Berlin's Inner City
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Berlin is located in north-eastern Germany on an ancient river valley in an area with marshy terrain. The river Spree follows this valley. On the west side of Berlin the Spree meets the river Havel, which flows from north to south. Earliest settlement happened here because of the presence of a ford that enabled the passage through this marshy area. Earliest evidence and written mention of towns in today’s Berlin central areas dates back to approximately 1192. It is traced back to two towns. Cœlln, a former fishing village on the Fischer-insel (fishing-island), and Berlin across the river Spree in what is now called Nikolaiviertel. Berlin is the transliteration of a Slavic name Brl- root for 'marsh' – n suffix for 'site': site in a marsh.

Further cause for development was the strategic position on a Europe wide trade route. Towards west it connected to Frankfurt Posen, Magdeburg, Westfalen. On the east it is linked to Leipzig the Harz and Danzig. Fluvial connection with Elbe and Havel was given and of high importance until the post-industrial era. Products reached until relevant city like Hamburg, Lübeck, Flanders and England. Society was organised in an upper class of wholesalers and a lower class with few civil rights. The early period was characterised by (a) exemption form duty (b) right of market stalls (c) decision making hold by citizens (d) town walls (e) duty right over shipping activity and wood trade.

Despite being located on a strategic position on an European wide trade route, the city was profiting from it only to a small extent. The old medieval Berlin is a largely forgotten reality. You cannot experience it anymore: no original sets of buildings are left from that period. Through history the modest, medieval character was reason for shame among the rulers and decision making upper-class society. The two towns had their own individual political, religious and trade centres. In 1307, the two cities were united politically turning into a (trading) free Hanseatic city, known as Doppelstadt (twin-
town) Berlin Cœlln. De facto until 1709 the two settlement where characterised by social division into an upper class of wholesalers, with the most decision making power. A middle class of tradesmen and the lower class, both with fewer civil rights. Berlin developed more in significance. It owned two market places, on the east a privileged residential area developed.

Residential City - The Kurfurst (prince elector) Frederick II, took over both town-sides and established in 1442 its residence. One year later the Stadtschloß (city-residence) was erected. Thus the twin-town became the capital of the Markgrafschaft (margraviate), and subsequent members of the Hohenzollern family ruled until 1918, first as prince electors of Brandenburg (the surrounding county), then as kings of Preussen, and finally as German emperors. During those times the number of inhabitant kept quite steady: around 6,000–10,000 in average.
After 1640, a policy of promoting immigration and religious tolerance offered asylum to the French Huguenots, more than 6,000 settled in Berlin. Until 1709 the population increased to about 58,000. Approximately twenty percent were French, which led to an immense cultural influence on the city. Many other immigrants came from Bohemia, Poland, and Salzburg.

The new role and relevance of Berlin as residential city was to be shown, put in evidence. With the residence several axes leading towards it have been laid. The twin–towns was first given a central point. By contrast, the old medieval resident areas in the east were left behind. From now on relevant extensions were made westward the elector’s residence.

Reading the Plan - A plan of Berlin in 1688 (see map on facing page 6 above) can be read as the conclusion of the previously mentioned dynamics. If we follow Spandauer Straße, we see in the north it connects with the west east side, its regular plan informs us about planned development signalling (wholesalers’s) wealth. From the new market place we move to the Berliner Rathhaus (town hall) the political power of the town, situated on half a way to the former market–place, economic centres of the town. Both market places were accompanied by a church: institutional religious power. Then we cross the Spree at the Mülendamm (dike that provided control over the shipping activities) reaching the next twin–town Cölln’s town hall (Cöllnische Rathhaus) church (Petri Kirche) and their in–between square. From amount and size of market places and churches we can deduce that Berlin was predominating.

The location of the Stadt–schloß, was to change the dynamics of the upcoming urban developments. The shift from twin–towns into one residential city. Situated in the north of Cölln, the Stadtschloß was well embedded into both towns. Close to both political powers (town halls) as well as protected by the water in the north, and backed by the nearby new city extensions on the west. Extensions for the elector’s recreation activities, and for settling the new ruling aristocracy. The streets linking the residence with the two town halls of the twin–town joined in front of it on An Der Stechbahn a representative place symbolising royal highness.
Elector's Residence Berlin at the Death of Prince Friedrich Wilhelm in the Year 1688


A Berlin 1788


Representative Place Facing the Stadtschloss

An Der Stechbahn 1880

Nicolaiviertel 1880
European Assert - In 1701 Berlin became Kingdom of Preussen’s capital. After 1740 under the rule of the philosophically oriented Frederick the Great, it became a centre of the Enlightenment. Regime buildings (residence) were flanked by institutions for science (academies), fine arts (museum) and performance (opera), health (hospitals) and education (library). This buildings were implemented in the exclusive area of (E) Dorotheen-stadt, part of a series of city extensions. Already in the 17th century several axes have been laid towards the Stadtschloss. The one linking the backyard of the palace with the hunting ground Tier-garten (animal-garden) turned into a royal promenade: the Allee Unter Den Linden. The city extensions followed those axes. The Stadtschloß (B1) was visually and symbolically centred by those axes, loosing its outskirt position and becoming the heart of the city. At the same time the residence was the border between exclusive and lower society. (see map on facing page 8 above) in fact the severe front façade was the end point of the axes leading throughout the east part. The controlling eye of royal highness. Meanwhile the splendid open courtyard was the starting point of the axis leading to exclusive areas and further to Tiergarten. The extensions were based on strong street-grids. The one in the west part were exclusive quarters for high ranking society and branched out royal institutions, they partly worked as autonomous suburbs. Namely: (E) Dorotheen-stadt (F) Friedrichs-stadt and (G) Luisen-stadt. In opposition extensions on the north and east side were for socially less privileged classes: (K) Spandauer Vorstadt (I) Kœnigsstadt and (H) Stralauer Vorstadt. Less rigid grid informs us about the poor planning effort for that areas. Those extensions formed the core for the later development of Großer Berlin (greater Berlin).

Until 1750 the population grew to 113,000. The city walls have been torn down and replaced by custom frontiers with gates. The city got close to the size of Vienna or London. In comparison Berlin was a newly emerged city and characterised by a fast growth. In the Middle of the 19th century new actors of urban development appeared. Berlin’s progressive policy attracted the newest generations of entrepreneurs (already hosting some manufactures) as well as academic elite (founding of Berlin’s university and museums). First generation of train stations (first steam locomotive: Berlin 1816) and industries settled down. This in turn attracted more and more workers and rural population. In 1850 Berlin counted about 419,000.
Ground Floor Plan of the Royal Residence City Berlin in the Year 1789

A: Berlin (today’s Nicolaiviertel)  B: Cölln (today’s Fischerinsel)  B1: Stadtschloss (today’s Museumsinsel)  C: Friedrichswerder  D: Neu Cölln  E: Dorotheen-stadt  
Capital City - In 1871 Berlin became capital of the new established united German Empire. Until World War I, with the Industrial Revolution going on, the city’s economy and population expanded dramatically. Main urban development mover was the production of good and its boundaries became blurred. The city transformed into a centre of transportation, commerce activities. Train, metropolitan, underground railway, tram. Most important: long distance connections ending in terminus station at the inner city border. The station’s forecourt and their linking roads to focal points of the city were the preferred location for tertiary sector business such as department stores, hotels and banks. Traffic nods became new business centres, Potsdamer Bahnhof (terminus station, in the west) and Alexanderplatz (traffic nod in the east). The flow of people between this two places made the Stadtshloß stop being a turning point but a transit place between east and west. Private capital was the main driving force of the public transportation and real estate.

The east districts were linked to the inner city by the Alexanderplatz, becoming a place of commercial activity for the lower class. The new living-space was shaped in deep blocks tenements houses, on small parcels, multistory (5 to 6) with several subsequent (narrow, poor in light) backyards and (overcrowded, unhealthy) side wings. Building and backyard was of (dirty, noisy) multifunctional use: living, business enterprise, handcraft, and so on. Western first class districts included also state and cultural developments (parliament, theatre) even here deep block typology was to be found, in comparison the parcels were larger, backyard wider, streets supported with trees, generous belle étoffe and production activities separated.

Main reason for this urban form was the fact that the state limited itself to frame the parameters for urban development. Its basis was the Hobrecht-Plan (1861) and the related building regulation, basically a street-and-squares plan showing the border between private and public, city infrastructure (canalization) and regulating the building’s quantitative measures (maximal highness). Its guidelines were to plan over the border of the city and avoid breakthroughs in the medieval core or through private ownership, leading to big unplanned sites in the hands of private development and a medieval core considered a leftover and obstacle for modern development.

Attention switched to the problem of housing shortage and industrial sprawl. Berlin was Germany’s capital, economical hub, cultural and political centre. As well as having the most heavy traffic and overcrowded housing,
Rearrangement - 1908–1910: precarious living condition of the broad population in the dense tenements houses and the outdated historic core, led the chamber of architecture launch an urban planning competition for Groß-berlin (greater-Berlin). The aim was to rationalise the chaotic developed urban sprawl, functional rearrangement, alternatives for the deep block and suggestion for suburbanization strategies and a new (more monumental) centre were asked.

This marked the following trends: social and qualitative reorientation, rethinking of tenements house’s relationship with courtyard and street, ideals of air–light–sun and of a car oriented city. Suburban housing developments spread. Medieval core and deep block were considered words of disgrace. Tenants right were implemented and nonprofit driven development associations took over the housing policy.

The period until late 1940s was marked by wars, decreasing economical prosperity and vivid political change (monarchy, republic, dictatorship) in a short time. Therefore none renewal or ‘monumentalization’ of the historic core was undertaken. Only suburban housing project as being the most urgent problem, were realised.

Post-war - After World War II, Berlin’s core was destroyed to about 50%, the city was occupied and divided into east and west (core on the east) later on a wall was erected along the border of the two parts.

East Berlin became the capital of DDR (socialistic Germany) and was used as propaganda–city. The historic building of the flourishing 18th and 19th century along the Allee Unter den Linden and around were rebuild, mainly classical representative buildings. The residence (symbol of monarchy) was replaced by the Palast der Republik, people cultural building. In the 80s even the disgraced medieval core has been reconstructed in a socialistic historicized manner. On the other side the ideal of an industrialized, modern country and a socialism leading to scientific progress had to be expressed. New centre became the widened Alexander–platz. In this way the Allee Unter den Linden was flowing into the square leading to its landmark, symbol of progress, the TV tower. Also the surrounding (former city extensions) districts are leading to it, being until today a main orientation mark.

The ideal about modernity in housing lead to high rise blocks implemented for example in front of the medieval core. In this way the centre became a mixture of rebuild historicism and progressive urbanity.

In west Berlin, most developments were following the 1950 ideas of car oriented urbanisation.
Normalisation - Despite great effort of reconstructing historical representative spaces, other places were left abandoned, like the Spandauer Vorstadt. Located at the ‘border’ i.e. at the wall, Such vacant ruined places suddenly found themselves as being the physical centre of Berlin when it was reunified in 1990. The city was characterised by vacancy, fragmentation, heterogeneity, diversity, temporarily, formlessly, subversion. It has been the stage of industrial sprawl, the golden 20s, I & II WW, dictatorship, Holocaust, Cold War and socialism’s collapse, capitalism and revolutions. Unique opportunities and need for redevelopment in central highly visible areas was given.

In 1993 a competition for the redevelopment of Alexanderplatz was launched. Second prize shows the effort of architects to take the city as opportunity for experimentalism and innovation, interpreting the above mentioned characteristic as Berlin’s specific. An idea of modern contextualization that accepts the heterogeneous set of structures and elements, but ties them together into a coherent urban space, puts in relationship, remove their deficits and densify with spatial and programmatic aggregations, strengthening their specific qualities. Aim was to keep the existing memory and re-structure it into a new urban texture with the help of modern means.

In contrast the first prize shows the academic-conservative attitude, supported by the government. It respects the rules of critical reconstruction but considers the profit pressure and new office use. Critical reconstruction and cautious renewal, a policy developed in west Germany as response to the lost traditional urban qualities. Reconstruction of a typical Prussian urban texture and removal of wars, socialism and western car oriented 50s fragmentation was evoked. Respectful contact with historical heritage, a pedestrian friendly revaluation of public space, strengthening of local transport, support mix-use, reconstructing the urban ground plan of the 19th century, its homogenous block perspectives, historicize architecture, visual parcelling and monolithic stony façade.

Topics of infrastructure, use and ownership have been left to the market dynamics. A global market characterised by international, profit oriented investments, with easy to consume products. Most part of the city centre has been sold as huge sites to multinationals with the requirement of displaying the image of a European city. New centres were founded, like Potsdamer Platz, the development included high rise and focussed on city-tourism, offering office spaces, large scale entertainment and shopping facilities. Developers were Siemens,
Sony and Daimler Benz. The result was a central homogenous service and governmental area between Spreebogen (governmental area, political power), Potsdamer Platz (entertainment and office centre, economic and service power) and Allee Unter den Linden (flâneur and commercial centre, recreational oriented service society). Further obstructing the city’s union, integrative growth and supporting social segregation.

The new space focussed on cosmopolitanism, service and tourism was not getting familiar for the inhabitants. Berlin’s characteristics were lost. Spandauer Vorstadt instead was still untouched and vacant. They soon appropriated this forgotten but now central area turning it into a place of vivid temporary, spontaneous, illegal use of experimental sociocultural communication and creativity. When redevelopment reached here too, the rules of critical reconstruction showed their ambivalence. Developments as Neuen Hackeschen Höfe (1 investor, 1 building, 12 façades) were implemented. After an euphoric period led by the believe that the long period of stagnation would turn into a boom of growth, it became clear that Berlin turned into a shrinking city. Today there is a decrease of 15,000 inhabitants a year. After the delusion of the construction euphoria and multinational oriented hopes, the planning strategies focus on smaller scale free market real estate (private developments). Leading to ambiguous developments like townhouses in the historic centre.

The idea is expressed in a Leitplan (model-plan) basically only a mass and void drawing.

Most controversial development is the demolition of the socialist cultural building for the people Palast der Republik in favour of imperialistic residence Stadtschloß’s reconstruction.

Berlin for me is a city that has since ever been articulated by struggling and contrasting elements with the failure through history of attempts to standardize and homogenize it. I hope that despite the restorative tendencies and the global commercialisation pressure, a normalization will be avoided, the specific characteristic, heterogeneity and memory of the city will not be erased but further preserved and used as pool for innovation.
Bibliography

Hanseatic: a league orig. constituted of merchants of various free German cities dealing abroad in the medieval period and later of the cities themselves and organized to secure greater safety and privileges in trading

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Markgraf: margrave.
The hereditary title of a military governor (especially of a German border province) and of the Holy Roman Empire. From MDu. markgrave, from marke 'boundary' + grave 'count'.

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Preussen: Prussia.
Historical region in northern Germany bordering on Baltic Sea. Former kingdom & state of Germany, during the 14th through early 20th centuries.

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Brandenburg: Historical region and province of Prussia.

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Kurfuerst: prince elector.
Prince of the Holy Roman Empire who had a right to participate in electing the German emperor.

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