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Independent Study

Berlin Program 2012

## **The Past and Present:**

Political Influences and Identity Change Behind the  
Development of Pariser Platz

## **Introduction:**

Following by the Bonn-Berlin Act, which was the decision of moving the seat of government for the united Federal Republic from Bonn to Berlin in 1991, Berlin as the capital city became one of the biggest construction sites in the world. The sum of \$135 billion was devoted to the massive urban renewal project in the city center by the federal government and the city of Berlin. (Till, 1999) Those former icons of the East-West division were paid especially more attention to be transformed to the new city icons that could represent the identity of the newborn city, as well as the reunited country. The city that was full of opportunities attracted numerous architects and urban planners all over the world to participate in this process of creating a new national identity by offering their opulent and innovative designs. The empty spaces in the city center, such as Pariser Platz, Potsdamer Platz, Charlie Checkpoint and Reichsta, became the best experimental sites for politicians, planner and architects to have the “heart operation” as Hans Stimann, who is the director of Berlin’s city building, described. (Till, 1999) The rebuilding of the city relied on the historical elements as representation of social memories from the past, as well as the modern architectural development as representation of involved technology and thoughts post-reunification. (Gittus, 2002) It's a process of not only rebuilding the city, but also remodeling the national identity.

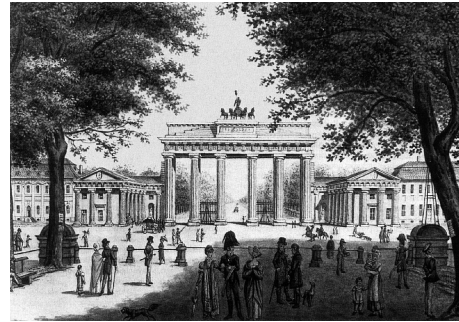
The politicians are one of the most important rule players in the city reinvention. The concrete structure and urban landscape have always been tools of expressing power and political ideals used by rulers of authority. The urban development is also heavily dependent on the rulers due to financial needs. However, I would argue that the people, the Berliners have crucial influences on built environments as well with . Though the identities and meanings that are given to the

architectures by the rulers are fixed, the national identity that people would synthesize from the received information and collective memory through time is infinite. This people-created national identity would have impacts on the political decision and urban development through democracy system, such as voting, polling or even protesting. The relationship between politics and national identity is reciprocal and evolves through time. Social changes and urban development are the reflections of this relationship. A focus on the development of a particular site of memory in Berlin following the unification may be especially insightful when symbolic system, social relations, expectations of the state and everyday landscapes are in flux. (Till, 1999)

In this paper, I choose Pariser Platz, where the Brandenburg Gate and much other symbolic architecture are, as my study site since it may be the public space that records the most intensive interactions between political discourses and civic interpretations. The square was built during the King Frederik William I ruling period and was continuously experiencing the political regime changes, from Kingdom of Prussia (1701-1947), to German Empire (1871-1918), then the Weimar Republic (1918-1933), followed by Nazi Germany (1933-1945), the cold war separation (1945-1990) and eventually the Federal Republic of Germany after unification (1990-now). It has been the witness of both victories and loses, and is now the most significant symbol of the unification. I would examine influences of politics decisions behind the development of the square and how the relationship between rulers and city plans has changed through time with more participation of the public residences. How has the meanings and identity of the square to politicians as well as the focal citizens changed through time after two world wars and thirty years division?

## Before the war – From Kingdom of Prussia to German Empire

The Pariser Platz was firstly built during the expansion of Friedrichstadt, which was the second Baroque expansion of Berlin outwards from its historical center, under Friedrich Wilhelm I between 1732 and 1734 as originally called “Quarre”. (Stangl, 2006) With the other two squared laid out during the same period, which are “Octogon” or now called Leipziger Platz and “Rondell” or now called Mehringplatz, Berlin has started a new



1. Pariser Platz with Brandenburg Tor, 1819  
(Pabsch, 2002)



2. Pariser Platz with Brandenburg Tor and  
north side of the square, 1846  
(Pabsch, 2002)

prosperous era as one of the biggest city in Prussian Kingdom. (Verlag, 2008) The three square were originally designed and used for military parade ground. Difference from his father who had great affection of arts and sciences, Friedrich Wilhelm I was only passionate for his army. He was considered as the beginning of Prussian militarism, which Hitler greatly admired and imitated from. (Ladd, 1997) He cut all the expenditures on the royal expenditures including his father's plan on building the new palaces and a big amount of money was invested in building the army. In order to ensure the supply of the army force, he imposed heavy tax on citizens and rebuilt the city wall in 1737 based on the old Berlin Fortifications from the Great Elector's time that was demolished in 1734. The new wall was functioning as a customs barrier that regulated the levying of taxes on import and export, as well as preventing soldiers from running away from their responsibilities. (Ladd, 1997) Though he was not interested in enlarging or beautifying the city, the Soldier King indeed had largely expanded the limit and promoted the growth of Berlin. When he dead in 1740 and his

son, who was later admired as “Friedrich the Great”, took over the kingdom, not only the large national debts were cleared, but also an outstanding national troop with well trained soldiers were formed and a prosperous city and stable neighborhood with organized taxation system was developed. All of these became the capitals that enabled Friedrich the Great to assure the reputation of Prussia Kingdom in Europe through numerous victories.

The original 14 gates on the old city wall were later gradually rebuilt in more imposing style in order to reflect the growing power and authority of the kingdom, and Brandenburg Gate, which is now the famous memorial symbol on Pariser Square, was the most famous one among them that still remains today. The original official name of Brandenburg Gate was “Gate of Peace”. It is a neoclassical triumphal arch based on the Propylaea of Athens designed by Carl Gotthard Langhans under commission of Friedrich Wilhelm II and completed in 1791. It is now the only remaining city gate restored after World War II and forms the entryway to the center of city from Tiergarten and from the other side it forms the western end of Unter den Linden. (Verlag, 2008) The copper quadriga, a portrait of Roman goddess of victory ridding a chariot drawn by four horses, was firstly mounted atop in 1793. In 1806 when the Prussia was defeated by Napoleon, the quadriga was taken down and shipped to Paris and was not returned until 1814 after the defeat of France under Friedrich Welhelm III. In order to memorize this victory, the square was renamed as today’s “Pariser Platz” and the gate became a “Gate of Victory”. Following this, a Prussian eagle and the Iron Cross were designed by Schinkel and added to the quadriga. (Ladd, 1997) Ever since then, the gate has became the symbol of Berlin as well as Prussia Kingdom, and the Pariser Platz played its original role as a traditional site for military parades, victory celebrations and ceremonial receptions. The square



3. Welcome of Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, 1901 (Gay, 2005)



4. Large crowd watching soldiers processing through Pariser Platz during the Kapp putsh in 1920 with French embassy on the left, 1920 (Gay, 2005)

has been witness of soldiers going off to war and returning victorious at the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815, after the war against Denmark in 1864, against Austria in 1866, and against France in 1871, which was the victory that settled the found of German Empire. The surrounding buildings on the square had also gradually taken significant roles. The Hotel Adlon, Embassy of France and Academy of Arts all moved in around last 19 century, which brought more diversity of functions and meanings to the square.

*From planning of Pariser Square in Friedrich Wilhelm I time to the rename of the square as Paris Square and the Gate as the “Gate of Victory” after the war defeated Napoleon, heavy influences of military intentions could be detected. The role as a symbol of the city, the victory, and the pride were firstly given in 1814 after the Napoleon war and the taken back of the statue of quadriga. This function of memorial was gradually enhanced through time by more events celebrated at the square. The parade for celebrating the found of German Empire has fixed the sense of national identity to the square and the gate. The uses as troops parade, victories celebrations as well as the connecting exit to the Tiergarten outside the city in earlier times of the square were all directed designated by the rulers. Rare public involvement could be seen in the development.*

### **During the war – From Weimer Republic to Cold War Separation**

The characters of German city planning and development, which focuses on efficiency and functions, were greatly emphasized and kept repeated between Weimer Republic and Third Reich period. Due to the large funding deficit and national debts after World War I, German planners and architects had stronger orientation towards the physical placement of buildings in shorter time within the urban environment. The accelerating process of urbanization and industrialization of this period lead the city to a more impersonal, and governmental-lead metropolis. (Mullin, 1982) There was a short time of prosperity between two world wars but the trend of using the city and architectures as tools to express more utopian theories of politicians was enhanced. This tendency of strongly political-driven has passed on to the Nazi. The Pariser Platz was as parade and celebration site by Hitler when he was appointed as chancellor and the National Socialists took over the power in 1933. (Ladd, 1997) Thousands of tounch-bearing Nazi brownshirts marched through the Brandenburg Gate which was the cause of the famous comment by Max Liebermann, who is one of the greatest impressionism painters and printmaker in his period, “I cannot eat the amount that I would like to vomit” when he witnessed the parade in the Haus Liebermann locating right next to the gate. (Verlag, 2008)

Thereafter, the square was frequently used by Nazi troops for celebrating the victory, such as after the fall of France in the summer of 1940 as shown in illustration 5.



5. Wehrmacht troops celebrating the fall of France, 1940 (Gay, 2005)

When the Red Army troops of Soviet Union erected atop its red flag on the gate, most buildings on Pariser Platz were demolished under bomb attack in World War II. Brandenburg Gate and the Academy of Arts were the two that only survived, though also badly damaged. (Ladd, 1997; Gittus, 2002) The replacement of the

shattered quadriga was even once proposed as a new sculpture of a group of workers but was sharply criticized by the western media and public and eventually abandoned. (Ladd, 1997) Due to the intensified arguments between two regimes in East and West, the debate of who should restore the gate has kept going for about a decade since the gate was in the East territory but the plaster cast used for restoring the quadriga statue was in the West. Not until 1958, the reconstructed quadriga by the West was finally brought to the East side border. Before the Soviet government installed the statue on the gate that the East restored, the Prussian eagle and the iron cross were sawed off as militarist symbol and “fascist” ornaments. Besides, there was a debate about the



6. Brandenburg Gate with sign on the West, 1961 (Ladd, 1997)

direction that the quadriga should face when the restored statue was about to be installed. Visitors were told that the direction of quadriga was faced away from town before Napoleon war and was turned around afterwards, which was actually something that never happened according. Both gate and quadriga were designed to face into the city and local residents, which is to the east originally. (Ladd, 1997) The Later followed the

advanced conflicts between the allies and Soviet

Union, the famous Berlin wall was erected in 1961 which desolated the Pariser Platz with the other part of the city. The most famous and elegant square in Berlin with palaces, the French and U.S. embassies, the Academy of Arts, and the city’s premier hotel Adlon was bare except for the gate and the Wall, and the Brandenburg Gate has once again became a part of a wall but fully restricted to the access of neither citizens or tourists. (Ladd, 1997) The square was transformed into a “Death Strip” by the wall,



similar to Potsdamer Platz. The East hanged their red banners between every column, which completely block the view of the inner city from the West as a Cold War gesture with more figurative meaning than the East had intended. (Ladd, 1997)



7. Pariser Platz and Brandenburg Gate with the Berlin wall, 1960s (Gay, 2005)

*Pariser Platz continued its function of army-parading site during World War. Behind each marching was the political symbol of conquering the country and representing the power by the rulers. The use as a political tool was further intensified after the division of the East and the West. It turned to a forbidden site after the erection of the Berlin Wall and was imposed with heavy communism influences during Cold War. The national identity that the square carried became incomplete and twisted under control of the Soviet Union after division of the city. The public was still the passive receivers of the information that the government given to the architectures.*

### **After the war – From the unification to now**

The fall of the wall and the reopening of the Brandenburg Gate in 1989 might still be one of the most exciting moments in many Germans mind. Since the square was packed with thousands of people on November 9<sup>th</sup> celebrating the wall's fall, it has become one of the most significant symbols of unification in the New Federal Republic of Germany. Due to the merging of two completely different political regimes and the diverse requisites nationally and internationally, the recreation and redevelopment of Pariser Platz and historical structures around first time had the involvements from the public, instead of solely relying on governmental decision. The

landowners, developers, architects, planners and even foreign governments all joined the debate of how Pariser Platz should be restored as a reflection of what kind of national identity. (Gittus, 2002) Due to the entire demolition of property and buildings except the gate on Pariser Platz during Cold War, the restitution of properties and plots to the pre-war owners and asking them to restore their buildings as a historical continuity was the least problematic solution without reselling the land or coming up with new land-use plan. It became the prime showpiece of critical reconstruction, which was the theory came out on the International Building Exhibition in 1987 and was encouraged by the Berlin government after unification as a way to define the central role of the city and invent the contemporary equivalent. (Heckner, 2002) However, debates on designs of particular buildings lasted long and remained controversial.

*Brandenburg Gate* – After the debate on the direction of quadriga in early Cold War time, a new discussion on whether the Prussian eagle and the Iron cross should be recovered with the newly restored goddess was aroused in 1991. The majority of public was supportive on the recovery due to the nostalgia of the gate as an authentic symbol the ruling empire, though few people with the media were against it for the reason that these two objects are the symbol of Prussian militarism. After long debate, Berlin's leaders eventually ceremonially decided to restore the quadriga with these two things as well as an artificial patina in regard to the two hundredth anniversary of the gate in August 1991. (Ladd, 1997) Another debate on whether the Brandenburg Gate should serve as an entrance and open to the transportation or the Pariser Platz should be restored as an enclosed square instead of a traffic island was sparked in early 90s. The final decision as we see today was permitting only bus and taxis on the square but restricted to pass through the gate. (Ladd, 1997)

*US Embassy* – The American embassy located on the Pariser Platz in center of Berlin is viewed as a symbol of American willingness of being an important and influential player on the German political decision-making. The building of the embassy, thus, became an important symbol of presenting American identity while at the same time respecting German identity. The request of adding two watchtowers and retractable barriers in order to increase the security provision of U.S. embassy in 2000 was considered very improper and raised largely public opposition. The watchtower has symbolic significance to German people especially at Pariser Platz where the wall used to stand and watchtowers used to exist for observing the potential violent or escape of people included its own citizens. (Gittus, 2002) The extra security demands were also problematic in terms of town planning as the needs of expanding the security zone. The U.S. embassy in the end has partially achieved its goal by using a part of land that was used to reserve for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which was owned by a state-controlled foundation, meaning the pressure of American request would have bigger impacts comparing to a private owned after unification.

## **Conclusion**

The re-establishment of Pariser Platz and the articulation of architectural styles were always reflections of the power behind construction and had managed to convey particular messages to the observer about the city's history, the social memory, as well as the national identity. (Gittus, 2002) The original building purpose as an open space for army parade seemed to tie the destiny of Pariser Platz with military use. During postwar time, the German architecture elites tended to preserve the squares and building around by focusing on the architecture values as national cultural heritage and avoiding mention the possible identity of "Prussian" or "militarism",

though eventually failed under the ruling of Soviet Union and its socialist-realist urban theory. Only the gate was restored and the square later became a wasteland after the wall was erected that separating the East and the West Berlin. (Stangl, 2006) After over two hundred years of governmental solely controlling the use of the square, with the more democratic system after unification the public first time had a chance to be involved in the discussion of constructing the square and decide on the symbolic meanings that the square represent. The increasing international pressure on German politics as the country has again become one of the most significant figures in the world and taking more international responsibilities also limited the freedom of the government on deciding the use of public spaces. In general, the political influences on Pariser Platz are progressively descending followed by the raising power of public involvement and international voices.

The identity that the square presents and carries changed from singly the space of celebrating victory to more complicated meaning in memorial to the urban memory of history as being invaded, as well as the nostalgia of glorious past. What should be preserved in architectures as for collective social memory and what should be abandoned as the burden from the past? Followed the critical reconstructions, the structures of historical architectures such as stones materials, proportions and eave heights were kept repeating and reappear on the newly restored buildings, which are gradually obscuring people's recognition of what are historical buildings and what are modern. Besides, the preservation of past has hindered the future development of diversity by limiting the urban vision and creative possibilities. However, no matter how the development has been criticized, what can't be denied is that Pariser Platz has been a junction of past, present and future as a symbol representing division, unification and evolution.

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