

THE INTERDEPENDENCY OF IMAGE AND MATERIAL SPACE: THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE IN NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT. EXAMPLES FROM BERLIN, GERMANY

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INTRODUCTION

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *image* literally as “a tangible or visible representation” and figuratively as “a popular conception (as of a person, institution, or nation) projected especially through the mass media”¹. This paper examines the meeting point of these two definitions, namely the interaction between the physical and visual aspects of the city and its popular conception, through the examination of two case studies in former East Berlin.

The poststructuralist and constructivist viewpoints of new cultural geography highlight both the dependence of structures on their cultural framework and the constant production and reproduction of culture by various actors; thus culture and its components can be understood as deeply interlinked and constantly under construction and revision². Semiotics allow us to analyse culture, and in this case its subordinate part “image”, by disengaging signs and symbols from their culturally embedded meaning³; in this way, the social production of meaning and its implications for the social production of spatial realities can be empirically examined⁴.

Thus, this paper will trace the development of the image concept in cities from two related disciplinary perspectives, architecture and cultural geography. This paper, whose findings are based on the author’s recently completed dissertation, seeks therefore to connect the theoretical, constructivist, and poststructuralist aspects of new cultural geography with real neighbourhood development in former East Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall, thereby creating a link between image and material space.

THE IMAGE OF THE CITY, THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE, AND SEMIOTIC LANDSCAPES

The theoretical underpinnings of this argumentation are formed by two key works in architecture and sociology dealing with spatial cognition, Kevin Lynch’s “The Image of the City”⁵ and Henri Lefebvre’s “The Production of Space”⁶⁷.

Kevin Lynch’s seminal text⁸ explicitly brought the idea of image to the forefront for the first time, albeit primarily in a denotative sense⁹. Lynch’s work concentrates on the literal aspect of image, namely its physical and visual characteristics (i.e. with relation to perception and negotiation of the physical environment), and explores “meaning” and “identity” from the pragmatic point of view, specifically with relation to legibility and navigability¹⁰. Lefebvre’s work, on the other hand, is concerned with the theoretical conceptualization of spatial units and relationships¹¹. In “The Production of Space”, he examines an actor-based, constructivist perspective in which spatial relationships and negotiations exist both in connection with and independent from the built space.

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These two texts approach two sides of the city's symbolic cognition and spatial composition. Where Lynch examines the way that users "read" the physical landscape from the perspective of the planner and architect, Lefebvre theorizes how actors produce socio-spatial relations independent of, in connection with, or even in spite of the physical materiality. Both works deal with spatial cognition and the relation between the user and space, however while in Lefebvre's work the power to create (social) space lies squarely in the hands of the user, Lynch concentrates on a quasi-paternalistic relationship between the architect as creator and the user as consumer.

The examination of the production of space and its relation to image are not a purely academic endeavour; the constructivist concept of (re)production finds inherent resonance in the physically productive practices of urban planners, architects, and landscape architects. Indeed, grassroots interventions, linked for example to the "right to the city" movement¹², show that the productive actions of planners and users interact with each other on many levels, both symbolic and material. Therefore, the examination of the literal symbolism of urban image à la Lynch¹³ or Alexander¹⁴ through semiotic interpretation¹⁵ presents a novel entry point to the study of the connotative aspects of image. Or, as Rem Koolhaas put it, "if space is invisible, all theory for the production of *space* is based on an obsessive preoccupation on its opposite: substance and objects, i.e. architecture"¹⁶.

Negative Image: Stigmatization

When the image of a neighbourhood is primarily composed of negative modifiers, the area is often described as "stigmatized". The concept of stigma and stigmatization in empirical sociological, ethnographic, and geographical research harkens back to Erving Goffman's 1963 book "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity"¹⁷. In the case of neighbourhood stigmatization, the neighbourhood is defined in some way as "deviant" from the socio-cultural ideal, either from its built space form or, more typically, the (assumed) characteristics of its residents¹⁸. Stigmatization is primarily transferred through popular culture and the media, and can pose a significant barrier for urban redevelopment efforts¹⁹. Stigmatization is a particular problem in social housing complexes²⁰ (especially post-war housing estates²¹), where "image management"²², in particular through branding efforts, have been developed to cope with the discriminatory effects of a negative image²³.

The Instrumentalization of Image: Marketing and Branding

Whereas stigmatization often implies a passive or diffused transference of image and its respective symbols and signs through the media and popular culture²⁴, marketing and branding imply an active instrumentalization of these traits to gain a social or economic advantage²⁵. Urban marketing often highlights existing tendencies in order to profit from them in the short or long run (i.e. through the marketing of a city as "creative"²⁶, or the identification and emphasis of specific popular, "hip", and bohemian neighbourhoods²⁷). Increasing de-industrialization and the expansion of the tertiary sector in combination with postmodern discourses of added-value through branding²⁸ have shifted image, symbolic capital, and immaterial values into the foreground of urban development and the global competition between cities. In order to succeed in this competition, cities must actively manage their image, creating brands, slogans, logos, and other signs and symbols that they then use to create a unique and recognizable concept which can be exploited for tourism, investment, and a range of other uses²⁹.

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COGNITIVE GEOGRAPHIES OF POST-WALL EAST BERLIN

The development of Berlin's cognitive geography is intrinsically linked to political power constructions in the time directly after the fall of the Berlin Wall³⁰. The author was able to show in her recently completed doctoral research that the importation of West German elites necessitated by the accession of the German Democratic Republic (GDR – East Germany) to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG – West Germany) was pivotal in the simultaneous importation of West German spatial discourses directly after the fall of the Berlin Wall³¹. Additionally, significant changes to the semiotic structure of the symbolic landscape, for example through the removal of monuments or replacement of street names, were significant for the further development and entrenchment of these discourses and the urban development paradigms that they set in motion³².

The research completed in the dissertation above also established that Berlin's lack of industry, stemming from the historical division of the city, has led to path dependence in the handlings of main actors today and the post-Wall economic development of the reunified city³³. The dearth of corporate headquarters and productive industry necessitates a disproportionate and, more troubling, involuntary dependence on the service sector, tourism, and "creative industries"³⁴.

Therefore, the creation of current-day paradigms in the city can be linked to a semiotic reinterpretation of existing structures in a new (West German) discourse on the one hand, and the pressing need to reorient the economic development of the city in the face of globalization, the expansion of the tertiary sector, and financial difficulties on local, national, and global levels on the other. Modifications in national welfare laws and the changing contours of the Berlin housing market have formed the backdrop of these processes, and a self-reinforcing cycle of socio-spatial segregation that continues to gain momentum³⁵.

Friedrichshain

Friedrichshain's built space is characterized by the industrial-era tenement housing typical for inner-city Berlin, punctuated by ensembles of socialist classicism and small groups of slab housing complexes. During the 40 years of German division, the tenements, unrenovated since their construction before World War I, were allowed to fall into further disrepair; GDR housing policy concentrated on new construction as a more affordable solution for post-war housing shortages. The lowest rung on the state housing allocation hierarchy, unrenovated tenements in the inner city, in particular in Friedrichshain and the neighbouring district of Prenzlauer Berg, housed a disproportionate number of 'undesireables' or outcasts from the socialist ideal – artists, political dissidents, unmarried young people, etc. Protests against the oppressive Socialist regime were held in these neighbourhoods in the years leading up to its overthrow, and both districts were home to numerous squats, thus further increasing the area's image as young, dynamic, and a seat of counterculture.

Marketing interventions in the last 10 years have particularly exploited this image³⁶, leading to a boom in tourism and "creative industries" throughout the city, but particularly in Friedrichshain³⁷. Capitalization on the spatial connection between these profitable industries and inner-city tenement housing has led to a semiotic connection between the built space type and use/user type; in this way,

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inner-city tenement housing has been discursively brought into connection with a young, hip, creative, educated and mobile public³⁸. The removal of rental stock from the market (often to create vacation rental properties) and gentrification have driven up rent prices and led to widespread displacement of the original working-class residents and low-income or welfare-recipient households.

Marzahn

Marzahn is the largest slab housing complex in the former GDR, with housing intended for up to 100,000 residents³⁹. The differential development in architectural discourses in the FRG and GDR meant that Marzahn, a typical late modernist housing complex, and the IBA 1987, a postmodernist flagship project in urban planning and development⁴⁰, were being constructed simultaneously on the Eastern and Western sides of the Berlin Wall, respectively, just a few kilometres from one another.

East German modernist housing was used in the housing allocation process as a form of reward for conformity to party line and the socialist ideal⁴¹. For this reason, at the time of German reunification, the peripheral housing estates in the East enjoyed a very positive image, and were populated by socio-political elites, young families, and industrial and state workers. Through the transference of the West German semiotic connection between the built space type “post-war housing” and “social housing”, Marzahn has experienced severe stigmatization since 1990. In this way, Marzahn has been brought into discursive connection with unemployment, immigrants, and other social ills before these, in fact, were problems in the district. The long-term effects of stigmatization combined with the displacement of low-income households out of the inner-city have created a self-fulfilling prophesy of the stigmatization that continues to deepen to date⁴².

CONCLUSION

Built space and its popular conception, and their respective development paths are intrinsically linked; changes to the image affect the demographic composition of the neighbourhood and vice versa. Why is this important? While existing studies implicitly link image management and urban development in an indirect and non-empirical way, anything more than an assumed causal link between image and development has not yet been hazarded in any study known to the author. This paper has therefore tried to briefly show the interdependence of image and material space on an empirical basis.

ENDNOTES

¹ Merriam-Webster, “Image,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 2011, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/image>.

² P.L. Knox and S.A. Marston, “Kulturgeographie,” in *Humangeographie* (Heidelberg, Berlin: Spektrum, 2008), 317–371; F.-J. Kemper, “Landschaften, Texte, Soziale Praktiken - Wege Der Angelsächsischen Kulturgeographie,” *PGM - Petermanns Geographische Mitteilungen* 147, no. 2 (2003): 6–15.

³ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁴ Mark Gottdiener and AP Lagopoulos, *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Mark Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Space*, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

⁵ Lynch, *The Image of the City*.

⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

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⁷ In the interest of brevity, only a very short introduction to this material will be presented here. For a thorough examination of urban semiotics and urban image construction, please see Mary Dellenbaugh, "Landscape Changes in East Berlin after 1989: A Comprehensive Grounded Theory Analysis through Three Case Studies" (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2014).

⁸ Lynch, *The Image of the City*.

⁹ P. Weichhart, *Entwicklungslinien Der Sozialgeographie. Von Hans Bobek Bis Benno Werlen*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2008), 171.

¹⁰ Lynch, *The Image of the City*, 8–9.

¹¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹² David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 4 (2003): 939–942.

¹³ Lynch, *The Image of the City*.

¹⁴ C Alexander, S Ishikawa, and M Silverstein, *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

¹⁵ Geoff Stahl, "Urban Signs/Signs of the Urban: Of Scenes and Streetscapes," *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 1 (December 21, 2009): 249–262; Geoff Stahl, "Urban Semiotics," *Encyclopedia of Urban Studies* (Sage Publications, Inc, 2010); D. Scott Canevit, "Production of Space: Urban Semiotics," 2011, <http://www.scottcanevit.net/urbansemiotics.html>; Gottdiener and Lagopoulos, *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*; Gottdiener, *The Social Production of Space*; Mark Gottdiener, *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

¹⁶ Rem Koolhaas, "Junkspace," *October* 100 (April 13, 2002): 176, <http://www.cavvia.net/junkspace/>.

¹⁷ Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1963).

¹⁸ Adam Brailich et al., "Die Diskursive Konstitution von Großwohnsiedlungen in Deutschland , Frankreich Und Polen," *Europa Regional* 16, no. 3 (2008): 113–128; Annette Hastings, "Stigma and Social Housing Estates: Beyond Pathological Explanations," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 19 (2004): 233–254.

¹⁹ Glen Gourlay, "'It's Got a Bad Name and It Sticks...' – Approaching Stigma as a Distinct Focus of Neighbourhood Regeneration Initiatives," in *Proceedings of the EURA Conference "The Vital City", 12-14 September 2007* (Glasgow, 2007); Jo Dean and Annette Hastings, *Challenging Images: Housing Estates, Stigma and Regeneration, October* (York: The Policy Press, 2000); Annette Hastings and Jo Dean, "Challenging Images: Tackling Stigma through Estate Regeneration," *Policy & Politics* 31, no. 2 (April 01, 2003): 171–184; Annette Hastings and Jo Dean, "Challenging Images : the Implications of 'image Management' for the Regeneration of Stigmatised Housing Estates," in *Area Based Initiatives in Contemporary Urban Policy, Conference of the Danish Building and Urban Research and European Urban Research Associations*, 2001.

²⁰ Hastings, "Stigma and Social Housing Estates: Beyond Pathological Explanations"; Adam Brailich et al., "Großwohnsiedlungen Als Bedrohliche Und Bedrohte Orte : Sicherheitsdiskurse in Deutschland , Frankreich Und Polen," in *Kongressband Der Deutschen Gesellschaft Für Soziologie 2008* (Wiesbaden, 2010), 1–15; Brailich et al., "Die Diskursive Konstitution von Großwohnsiedlungen in Deutschland , Frankreich Und Polen"; Frank Wassenberg, "Large Social Housing Estates: From Stigma to Demolition?," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 19, no. 3 (2004): 223–232.

²¹ Brailich et al., "Großwohnsiedlungen Als Bedrohliche Und Bedrohte Orte : Sicherheitsdiskurse in Deutschland , Frankreich Und Polen"; Brailich et al., "Die Diskursive Konstitution von Großwohnsiedlungen in Deutschland , Frankreich Und Polen."

²² Hastings and Dean, "Challenging Images : the Implications of 'image Management' for the Regeneration of Stigmatised Housing Estates"; Frank Wassenberg, "Renewing Stigmatised Estates in the Netherlands: A Framework for Image Renewal Strategies," *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 19, no. 3 (2004): 271–292.

²³ Jan Fasselt and Ralf Zimmer-Hegmann, *Neighborhood Branding - Ein Ansatz Zur Verbesserung Des Images von Großwohnsiedlungen*, 2004; Jan Fasselt and Ralf Zimmer-Hegmann, "Ein Neues Image Für Benachteiligte Quartiere : Neighbourhood Branding Als Wirksamer Ansatz ?," *Quartierforschung* 3 (2008): 233–255.

²⁴ Dellenbaugh, "Landscape Changes in East Berlin after 1989: A Comprehensive Grounded Theory Analysis through Three Case Studies."

²⁵ Mihalís Kavaratzis and G. J. Ashworth, "City Branding: An Effective Assertion of Identity or a Transitory Marketing Trick?," *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 96, no. 5 (December 2005): 506–514.

²⁶ Richard Florida, "The Flight of the Creative Class: The New Global Competition for Talent," *Liberal Education*, 2006; Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

²⁷ Jan Glatter and Daniela Weber, "Die Mediale Konstruktion Des Stereotyps Szeneviertel in Reiseführern," in *Tourismusräume - Zur Soziokulturellen Konstruktion Eines Globalen Phänomens*, ed. Karlheinz Wöhler, Andreas Pott, and Vera Denzer (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 43–66.

²⁸ Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005).

²⁹ Colomb, *Staging the New Berlin: Place Marketing and the Politics of Urban Reinvention Post-1989*.

³⁰ Elizabeth A Strom, *Building the New Berlin: The Politics of Urban Development in Germany's Capital City* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2001).

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³¹ Mary Dellenbaugh, "Die Stigmatisierung Berlin-Marzahns Als Ausdruck Kulturelle Hegemonie Des Westens Im Vereinten Deutschland," in *Spielplätze Der Verweigerung. Gegen/kulturelle Topographien Und Inszenierungsweisen in Ost-Mittel-Europa Ab 1956*, ed. C. Gölz and A. Kliems (Weimar: Böhlau-Verlag, 2014).

³² Dellenbaugh, "Landscape Changes in East Berlin after 1989: A Comprehensive Grounded Theory Analysis through Three Case Studies"; Mary Dellenbaugh, "The Temporal Development and Solidification of Urban Discourse Paradigms in Post-Reunification East Berlin," *Unpublished Manuscript* (n.d.).

³³ Dellenbaugh, "Landscape Changes in East Berlin after 1989: A Comprehensive Grounded Theory Analysis through Three Case Studies"; Dellenbaugh, "The Temporal Development and Solidification of Urban Discourse Paradigms in Post-Reunification East Berlin."

³⁴ Hartmut Häußermann and Claire Colomb, "The New Berlin: Marketing the City of Dreams," in *Cities and Visitors: Regulating People, Markets, and City Space*, ed. Lily M. Hoffman, Susan S. Fainstein, and Dennis R. Judd (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003); Colomb, *Staging the New Berlin: Place Marketing and the Politics of Urban Reinvention Post-1989*; Bastian Lange et al., "Berlin's Creative Industries: Governing Creativity?," *Industry & Innovation* 15, no. 5 (October 2008): 531–548.

³⁵ Dellenbaugh, "The Temporal Development and Solidification of Urban Discourse Paradigms in Post-Reunification East Berlin."

³⁶ Häußermann and Colomb, "The New Berlin: Marketing the City of Dreams"; Colomb, *Staging the New Berlin: Place Marketing and the Politics of Urban Reinvention Post-1989*.

³⁷ Dellenbaugh, "Landscape Changes in East Berlin after 1989: A Comprehensive Grounded Theory Analysis through Three Case Studies"; Dellenbaugh, "The Temporal Development and Solidification of Urban Discourse Paradigms in Post-Reunification East Berlin."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Dellenbaugh, "Die Stigmatisierung Berlin-Marzahns Als Ausdruck Kulturelle Hegemonie Des Westens Im Vereinten Deutschland."

⁴⁰ Werner Durth and Paul Sigel, *Baukultur: Spiegel Gesellschaftlichen Wandels* (Berlin: Jovis, 2009).

⁴¹ Christine Hannemann, "Architecture as Ideology : Industrialization of Housing in the GDR," *HU Berlin Stadt-Und Regionalsoziologie* no. Working Paper 2A (2004); Dellenbaugh, "Die Stigmatisierung Berlin-Marzahns Als Ausdruck Kulturelle Hegemonie Des Westens Im Vereinten Deutschland."

⁴² Ibid.; Dellenbaugh, "The Temporal Development and Solidification of Urban Discourse Paradigms in Post-Reunification East Berlin."

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