



EWT/ Eco Web Town

Magazine of Sustainable Design

Edizione SCUT, Università Chieti-Pescara

Registrazione al tribunale di Pescara n° 9/2011 del 07/04/2011

ISSN: 2039-2656

REGIONAL CITY

Back to territory. Positions and forms of sustainability in Germany.

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Pioneer Urbanism and the Ambiguity of Governing Temporary Uses in Berlin

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Vacant buildings, underused lots, empty sites, fallow lands, overgrown wastelands, abandoned factories, warehouses and infrastructural sites - all these places have become characteristic features of Berlin's urban landscape and are a result of both the massive ruination of the city after World War II and the deindustrialization in the second half of the 20th century. After reunification, these places have become playgrounds of various kinds of informal practices. It is precisely this fractured urban landscape and its creative appropriation that serve as the grounds and foundation for the city's gained reputation as the capital of temporary uses.

However, the urban development departments of the city only fairly recently began engaging with these processes. In the 1990s, in the wake of reunification, Berlin sought to put itself on the map of world cities as the new capital of one of the most economically potent countries in the world. Yet, after a short hype, international investment was stagnant and the city changed its focus by jumping on the bandwagon of the "creative city" agenda. As a result of this new orientation, officials began perceiving these vacant lots and buildings differently: what was seen in the 1990s as a weakness in the urban development process, has for some years now been endorsed and proclaimed as a strong and idiosyncratic feature of the urban landscape. The city nowadays considerably promotes and supports its "urban pioneers" - the actors of temporary uses - in the production of the creative city.

Urban pioneers have gained influence in the well reputed "poor but sexy" agenda of ruling Mayor Klaus Wowereit especially since the publication of the book "Urban Pioneers: Temporary Use and Urban Development in Berlin".ⁱ The book was published by the Senate for Urban Development in cooperation with Studio Urban Catalyst in 2007.ⁱⁱ In the introduction of the book the then Senator for Urban Development Ingeborg Junge-Reyer affirmed that Berlin is "a laboratory for the business of temporary use."ⁱⁱⁱ In this "business," urban pioneers - or "space pioneers" - are the crucial actors. They discover vacant spaces, reprogram them through their informal uses, maintain them, and put the areas on the map again for potential investors. Consequently, one major benefit for the city in the encouragement of urban pioneers is fostering future reintegration of undevelopable, currently valueless land or buildings into the property market without investment or maintenance costs. Thus, for the city, urban pioneers are spatial entrepreneurs.^{iv} While in 2004 Urban Catalyst defined five types of temporary users, start-ups, migrants, system refugees, drop outs, and part-time activists^v, the range of users is much more homogeneous in their publication for the Senate. Politically motivated projects initiated by migrants, system refugees, drop outs, and part-time activists are underrepresented. More space is given to economic and leisure based projects, an emphasis already hinting to the direction the city will follow in the future. Additionally, apart from the economic valorization of unused land by urban pioneers, their practices have been incorporated prominently in city marketing. The public promotion of urban pioneers has bolstered the process of renewing the image of Berlin in the new millennium as a creative city.^{vi}

In addition to the incorporation of urban pioneers in official city planning, city officials have also begun to regulate informal uses. Yet, in the decade after reunification control was almost absent. During this period Berlin "became the projection surface for a new wave of uncontrolled urban practices and ideas [...] whose restless speed was barely slowed down by formal control mechanisms".^{vii} However, nowadays the city's approach is to more and more control these types of practices by regulating them and incorporating them in urban development processes. The most prominent and internationally acclaimed project of such a pioneer

urbanism approach is currently progressing within the redevelopment of the grounds of former Tempelhof airport.

Pioneer Urbanism at Tempelhofer Freiheit

With the Tempelhof project, the city of Berlin is breaking new ground in participatory planning. For the first time, the bottom-up approach of urban pioneers is being structurally integrated into the official planning process on a large-scale. In 2010, one and a half years after the closure of Tempelhof airport, the vast 350 ha site, now renamed as Tempelhofer Freiheit^{viii}, was made publicly accessible, and since then has become a popular and intensely used park around the two former runways. The city plans to make use of the expansive land resources by further developing new mixed use city quarters and cultural institutions around the fringe of the site, while maintaining the majority of the site as a public park.^{ix} In order to encourage lively development directly from the beginning, the city of Berlin has initiated and fostered various temporary uses already since 2010 when the park was opened. Intermediate uses ranging from urban gardening, sports, and gastronomy to education, leisure activities, and playgrounds have populated the three “pioneer fields” on Columbiadamm, Oderstraße, and Tempelhofer Damm.^x City administration^{xi} promotes the first phase of the redevelopment of Tempelhof airport as a “lab for intermediate use” wherein pioneers “are not big investors” yet “bring life to the space [sic] and make it attractive for others. They do so via short-term initiatives and projects that grow sustainably and become more professional and maintainable long-term.”^{xii} Furthermore, pioneers “create new economies that can, if successful, also have a positive effect on general employment.”^{xiii}

Right from the beginning, both planners and city government have relied on urban pioneers to play a crucial role in the incremental redevelopment of the area. Urban pioneers have thus been envisioned as the *motor* of the overall development or “in the true sense of the word, trailblazers”.^{xiv} Understanding these temporary users as the motors of urban development in Berlin relates back to the aforementioned publication on urban pioneers^{xv}. However, these bold statements from the city on the important role of pioneers need to be qualified after more than three years of integrating pioneers on the site. Even city officials are no longer confident that pioneers are able to significantly impact the future development of the site.

Nevertheless, for city marketing and the promotion of Berlin as the city of pioneer urbanism, the pioneers of Tempelhofer Freiheit remain a decisive factor. Since the project has gained much international attention, city officials often highlight the touristic importance of the pioneer projects. However, the results of a visitor’s survey conducted in 2012^{xvi} revealed some cause for question of this position. More than three-quarters of the respondents were familiar with the existence of pioneer projects, an increase of 7 percent compared to the previous year. Yet, only 10 percent made use of the pioneer projects. Among these, the majority were visiting the urban gardening projects at Oderstraße. All of the other pioneer projects received only very few mentions. The users are mainly local residents and scarcely tourists. Furthermore, the monitoring indicates that only 3.9 percent of the polled visitors state that the main reason for their stay is to visit specific pioneer projects. Thus, according to the survey, the touristic impact and the value for city marketing remain questionable.

Moreover, the relatively small areas of the pioneer fields in relation to the total area of the site amplify the impression of the weak impact pioneers are able to exert on the overall development. In total, 8 hectares of land are allocated for pioneer fields. This amounts for only 10 percent of the planned future built-up area and only 2 percent of the total area of the Tempelhofer Freiheit.

The Ambiguity of Governance-Beyond-the-State

The incorporation of informal practices in the formal planning procedures positions official city planning in an ambiguous role. On the one hand the city acts as enabler and facilitator for experimental uses, while on the other hand it is obviously unable to withdraw from the role of the authority that needs to set up rules and regulations for exactly what it has enabled. Therefore, in these processes, there are always instances of taming the evolving informal practices and forcing them into a regulated process. We can unmask this ambiguity by scrutinizing the decision-making process in the selection of the future pioneers and the regulations the pioneers need to follow once they are on the field.

The decision-making process in the selection of pioneers follows a multi-part script that is based on architectural competition proceedings. Two juries are needed to evaluate the applications. After a pre-screening, a panel of local and external experts assesses the applications. In a second round, the political jury consisting of members of the local district government, members of the senate, and members of the two city-owned redevelopment companies approves the pre-selection. Eventually, the projects are evaluated on the basis of a point system, quantifying how sustainable they are, how they correlate with the guiding principles of the three pioneer fields, and how much “Strahlkraft” or spillover effects they might generate. The first cycle of the evaluation process resulted in a broad range of different activities. However, in relation to the city’s expectation of generating a field of experimentation the range of the selected projects is low-risk and can be predominantly described as conventional.^{xvii} Due to this restrictive evaluation process, the aspiration of the city to integrate experimental uses that are capable of pushing the overall development in unanticipated directions has not been very successful. Hence, this approach has had little groundbreaking impact and resulted in few sustainable experimental uses.

Formal constraints and regulations also contribute to the restriction of a more progressive range of informal uses. These regulations are registered in documents such as the Federal Building Code, the local building regulations, the general park regulations, use regulations, as well as the pioneer and interim use contracts. Since the park is closed between sunset and sunrise, the weightiest restrictions apply to the accessibility of the pioneer fields. Sleeping and camping on the field, for example, are not permitted. Furthermore, the overall design of the pioneer uses need to follow pre-given design principles. Pioneers need to pay a lease of one euro per square meter per year, and if commercially orientated, they need to pay ten percent of their turnover to the city. Consequently, such regulations and restrictions vigorously limit the range of pioneer uses.

In a nutshell, the described selection process, formal master planning, as well as myriad restrictions and regulations curb the inherent potential of pioneer practices to be a decisive motor for overall development. Such formalization strategies, deriving out of the city administration's wish or requirement to control the process, undermine the innovative urban development that seeks to stimulate informal uses.

The above outlined governance processes at Tempelhofer Freiheit are embedded in a broader development of governance-beyond-the-state. Governments increasingly assign greater roles to private actors and to parts of civil society in order to manage what formerly was provided for and organized by the state.^{xviii} The ambiguous role of the government in the Tempelhof project resonates well with "the janus face of governance-beyond-the-state".^{xix} The city administration reveals its janus face, by simultaneously acting as an enabler of urban pioneer projects and a restrictor of exactly what it has enabled. The state can never withdraw from newly developed governance models that include participation and the assignment of responsibility to civil society. It is precisely the state that always needs to respond to assigned public responsibilities.^{xx} These forms of governance are conceptualized as empowering, democracy enhancing, and more effective; however, by existing within the old system of regulations, they bear difficult tensions and inherent contradictions. The state's embrace of informal uses simultaneously entails formalizing such uses and thus deprives them of their inherent potential. Hence, despite its still underexplored potentials for urban development, pioneer urbanism needs to be examined cautiously when appropriated by neoliberal city governance.

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Caption: "Runway at Tempelhofer Feld, 2014"
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Caption: "Community Gardening at Pionierfeld Oderstraße, 2013"
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Eco Web Town, N° 10-11, II-III 2014

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- ⁱ Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung (SenStadt) ed., 2007. *Urban Pioneers: Temporary Use and Urban Development in Berlin*, Berlin: Architektenkammer & Jovis Verlag.
- ⁱⁱ Studio Urban Catalyst is Klaus Overmeyer's offshoot of the Berlin-based research collective Urban Catalyst founded in 2003 by Philipp Misselwitz, Philipp Oswald and Klaus Overmeyer. The collective's research on temporary uses, their potentials and pitfalls acclaimed international attention.
- ⁱⁱⁱ SenStadt 2007, p. 17
- ^{iv} *ibid.*, p. 38
- ^v Urban Catalyst, 2004. *Urban Catalysts: Strategies for temporary uses – potential for development of urban residual areas in European metropolises*, Project Report. Available at: http://cordis.europa.eu/publication/rcn/4438_en.html.
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- ^{vii} Cupers, K., & Miessen, M., 2002. *Spaces of Uncertainty*. Wuppertal: Müller and Busmann. p. 78
- ^{viii} Freiheit: German word for freedom
- ^{ix} Right from the beginning, there has been lively debates on the future plans, which have been amended various times mainly as a result of pressure by local residents. In May 2014, a referendum initiated by the "Demokratische Initiative 100% Tempelhofer Feld e.V" will be held that aims for preventing any building at the Tempelhofer Freiheit and for keeping the whole site as a public accessible park.
- ^x For a map of the pioneer fields see <http://www.tempelhoferfreiheit.de/besuchen/karte-und-anfahrt/map/2/> Accessed 16 February 2014
- ^{xi} Three governmental bodies of the federal state (=city) of Berlin are responsible for the administration of the redevelopment: Berlin Senate Department for Urban Planning and Environment, Tempelhof Projekt GmbH, and Grün Berlin GmbH.
- ^{xii} <http://www.tempelhoferfreiheit.de/en/get-involved/> Accessed on 13 February 2014
- ^{xiii} *ibid.*
- ^{xiv} *ibid.*
- ^{xv} In the *Urban Pioneers* book, temporary uses are understood as "motor of urban development" SenStadt 2007, p. 21
- ^{xvi} "Besuchermonitoring 2012", available at http://www.gruen-berlin.de/fileadmin/used_files/Infomaterial/Tempelhof/Kurzfassung_Besuchermonitoring_2012.pdf?PHPSESSID=0f16fe32c2a621f16cb3818d199f88a5 Accessed on 12 February 2014
- ^{xvii} For a complete list of currently active pioneers see: <http://www.tempelhoferfreiheit.de/en/get-involved/pioneer-projects/>
- ^{xviii} Swyngedouw, E., 2006. *Governance Innovation and the Citizen: The Janus Face of Governance-beyond-the-State*, 42(11), pp.1991–2006.
- ^{xix} *ibid.*
- ^{xx} *ibid.*