

REVIEW ESSAY

Berlin's Transformations: Postmodern, Postfordist ... or Neoliberal?

Häußermann, Hartmut and Andreas Kapphan 2000: *Berlin: von der geteilten zur gespaltenen Stadt? Sozialräumlicher Wandel seit 1990*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Krätke, Stefan and Renate Borst 2000: *Berlin: Metropole zwischen Boom und Krise*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Since the fall of the wall and the reunification of Germany, the future of Berlin has been a topic of intense political debate both within and beyond that city. On the one hand, the large-scale construction projects at Potsdamer Platz and Alexanderplatz have generated considerable debate among architectural critics, urban designers and city planners. On the other hand, the reinstatement of Berlin as Germany's capital city has triggered a number of debates regarding the changing nature of German national identity and the politics of historical memory (Huysen, 1997). In contrast to the semiotic orientation of much of this literature, in which urban space is treated largely as a metaphor for broader socio-cultural shifts, the two books under review here explore the political economy of urban restructuring in post-unification Berlin. Both books document and analyze extensively some of the key socio-economic transformations that have occurred in both halves of the once-divided city, and both books effectively demonstrate that new forms of polarization and marginalization have emerged throughout the Berlin region during the last decade. Most significantly, perhaps — in an era in which softened versions of neoliberal policy are being embraced by local growth machines throughout western Europe — these books emphasize that state policies continue to play a fundamental role in mediating and molding the creative destruction of urban space.

In *Berlin: von der geteilten zur gespaltenen Stadt? Sozialräumlicher Wandel seit 1990* (Berlin: from the divided to the polarized city? Sociospatial change since 1990), Hartmut Häußermann and Andreas Kapphan propose to examine the effects of three intertwined transformations — the introduction of a market economy and private property structures in East Berlin; the end of West Berlin's special political status within the Federal Republic during the Cold War; and the transition from industrial production to service-sector led growth — upon the entire city's socio-spatial fabric (p. 2). Häußermann is a well-established contributor to German urban studies and currently teaches at the Humboldt University, located in the heart of the former East Berlin. As the authors note in the preface, their book is based upon research they conducted as private consultants for the Department of Urban Planning, Environment and Technology in the Berlin city government. The book is framed around the looming crisis of the modern European city of the twentieth century, in which social policies were mobilized extensively to alleviate class polarization, to provide basic public services (such as housing) and to promote social integration. In the face of globalization tendencies, the purported weakening of national models of socio-economic governance and the intensification of interlocality competition, Häußermann and Kapphan suggest, a 'postmodern' form of urbanization began to crystallize in the late twentieth century that has been characterized by increasing socio-spatial polarization, more disparate social problems, weaker forms of state intervention and a greater role for private interests (p. 22). Their book attempts to

* Views expressed in this section are independent and do not represent the opinion of the editors.

examine the political-economic dynamics of this postmodern urbanization process in Berlin, to map its basic socio-spatial contours and to suggest various ways in which local policy-makers might work to counteract its most pernicious effects. Despite the specificity of spatial development patterns in Berlin due to its Cold War partition, the authors argue that intensified socio-spatial segregation, and thus a process of postmodern urbanization, has indeed been occurring in this city since the early 1990s.

Although Häußermann and Kapphan refer, at various points in the book, to a variety of political-economic factors within and beyond Berlin, their analysis focuses primarily upon the evolution of Berlin's housing market since reunification. Early chapters of the book situate post-1990s developments in historical context by tracing the evolution of socio-spatial structures and housing policies before and after 1945. The main empirical section of the book contains detailed analyses of diverse socio-spatial trends in the 1990s.

In part because these chapters are largely unhinged from the book's theoretical framing, they make for rather tedious reading; they contain a pure description of diverse empirical trends — for instance, in population development, immigration, household composition, housing supply, labor markets, unemployment, social assistance, income, residential relocation, commuting patterns and suburban settlement — without much interpretive discussion or analytical synthesis. While the authors convert some of this data into maps that graphically illustrate some of the new socio-spatial patterns that are emerging in the Berlin region, for the most part their discussion consists in descriptive summaries of data drawn from standard public sources. Similar problems mar a number of chapters devoted to neighborhood-level change during the 1990s. In a series of descriptive case studies, the authors summarize demographic and economic trends in the large-scale public housing estates of the city's eastern peripheries, as well as in a variety of inner-city enclaves on both sides of the former wall. The main interest of this analysis consists in its demonstration that broadly analogous problems of industrial decline, unemployment, segregation and infrastructural decay plague many eastern and western neighborhoods. However, because the authors do not attempt to link their descriptions of specific locales within the Berlin region to the broader theoretical questions around which the book is framed, the reader is left to make the appropriate conceptual connections on her own. A chapter on immigration describes the changing composition of the non-German population in Berlin during the 1990s and underscores the high levels of residential segregation which foreigners experience. On a number of occasions, the authors acknowledge that the concentration of foreigners — Turks in particular — within specific zones of the city does not occur through voluntary choices on the housing market (pp. 211, 213), and they discuss a number of factors that contribute to this process. Curiously, however, Häußermann and Kapphan neglect to consider the persistent role of racism and anti-foreigner discrimination on both sides of the former wall in mediating and perpetuating these segregation processes within and beyond the housing market.

One of the book's most controversial chapters examines the imposition of a private land and property market in East Berlin following reunification. Here, the authors discuss some of the legal battles over land and property ownership that ensued following the dissolution of the German Democratic Republic and the subsequent struggles over the 'modernization' of East Berlin's decaying housing stock, the infamous 'rental barracks' of the late nineteenth century. In this context, Häußermann and Kapphan discuss the complex interplay between private and state-led investment in housing redevelopment during the post-1990s period, and they outline at length the broad array of policy instruments through which the local state has attempted to influence investment patterns and residential change. While they acknowledge that many East Berliners continue to view the transformation of their neighborhoods as a gentrification-based form of 'capitalist renewal' (p. 187), Häußermann and Kapphan reject this interpretation as an ideological myth propagated by culturally alienated 'Ossis' (Easterners) (pp. 199–200). Instead, they maintain that most East Berliners lack not only economic capital, but a

'sober, legally informed analysis of their own rights and the capacity to form public associations or coalitions with other tenants' (p. 200).

Aside from its unabashedly condescending portrayal of East Berliners' perspectives on contemporary urban restructuring, one deeply problematic theoretical implication of this contention is a liberal-pluralist view of state institutions as the benign agents of the 'public' interest. Just as importantly, the empirical accuracy of Häußermann and Kapphan's portrayal of East Berliners as embittered ideologues can be called into question. Their account glosses over the intensely contested character of socio-spatial change in East Berlin, rather arrogantly dismissing the struggles of East Berliners to maintain control over basic aspects of their everyday lives as expressions of ignorance or a propensity towards self-victimization. Given the continued vibrancy of tenants' associations and other urban social movements in many parts of East Berlin, such an interpretation is itself deeply ideological — in Ernst Bloch's classic sense of promoting 'the premature harmonization of social contradictions within existing social relations' (see Panitch, 2000: 7; for further documentation, analysis and discussion, see *MieterEcho*, a journal devoted to housing struggles in Berlin, at www.bmg.ipn.de).

The book concludes by reviewing some of the major social-scientific perspectives on the effects of urban socio-spatial segregation and by summarizing some of the main lines of socio-spatial division that have emerged in post-unification Berlin. Current trends are interpreted as a major threat to the traditional framework of the modern European city and its associated forms of societal 'integration'. According to the authors, the state's task today is less to impose greater urban heterogeneity than to attempt to prevent further segregation and polarization from occurring (p. 235). On this basis, Häußermann and Kapphan survey a variety of policy initiatives through which Berlin's local state has been attempting to influence current trends — including physical planning programs, economic development policies, new forms of surveillance and social control, community-based initiatives known as *Quartiersmanagement* and social housing policies (pp. 249–68). In particular, the authors argue for a rejuvenation of housing policies oriented towards the mixing together of diverse socio-economic groups (pp. 264–8). While this goal is unobjectionable in itself, deeply controversial political questions emerge in considering the appropriate means to its realization. Unfortunately, however, the authors do not attempt to confront such questions; they neglect to evaluate the degree to which the policies enumerated in their survey contribute to their stated goal of promoting socio-spatial heterogeneity. Yet, other analyses of the same policies have underscored their exclusionary, punitive and disciplinary consequences, particularly for low-income residents, foreigners and other marginalized social groups (see Eick, 1998; 2001). Indeed, the neighborhood-based program of *Quartiersmanagement* — which Häußermann and Kapphan enthusiastically endorse — has arguably served as an important political mechanism through which Berlin's local state has actively facilitated gentrification processes (see Ronneberger *et al.*, 1999: 82–7; Holm, 2001). At this stage, Häußermann and Kapphan's text more closely resembles an official justification for extant local policy initiatives than a social-scientific analysis of their dynamics and consequences.

I would recommend Häußermann and Kapphan's book primarily to a readership directly interested in the empirical details of Berlin's transformation during the last decade. Despite the authors' questionable interpretations of certain key trends, the broad array of empirical data presented in the book may potentially be useful to future researchers concerned to develop their own accounts of post-unification spatial transformations in Berlin. However, if evaluated as a work of critical urban political economy, Häußermann and Kapphan's book arguably contains a number of significant limitations.

First, as indicated above, the argument is characterized by a major disjuncture between theory and evidence. While the book is framed around stimulating and important questions about the future of the European city in an age of global political-economic

restructuring, the empirical chapters present excessive amounts of relatively unfiltered, unsynthesized data.

Second, and relatedly, the authors devote most of their attention to an examination of socio-spatial outcomes but provide only a relatively minimal discussion of the *causes* of current segregation patterns. The intimate links between industrial restructuring, labor market change, real estate speculation and the reorganization of the urban housing market are alluded to, but never systematically theorized or analyzed.

Third, particularly in light of the lead author's earlier contributions to international urban scholarship, I was surprised by the book's rather superficial references to recent international debates on the dynamics of urban socio-spatial segregation and gentrification in comparative perspective. Although Häußermann and Kapphan cite scholars such as Peter Marcuse, Saskia Sassen, Neil Smith and Loïc Wacquant at various points in the book, they do not systematically engage with these authors' arguments or the international debates that have been provoked by the latter. For instance, while Häußermann and Kapphan cite Neil Smith's rent-gap theory of gentrification in their discussion of residential change in Prenzlauer Berg and other areas of East Berlin, their analysis focuses on a somewhat confusing cluster of empirical indicators, including the pace of residential turnover (pp. 176, 189), the subjective dispositions of property owners (pp. 194–5) or residents (pp. 195–6) and residents' income levels (p. 176). For this reason, the authors' assertion that large-scale gentrification has not occurred in neighborhoods such as Prenzlauer Berg is difficult to evaluate, for their own definition of what such a process would entail fluctuates during the course of their analysis, and is not grounded upon a sufficiently detailed engagement with international scholarship on the topic.

Finally, I did not find the authors' framing of their analysis around the problematic of the 'postmodern' city to be illuminating. Throughout the book, this concept remains a rather amorphous, catch-all term for referencing the multifarious socio-spatial shifts that are unfolding within contemporary cities; it lacks the intellectual substance and precision of other well-known approaches to 'postmodern' urbanism (e.g. Soja, 1989) and of competing interpretive notions such as 'postfordism'. Moreover, by the end of the book, the 'postmodern' urban condition is described in terms that are closely reminiscent of some of Anthony Giddens' (2000) recent pronouncements regarding the 'third way', in which neoliberal policy goals — such as 'lean management', deregulation, privatization and market-led growth — are presented as if they were uncontroversial objects of a society-wide consensus (see pp. 22, 271). As noted, major portions of Häußermann and Kapphan's study were commissioned by Berlin's local government. Upon finishing Häußermann and Kapphan's book, I could not help but wonder whether, in organizing their study, these scholars had prioritized the immediate political and ideological agendas of the current local administration over the goal of providing a genuinely critical analysis of ongoing sociospatial transformations (see also Lanz, 2001). While the authors' close ties to the political establishment in Berlin may explain their interpretive orientations on certain controversial issues, it cannot justify their selective and seriously one-sided presentation of the empirical evidence on key trends such as gentrification and on key policy initiatives such as *Quartiersmanagement*.

Stefan Krätke and Renate Borst's book, *Berlin: Metropole zwischen Boom und Krise* (Berlin: Metropolis between boom and crisis), provides a theoretically sophisticated, empirically nuanced and politically incisive counterpoint to Häußermann and Kapphan's analysis. In the early 1990s, Borst and Krätke played key roles in the introduction of regulationist-inspired approaches to urban political economy to a German-language readership (see Borst *et al.*, 1990). Krätke has subsequently published a variety of regulationist texts on urban land markets, the western European city-system and the dynamics of regional restructuring in eastern Germany (see, for instance, Krätke, 1991; Krätke *et al.*, 1997). Krätke and Borst's book builds upon these theoretical foundations while elaborating a number of original research strategies for the investigation of urban

political-economic and geographical dynamics. In approaching the transformation of Berlin's space-economy during the 1990s, Krätke and Borst are concerned to explore the complex interplay among diverse restructuring processes — including, among other trends, the reorientation of corporate locational strategies; the remaking of localized industrial agglomerations; the speculation-driven evolution of local real estate markets; the transformation of the local housing market; and the intensification of socio-spatial polarization throughout the regional economy. While each chapter of Krätke and Borst's book represents an elegantly crafted combination of theoretical discussion and empirical analysis, their approach to the aforementioned issues is framed around three overarching agendas.

First, even though Krätke and Borst ground their study upon empirical analyses of contemporary Berlin, their book develops the methodological foundations for a transdisciplinary, comparative approach to critical urban studies. As they indicate, their goal is not only to write a 'Berlin book' but to treat their analysis of that city as a basis on which to analyze, in comparative perspective, the multifarious social, economic and spatial transformations that are unfolding within contemporary capitalism (p. 11). Drawing extensively upon the cutting-edge of international urban studies (including, among other traditions, world city theory, regulation theory, the 'California School' of industrial geography, critical studies of gentrification and recent work on industrial 'conventions'), Krätke and Borst's study of Berlin provides a brilliant example of what an 'integral' approach to the study of contemporary urban development entails (p. 11). They deftly circumvent debates on Berlin's supposed 'uniqueness' by embedding that city's post-unification trajectories within the broader re-hierarchization of the western European urban system and the closely related reorganization of production systems, labor markets and real estate markets in major western European metropolitan regions during the post-1990s period.

Second, Krätke and Borst elaborate a systematic critique of the widely prevalent notion — which, incidentally, also pervades Häußermann and Kapphann's analysis — that Berlin is currently experiencing an accelerated process of 'structural adjustment' as it is transformed from a predominantly industrial city into a service-sector based metropolis (*Diensleistungsmetropole*). Against this simplistic transition model, Krätke and Borst emphasize: (1) the internal differentiation of Berlin's space-economy among multiple, partially overlapping industrial districts characterized by a range of specializations, institutional forms and conventions; (2) the path-dependent character of industrial restructuring in each of these districts; and (3) the degree to which politico-regulatory strategies may influence urban developmental pathways (pp. 9–10).

A number of chapters provide comprehensive sectoral and geographical analyses of Berlin's local and regional industrial networks. Here, the authors introduce a tenfold scheme for examining the sectoral differentiation of metropolitan economies; they then deploy this scheme in order to analyze the dynamics of industrial restructuring in the Berlin region during the last decade; and, on this basis, they contextualize Berlin's developmental pathways in relation to those of other German and western European metropolitan regions (pp. 24–71). Subsequently, in an analysis that resonates closely with Allen Scott's (1988) well-known studies of industrial agglomeration in Los Angeles, Krätke and Borst provide a detailed mapping of the multiple industrial clusters that permeate Berlin's metropolitan economic landscape (pp. 97–128). This part of the book provides a devastating critique of the view of Berlin as a service-sector based urban economy, demonstrating instead the existence of no less than 15 specialized industrial clusters that are localized within distinct zones of the Berlin region. Rather than viewing the existence of small- and medium-sized industrial clusters within many of Berlin's residential and commercial districts as evidence of the city's economic 'backwardness', the authors interpret the latter as place-specific, path-dependent networks of industrial organization.

Third, in developing their transdisciplinary approach to urban studies and their detailed analysis of Berlin's economic geographies, Krätke and Borst also elaborate a systematic critique of the major social, economic and planning policies that have been introduced by Berlin's local government since reunification. The bulk of these policies have been grounded upon the very model of Berlin as a service-sector based metropolis which Krätke and Borst are concerned to criticize. According to Krätke and Borst, these policies have exacerbated rather than alleviated Berlin's socio-economic woes and have contributed to a marked intensification of socio-spatial polarization throughout the region during the course of the 1990s. Accordingly, nearly every chapter of the book concludes by underscoring the limitations of current urban policies in light of the trends described therein. Krätke and Borst suggest, for instance, that the dominant vision of Berlin as a service-sector based city — and as a world city in-the-making — has led local policy-makers to subsidize investments by high-technology firms and transnational corporations rather than protecting and promoting Berlin's extant industrial strengths or addressing the current employment crisis (pp. 71–82, 124–8). Such policies, the authors argue, channel public resources into sectors in which Berlin has only minimal competitive assets while neglecting to address the major dilemmas faced by small- and medium-sized firms within more traditional industrial clusters (pp. 82, 127–8). These arguments are reinforced in a chapter that demonstrates the negligible level to which the command and control functions of any major transnational corporations are localized in Berlin (pp. 83–96). Under these circumstances, the authors argue, the local state's goal of transforming Berlin into a 'global city' is seriously misguided. Relatedly, in their chapter on the evolution of real estate markets during the 1990s, Krätke and Borst emphasize the ways in which speculation-driven office and commercial development in Berlin's inner city has displaced local shops, small-scale local firms and craft producers, thus further exacerbating the current employment crisis (pp. 129–56). Although local boosterists have represented the downtown construction boom as an important step towards enhancing the city's international locational advantages, the authors suggest that this trend has in fact entailed an acceleration of deindustrialization and a squandering of public funds on useless subsidies to large corporations. Krätke and Borst also develop an extensive critique of the local state's decision in 1997 to subsidize apartment and house ownership rather than tenancy in the regional housing market. Even though the supply of apartments in the Berlin region has improved since the early 1990s, the authors suggest that this new policy — along with rapidly rising rents in low-income housing — is contributing to an increasing concentration of disadvantaged groups within particular neighborhoods and thus to an intensification of socio-spatial polarization (pp. 157–210).

The authors conclude their study by mapping some of the new lines of socio-spatial division that are emerging in post-unification Berlin, demonstrating that new axes of polarization between the city core and its suburban peripheries are being superimposed upon the inherited East-West axis (pp. 211–84). In this context, they develop quantitative indicators for measuring gentrification processes and suggest — in direct contrast to Häußermann and Kapphan's analysis — that evidence of incipient gentrification tendencies can indeed be found in selected eastern neighborhoods such as Prenzlauer Berg (pp. 249–63, 278–81). On this basis, Krätke and Borst criticize local state policies for their failure to protect low-income residents from being displaced by current gentrification and revalorization tendencies. Against the local government's one-sided promotion of neighborhood-level initiatives, such as the above-mentioned policies of *Quartiersmanagement*, to address the problem of urban decline, the authors argue for a broader, region-wide program of socio-spatial redistribution and balanced economic development (pp. 281–4, 293).

Krätke and Borst's book represents a highly impressive contribution, both to the international academic literature on urban political economy and to ongoing policy debates regarding Berlin's current and future spatial development. On the one hand, this

book draws together many of the key analytical tools developed by critical urban political economists during the last two decades in order to analyze a particularly complex instance of urban socio-spatial restructuring in the current period. On the other hand, Krätke and Borst demonstrate quite brilliantly some of the ways in which this international academic literature might be mobilized in order to derive politically salient conclusions and policy recommendations for a specific city. Krätke and Borst's work is also characterized by an abiding concern to operationalize empirically some of the major theoretical propositions developed within various strands of contemporary urban economic geography, and they accomplish this task with admirable rigor, expertise and skill. For this reason, the methodological strategies developed in their book have considerable relevance for scholars working on the political economy of urban restructuring in other major city-regions. In addition to these formidable achievements, Krätke and Borst's multifaceted and hard-hitting critique of contemporary entrepreneurial urban policies in Berlin opens up a useful political perspective for progressive scholars and activists who are waging similar battles against local growth machines in other geographical contexts, whether in western Europe or beyond.

Despite their marked differences of theoretical framework, analytical focus, research methodology and political orientation, these books articulate a number of analogous arguments regarding the current situation in Berlin. Profound divisions between East and West persist in Berlin, but they have been blurred in equally profound ways by the new patterns of socio-spatial polarization that have been unleashed during the course of the 1990s. Moreover, these books reveal that, over a decade after reunification, Berlin has not become the vibrant global city-region envisioned by many local boosterists, but a city confronted with a deepening social, economic and fiscal crisis. Häußermann and Kapphann interpret this situation as a 'structural calamity' (p. 272) characterized by intensifying unemployment, marginalization and socio-spatial exclusion. They view Berlin as a powerful example of the degree to which traditional forms of social integration within European cities have today been superseded. At the same time, these authors suggest that Berlin could become a 'laboratory of postmodernity' (p. 271) in which new approaches to social policy might be developed in close coordination with private-sector actors and institutions.

For Krätke and Borst, by contrast, Berlin's current crisis is rooted in the difficult transition to postfordist forms of territorial development and in the systematic failure of local policy-makers to develop a coherent vision through which to manage that transition. Their book thus concludes with a plea for new forms of social, economic and planning policy that are grounded upon a sober, empirically substantiated assessment of the city-region's actual strengths and weaknesses rather than upon the whimsical fantasies of boosterist elites (p. 290).

Given both books' emphasis on the role of state policies in shaping spatial outcomes, I was disappointed that neither book attempted explicitly to theorize the entrepreneurial, globalization-oriented policy reorientation that has unfolded in Berlin's local state apparatus during the last decade (see Prokla, 1998). In comparative perspective, the policy tendencies and spatial development trends described in these books closely resemble those which have been documented extensively in city-regions dominated by various forms of neoliberal urban policy, such as the South East of England under Thatcher or in the Californian technopoles (see Allen *et al.*, 1998; Peck and Tickell, 1994). Here, as in Berlin, market-driven, growth-oriented, speculation-driven and extrospective state policies were mobilized in the hope of 'unleashing' endogenous economic capacities, and here too any number of market failures ensued, along with a dramatic intensification of socio-spatial polarization at local and regional scales. Given the stubborn persistence of the famous 'Rhine Model' of German capitalism during the 1990s (Esser, 1998), this apparent parallel between a major German metropolis and city-regions located in the geographical heartlands of neoliberalism may seem rather

surprising, if not thoroughly paradoxical. However, a fundamentally neoliberal vision of unfettered interlocality competition, hypermobile capital, naturalized market relations and chronically weakened state institutions has been diffused quite extensively throughout the European urban system in recent decades; it has been explicitly embraced even among many social democratic local regimes concerned to adjust to the purported pressures of 'globalization' and to position their cities strategically in the global 'space of flows' (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Against this background, the specter of neoliberalism may, in fact, be much closer to Germany's own doorstep than has previously been acknowledged (see Röttger, 1997; Bischoff *et al.*, 1998) — not least within strategic urban and regional spaces.

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