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…Berlin

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1 Alt Friedrichsfelde in the Berlin Borough of Lichtenberg: prefab housing estate from the GDR era in the outer city (2013)

Until the last election in the Federal State of Berlin, its social democratic/socialist government claimed that there was no housing shortage in Berlin, that there even was a surplus of 100,000 homes, thus the government need not deal with housing issues. In the Eastern boroughs hundreds of flats in the prefabricated housing slabs of the German Democratic Republic have been demolished since 2002 – a process that was sponsored by the government-funded programme Stadtumbau Ost. *[1]* While housing activists were already pointing out that mainly in the inner city there was a lack of affordable housing, especially for students, the elderly and families, this fact only became official in 2011 when a new coalition government of the Social Democratic and the Christian Democratic Parties took over. Nobody could argue that Berlin was still 'poor but sexy' – as its Mayor Klaus Wowereit had in 2003, but it became obvious that more and more tourists and 'creatives' were flocking to Berlin from all over the world and that Berlin as the capital of Europe's strongest economy was becoming an important spot on the map of international real estate investors. *[2]*

Since then a radical policy change has been under way, which on the one hand must be attributed to the strong pressure Berlin's often left-wing housing and anti-gentrification activists were able to build up and which led to extensive media coverage, demonstrations and a wide perception of housing-related issues among many Berliners. On the other hand, many city officials realised that Berlin's very successful creative and cultural industries are heavily dependent on low rents. The fact that artists and young entrepreneurs can survive in Berlin on a very tight budget was accepted as a key precondition to sustain the diverse and cutting-edge cultural scene. Keeping the rents low would actually be the most important factor to promote the creative industries in Berlin, many stakeholders from cultural institutions argued.

A massive policy change …

Berlin is expected to grow by 250,000 new inhabitants by 2030, meaning that around 10,000 new flats will have to be built every year. The Senate Department for Urban Development and Environment is currently in the process of producing a housing strategy that identifies

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2 Protest camp by 'Kotti & Co': residents fear eviction and relocation to peripheral housing estates because of rising rents (2012)



3 Former Tempelhof airfield: site of a big controversy over whether all of it should stay a public park or whether the fringes should provide space for housing and new neighbourhoods (2011)

land available for new housing, mostly brownfield sites. Berlin has underused land in all types of locations: along the River Spree, along the former border between East and West, on former railway and industrial land. One of the biggest potential housing areas is the former Tempelhof Airport, which has been closed since 2008 and used as a giant park since 2010. With a size of 386 ha – larger than the state of Monaco – its fringes are identified to be built up with housing, a business and technology area, a huge new central library and other facilities, with the centre remaining an open green area. At least that's the opinion of Berlin's Senator for Urban Development, Michael Müller, and many other stakeholders, who claim that building affordable as well as luxury housing on the site will relieve some of the pressure on the existing building stock in the rest of the city. These desires, which have been developed into a masterplan by ASTOC, came to an abrupt halt at the end of January, when more than 180,000 signatures collected by a citizens' initiative called '100% Tempelhof' were handed to Berlin's government, which now has to organise a referendum on the question of whether the Tempelhof Park should stay effectively untouched (also prohibiting the planting of trees on the former airfield) or allowing parts of it to be developed. *[3]*

Another key aspect of Berlin's new housing strategy was to change the city's municipal real estate policy. Until recently in Berlin public land was sold to the highest bidder regardless of the quality of the project. The idea behind this was to take in as much cash as possible for the public purse (which faces debts of more than €60 billion). But this approach faced strong opposition from civil society initiatives, who asked for high-quality proposals to be given priority, e.g. such that would use the land for family housing or cultural uses. Increasing pressure contributed to a policy change and a 'new real estate policy' is currently under review. Quite a few developable plots are assigned to alternative developers or co-operative models – too few though according to critics, who argue that the best plots in the inner city have long been sold off and that the left-overs are not very attractive and accessible. Further policies are currently being implemented, at a state as well as federal level, which will introduce quite strict rent caps or prohibit flats being turned into holiday apartments or sublet via web platforms. It is even being considered that Berlin should institute a policy which would introduce obstacles when turning rented flats into privately owned flats.

... and self-made examples

But besides these pretty strict policies, what is actually being built to ease the housing shortage? In the past decade a self-build movement and co-operatives have prospered in Berlin. These ideas can build upon a strong tradition mainly in the west of the city, where earlier models were supported by the International Building Exhibition (IBA) 1987. The trend of so-called *'Baugruppen'* – self-initiated co-housing groups, where a number of people choose an architect, search for a building plot and start to design and finally build their own residential properties – has produced a number of significant examples and new models for inner-city housing. This model makes it possible for people to acquire their own tailor-made flat. It is quite common that the group comes up with ideas for special common facilities such as roof gardens, saunas, guest apartments or even amenities, which the wider neighbourhood can use, which add an extra community benefit to the projects. In these projects,

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4 Infill project by Brandlhuber + Emde, ERA, Schneider, Brunnenstraße/Berlin borough of Mitte (2010)

people are often living together rather than next to each other and it comes as no surprise that many of them have a focus on multigenerational living so floor plans are flexible and barrier-free. A key example currently under construction is the project Spreefeld by FAT Köhl Architekten, Carpaneto.Schöningh Architekten and BARarchitekten on the banks of the River Spree. The people involved in this project formed a co-operative association and are now erecting approximately sixty flats as well as 420 sqm roof terraces, three laundry rooms and 350 sqm of communal multi-functional rooms.

Many of the projects also aim at implementing high ecological standards or test out new building technologies, which might not be realised by profit-oriented developers. The building E3 by Kaden Klingbeil Architekten is the first seven-storey apartment block constructed entirely from timber and with construction costs of €2,000 per square metre it can still be considered relatively affordable.

Coming years will show whether these interesting inner-city ideas can also be transferred to Berlin's outer city, where suburban housing or large-scale housing estates from the interwar years and from the 1960s and 1970s dominate. Increasingly, space in the sought after inner-city areas of Prenzlauer Berg and Kreuzberg is getting scarce and there is hardly any space for urban infill, with the few plots left being claimed by urban gardening groups and for pocket parks and playgrounds. *[4]* Berlin has increasing pressures to figure out how the entire city region and especially the outer city can become an attractive place to live while at the same time not copying the mistakes of the past and creating suburban style monofunctional housing developments with low densities. These examples of self-initiated co-operative housing or even mixed-use developments could be a good contribution to create more sustainable and attractive neighbourhoods in the outer city.

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