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City profile

City profile: Berlin



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ABSTRACT

Berlin is a German city and federal state, situated in the heart of Europe. It has been the capital city since 1991, and is the largest city in the country with around 3.4 million inhabitants. This profile explains Berlin's historical development and emphasizes changes which took place during the 20th century (the Weimar period in the 1920s, followed by the Nazi takeover in 1933 and the city's destruction during World War II, then the division of the city into West Berlin and East Berlin, until its final reunification in 1990 after the Wall fell down). After reunification, Berlin experienced a new period of urban redevelopment in which many new buildings were constructed. This profile also outlines some recent positive changes in terms of Berlin's economic growth and its transformation into the capital of innovative new companies in the digital, culture and media industries.

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Introduction

Berlin is the city that best portrays the unification of the two Germanies, both visually and physically. It has always been a place of political power and a legendary symbol of survival. A political division of more than 40 years during the Cold War period and a physical division of more than 30 years imposed differences between the Western and Eastern parts of the city. Berlin is a combination of new with the old, where abandoned factories in unused areas along the former Wall are still to be found. Berlin is a city where 'every corner is telling a story, a city that narrates its multiple histories, the only place in the world where the center is empty' (Till, 2005). The 20th century was full of dramatic changes, starting from the revolution of 1918, followed by the Nazis taking power in 1933, then the post-war city division from 1945, the erection of the Wall in 1961, followed by life in the divided city and then reunification in 1990. All these events are turning points in the city's political life and have shaped its built environment. The city's present borders were assigned in 1920 with the inclusion of adjacent small towns, agricultural land and lakes and forests, not by the inner city enlargement process.

It is a dynamic city of culture and one of the UNESCO Cities of Design. As a capital city, Berlin is rich in cultural institutions. Most

of them are financed through public subsidies, though it is important to emphasize that Berlin is equally famous for its non-subsidized arts scene and creative industries. One of the results of Berlin's division is its duplication of cultural institutions. As the city's cultural center was in the Boulevard Unter den Linden, which fell on East Berlin's side, the West German government compensated for this by creating new institutions. The Deutsche Oper Berlin in West Berlin was equivalent to the State Opera. Mies van der Rohe's New National Gallery (part of the Kultur Forum complex) served as counterpart to the old national museums, and Hans Scharoun's State Library was West Berlin's answer to the old Berlin Library. All of these institutions stayed after the unification and today Berlin has three opera houses, four opera ensembles, eight large orchestras, including Berlin Philharmonic Hall, and ten chamber orchestras (OECD, 2003). During the Weimar Republic, Berlin gained 'entertainment metropolis' reputation, which holds to this day. The unified German capital also embraces a great number of corporate buildings, a new federal government district, a reconstructed regional transportation system and gentrified neighborhoods. Its historical district has also been renovated, while suburban settlements are still growing. Berlin is rich in large public spaces, particularly at the waterfront and in its green urban parks (which cover more than 40 % of the city area). It is the European city with the highest density of green space (Berlin Senat Department for Urban Development) (see Figs. 1–4).

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The history of Berlin's urban development

Berlin's early history

A dense network of villages appeared on the territory between the rivers Elbe and Oder during the 12th century. These villages had similar structure, and were all concentrated along a road with a green area at its center. Even today, the outline of the green area can still be seen in some Berlin districts. At the end of the 12th century, two separate settlements sprang up from these villages, Cölln and Berlin. These two settlements kept separate identities until the 18th century, though they even shared a town hall for one period and were often communally referred to as Berlin. In 1709, these two settlements finally officially unified. During the Middle Ages these settlements spread minimally but with no significant architectural shapes. Indeed, in the area of urban development Berlin definitely stayed far behind other grandiose capitals in Europe like Vienna or Paris. Berlin started developing during the Baroque period under Friedrich Wilhelm the Great Elector (Cobbers, 2011).

Berlin before the 20th century

A new chapter in the architectural history of Berlin started at the beginning of the 1700s when a line of new districts was set out on the west side from the remains of the previous medieval city, under the rule of Prussian King Friedrich I. This development continued under Friedrich Wilhelm I, when Berlin's intense grid

patterns were formed. The south-western district was named Friedrichstadt (today part of Mitte and Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg districts). The 1737 expansion advanced the idea of the new city. Three major gates were built with public spaces around them – the Hallesches Gate on the south, the Brandenburg Gate which formed a square on the north, and the Potsdamer Gate which was the city entry from the road to Potsdam. This development of the city was directly inspired by the reconstruction of the center of Paris by Louis XIV. The Potsdamer Gate had special significance and was marked as the royal gate from Sans Souci, the beloved king's country palace (Balfour, 1990).

The son of Friedrich Wilhelm I, Frederick II, (known after his death as Frederick the Great) ruled Prussia from 1740 to 1786, during which time Berlin became a European metropolis famed for its architecture and culture. The fame of Berlin's architecture at that time was connected with Karl Friedrich Schinkel, who dominated the architectural scene of Berlin for more than half a century. In the 18th century Berlin also gained a reputation as a major city for crafts, and during the 19th century, it became the largest industrial city in Germany and one of the largest cities in Europe. Berlin already had 56,000 inhabitants in 1710. The city had 265,000 citizens in 1834 and 826,000 in 1871. At the end of the 18th century this number was still growing, which led to 2,040,100 citizens in 1905 (Cobbers, 2011) (see Fig. 5).

One of the most important periods in Berlin's history was the Founders Period (Gründerzeit), the period just before and after Germany's 1871 unification, which was a time for big changes and the start of the development of German industry. During the

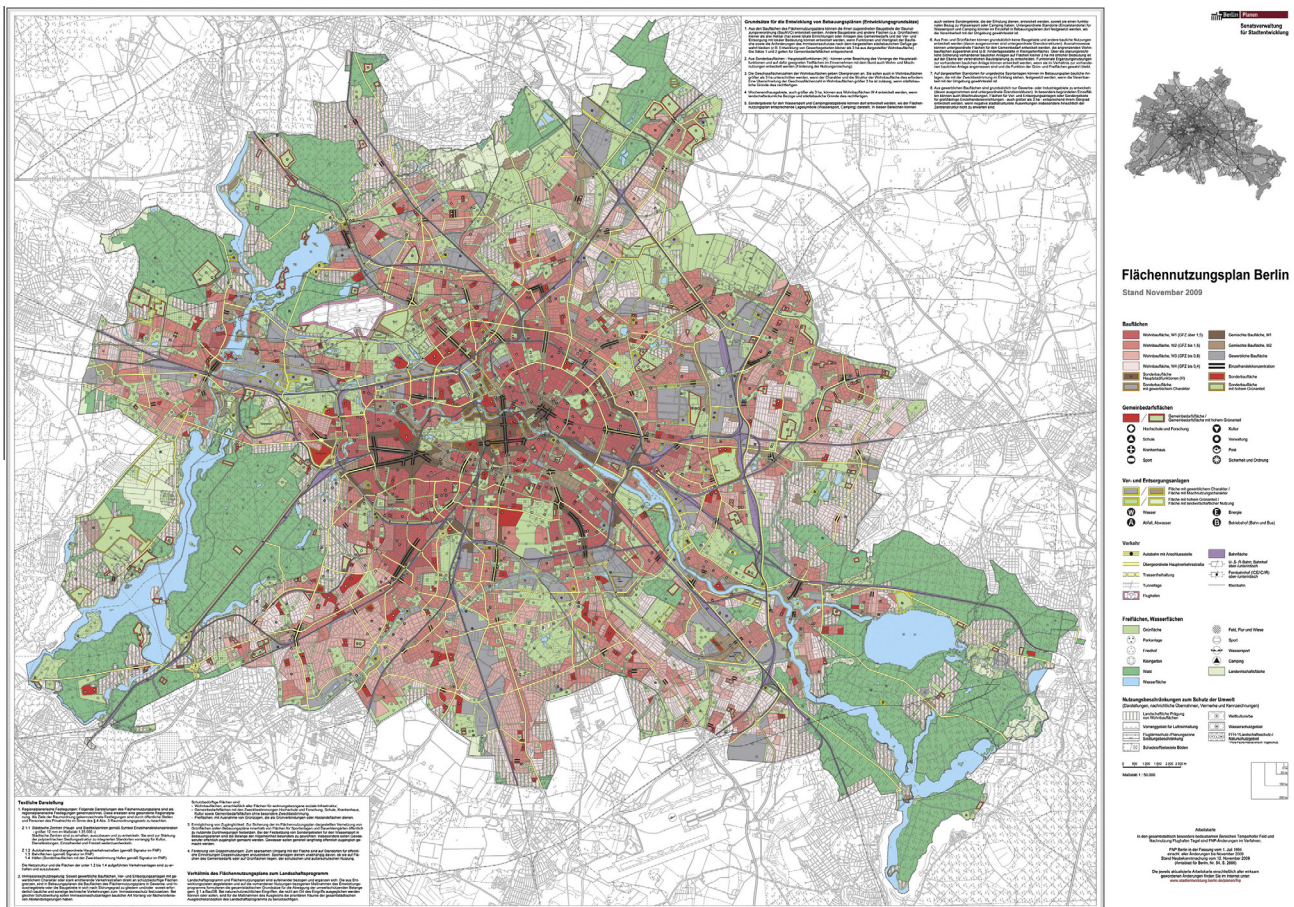


Fig. 1. Current edition: Berlin Land Use Plan (FNP Berlin) published November 12th, 2009 (Official Gazette (Amtsblatt) p. 2666), last modified March 7th, 2013 (Official Gazette (Amtsblatt) p. 432).

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