

Why Berlin?

1. Big cities not only attract people from the countryside. They are already drawing – and will increasingly continue to draw – people from all over the world who are looking for a place to live.

The global map is being increasingly drawn by cities and regions, not by countries and nations. Take Berlin, for instance, a city whose attractiveness will in future depend less on its being part of Germany and more on its status vis-à-vis international partners.

2. Why Berlin? Berlin must therefore be aware of

- its importance as a city and why it is seeking to attain global importance; of the place it is claiming for itself within the international community and the competitive edge it is seeking to assert
- how it can use this to build future projects that will redeem its promise as an international player

This is the concern of urban development policy. Such policy clarifies and defines the specific potential the city is seeking to realize; what it intends – and is able – to achieve based on its particular capabilities, and how it proposes to do so.

3. There are two key aspects concerning the development of cities:
 - a. To work out middle- and long-term strategies of development for the future of cities. These strategies should be fed from the top as well as from the bottom: From the bottom insofar as they analyze and take seriously a city's potential, also by recognizing which achievements a city is not capable of.

From the top: To develop a specific message for the city, which may be called its contentual, its perspective spirit and may be put "along with its name".
 - b. This spirit has to be increasingly a cultural one, at least with regard to the European city – not only functionally, not only derived from the city's infrastructure / set-up, but from its common goals. From its ethos.

4. The development of Europe's cities is based on their cultural memory – not only in terms of architectural design and urban logic, but more importantly in terms of the development of urban societies that are already benefiting European cities and will continue to do so in the future.

5. In Berlin, urban development policy post-1989 – when the era of world wars and dictatorships and of the partitioned city was finally over – was, strangely, in its infancy. Old shackles had been cast off and previously unknown opportunities were beckoning.

Berlin's complete fresh start in 1989 has resulted in the city's undergoing a great deal more modernization over the past two decades than other major European cities. That has turned Berlin into a pilot project for what could be the future of European cities in the 21st century:

- 6.a. Berlin – City of Young People. An open city featuring attractive public spaces that are developing and asserting their unique quality. A city rich, appealing and deliberately sustainable in terms of infrastructure. A city not yet completed in 1989. A city that is proving to be a sought-after place of discovery and experience for young people – for both personal and professional reasons.
- b. Berlin – City Through Culture. Over the past few years, Berlin has been witnessing a transition from what are merely “cultural spaces in an urban setting” to a cultural energy radiating across the entire city. An energy inspiring its citizens’ private lives and professional work and promoting a sense of urban community.
- c. Berlin – City of Knowledge. Berlin has traditionally been – and in recent years has been re-evolving into – a city of science and research. A city of universities and major research institutions. A city that can rely on the know-how and skills of its citizens and institutions.
- d. Berlin – The International City. Cities like Berlin are internationally visible. They are perceived in their entirety, not just through the companies and organizations within their walls, the events taking place there and the achievements of individual citizens. They are on the map.

7. None of these characteristics evolve of their own accord. They are, initially, just opportunities available to those responsible for urban development policy. It is the latter's job to provide scope for these opportunities.

Such urban development policy precedes urban planning and development. It defines the tasks to be accomplished. If cities fail come up with specific answers to their own "Why?" question, all other answers become arbitrary and interchangeable. What reason is there then for taking an interest in that particular city?

8. That's why, for example, the Federal Government has for some years now been providing substantial funding for preparatory work on the Humboldt Forum at the very heart of the city – on the site where Berlin's City Palace once stood and, in the GDR era, the Palace of the Republic.

What a challenge, what an inspiring opportunity to be able to shape and define the centre of a European metropolis (where cathedrals, palaces and national political institutions used to be located) now and for the future to meet the requirements of the 21st century!

- 9.a. There is no doubt in my mind: such a definition and mission, derived from Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt, can be an ideal answer. Germany should set out to – and given the names of Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt is in a position to – offer the world a place of encounter and understanding between the different cultures of this planet, using language and cultural experiences to further cooperation in forging a shared future in an ever smaller world.
- b. This, in turn, would change and shape the whole ambience of the city. And that would not only affect Berlin's culture and cultural life but also have an identity-creating impact on the whole of urban society, on business, on the social and financial sectors, and so on.

I firmly believe that Berlin has what it takes. The city already boasts a host of institutions and an urban atmosphere that enable us to say: "the whole of Berlin is a Humboldt Forum".

10. I cite this example to show that future development policy for big cities, for cities of international importance and renown, must encompass the city's interaction with the rest of the world. It's no longer just a question of ordering affairs within the city itself; it's all about the role of urban society vis-à-vis its international partners.

11. To be quite honest, I'm also using this example to admit that the city itself – both Berlin and the Federal Government that is largely funding the project – have not yet managed to achieve this. Quite evidently, the so-called “reconstruction of the City Palace” – the remodelling of the palace complex that will house the Humboldt Forum – has the primary attention, and not the creation of the Humboldt-Forum, which is so important in terms of urban development.

12. I'm using this example, then, to underline the fact that urban development policy also has an important educational function, by challenging the initial expectations of urban society, which are fundamentally conservative in nature.

This means that pleasant, picturesque cities in particular, cities we have grown fond of, are in danger of becoming outdoor museums. Urban development policy, however, means that they develop the spirit and strength to continually reshape themselves as places of the future. Only then will such cities become places where those whose daily job it is to shape this future for society and business, and not least for science and research, feel at home.

A highly political task in the sense that it determines the path which the city is taking and that it influences the city's self-concept.

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