



Potsdam between shifting ideologies  
Selective deconstruction and reconstruction in two systems

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# 1. Introduction

This paper examines how the political and ideological background of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) influenced architecture and urban planning, as well as the upswing of selective reconstruction and demolition in the former GDR following the German reunification.

The thesis departs from the hypothesis that the frequent change of political and economic systems in post-war Germany was accompanied by an urbicide of architectural heritage and the selective use of historical legacy to satisfy their ideological demands.

I am going to trace the political circumstances during the period of the GDR and after the reunification and consider how ideological changes have affected the image of cities. Therefore, the following questions arise which I am going to answer in this paper.

What were the main reasons a building has been demolished or reconstructed, and additionally, did the reasoning differ in the two consecutive political systems? How influential was the political will for this, and how did it take part in architectural developments?

To what extent do these selective demolitions and reconstructions describe or overwrite history?

To answer these questions, the political past and the historic narratives of the German Democratic Republic as well as the reunified Federal Republic of Germany will be described on the basis of a literature study. In order to address these topics with built, reconstructed and demolished case studies. I am going to examine the city of Potsdam, and two specific sites within it, which have experienced the multi-faceted political and ideological circumstances of post-war Germany.

The structure of this paper consists of four chapters. In the first I will examine the formation of the GDR, its historiography and self-conception. In the second chapter I will trace how this influenced architecture and urban planning through the lens of the concept of urbicide. The third chapter traces these mechanisms of change in the city of Potsdam, specifically in the inner city, with a focus on demolitions and reconstructions around Alter Markt and the Garnisonkirche, which will be addressed in greater detail in the fourth chapter.

## 2. Political background and architectural conception of the GDR

### 2.1 Formation and fall of the GDR

After the surrender of the German Wehrmacht and the end of the Second World War in 1945, Germany was occupied and administered by the four victorious powers until 1949, when they withdrew and paved the way for Germany's independence. France, Great Britain and the United States merged their occupation zones and permitted the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany. The Soviet occupation zone did not follow this approach, due to the irreconcilable differences between the political and economic systems of the victorious powers. As a result, Germany was a divided country from 1949 to 1990. While at the beginning there were still efforts to establish a united Germany, increasing tensions, for example over the Marshall Plan, which the Soviet occupants did not support because they would have had to adopt a capitalist economic system, ultimately led to the separation. When the Western powers then made efforts to establish a distinct German state in their occupation zones and therefore introduced a new currency, the Soviet occupiers felt compelled to respond. They reacted with the introduction of their own currency which paved the way for the separation of Germany. The founding of the Federal Republic of Germany followed on 23 May 1949 with the enactment of the constitution. In October of the same year, East Germany followed this example again, the *Volkskongress* (People's Congress) passed the constitution and thus the founding of the GDR. (Malycha, 2011b)

While the Western powers pursued an establishment of democratic political- and a capitalist economic system, the GDR followed the model of the Soviet Union, both politically and economically. Although “democracy” was part of its name, it was a dictatorship in which practically all power was concentrated in a single party, the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED) and its leaders. Economically it defined itself as a socialist state, thus taking a counter-position to the democratic and capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

At the beginning of the 1980s, the already tense economic situation in the socialist GDR became more and more precarious, materials as well as everyday items became scarce. At the same time, the population became increasingly dissatisfied, restricted rights such as the freedom to travel and the freedom to choose a profession led to internal conflicts and dwindling support for the SED regime among the population. One consequence of this discontent was that in 1989 many citizens took the opportunity to flee to West Germany via Hungary, which was dismantling its border fortifications at the time. Further pressure was exerted by the occupation of the FRG embassy in Prague, which also led to violent clashes between the state and its citizens. In autumn 1989, these protests



1. Founding of the GDR during the Volksratsitzung. 1949



2. A protest of the peaceful revolution that led to the end of the GDR. 1989

reached a climax in mass demonstrations for democratic reforms. The fleeing to West Germany continued during this time, as visa-free travel to Czechoslovakia was once again possible. Only a few days later, Czechoslovakia also allowed further travel to West Germany, as a result of which the GDR was forced to grant freedom of travel, which led to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Meanwhile, political discussions arose about democratic reforms in the GDR, but also about a possible reunification with West Germany. In 1990, the first free elections were held, and most parties had previously spoken out in favour of a reunified Germany. This foundation stone for the reunification was a result of a peaceful revolution of the GDR citizens and ultimately ended the GDR dictatorship. The final reunification of the two German states, was completed in October 1990. (Malycha, 2011a)

## 2.2 Historiography and self-conception of the GDR

Particularly in the early years of the GDR, it was important to distinguish itself from West Germany and demonstrate autonomy, which resulted in its own narrative of the recent past that formed the basis of legitimacy for its existence. To this end, the GDR developed its own historical image with which it could present itself as a guilt-free resistance state after the second World War. The state's predefined anti-fascism made it possible to avoid any confrontation with its own history and its participation in National Socialism and at the same time gave it a historical identity as a resistance fighters and victors over Hitler's Germany. Although the deeds of the National Socialists were condemned and even higher-ranking accomplices were prosecuted and sentenced, the GDR declared themselves innocent and whitewashed of the crimes of the National Socialists. Subsequently, the GDR did not see itself as the successor state of the National Socialists and the Third Reich, nor as the heir to the Prussian state, but as a counter-position to the Federal Republic of Germany, which in turn accused it of being in the legacy of National Socialism. From this counter-position it drew its *raison d'être*, its political legitimacy and large parts of its identity, but also made it possible to largely avoid a serious confrontation with the Second World War. (Müller, 2008).

This image of history naturally also had an influence on architecture and urban planning, which, due to the destruction of the war, had great potential for redesign and reorganisation in a socialist and anti-fascist sense.

## 2.3 Architecture in the GDR: Between expression and fundamental needs

The GDR was strongly ideologically bound to the Soviet Union, especially immediately after its foundation. In order to represent socialism in the cities, the GDR authorities drew up guidelines and specifications that were supposed to



embody this ideology. In the course of time, the exact formulations changed over and over again, which resulted in a large variety of laws and guiding principles. In the early phase of the GDR, for example, this was expressed in the search for an architectural style called "socialist realism", which was to be developed and anchored on the basis of national traditions. (Molnár, 2013)

In 1950, a GDR delegation travelled to the Soviet Union to visit cities such as Moscow and Kiev and to be informed and educated about the reconstruction process. During this stay, they were also confronted with the Soviet models of urban planning, which they translated almost word for word into German. With their return, these guidelines became the first leading principles of GDR urban planning - *Die sechzehn Grundsätze des Städtebaus* (the sixteen principles of urban planning). Although these principles were rather vaguely formulated, they demanded, among other things, that city centres should provide space for political demonstrations and parades, but also encouraged to continue national and local construction traditions. (Klusemann, 2016)

The unification of these goals seems contradictory. In particular, the continuation of a tradition in relation to the remodelling measures that were planned at the urban planning level, in which above all magistral and squares were to be created in order to be able to hold large public celebrations. The rebuilding process of war damaged cities would therefore be based on the example of a regional style that had already been practised for a long time before the war. On the other hand, the GDR was a newly found state and was simply too young to have traditions developed organically, especially since many cultural characteristics that could be associated with National Socialism were not to be continued. How exactly this tradition was to find a built form therefore remained open at first.

Walter Ulbricht, a trained carpenter and autodidact in architecture and later general secretary of the GDR, provided assistance in interpretation. He rejected modernist architecture, as it was often built in West Germany at the time, and called for a departure from the American "*Kasernenstil*" (barrack style). (Molnár, 2013)

The national form thus also involved a separation from the Federal Republic by adopting an oppositional position to the modernist style, which was seen as the embodiment of American imperialism and the capitalist economic system.

In the 1960s and 1970s, building activities changed and were increasingly characterised by a housing shortage, which naturally also affected architecture and urban planning in the GDR. Although the GDR granted itself extensive powers in a land reform that made it possible to expropriate land, financial resources and building materials were scarce. As a result, the building production shifted from elaborate individual construction of houses to the serial production of residential buildings. This allowed to manufacture them much more economically and

quickly than residential buildings that matched the national tradition that was initially propagated. (Klusemann, 2016) The call to reform the building industry came from Moscow, by party leader Nikita Khrushchev, who accused architects of using outdated building techniques and being profligate with public money. He demanded a strong push for housing construction and a reduction of unnecessary beautification. (Molnár, 2013)

These flats were often built in suburban area, which is why, until the collapse of the GDR, inner cities were often abandoned and dilapidated. The prefabricated slab buildings constructed in large panel construction are still a striking legacy of GDR architecture today. The so called *Plattenbauten* were quite popular in the GDR because they offered above-average comfort. Today, this narrative has changed and they are the symbol of a failed system.

During this period the notion of architecture also changed from a profession that was initially seen as art to one of providing basic needs for the public, and with it the architectural discourse changed from a qualitative search for expression to a quantitative one, which was primarily determined by the number of newly built dwellings. (Tiedtke-Braschos, 2015)



3. Model of planned Plattenbauten in Potsdam Schlaatz. n.d.



### 3. Urbicide and its consequences in former GDR territories

#### 3.1 Urbicide in the GDR

The transformation of the system intended to turn a nation that had recently supported the National Socialists and persecuted and murdered millions of people for racist and anti-Semitic reasons into an anti-fascist and peaceful state. This radical change of society was expressed in the GDR on the one hand through programmes such as denazification, which sought to prosecute and sentence former Nazi leaders, and on the other hand it should find its way into everyday life in a more subtle way. With the establishment of the socialist state, socialism was also to be anchored in the cities. In some cases, this led to further destruction in cities already damaged by the war, or to the hesitant rebuilding of historical and symbolic buildings. This kind of political intervention in built history is often described by the concept of urbicide.

The term urbicide describes the intentional, systematic and selective destruction and reconstruction of buildings. It was first used in the USA in the context of gentrification and displacement in New York and was reused by eastern European cities to describe the methodical raze or reconstruction of symbolic buildings which is usually targeted at local communities. It derives from the idea that urbanity is created through diversity of beliefs. Whereas the genocide destroys heterogeneity of lifestyles, during an urbicide, buildings that resemble this diversity are razed or buildings are reconstructed in order to promote a certain way of living or system of beliefs to achieve a hegemony of interpretation. (Travis, 2011)

Due to the close linguistic relationship to the word genocide, one should nevertheless be careful with the use of the word. Particularly in the context of the GDR, it is less about warlike and military action as in the South-East European context, than about political demonstrations of power and historical reinterpretations. In addition, it was not directed against a social community but against the architectural heritage of a political system. After all, the Second World War was already over and even if the Cold War caused military rearmament and menacing gestures, fortunately there were no further violent and warlike acts in Germany.

Nevertheless, architecture is a communicative medium in which collective values are often manifested, both for society itself and for external parties. Buildings that express these values and develop a commemorative status can serve and nourishes a local identity and are therefore vulnerable for attacks when it comes to the destruction of cultural heritage. (Barthel, 1996)

In the GDR, the mechanism of demolition was primarily used, since after the destruction of the second world there was nothing to reconstruct, at most the selective repair of war damaged buildings. Following its self-conception, in which

it did not see itself as the next German state, but as a new and better system. Therefore, the GDR wanted to manifest its own position in the built environment and did not retain parts of the built heritage that represented the imperial and national socialist ancestors which nourished the plan to transform cities socialistically. This resulted, in the decay and demolition of buildings that symbolised the unwelcome past in order to eliminate their identity-giving and representative power.

### 3.2 Urbicide since the reunification

While the destruction of symbolic buildings is equivalent to the destruction of important historical evidence and possibly part of a collective identity, reconstruction is a subtler way of influencing the representation and manifestation of a culture. Following the reunification of the two German states and another shift in the political and economic system, the methods of urbicide were used again, with the promotion of reconstruction, especially in the East German cities. Since the 1990s, there has been a tendency to erect historic reconstructions, often of buildings that were demolished or not rebuilt in the former GDR. The influence of the GDR was therefore not permanent; important buildings are once again being revisionistically overhauled, this time by the reunified Federal Republic of Germany.

Joachim Fischer tries to describe this desire for built replicas in a sociological concept that is related to the loss of identity. He argues that reconstructions in former GDR cities are related to the rediscovery of the bourgeoisie after German reunification and thus a desire for figurative elements in architecture. The GDR defined itself as a *Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat* (workers' and peasants' state), which practically resulted in the disappearance of the bourgeoisie. This loss of social class and distinction was also visible in architectures that embodied the egalitarian social image of the GDR through repetitive and unadorned façades. Accordingly, he sees a longing to represent this rediscovered bourgeoisie to embody the regained citizenship in architecture again as a reason for the increasingly frequent historicist reconstructions. (Fischer, 2011)

These reconstructions are not just new buildings, but often lead to the erasure of the GDR from the architectural heritage and thus a loss of a chapter of the built history, in order to construct a homogenous and streamlined version of a city. The following case study of Potsdam, which is a city that has repeatedly been the location of the eventful German past of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is also a place of radical urban transformations. On one hand due to the interventions of the GDR, on the other hand because of the constructions of replicas of historic buildings which are still ongoing today.

## 4. Potsdam between heritage and reorientation

### 4.1 Potsdam's feudal heritage

Potsdam is a city that is beautifully located at the Havel. It was the city of residence for Prussian kings and emperors, who enjoyed spending their summers here, surrounded by magnificent palaces and gracefully landscaped gardens that were inspired by French or Italian examples, such as Sanssouci or the Palazzo Barberini.

With the coming into force of the Treaty of Versailles in 1918 and the founding of the Weimar Republic, Potsdam loses much of its importance, the magnificent buildings lose their use, especially the New Palace at Sanssouci Palace, which had served as the residence of Emperor Wilhelm II, and the Stadtschloss with its pleasure garden. (Felgendreher, 2011)

Nevertheless, this pompous heritage does not fit in with the ideological orientation of the modest workers' and peasants' state, which is also shown by the urban development in Potsdam under the dictatorship of the GDR.

### 4.2 Potsdam in the context of the GDR

With the rise of socialism, many cities were designated as *Aufbaustädte* (rebuilding cities) which were favoured in the allocation of financial resources and building materials. Potsdam fell into the second highest group of prioritisation, behind important industrial cities such as Chemnitz or Magdeburg and planned projects for completely new cities. The GDR gave special importance to these industrial cities in the rebuilding process, as they were to be the driving forces of the socialist economy. To accomplish this, not only were pre-war cities rebuilt, but completely new planned cities were designed and built. The best-known example of this productive city is presumably Eisenhüttenstadt. Cities like Potsdam, on the other hand, without a strong industry as an economic driver, had to take a somewhat lower ranking in terms of the allocation of materials and resources. (Beyme, 1987) While new socialist cities were designed on the drawing board, existing cities did not necessarily fit into the urban planning ideas of the socialists; they were too complex and densely built, which made them simply too fragmented for the visions of socialist urban planning, which were characterised by spacious streets and open spaces for gatherings and parades. especially after the shift to industrial building production during the late 1950s. During the rebuilding process and the socialist reorientation of Potsdam, especially in the inner city area, changes were made to the medieval urban layout, the city canal was filled in and the city as a whole was loosened up and made more spacious. (Klusemann, 2016)

While initially attempts were made to rebuild the destroyed parts of the city, later stronger interventions followed in order to implement the visions of socialist urban planning. Despite the great ambitions of the GDR planners to rebuild the cities in a socialist style, the execution was slow, also due to the adverse economic circumstances, which led to plans that had already been made being discarded or simply never being realised. This was also the case in Potsdam's city centre, where plans were initially made to preserve the historic buildings and incorporate them into the new, socialist Potsdam. (Klusemann, 2016) However, these plans for reconstruction were not realised for a long time, which resulted in the ever-increasing deterioration of the ruins and was ultimately at least one of the reasons for the demolition of the Potsdam Stadtschloss in 1960 and the Garnisonkirche in 1968.

In contrast, the rebuilding of the Nikolaikirche is a rare exception, as it was consistently rebuilt over a longer period of time. This determination was lacking in buildings for which the GDR leadership was ideologically preoccupied. As it was the case with the Garnisonkirche, where Adolf Hitler and Paul von Hindenburg sealed their alliance, which was considered an important step towards the National Socialists' rise to power, or the Stadtschloss, which was formerly the Prussian residence. Although war damage was repaired in many smaller places in Potsdam, the GDR had a lasting impact on the cityscape through this selective neglect and symbolic buildings were lost.

This illustrates that urban planning in the GDR developed gradually and went through several temporal phases, each of which was accompanied by its own intention and which show points of overlap with the overall state objective and development. On the one hand, these phases can be traced in stylistic developments, as can be seen in the rapid change from building in the national tradition to industrial construction; on the other hand, they do not necessarily result from artistic progress or spatial needs, but also from political decisions and changing nationwide conditions. The urban planning activities of the GDR in Potsdam was therefore marked by a gradual adaptation of the city to the new values, as well as the destruction of predecessor state as put forward in an architectural Guide of the time: "The political reorganisation that has consistently served the interests of the working class for almost four decades opened up new possibilities for urban planning in Potsdam from the very beginning; the residence and garrison city of Prussian-German militarism was transformed into a socialist district city soon after the founding of the GDR." (Hoffman & Schulz, 1981, p. 9)

### 4.3 Rebuilding gets started

On the one hand, rebuilding was essential to repair the destruction of the war, on the other hand, the rebuilt city should represent the socialist state. Therefore, ambitious plans were made for the urban rebuilding and redevelopment of Potsdam early after the GDR was founded.

In addition to the state requirement to build in the style of national tradition, the previously formulated 16 principles of urban development also placed demands on the redesign. Retrospectively, the city architect of the time, Werner Berg, made clear that the city had to be transformed from what he saw as a fascist cityscape to one of human progression, and that this had to be expressed in architectural terms. (Klusemann, 2016)

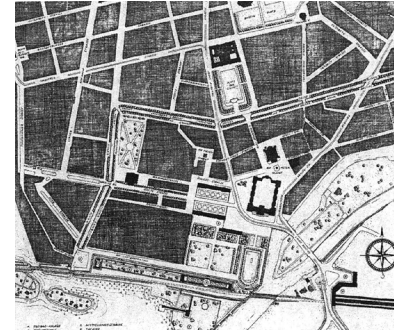
This demonstrates that there was certainly a motivation to remove buildings that represented political predecessors or opponents from the cityscape, making use of an urbicide to demonstrate the superiority of a political system.

However, this redevelopment was as slow as everywhere else in the GDR, although there were already ambitious goals at the local level as well as at the state level to form cities in a socialist way, rebuilding was the main activity in Potsdam at the beginning. While buildings had to be demolished because the war damage was too significant, attempts were made to repair the damage caused by the bombing in many streets and buildings. Some streets were rebuilt, mostly following the existing city layout, materiality and proportions, such as in Wilhelm-Staab-Straße, where damaged residential buildings were rebuilt more elaborately than usual to comply with the notion of building in national tradition. At this time, some city planners were also prudent with more iconic buildings, trying to incorporate historic buildings into new developments, especially in the city centre area as several plans by different architects were drawn up for this purpose. (Klusemann, 2016)

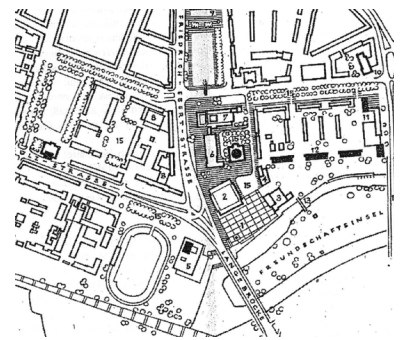
### 4.4 New problems and political redirection

Around the beginning of the 1960s, urban development in Potsdam took a different path, with the GDR once again attempting to find a socialist form of architecture by turning away from building in the national tradition towards industrial construction. Following the first period of the rebuilding process, urban redevelopment in the socialist sense was now approached more determinedly and vehemently. Once again, a guideline was developed and published to help the state-employed planners redesign inner cities in particular, this time by the GDR's Bauakademie. (Beyme, 1987)

These new guidelines formulated similar goals to those already known from the 16 principles of urban planning, such as focussing on the centre of the city and its hierarchical structure, but by dropping the claim to the national tradition, they



4. Planning scenario for the preservation of the Stadtschloss. 1949



5. Planning scenario after the demolition of the Stadtschloss, the Lange Brücke now crosses the site. 1960

found a different architectural form from now on. This meant, that buildings were placed as large volumes in the urban space and streets were widened to create spacious magistral, which in turn would lead to spacious public squares where political rallies could take place. (Klusemann, 2016)

This intervention in the basic functioning of the city was also noticeable in the layout of the city; in Potsdam, this resulted in a change in the routing of traffic in the city centre at the Alter Markt. When crossing the long bridge in the direction of the old town, the street used to lead north along the Havel in order to make the inner city more car friendly. With the demolition of the Stadtschloss, the street axis was extended and the traffic led directly across its former building site, along the Alter Markt. To the south of this street axis, a high-rise hotel was built in 1969 in the former pleasure garden of the Stadtschloss, which still exists today and was also built using industrial construction methods. (Felgendreher, 2011)

Yet modifications were also made outside the city centre. The need to make housing construction more efficient and to optimise production processes led to the construction of *Plattenbau* residential buildings around Potsdam. Examples of this are the districts of Drewitz or Schlaatz, where new high-rise apartment buildings were erected due to the shortage of materials and housing. In other places, however, buildings that should have been rebuilt fell into disrepair, both residential buildings and those of public relevance, such as the Garnisonkirche, which was demolished in 1968 due to its severe decay.

On the one hand, the urban redevelopment pursued the goal of creating needed capacities in housing construction, and on the other hand, architecture could be used in the sense of a communicative medium to once again send a message to the local population and external parties, specifically that of the socialist state creating access to a basic need, access to housing.

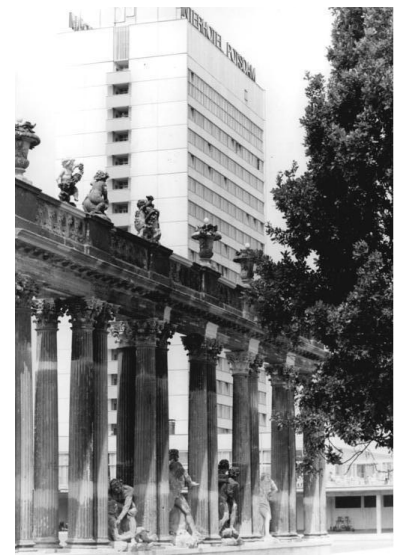
Despite further deconstruction work in the city centre, important buildings for the cityscape were preserved. The reconstruction of the Nikolai Church had already begun earlier and continued in the 1960s and 70s until it was finally inaugurated in 1981. (Emmerich-Focke, 1999)

The selective destruction shows that the socialist state tried to distinguish itself from its Prussian and National Socialist predecessors, but it did not radically demolish everything old. Plans for the socialist transformation were implemented only slowly and had to adapt to the scarce resources.

Nonetheless, buildings with distinctive symbolic power were treated separately as these identification symbols have been destroyed in the sense of an urbicide - intentionally and with ideological motivation.



6. View of the Alter Markt after the demolition of the Stadtschloss and the newly planned street course. n.d.



7. View of the high-rise hotel in the former pleasure garden, in the foreground a preserved colonnade. 1969



## 4.5 The reunification and the revival of opulence

Early after the fall of communism, the reunification and therefore another change in the political and economic system, first citizen movements were formed to restore the old splendour of magnificent Potsdam. While the GDR's uricide was criticised and its conversion measures were to be reversed, the young FRG did not hesitate to selectively demolish and reconstruct buildings, even if this meant that significant buildings were once again erased. Until today there seems to be a counteractive uricide in progress with the reverse intent: while GDR buildings are vanishing from the cityscape, increasingly historicising reconstructions are being erected that are reminiscent of the Prussian heritage. This concerned in particular the city centre (Tomczak, 2013), which was to be restored to its historical origins, as a resolution passed by the city council shows. (Stadtverordnetenversammlung Potsdam, 1999)

After the start was made with the reconstruction of the Fortunaportal's of the Stadtschloss in 2002, the enthusiasm for reconstruction spread like wildfire and led to a long list of new "historic" buildings. Since reunification, inter alia, the Stadtschloss, the tower of the Garnisonkirche, the Palazzo Barberini, the residential buildings on the Old Market Square, and the main facades on the Old Market Square, such as Palazzo Pompei and Palazzo Chiercati, have been reconstructed and thus form Potsdam's new old centre. As a result, GDR buildings are disappearing from the cityscape, either because they are being demolished, or because they are becoming increasingly dilapidated, as was the case recently with the *Institut für Lehrerbildung*, which is making way for residential development in historicising style, after it has been in poor condition for years. (Tschesch et al.)

This shows parallels to the GDR, which also did not take the necessary measures to keep historic buildings usable. Unlike in the GDR, however, it is not only politics that influences the appearance of the city. Recent activities in urban development have been marked by private commitment, which is dedicated in particular to Potsdam's prestigious and representative building projects. Therefore, persons of public prominence speak out in favour of reconstructions of historic buildings, take responsibility for large parts of the construction costs or even fund the entire reconstruction, as seen with software entrepreneur Hasso Plattner or the well-known TV presenter Günther Jauch, who funded significant parts of the Stadtschloss. (André et al., 2018)

The political backing of reconstructions and the involvement of private stakeholders accelerate the erasure of GDR architecture in Potsdam and is an expression of the post-communist society, supported by its ideological framework, which includes the pursuit of private interests in the public realm. This steady and still ongoing uricide has also resulted in the erasure of a young and yet significant part of Potsdam's long history.

## 5. Stadtschloss and Garnisonkirche – reflecting shifting ideologies

Both political and economic systems left and still leave their mark in Potsdam as has already been highlighted in the chapter prior. To illustrate this development in greater detail, this chapter will trace the history of two case studies, the Stadtschloss and the Garnisonkirche, in order to understand how the shifting political, economic and social paradigms are reflected and how the buildings have been affected by them.

Each of them represented structures that were not appreciated or desired by the GDR regime and thus became the target of political demonstrations of power and its manifestation in the built environment, which made them a target and ultimately a victim of the post-war urbicide. With their reconstruction in the FRG, an attempt was made to regain a piece of the city's history, a process that is still underway more than 30 years after the reunification and has repeatedly caused controversial public debates, as these reconstructions also overwrite a part of Potsdam's post-war history.

### 5.1 Stadtschloss during the GDR

The Stadtschloss was built in 1662 and later magnificently extended under Frederick II "the Great", a Prussian king who has a reputation as a glory-hungry ruler. After he made Potsdam and the Stadtschloss his seat of government, he and architect Knobbelsdorf continued to pompously expand it. (Sigel & Rennison, 2006)

The GDR later challenged the Stadtschloss, among other factors, because of the reign of Frederick II and the Prussian desire for conquest. He tried to make a name for himself as a military ruler in order to satisfy his thirst for prestige and fame. In 1741 he invaded Silesia, in present-day Austria, in 1744 Bohemia and in 1756 the Prussian army invaded Saxony, an attack that ended in a seven-year war. (Luh, 2021)

Until the resignation of Reichskanzler Wilhelm II in 1918 it served as the residence of the government, during the Second World War it was hit by several bombs during the war and burnt out as a result. Finally, it was demolished in 1960 by the GDR who found the martial and feudal heritage represented by the building unacceptable. The demolition of the Stadtschloss was marked by numerous discussions and disputes between monument conservators and political actors. The decision-making process, which lasted over ten years, shows how difficult it was for the GDR to translate the self-imposed, sometimes contradictory ideological guidelines into built form.



8. Military parade of Kaiser Wilhelm II in front of the Stadtschloss. 1910

In 1949, an expert's report was commissioned to explore the possibilities of rebuilding the building and putting it to further use, and to verify the options against a complete demolition. The likely saving of building material spoke in favour of preservation, as the building was still partially intact and only damaged parts had to be replaced and supplemented. However, it is also stated that in the hypothetical case that sufficient building material is available, demolition and replacement of the building with a new construction is preferred. Nevertheless, local planners were still considering to rebuilt the Stadtschloss, as it would have been in line with the goal to integrate historical buildings into the socialist cities. (Klusemann, 2016) When the rumour spread in the city that rebuilding was being considered, the district group of the SED Brandenburg took the initiative and wrote an open letter to the public in which they spoke out against a possible rebuilding and thus for the removal of the Stadtschloss. The arguments put forward are, on the one hand, the high costs of reconstruction, although these have already been estimated in the expert report as comparable to a new building. On the other hand, the symbolic function of the building in the heart of Potsdam is also in focus: "[...] But the deeds of the Hohenzollern were not so praiseworthy for our people that a destroyed palace has to be rebuilt. It was not a coincidence that Hitler's mob built up their criminal activity by continuing the methods of F. II." (Emmerich-Focke, 1999, p. 15)

During this period, minor demolition work was unofficially carried out on the Stadtschloss, mainly to obtain building material for other projects such as the construction of a stadium. In order to stop further work, alternative plans were drawn up by the proponents of reconstruction that would allow the desired traffic routing and partial preservation of the Stadtschloss. This feud between the various interest groups escalated to the level of state politics until the SED put an end to the discussion for the time being, as it did not give the issue a high priority and thus prevented further demolition work for the time being. (Dippel, 2003)

Due to the temporary lack of conservation, the ruins of the Stadtschloss continued to decay until the end of the 1950s, when the planning process picked up again. On the one hand, the role of the Stadtschloss in urban development was questioned, as it blocked the possibility of improving transport connections to the city centre, but ideological arguments in favour of demolishing the Stadtschloss were also still present. According to the GDR, it prevented a stronger integration of Potsdam with the incorporated labour town of Babelsberg, which is why Babelsberg has not been given greater emphasis in Potsdam's urban planning. Although further possible uses were examined by the *Kulturbund*, which continued to advocate a preservation of the Stadtschloss. Nonetheless, the fate of the building was already slowly becoming apparent until 1959 When the city council decided to demolish it. The local politicians were following a decision by the *Politbüro*, the political power centre of the GDR, (Dippel, 2003) because as a



9. The Stadtschloss before its destruction during the war. n.d.



10. The ruins of the building after the damage of the Second World War. n.d.

former site of Prussianism, it represented the oppression of the proletariat under the feudal rulers. (Emmerich-Focke, 1999) This decision was given particular emphasis by the construction of a Karl Liebknecht Forum to symbolise the triumph of socialist ideas and was built on the site of the former pleasure garden of the Stadtschloss. (Klusemann, 2016)

This interpretation of the building, as symbol of oppression struck at the heart of the ideological anchoring of the GDR, which rendered itself as a workers' and peasants' state. Wherefore the demolition and thus the removal of this contrary symbol on the territory of the GDR seems politically favourable. This shows that the intervention was not only thought out in terms of urban planning and spatial aspects, but was also based on political and symbolic processes. With the demolition, the GDR irreversibly overwrote historical testimonies. The architectural substance of the Stadtschloss could probably have been preserved, even if an ideological reinterpretation had to be undertaken instead of demolition, in the sense of a victory of the working class over its feudal rulers. This would at least have prevented the irretrievable loss of the authentic Stadtschloss.

In 1960, the first competition for ideas was launched to redesign the new empty space in the city centre, that offered space for the desired transformation. However, apart from the many concepts of proponents and opponents of reconstruction, there was no fully developed plan for the further use of the prominently located site. The results of numerous competitions until 1968 were used as the basis for urban development plans, including the proposed planning of a theatre and cultural centre. Yet, none of these plans were carried out, and the area was used mainly as a car park until 1988, when finally the construction of the Hans-Otto Theatre was begun, although it was never completed beyond the bare concrete structure, given the fact of the soon-to-be reunification of Germany. (Emmerich-Focke, 1999)

## 5.2 Reconstruction of the Stadtschloss

This last attempt by the GDR to make use of Potsdam's inner city was confronted with criticism soon after reunification. The building was still in an unfinished state when the spatial qualities, as well as the positioning of the building were in doubt, because it counteracted the former urban layout and thus opposed a revival of it. An architectural competition that dealt with the repeated transformation of the site then brought the subject to the attention of the general public, who controversially discussed the meaning of Potsdam's centre. Although a continuation of the construction project initiated under the GDR was considered at the beginning, the demolition of the building shell was finally decided and carried out in 1991, and thus the gap of the city centre was torn



11. Demolition work on the Stadtschloss. Estimated 1960



12. Concrete scaffolding of the Hans Otto Theatre with graffiti: „Here rests your festive theatre evening“. Estimated 1990.

open again. (Tomczak, 2013) This gap should remain for a few more years, as Potsdam's centre will only be designated as a redevelopment area in 1999. (Stadtverordnetenversammlung Potsdam, 1999)

On behalf of the city administration, a report was conducted that considered the reconstruction of the Stadtschloss to be indispensable for the cityscape and argued against a modern redevelopment. It also suggested the reconstruction of other historical buildings, such as the Garnisonkirche, in order to embed the Stadtschloss in its traditional surroundings. (Tomczak, 2013)

At the same time, a commercial use of the possible reconstruction is examined, as a practical use scenario and a financial concept were still lacking. (Felgendreher, 2011)

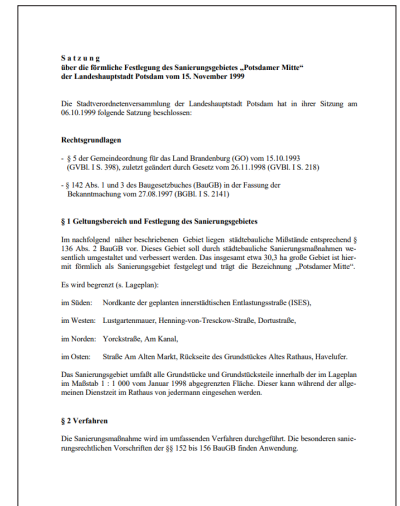
Nevertheless, ongoing reconstruction initiatives that later unified under the name "Mitteschön!" continued to push for the construction of the lost Stadtschloss.

This private commitment is also reflected financially. The well-known TV presenter Günther Jauch, for example, funded the reconstruction of the Fortuna Portal with seven million *Mark*. (Tomczak, 2013)

This construction of the Fortuna Portal was the prelude to the then still imminent reconstruction of the Stadtschloss and illustrates the ambitions of the supporters of reconstruction, who just manifested an opportunity for further building projects at a central location. However, the interweaving of public representatives and private sponsorship just started with the Fortuna Portal. In 2005, the Brandenburg state parliament finally decided to erect a parliament building in the cubature of the Stadtschloss, which would serve as the seat of government after completion. However, so far not in the form of a perfect copy, but certainly in the form of a historic reconstruction. (4/1092-B, 2005)

The impulse to create a reconstruction accurate to the original once again came from the private sector and with financial incentives, this time by software entrepreneur Hasso Plattner, who announced a donation of 20 million euros if the palace is restored in its authentic form. The architectural designs of an initial competition for the new state parliament had to be revised again, as they were to be presented only one day after Plattner's proclamation. (Felgendreher, 2011)

Peter Kalka's design emerged as the winner of the second competition in 2008. It aims to reconstruct the historic façade of the old Stadtschloss, but has to reduce the size of the inner courtyard in order to achieve a greater building depth, in particular in the southern front building, to gain space to accommodate all required facilities. In 2014, the new Brandenburg State Parliament finally opened as a close reconstruction of the former Stadtschloss, which is probably only recognisable as such to the closest observer.



13. Decree on the designation of Potsdam's city centre as a redevelopment area. 1999



14. The reconstruction of the Fortuna Portal, at this time without the later built Stadtschloss. 2007



15. The fully reconstructed city palace and new parliament building of the Brandenburg State Parliament. 2016



### 5.3 Garnisonkirche during the GDR

The same fate of destruction also befell another important building in Potsdam, the Garnisonkirche, which had been renamed to Heilig-Kreuz Kirche (Holy Cross Church) in the GDR, to some extent to distance itself from its heritage. (Grünzig, 2020b) Like the Stadtschloss, the building was hit by bombs during the war and as a result was in danger of collapsing, after which rudimentary safety measures were taken that were unable to protect it from further decay. More extensive measures to preserve the building were initially rejected by the council of the city building department because there was insufficient building capacity available. Initiatives to use it as a concert hall also failed, which is why it continued to deteriorate. (Emmerich-Focke, 1999)

The Garnisonkirche was built in 1735 by order of King Frederick William I. in place of a previous church building of 1722, which had sunk due to the poor condition of the ground. It was built as a simultaneous church for the civilian and military congregations and was directly under the influence of the Prussian king, who sought to combine secular-military power with religious power. (Domstiftsarchiv Brandenburg, 2012)

On the one hand, the Garnisonkirche was strongly ideologically charged, because it was the military church of Prussia, in which protestant soldiers held church services. The building was part of a wider military infrastructure, like a rifle factory, military hospitals or an orphanage run by the armed forces and was therefore regarded as a symbol of military oppression and activities in the GDR.

Additionally, churches and the resulting religious buildings had a difficult time in the GDR due to the ideological framework of socialism. Vladimir Lenin, one of the founding fathers of the USSR and thus also an influential figure for German socialists, rendered religious activities as numbing to the spirit and human endeavour. Echoing Karl Marx and the saying "religion is the opium of the people", he saw it as a reason for the oppression of the working class and thus danger for socialism. (Lenin, 1905)

This rejection was reinforced by the infamous Day of Potsdam, when Reich Chancellor Hitler and Reich President Paul von Hindenburg gave speeches in the Garnisonkirche which is considered to be the closing of ranks between the National Socialists and the German Reich. The Garnisonkirche as a location was by no means chosen coincidentally, as it had already advanced to become an important symbol of Nationalist movements in the Weimar Republic: "[...] even in imperial times, it stood for the close connection between the state, the military and the church. In the time of the Weimar Republic, it thus advanced to become the symbol of the extreme right." (André et al., 2018, p. 234)

This event also had an impact on the GDR's treatment of the building, which considered using the Garnisonkirche as a memorial against fascism at an early



16. The later destroyed Garnisonkirche still completely undamaged. 1920



17. The damaged bell tower of the Garnisonkirche during the time of the GDR. 1960



stage. An expert report also showed that the preservation of the church was examined despite its unfavourable reputation. According to the report, both a rebuilding of the entire building and a partial restoration as a memorial would be more cost-effective than the complete demolition, but despite these considerations, the later destruction of the church could not be prevented. (Emmerich-Focke, 1999)

On the other hand, Wilhelm-Külz-Straße (today again renamed Breite Straße), which adjoined the Garnisonkirche, played an important role in the city's infrastructure plans. It was to be enlarged for higher traffic volumes and at the same time serve as an important socialist magistrale leading to the central demonstration square at the former Stadtschloss. (Stadt Potsdam, 2007) Since these plans called for a widening of the street, the Garnisonkirche simply obstructed these intentions.

There are varying levels of research on the decision to finally demolish the ruins, and the way it came about is at least vague. On one hand, General Secretary Walter Ulbricht, who regularly commented on urban developments in the GDR, is said to have personally ordered the final demolition by asking the city architect Werner Berg during a visit to Potsdam why the ruins were still in place. When Berg replied that the Garnisonkirche was an important dominant feature in Potsdam's cityscape, Ulbricht told him "[...] that he would probably have to look for a new dominant landmark." (Emmerich-Focke, 1999, p. 160) On the other hand, the local church negotiated with the city for financial support for other projects such as the rebuilding of the Nikolaikirche and new community centres in Potsdam. To secure greater funding for these, they were willing to give up the Garnisonkirche as the church was also aware of the historic rooted images that the building carried. (Grünzig, 2020a)

The final tearing down of the Garnisonkirche was decided by the city council less than a year after Walter Ulbricht's visit. This only happens indirectly, as the construction of an electronic data processing centre is approved in place of the Garnisonkirche, for which purpose it was demolished in 1968. (Klusemann, 2016) For the GDR, the demolition of the Garnisonkirche was supposed to symbolise the overcoming and leaving behind of the old forms of rule and at the same time strengthen the idea of the new socialist system. The new anti-fascist attitude was also to be embodied in the new plans for the Garnisonkirche site, as was also reiterated by the Bauakademie. (Emmerich-Focke, 1999)

The so-called Rechenzentrum was completed in 1971 with industrial prefabricated construction methods and embodies the required progressive and scientific character that the GDR wanted to cultivate. This optimism towards technology is expressed on one hand in the use of the building, and on the other hand also through the design of the façade. The ground floor is decorated with the wall mosaic *Der Mensch bezwingt den Kosmos* (Man conquers the cosmos),



18. Adolf Hitler (left) and Paul von Hindenburg (right) on the "Day of Potsdam". Adolf Hitler in civilian clothes Paul von Hindenburg in military outfit. 1933



19. The same scene in different context, as artwork printed on a postcard. In the background the chance of the Garnisonkirche. 1933



20. The remains of the bell tower after the demolition. The nave used to be on the left of the tower, the demolition gives a view of Nikolaikirche. 1968

which shows an astronaut (presumably Yuri Gagarin) in front of planet Earth. The surrounding panels show additional images of flying spaceships, rocket launches and also a quote from Karl Marx. (Klusemann, 2016)

With the demolition of the Garnisonkirche and the construction of the new computer centre, a sacred church building, symbolically occupied by the Prussian and National Socialist ancestors, was removed from Potsdam's cityscape and replaced by a secular building of science, which was also built to demonstrate the supremacy of socialism in contrast to its competitors.

#### 5.4 Reconstruction of the Garnisonkirche

In the case of the Garnisonkirche, private involvement and a claim of the location also precede the concrete reconstruction of the building. Whereas in the case of the Stadtschloss it was the Fortuna Portal, for the Garnisonkirche it was an initially unsuspecting replica of the carillon, which had the intention to commemorate a former landmark of the city.

A first initiative is taken even before the reunification by the former lieutenant colonel Max Klaar, now considered a right-wing extremist, who plans to have parts of the Garnisonkirche's carillon rebuilt and collects donations for this purpose. He aims to commemorate the service and tradition of Prussian soldiers and to reinterpret the Garnisonkirche as a place of Prussian military tradition.

Thanks to numerous donations, including those of former members of the Wehrmacht and the descendant of the Prussian monarchy, Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, the carillon was completed in 1987 and for the time being stands on the grounds of the *Bundeswehr* in Iserlohn. The bells are dedicated to high-ranking former military personnel of the Wehrmacht, descendants of Prussian nobility or cities such as Königsberg (Kaliningrad) in today's Russia. After reunification, the carillon was donated to the city of Potsdam, which, despite clearly right-wing nationalist inscriptions and engravings, gratefully accepted it and was already considering a possible reconstruction of the Garnisonkirche. The Carillon was placed near the former site of the Garnisonkirche and became the subject of protest actions and sabotage until it was finally shut down in 2019. (Oswalt, 2020)

This was criticised by the initiative "Mitteschön!", which was already significantly involved in the reconstruction of the Stadtschloss and with advocacy for the Carillon also reveals its political attitudes. (Mitteschön!, 2019)

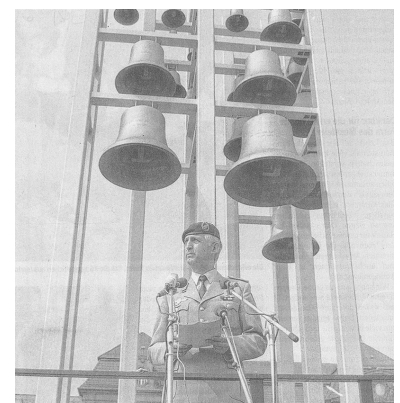
The construction of the carillon provided the impetus for the further reconstruction of the Garnisonkirche. In 2004, the *Ruf aus Potsdam* (call of Potsdam) issued an appeal for donations for the reconstruction, supported, among others, by the then Prime Minister of Brandenburg, his Minister of the Interior and Bishop Wolfgang Huber. It was them who later laid the symbolic



21. View of the data centre with wall mosaic on the ground floor. 1980



22. The wall mosaic at the computer centre "Man conquers the cosmos" by Fritz Eisel. 1973



23. Max Klaar at the inauguration of the carillon after it was installed in Potsdam. 1991

foundation stone for the reconstruction of the bell tower and played a major role in the founding of the Garnisonkirche Foundation Potsdam in 2008, for which Huber held a religious service, exactly 40 years after the demolition by the GDR. (Stiftung Garnisonkirche Potsdam)

From then on, the foundation officially pursued the reconstruction and was able to achieve repeated successes thanks to political support and private donations. In 2010, for example, the land on which the reconstruction is to be built was transferred to the foundation by the city free of charge. (Weinz, 2011) Günther Jauch, who was also involved in the Stadtschloss, donated again 1.5 million euros to make the enormous building project possible. (André et al., 2018)

Under the patronage of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, reconstruction of the bell tower began in 2017 and is scheduled for completion by 2022. The future of the Rechenzentrum, which has served since 2015 as a place for local artists to run their studios and workshops, is still unclear, but it is likely that this GDR building will also have to make way for Potsdam's reconstruction activities, when the construction of the nave of the Garnisonkirche is fully funded.



24. Construction site of the bell tower reconstruction. In the background the computer centre. 2020

## 6. Conclusion

The numerous political changes since the Second World War have undoubtedly left their mark in Potsdam. Major urban planning events have followed their political systems, with ideological motivation and representational aspirations playing a significant role alongside spatial planning aspects. It is not unusual for political actors to intervene in urban planning, as the legislation creates a framework in which the city can develop. In Potsdam, the extent to which these interventions take place, in what manner and for what reasons, is related to the political systems and their ideological superstructure.

Urban Planning in Potsdam has always been a tedious, complex and sometimes contradictory process but it appears that both systems were engaged in an urbicide in Potsdam, albeit with the use of different mechanisms. While the GDR, as a new political system, attempted to manifest itself in construction and did not refrain from demolitions of buildings that represented nationalist or feudal ideologies. The FRG, was not as systematic in its destruction, but accepted the homogenisation of the city by tolerating and supporting persistent privatisation, in some cases even with the support of right-wing nationalists.

The case study shows how a cityscape can become ideologically defined, and how significant a change in this ideology is reflected in the urban environment. It is also clear that historical buildings in particular are not perceived as neutral and value-free, but that they are spaces of ideological representation. Whoever is allowed to occupy this space gains a certain degree of interpretive sovereignty over the past, which affects future notions of the city. A concentration of interpretive sovereignty, as it was secured in the GDR through dictatorship, in the FRG to some extent through private funding, results in a singular, selective cityscape. The ideological preconditions are therefore essential factors for the appearance of the city, as none of these concentrations of power would have been possible in the respective other political and economic system.

In this way, neither the urban interventions of the GDR nor the reconstructions of the FRG have managed to represent Potsdam's history in an ideologically unselective way. Now that many parts of Potsdam's pre-war period have found their way back into the cityscape, it is to be hoped that the last architectural landmarks of the GDR will be preserved, because only in this way is it possible to convey a complex and heterogeneous image of Potsdam that is appropriate to the city's history and to overcome the discord of the political superstructures and ideological boundaries.



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