

## PLACE IN PRACTICE

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# Shopping districts and centres, markets, neighbourhoods, public squares, and urban gardens

## Reflecting upon place management practice in Berlin

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to reflect upon a recent study trip to Berlin to offer some conclusions about similarities and differences in approaches to place management.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors start with a short overview of the visits made to City West (a shopping district), Bikini Berlin (a shopping centre), Visit Berlin (a destination management organisation), Leopoldplatz (a public square), Brunnenstrasse and Bayerischer Platz Quartier (both neighbourhoods), Markthalle IX (a covered market) and Prinzessinnengarten (an urban garden) before identifying some key lessons learnt.

**Findings** – The eight visits made as part of the study trip offered a brief but diverse insight into how different areas and functions of the city were managed, maintained, developed and promoted. Key lessons learnt and identified in the paper are as follows. Place management, as a practice, consists of people with passion working in partnership within the context of a place “patch”. Place management is practiced somewhere, and that somewhere has its own political, legal, economic, technological and social environment. People learn more about places in places. Place management is more akin to gardening than architecture.

**Research limitations/implications** – The conclusions drawn in this paper are based, predominantly, upon the observations of the study trip facilitators, along with some comments and feedback from the delegates.

**Practical implications** – Place managers can and should learn from each other. Other places and people can be a source of inspiration – not necessarily providing a readily transferable solution (as the



legal or political environments may not be conducive to carbon-copy interventions) – but offering alternative perspectives and approaches which can then be contextualised and adapted locally.

**Social implications** – Enlarging the pool of information and evidence from which practitioners can draw from when solving place problems can ultimately lead to places that are more successful, liveable and equitable.

**Originality/value** – Many place managers are volunteers or may not have access to a professional development budget. The authors hope that this paper can help to share the reflections of one study tour with a much wider audience.

**Keywords** Tourism, Place marketing, Neighbourhoods, Place management, Shopping centres, Urban commons

**Paper type** Case study

The study trip to Berlin was the first of its kind to be organised by the Institute of Place Management (IPM). In total, 16 delegates from eight countries (Australia, Brazil, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Singapore and UK) met in Berlin to participate in an intensive programme of lectures, visits and discussions. The idea behind this format, one of the educational courses of the IPM, is to offer new insights and facilitate knowledge exchange between members. It is one of the guiding principles of the Institute that we investigate challenges and provide answers in the *specificity of place* and support people *in places*. Consequently, a series of visits were arranged to explore not only the management of different areas of Berlin but also different types and approaches to place management.

The study trip was led by Dr Ares Kalandides and facilitated by Professor Simon Quin and Professor Cathy Parker. This report starts with a short overview of the visits made as part of the tour, before reflecting on some lessons learnt during the study trip.

### **City West: planning the first business improvement district in Berlin**

The area around the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Memorial church and the main streets Kurfürstendamm and Tauentzien Strasse are examples of the major retail centres in Berlin. AG City West, an association of retailers, hotels and other business in the area has been responsible for its development and promotion for the past 40 years. Currently, they are looking to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) which they believe would further support the development, drive footfall and increase sales. Under the recently introduced Berlin legislation, there are two requirements in securing approval of a BID: at least 50 per cent of property owners (both in numbers of owners and in surface of ownership) need to agree with the BID; and, secondly, the percentage of those who oppose it cannot be higher than 30 per cent. In developing their concept, City West has been looking at the experience of BID development in the UK, notably London and the New West End BID in Oxford Street/Regent Street.

### **Bikini Berlin: a different shopping experience**

As Nicole Srock-Stanley, owner of Dan Pearlman brand architecture and creative director of Bikini Berlin vividly elucidates, this is definitely not your conventional shopping mall. Centrally located, Bikini Berlin houses designer stores, bookshops, cafés, bars, restaurants, a hotel, party space and some rare views directly into the Berlin zoo. The management approach is to enable young retail businesses to try out their fortunes in small box-like stalls for a reasonable rent, before they have the option to move into

established (and more expensive) shop space. Bikini Berlin mixes experimentation and establishment, niche and mainstream and innovation and classics. The building was originally a fashion workshop that earned its name through its distinctive design. The conversion to its current use also saw the creation of a new covered square with a glass wall onto the city zoo on what was previously open space.

### **Visit Berlin: managing tourism in Berlin**

Tourism has been booming in Berlin for several years – from 2,985,093 arrivals in 1993 to 12,369,300 in 2015 (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg) – and the challenges of Visit Berlin have shifted from marketing the city to potential visitors to better managing tourism for everybody's benefit. Protests against tourism have been strong in Berlin as in other European cities in the past years, as the city has become more crowded, noisier and less affordable. Visit Berlin has been appointed as the mediator between Berliners and visitors. A survey conducted in 2015 among 2,500 Berliners (admittedly a rather limited number to be called representative) showed that only 15 per cent of the population felt disturbed by tourists, whereas the large majority welcomed them. Visit Berlin organized a workshop and put together a communication platform where both Berliners and visitors can express opinions and even communicate their dissatisfaction.

### **Leopoldplatz in Berlin-wedding: negotiating public space for everybody**

Leopoldplatz is a square in a rather low-income area in the Berlin borough of Wedding, which was recently completely redesigned to accommodate different type of users: market stalls, playing children and a group of people who spend their days drinking together. The group of “drinkers” was considered a problem by other users who see their presence as a sign of abandonment and crime. Still, the general agreement was that a truly public space should be accessible to very different groups, and some other kind of spatial negotiation needs to take place: displacing the “problem” (if it was one) would simply make it somebody else's problem. Klemens Klickar, who moderated the public participation process, entered a dialogue with precisely those people nobody talked to: the drinkers. Together, they defined their needs, but also their limitations. They now have their own space, a high number of litterbins to encourage a tidier use, a public toilet, which they can use by tokens provided to them by the social services, and a fence that separates their dogs from the nearby playground.

### **Neighbourhood management Brunnenstrasse: dealing with local problems locally**

Neighbourhood management is an instrument of the German national programme “Socially Integrated City”. The main idea behind it is to give local actors in neighbourhoods the possibility to deal with local challenges. A neighbourhood manager is installed by the state and is responsible both for the thematic orientation of the intervention and the actual management of the processes. A neighbourhood committee, elected among residents, decide upon the projects that can be implemented, and a neighbourhood fund finances them. Katja Niggemeier, the Brunnenstrasse Neighbourhood Manager, explained the initiative and talked about the difficulties and main challenges of the neighbourhood, where according to their own sources, over 75 per cent of children live on welfare.

**Bayerischer Platz Quartier: a voluntary approach**

The neighbourhood around Bayerischer Platz in Berlin-Schöneberg has been in existence for just over a century and has been inhabited throughout this time by a number of renowned men and women of high education. Albert Einstein and Erich Fromm are just two of the most prominent names. The neighbourhood association that carries its name, Bayerischer Platz Quartier, has been working to build on that past to create a recognizable image for the area, one that can be identified both by residents and visitors. The non-profit association managed to cooperate with Berlin's public transport corporation (Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe), receive money through the lottery foundation and build a local meeting-point, a café/visitor centre, right on top of the underground station. Regular cultural events are held there, neighbours meet and discuss issues and visitors can get information about the area; and a series of trails through the area have been established around the area through the use of art and interpretation panels.

**Markthalle IX: covered market revival**

Only 3 of the 14 covered markets built in Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century still survive today, and Markthalle IX is one of them. In 2009, Nikolaus Driessen, one of the co-initiators of the current refurbishment project, contacted the city administration which was about to sell the city-owned building. His idea was to find a future use that would still make sense to the people in the neighbourhood:

It was very clear from the beginning that we could not compete with the big ones in the business, who could pay a lot more to the city than we could to buy it. Then little by little, resistance in the neighbourhood grew. People wanted a concept that could pay tribute to the place and its 120-year-old history. The city fixed the price and looked for the best concept. And that is how we won. What was it? Keep as much as possible of what was in here and gradually add uses.

Currently, the market is regularly open on Fridays and Saturdays, and the street-food Tuesday has a huge success among Berlin's hipsters.

**Prinzessinnengärten: rethinking the urban commons**

There was a general agreement in the group that Marco Clausen, co-initiator of the Prinzessinnengärten, is one of the best story-tellers we have met. The story of the project is indeed worth telling: it started as a medium-scale urban gardening project on an empty plot, formerly the site of a department store destroyed during the Second World War. What started as urban gardening soon became a point of reflection over the urban commons: What do you do with empty land in the city centre? How do you use it and who has the right to it? How do you organize a group of people around a project? What is the role of the state in safeguarding public property and how good is it at that?

**Lessons learned**

*Place management, as a practice, is about people with passion working in partnership within the context of a place "patch"*

Although the place management partnerships and initiatives we visited were quite different, in terms of their aims, objectives, stakeholders and budgets, they shared some core similarities. Most of the initiatives had a person or small group of people – a place champion or champions – that were passionate, enthusiastic and were obviously the driving force behind the place improvements. Nevertheless, to achieve anything at

all, it was not enough to just talk to and involve like-minded people. Some partnerships were more homogenous in terms of their make-up (e.g. in terms of age and social background at Bayerischer Platz Quartier), and these were also more narrowly focussed in terms of what they are trying to achieve (in the case of Bayerischer, this was encouraging visitors to the area). This observation is no criticism. If anything, many place management partnerships have been guilty of “mission creep”, where the list of aims and objectives grows so much that it alienates many of the stakeholders who were signed up initially to tackle the one specific ‘inaugural’ issue. Being clear about what the place management partnership actually does probably helps explain the popularity of BIDs, or similar, across USA, Canada and the UK, and now Germany with the launch of City West in Berlin. Nevertheless, embracing the different ideologies and expectations of stakeholders was important where more dramatic or innovative breakthroughs occurred, such as in Leopoldplatz and Prinzessinnengärten.

Apart from Visit Berlin, all the visits were to very specific neighbourhoods where the place managers knew every inch, every nook, every cranny and every character. In this respect, we thought “patch” was an apt work to use – as there seemed to be such a strong identification with a very specific location, such as a policeman knowing his/her beat or a gardener tending an allotment. Visit Berlin, on the other hand, represented the whole of Berlin, an area far too big to get to know intimately, hence the reliance on general surveys and other more anonymous – less personal – ways of collecting data.

*Place management is practised somewhere – and that somewhere has its own political, legal, economic, technological and social environment*

One of the guiding principles of the Institute we referred to at the start of this paper is how we look for challenges and answers in the *specificity of place*. In relation to the point above, where we say there are similarities in the visits we made, it is important to remember that all these initiatives *are based in Berlin*. From the delegate feedback, we know that the initial “scene setting” lecture, which set out the history of the city, politically, economically and socially, provided a context for what was to follow. The approach to neighbourhood management we learnt about in Brunnenstrasse, for example, is directly related to a more state-led approach to place planning, management and development. The tools of place management (such as place marketing, place branding, place making, etc.) can be shared across geographical boundaries, but their applicability and ultimate success will depend upon how well the place manager understands the political, legal, economic, social and technological environment in which they are operating. The place-first (rather than the management-first) approach to place management is a fundamental cornerstone and guiding principle within the IPM and is one of the reasons why Member status is only available to practising place managers, as we do not believe you can be a place manager without a place to operate in.

Although local action has to be place sensitive, there is a role for the IPM and academics to look at different place management environments to understand at a macro level the impact of factors such as the influence of political ideology upon place management and development. How does a more state-interventionist approach to neighbourhood management in Germany work in comparison to the neo-liberal or *laissez-faire* approach in the UK? Are there policy lessons a government can learn from another in relation to place management? Can academics and researchers in the IPM help to gather the evidence for these?

*People learn more about places in places*

The study trip demonstrated that there is something very special about visiting a place, meeting the people and hearing their stories. Theory and the academic literature tend to strip away identities – both from the place protagonists and of the places. The nature of research is often to produce generalisable and replicable findings. On the other hand, everything came alive and into focus “in the field”. Of course, geography has a long tradition of the field trip. In our study tour, we found that our study visit hosts were just as keen to learn from the visitors as the visitors were to learn from them. Outside of the classroom or the conference venue, the exchanges were unmoderated and spontaneous. Connections were made that were more meaningful and less instrumental than one would usually associate with “networking”. The opportunity for a diverse group of informed outsiders to discuss the place and proposed initiatives with those actively engaged in its management prompted significant insight, and, in a few instances, questions were posed of the local managers about the approaches they were adopting. Of course, that does not mean the extant theory and literature is rendered useless by our study tours! Our High Street UK 2020 project (Parker *et al.*, 2015) found relevant articles and commentary dating back to 1892. Academic researchers have been predicting many of the problems our town and city centres are currently facing at least 50 years ago. But, what seems to happen is that there are major changes in the environment, for example, technology changes (the internet) or consumer behaviour changes (an increased interest in “the local”), and then there is too long a time lag before place stakeholders (e.g. property owners, the council and retailers) adapt their decision-making/operations in response to these major changes. Markthalle IX is a good example of how an initiative has responded to the emerging needs of the local population and used a wider evidence base to justify an approach that challenges the status quo (which had led to urban markets being replaced with supermarkets). Similarly, we want place managers to take a bit more notice of the research and predictions academics and other experts make so that they can anticipate change and respond more effectively, rather than just do what they have always done or copy what other people do. For future study visits, engaging practitioners with additional relevant reading and links to theory to help them make more effective decisions is something we will do *after* we have developed our collective understanding of issues “in the field”.

*Place management is more gardening than architecture*

Many of the visits made reference to flexibility and the temporary use of space. From Bikini Berlin and its incubator retail units to the transformation of a derelict plot into an urban garden in Prinzessinnengärten, being able to repurpose or reinvent space is a key element of successful place management. Our own research in IPM reinforces this observation. During the study tour, we presented our findings from our Market Matters report (Hallsworth *et al.*, 2015) – which has demonstrated how the reinvention of markets, the growth of farmers’ markets or the success of other specialist markets such as “makers markets” are part of a broader movement within urban renewal that underlines the value of temporality and diversity. There are a number of labels used to describe this: Tactical Urbanism, Lean Urbanism, adaptable neighbourhoods or even Popupurbanism (Bishop and Williams, 2012). These terms capture a range of interventions, for example, temporary galleries or public art installations, cultural events and festivals and guerrilla interventions (gardening and lighting). Some might

also include political occupations of space (protest camps and flash mobs). In terms of retail, we could include pop-up shops, flexible uses of fixed retail space (such as Bikini Berlin) and, most obviously, a diversity of market forms (including indoor markets such as Markthalle IX).

Such phenomena are characterised by a temporary use of space (a market can be dedicated to food and drink one day and vintage goods the next, depending on the collection of traders) or activities with a planned limited life (meanwhile use) or even built-in obsolescence. Often, they are the product of self-organising community activity that establishes experimental or alternative uses compared to mainstream economic or cultural activities, as was the case with Prinzessinnengärten.

Temporary usage of public and private assets is usually demonstrative of communities simply making-do in the face of adverse economic conditions and restricted public expenditure. Although the recent economic downturn has undoubtedly contributed to an expansion of flexible and creative interventions, we must also consider the structural vacancy within town and city centres produced by decades of counter-urbanising processes and demographic change. A further defining attribute of such interventions is their low capital costs and limited operating budgets. Although Bikini Berlin houses some flexible retail space, as an entity, it is more traditional retail real estate. However, given the recent economic shocks, even a traditional industry such as retail property has to embrace innovation and experimentation, as traditional retail tenants reduce their physical property portfolio.

Place management, therefore, should not only be concerned with the question of how to fill empty shops but also ask what to do with vacant commercial and industrial premises, derelict sites and indecorous car parks as a strategy for urban renewal where access to large capital and infrastructure funding is unavailable. Temporary interventions should not simply be an interim strategy or a practice of making-do until “normal” market conditions return only for mainstream profit-making to supplant local community achievements (Tonkiss, 2013). There are many examples of creative destruction (Zukin and Braslow, 2011), a situation whereby experimental and creative uses of urban space have successfully established attractive vibrant neighbourhoods, only for gentrification to subsequently price out self-organising, not-for-profit activities, quashing the distinctive nature of such spaces. Hearing Marco Clausen tell us that the landlord was unlikely to allow Prinzessinnengärten to exist for more than a few years made us feel sorry for the residents of the area who would not be able to enjoy such quality greenspace in the not-too-distant future. It left us thinking that residents were unlikely to feel so attached to a new retail or housing development or whatever was to be built in its place.

Encouraging temporary uses provides not only an opportunity to restore an element of vitality and vibrancy to areas but also raises the potential for generating progressive models of place management based on inclusive forms of local governance. In short, there is an opportunity to rethink how various buildings and space might be brought back into effective use through better integration between planners and stakeholder groups, including various community interests. Greater independence and community-managed assets offer a mechanism to enable local people to take greater control of their centres and create attractions and services that meet the needs of the local catchment. Not so much “build it and they will come”, but “reclaim it so we can use it”.

### Conclusions and implications

The lessons learnt in this paper are based, predominantly, upon the observations of the study trip facilitators, along with some comments and feedback from the delegates and a “critical friend” (one of the directors of IPM who did not attend the study trip). Next time, the authors intend to incorporate a more structured reflection session (for the purposes of both data collection and analysis) within the study trip itself. This will ensure that lessons learnt are developed collectively by the whole cohort. Nevertheless, despite this limitation, this paper has a couple of important implications for place management practitioners and researchers. First, the paper reminds us that the community (or place management academy) we belong to is truly global. The similarities between practitioners and their endeavours to make improvements for residents, shoppers, workers, traders and/or entrepreneurs are strong enough to ensure that meaningful connections can be made between people working in place management, wherever they are. One of the most striking similarities found in both the people we visited and the delegates on the study trip was both a commitment to a particular place and an in-depth knowledge of all the players, problems and peculiarities associated with it, as well as an ability to see and progress opportunities and facilitate change.

The study trip reinforced the point that place managers can and should learn from each other. But, as many place managers are volunteers, and many more do not have access to a professional development budget, we hope that this paper can help to share the reflections of one study tour with a much wider audience. Other places and people can be a source of inspiration, not necessarily providing a readily transferable solution (as the legal or political environments may not be conducive to carbon-copy interventions) but offering alternative perspectives and approaches which can be contextualised locally.

Finally, through collective efforts, such as the study trip described in this paper, this journal and IPM, the body of knowledge from which practitioners and policy makers can draw from, when solving place problems, becomes broader and richer. The number of people involved in place-making, marketing or management and the impact their practices have on the everyday lives of the people living and working in places also make it an area worthy of academic enquiry. Researchers have an important role to play in understanding the importance of place context and the people involved (including those who are expected to benefit). Place management cannot be understood without asking questions related to “where” and “who”. Improved knowledge and more effective place management practice can ultimately lead to places that are more successful, more liveable and more equitable – goals which should unite the place management community.

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