

PARK AM GLEISDREIECK IN BERLIN AS AN EXAMPLE OF POST-RAIL AREA REVITALIZATION

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Post-rail areas have a good chance of development. They occupy vast lots, often in city centres, yet they undergo rapid degradation because of abandonment and neglect. Such space becomes unattractive, not only in the social context but also investment-wise. The creation of new quality space is a desirable objective for both residents and visitors. The basis for success is the consistent implementation of a coherent spatial vision. Foreign examples confirm that well-planned projects of modernization and adaptation of such areas may contribute to gaining spatial order and increasing the city's aesthetic value.

Berlin is a city where, after World War II, many major train stations were not rebuilt or were completely demolished due to reduced connections between the western part of the city and surrounding areas. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, many of the former railway areas were transformed into complexes of buildings with recreational and cultural functions.

An example of such transformations is Park am Gleisdreieck: 2 September 2011 saw the opening of the first 12-hectare part of this development, located on the border of districts Kreuzberg and Schöneberg. The second part of the park, with an area of 9 hectares, will be made available to visitors in autumn 2013 (il.1, 2). The client is the Senate Administration for Urban Development in Berlin, represented by Grün Berlin GmbH, and the designer is Atelier Loidl, a group of architects who won the competition for the development project for the area in 2006. The local community was also involved in the design process.

Historical overview

In the years 1871-1874 the Berlin-Anhalt Railway Company built a freight train station on the area called Gleisdreieck. After the devastation of World War II, only the east front of the building remained, and is now used as part of the German Museum of Technology.

The name "Gleisdreieck" (*triangular junction, wye*) comes from the triangular intersection of the elevated railway lines built in 1912 (il. 3). Follow-

ing two serious accidents, the branching has been changed so that the lines intersect at two levels. After World War II, passenger and freight traffic was stopped, and currently only city trains (S-Bahn and U-Bahn) pass over this section. The area is gradually being transformed into a green space called Park am Gleisdreieck.

The park occupies a key position among Berlin's open spaces, filling the gap in the north-south connection of the green belt in the centre through the government quarter, Potsdamer Platz to the Gleisdreieck area. In the future, the connection is to be extended to the Natur-Park Schöneberger Südgelände. In close proximity to the park are several urban spaces of exceptional attractiveness, such as Potsdamer Platz, the German Museum of Technology, the spa complex Liquidrom and the music hall Tempodrom.

Concept of the project

A long-distance railway track clearly divides the park into eastern and western parts, yet the concept considers the complex as a whole, so that visitors can feel the immensity of the space (il.1, 4). One of the most important elements is the variety of usage divided into two "speeds". The park offers a meeting place, places for rest and contemplation, as well as a playground and a sports field (il. 5). An important aim of this project is to preserve ruderal plant species and historical elements. As a result, old railway tracks, signals and platform buffers can still be found there by keen observers (il. 6, 7). In 2011, the project won the silver Urban Quality Award.

In an interview in February 2012, Markus Kohlke from Grün Berlin GmbH explained why a public park had been formed on such a vast plot in the city centre, so very attractive for commercial investors. This space is located in the vicinity of Potsdamer Platz, which became the site of numerous investments after the reunification of Berlin. According to German construction law, with such a large urban development on the green grounds (and Potsdamer Platz was considered a green space because it had been left empty during the separation of Berlin), the

investor must “replace” the destroyed green areas in another location (preferably nearby). Funding for the construction of the park came from developers of Potsdamer Platz, Leipziger Platz and from German Railways (Deutsche Bahn), not from taxes. After the Berlin reunification, there were many companies interested in this area, but their development plans met with strong protests from the residents. Because this area had not been used for almost 40 years, people began to go there for walks, and years later no one could imagine there being any other use than a park.

In consequence, public participation was very strong during the process of designing. Every two weeks the designers presented their concept to the residents, who could make comments. Markus Kohlke adds that, in addition to meetings with designers, residents could participate in workshops and present their vision for the area at open-air meetings. Grün Berlin GmbH and Atelier Loidl introduced changes to the plan on the basis of these contributions. Not all requests and suggestions could be included, but many have been taken into account. Today, most people are happy with the park, though some residents believe that the entire investment has swallowed too much money (it cost about 50 Euro/m²). Others say that instead of a designed park, the wild vegetation of the area should have been preserved. However, if this had been the case, it most likely would have been occupied by the homeless and hooligans. Currently, Grün Berlin GmbH receives a lot of positive feedback about the success of the park. Leonard Grosch, partner at Atelier Loidl, admits that in the design process, staying in contact with local residents and clients (which in principle were two: the Senate Administration for Urban Development in Berlin and Grün Berlin GmbH) and combining their different concepts associated with the vision of designers in one coherent plan was altogether a difficult, but ambitious challenge. Unfortunately, the final plan has failed to fully integrate the so-called “Generalszug” axis, which had been included in James Hobrecht’s plan from 1862 (il. 8-10). Due to the high traction passing perpendicularly to the axis, and because of high costs, the construction of the pedestrian bridge that would have connected the two parts of the park in the central section was not possible.

Despite the enormous success, the problem of vandalism has not been completely solved. The elevation of the area by 3-4 meters above the surrounding street grid has created a natural barrier on the west

and east sides. Still, the park is not closed during the night and there are no surveillance cameras installed, and patrolling such a vast area is not enough to eliminate hooliganism. Newly created graffiti has to be regularly cleaned, which creates a considerable financial burden: for example, within the first 2 months of the park’s existence, the costs of cleaning amounted to 20,000 Euros. This is a huge problem that needs to be solved in the near future. Leonard Grosch points out that a fence would be very easy to build because of the bilateral elevation of land above the street, but the client’s decision was not to close the park. Maybe in the future, due to intensifying acts of vandalism, this decision will be changed. The partner of Atelier Loidl personally does not want to have an area in the city centre which would be available only during certain hours, or where the visitors would be under constant surveillance.

In Berlin, there are 35 parks and gardens with an area of over 15ha. What makes Park am Gleisdreieck special is an open space where people can spend time together, play together, talk, and share a common space. In the park there is also a special place for women from Bosnia. Leonard Grosch admits that it was not the idea of the designers, it has been brought up at one of the meetings with the residents as part of intercultural integration. The residents of the Bosnian minority wanted to have a communal garden to plant and care for roses, and the Berlin Senate has agreed to this idea. Markus Kohlke adds that existing gardens were incorporated into the park. Their owners now offer their products at a market which is regularly held in the park.

A unique feature of the Gleisdreieck park on the European scale are railway bridges above Yorkstraße (il. 1, 2, 11). Construction of 45 bridges for three private carriers began around 1875 and 33 bridges have been preserved until today, of which 10 are still in operation. Support structures of some of them are cast-iron Hartungs’ columns – once typical for railway facilities, but unfortunately for several years successively removed. Whether the bridges over Yorkstraße should be retained and which of them need to be removed due to the high maintenance costs is up for discussion.

Since the western part of the park is currently under construction and will be opened in 2013, designers can see which elements work well in the eastern part, already opened to public (il. 2). Leonard Grosch emphasizes that there is no need to design every square meter of a park space. Through the designing

process, architects dictate to people where and what to do, but the success of this project shows that if you provide people with a piece of green space, they will know how to use it for their own needs. In the future, park space should change depending on how the users themselves want to use it. Markus Kohlke points out that meetings with residents are still being held today, to obtain suggestions of what might be changed in this park in the years to come.

Information about the Project

Area: total: approx 26ha

Ostpark: approx. 17ha / Westpark: approx. 9ha

Cost: total: 18mln Euro

Ostpark: approx. 9.5mln Euro / Westpark: approx. 8.5mln Euro

Opening: Ostpark: September 2011 / Westpark: Autumn 2013

Client: Senate Administration for Urban Development in Berlin, represented by Grün Berlin GmbH

Design: Atelier Loidl Landschaftsarchitekten und Stadtplaner, Berlin

Construction Management: Breimann Bruun Simons Landscape Engineering GmbH In collaboration with Atelier Loidl

Atelier Loidl is a landscape architecture office founded in 1984 by Hans Loidl; since 2005, the partners are: Leonard Grosch, Bernd Joosten and Lorenz Kehl. Selected projects: Lustgarten, Berlin

(2000), Rhinepark, Duisburg (2009), Feldbergstraße, Frankfurt (2009), Hirschgarten, Erfurt (2009).

Grün Berlin GmbH

Grün Berlin GmbH is a service company of Berlin region for all open space development projects. Since its creation the company has successfully developed a number of quality green sites including the Lustgarten park, the park on the Moabiter Werder, the Berlin Wall Trail, Leipziger Platz and the Berlin Wall Park.

Translation by the Author

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