

Research Plan – Vlad-Gabriel Dobran

Problem statement

The turmoil history of Berlin is a history of clashes between ideologies. This created a divided city not only from an architectural point of view but also from a socio-political background. The initial fieldwork research in Friedrichshain (and in Berlin as a whole) has shown diverse people with different and sometimes extremely opposing ideologies congregating in the same public space. The ideological background presented by the inhabitants is the result of the combination of shared beliefs regarding religious, cultural, and societal self-identification. This difference plays a crucial role in the formation of each individual's worldview, which forms their ideologies. The various social groups observed in the analyzed area show almost no interaction, with each group discussing their ideology and social problems internally. This leads to polarization in the local society.

As such, the lack of interaction between different social groups creates tensions that burst and create ideological extremes, such as the current examples of the rise of the far right movement and the far left, which obtained 5% and 17.7% of the votes, respectively, in the last election of 2017¹. According to the study published by Abigail Greene in the Columbia Journal of Transnational Law, this polarization can be attributed to the historical absorption of the East Berlin by the West, which led to the imposing of the western model of economic and social structure over East Berlin. This led to the East Berlin population feeling estrangement from the city and its politics, with the election turnouts in East Berlin and Friedrichshain specifically being lower than the national average².

Importance

As Vladimir Mako states in his research of the influence of ideology on architecture, 'ideology is a phantasmatic construction which serves as support to our reality, in other words, it is an illusion which structures effective social relations and masks traumatic social divisions or confrontations which could not be symbolized, therefore the function of ideology is to supply us with bearable social realities'³

In other words, ideology represents a prism through which people can deal with real social-political problems, presenting a singular point of view for each problem. By becoming exposed to a different ideology (looking at the prism from a different direction), people can understand other points of view and start a conversation that brings the problem closer to a solution. Such a place is already present in Berlin (and in every city), though to a different degree, namely the presence of street statements such

¹ The Federal Returning Officer. "Results Berlin-Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg – Prenzlauer Berg Ost - the Federal Returning Officer." The Federal Returning Officer, 2021. <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2021/ergebnisse/bund-99/land-11/wahlkreis-83.html>.

² Greene, Abigail. "Together but Apart: German Unity Day's Significance in an Election Year." Columbia Journal of Transnational Law, October 1, 2021. <https://www.jtl.columbia.edu/bulletin-blog/together-but-apart-german-unity-days-significance-in-an-election-year>.

³ Mako, Vladimir, Mirjana Roter Blagojević, and Marta Vukotić Lazar. "Architecture and Ideology - Cambridge Scholars Publishing." Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014. <https://www.cambridgescholars.com/resources/pdfs/978-1-4438-5671-3-sample.pdf>.

as protests or art elements (posters, stickers or graffiti) that tries to spark interest and the discussion of the people passing by. Architecture can play a role in sparking the discussion by taking a proactive role and providing a middle ground in the debate. This role of architecture is not new, and as Mako states, historically, architecture was a direct political and ideological practice that expressed the societal debate and, as such, contributing to the cultural identity. Only during the postmodernism movement, the architecture tried to detach itself from the ideological debate, trying to adopt a 'neutral' stand on the local level.

Research Aim

As such, this research aims at understanding the reason behind the division in the Friedrichshain neighborhood and discovering ways for architecture to act as a middle ground and contribute to the start of the conversation by amplifying the existing effect of the public space, where people can exchange their views and approach the local problems in a more constructive way.

Question

How can architecture act as a middle ground in the ideological debate and contribute to the starting of discussion and interaction between different socio-economic groups of people in the Friedrichshain neighborhood?

Sub-questions

What is the influence of ideology on architecture from a techno-aesthetic and techno-artistic point of view?

What functions can enhance the social interaction of people from different ideological backgrounds?

Methodology

The research is constructed around a critical literature review of materials and previous research in order to understand the core problem in the polarization of different social groups and to understand how the ideology can be translated into architecture in order to create a debate incubator. The research will include the analysis of various case studies of previous architectural project which tries to generate debate/knowledge centers, such as the example of the Seattle City Library or the Amsterdam deBalie. In addition, the research is based on interviews on one hand of people already involved in the creation of debate spaces, such as the director of the deBalie debate center. On the other hand, the research will be based on interviews with the local community in order to understand the necessities of individuals impacted and in order to include them in the design phase for the purpose of creating a flexible space that can adapt and morphs around the community needs.