houses was followed by the thematization of the Hobrecht Plan among conservationists. Because of the way in which the plan had integrated existing construction and streets, it was recognized as being an early approach toward conservation in Berlin. However, it was also realized that this did not occur for aesthetic reasons, but rather as a result of financial and legal considerations stemming from existing property relations.

A further differentiation of the plan's structural qualities is to be expected in a continuation of the book series *Topographien* on all the Berlin districts. Working-class housing areas are still being investigated (Kreuzberg, Prenzlauer Berg, Neukölln). In 1996 the volume on the Friedrichshain area appeared. The construction of apartment houses is presented in the volume as a formative design element and the history of the Hobrecht Plan is partially examined. All in all, the plan is credited with being the precondition for 'finding building clients for residential

[61] Istel, *Raumplanung*, 74–5.
[62] Strohmeyer, *Hobrecht*, 43, 214.
[63] J. Haspel, 'In welchem Style sollen wir konservieren?' in *Denkmalpflege nach dem Mauerfall* (Berlin, 1997), 82–8, 86.

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and commercial buildings'.[64] This represents a new step in the attempt to affirm the economic quality of the Hobrecht Plan, in other words the importance of the plan as an instrument of state economic incentives and as the foundation for Wilhelmine investments.

Conclusion

Every generation has re-assessed the Hobrecht Plan. 150 years after its emergence, it is still referred to by city planers, politicians and historians as cause for either horrors or beauty. Its author produced it hastily, hardly aware that it was to become Germany's most famous city plan. Today there is agreement that this plan was actually not a building plan and that it cannot be blamed for the quality of later buildings. For a long time its sharpest critics not only refused to recognize the plan's value but also blamed it for any number of errors in city planning. Among the opponents were prominent social reformers of the last 150 years: Ernst Bruch, Rudolf Eberstadt and Werner Hegemann, who argued for affordable rents, spacious quarters and light. Questions of aesthetics played a subordinate role. For these reasons the virtues of the plan have only recently been acknowledged. The plan may be credited with providing a robust network of streets which has enabled Berlin to enjoy an exemplary system of public transportation and maintain green spaces.

With the reunification of East and West Berlin and the return of the capital from Bonn, people were reminded of Hobrecht as the creator of a greater Berlin with neighbourhoods planned consistently in both East and West. Finally, the plan has earned its place among conservation documents. Original street layouts have been reinstated, and neighbourhoods, squares and parks have been celebrated for providing a framework into which an unmistakable 'Berlin of Stone' was set upon the sands of Brandenburg.

[64] Landesdenkmalamt Berlin (ed.), *Bezirk Friedrichshain*, 46.

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