

Human Geographical Study on the Transformation of  
Urban Space in Berlin:  
The Emergence of Conflicts over Cultural and Creative Spaces  
in the Former Border Area between East and West Berlin

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to clarify the role of cultural facilities in the urban transformation of the inner-city districts of former East Berlin through focusing on cultural and creative usage by the squatting movement and temporary usages that have emerged since the fall of the Wall.

In the transformation of urban space especially gentrification, defined in the 1960s in England with focus on English speaking countries, was examined in the historical backdrop and in each region's social and economic background with many meanings, on the other hand its interpretation was constantly updated in various aspects and it can be argued that its concept was constructed anew each time. Especially after the economic downturn in the 1990s, the concept of gentrification in North American and European cities was changed by globalisation and the expansion of capital investment, and arguments for the appearance of a new gentrification have been brought forward in academic discussion. The focus of this research was on the relation between culture and gentrification. Furthermore, the cultural and creative industries have become an important subject for a new orientation of cities as new industries of the post-industrial city since the 1990s and since Florida (2002) provoked controversy in the scientific world with his theory of the creative class. The employees of these industries are attracting great attention in gentrification as the new middle class.

However, in this existing research about geographical topics, the focus was mainly on the conceptualisation of gentrification and the characteristics of new residents and their movement without reference to the historical background and the regional conditions of the places where gentrification was induced. There exists only little research focusing on the concreteness of culture and its evaluation process despite the fact that culture is understood as a main contributor to gentrification. Furthermore, with gentrification being a process, specific conditions are brought about in its progression. To verify in what way a qualitative change of culture (that caused gentrification) is experienced in this gentrified situation, it can be said that it is necessary to clarify the recognition of its actors.

Based on the above points, I analyse in this study the emergence - and its reasons – of a squatting movement and of temporary uses as forms of space usage from Berlin's historical background. In particular, I examine the characteristics of space usage in two example areas and the process of revaluation (gentrification, touristification) in former East Berlin inner-city districts in relationship to cultural spaces. Specifically, I examine the historical transformation of Berlin's urban structure from

the beginning of the 20th century until the division of Germany (pre-division era), during the division era, and after the division (Chapter II-1). Next I describe the history and characteristics of forms of space usage - namely the squatting movement and temporary uses - that have emerged in relation to this structural features (Chapter II-2). Furthermore, I examine the contribution of cultural spaces to the upgrading and restructuring of certain districts through the case study of the Kunsthaus Tacheles, an example for a squat, and the Spandauer Vorstadt (in the former Mitte district) (Chapter III), and the case study of cultural spaces as temporary uses and the Mediaspree project in the district Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg (Chapter IV). As a result, the following points became clear.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, a higher concentration of cultural spaces occurred in the inner-city districts of former East Berlin compared to former West Berlin. The reasons for this are as follows. First, old and dilapidated buildings remained in an unrenovated state until the *Wende* in the former East Berlin districts. Second, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) private property was not acknowledged publicly and therefore the situation regarding usage rights and land rights of properties was complicated, especially in cases where a user possessed certain rights.

Squatting movements have occurred twice in Berlin in the unique historical background of the city's division and its urban structure. The first wave of the squatting movement occurred at the end of the 1970s in the inner-city districts of West Berlin, whereas the second wave emerged after the fall of the Wall in 1989 in districts of former East Berlin. This cultural squatting emerged in the process of artists trying to halt the demolition of dilapidated buildings planned by the East German government. As a result, cultural squatting formed a cultural scene through cultural-creative uses by artists while focusing on the historical value of the properties, discovering their historical sense as a Jewish quarter, and at the same time restoring the place name Spandauer Vorstadt. In other words, cultural squatting played a role in the rediscovery of the historical and cultural value of a district that was forgotten during the wall-era, and it contributed to the creation of a cultural scene in the process of gentrification. The culture of this district was based on a sense of its history; however, this culture came to be displaced by economic values in the form of gentrification or touristification. In Tacheles, a cultural squat, a conflict emerged as it faced touristification; debates in the squat emerged regarding the protection of its authenticity as an art space on the one hand and the possibility of the squat's continued existence on the other. Furthermore, similar to the squatting movement, temporary uses have emerged as forms of space uses in Berlin. Because of the Spandauer Vorstadt's special character as a Jewish

quarter, public properties were returned by predetermined legal measures to their rightful owners in the first half of the 1990s. By contrast, because the Spree riverside was an industrial area before the Wall era, the restitution of separate blocks of land was very difficult and the return of ground rights required time. To prevent vacant houses and ruins from neglect during the restitution process, designated applicants were allowed to use them. Therefore, artists and urban entrepreneurs engaged in cultural and creative uses in these buildings, including industrial heritage sites. However, because of the failure of urban development policies in the first half of the 1990s and the subsequent amassing of large debts, the city government sold off the properties of former city-owned enterprises in the 2000s. Against this historical background, the drawn-up MS plan was intended to promote cultural and creative industries, attract new-economy sectors such as media industries, and make extensive use of the creative 'placeness' established in the course of temporary usage. Furthermore, properties were resold as speculation objects by European development and real estate companies, particularly properties that were subject to temporary usage; thus, these cultural facilities were low-risk investments. However, the resale of real estate in the financial crisis of 2008 and the European crisis and the emerging economic impact of the tourism industry in 2010 combined to facilitate the acknowledgement of usage rights for some cultural facilities, which were allowed to continue operating. In other words, because these cultural facilities were important as a tourist resource, the city of Berlin sought to enable their continued existence.

As aforementioned, places adjacent to the former border between East and West regained their geographic centrality after reunification; in the Wall era, these areas were marginal areas and were not actively developed by East or West Germany. As a result, in old buildings that were left by chance, cultural artists and urban entrepreneurs engaged in cultural and creative usages. In addition, based on a clear development concept, city-owned land was sold and cultural facilities were traded for economic values in the form of gentrification and touristification. This process of cultural values being traded for economic values could probably be understood as a new form of gentrification. Additionally, it was revealed during the interviews from the personal histories of the operators of the cultural facilities that one operator of a facility at the Spree riverside was involved in the business operations of the Tacheles in the beginning of the 1990s. As a result, as a new discovery can be cited that cultural scenes that have been pointed out in existing research about gentrification in German-speaking countries are not only socio-spatial movements but are inseparable related to a certain group. Furthermore, the

actors of civic movements in this urban transformation process are not only political groups but also cultural facilities and their supporters who are eager to continue operations and emphasise their facilities' value as important tourist assets. This can also be interpreted as part of the ongoing transformation of the character of this civic movement in the context of neoliberalism.

**Key Words:** East Berlin Inner-city districts, Cultural and Creative Space, Squatting Movement, Temporary Use, Cultural Upgrading, Gentrification, Artist and Entrepreneur, Jewish Quarter

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