

Editorial

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On the occasion of the 175th anniversary of Berlin's Geographical Society which was celebrated in 2003, the editors decided to dedicate one issue of DIE ERDE to problems of Berlin's changing geography, both in socio-economic and in physical terms. Authors from Berlin and from other locations were asked to contribute.

Berlin in April 1828: A handful of eminent members of the university, the military, from teaching or commerce, who were united by the common interest of exploring planet earth, were gathered together to celebrate one of their associate's birthday – the opportunity was seized to proclaim a „Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin“, a Geographical Society of Berlin. An earlier attempt to found such a society had failed, but this time, fuelled by *Alexander von Humboldt's* regular reports of the evolution and growth of the corresponding Société in Paris of 1821, more efforts were taken to succeed, to have the society registered and to invite more members during the following months. Ever since, the Berlin Society has served as a place for the exchange and communication of geographical knowledge for Germany and the world. Under *Carl Ritter's* direction – until his death in 1859 – monthly reports were soon issued, followed in 1853 by a fully-fledged journal: *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin* which, relaunched in 1949 as *DIE ERDE – Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde zu Berlin*, must be regarded today as the oldest existing geographical journal in the world. With this issue, *DIE ERDE* turns its eyes on the place of its birth and publication, on the Society's very own city: Berlin.

For urban geographers, Berlin is of course a very special place – no wonder that so many colleagues and researchers from all parts of the world come to Berlin to investigate the metropolis in transition: transition from the divided city of the cold war, with East Berlin as the capital city of a small country of the socialist block and West Berlin as an enclave of the West, to the reunited capital of Germany, in a reunited Europe.

Having arrived late on the urban scene in Europe, both as a medieval trading place and as a modern

metropolis, Berlin saw a stunning rise in the late 19th century as the centre of Prussia and, after 1871, of united Germany. With the rise of Prussia through the 17th, 18th and 19th century, the city had gained importance, and from being the seat of the Prussian princes and kings (ever since the 15th century), by the middle of the 19th century the city had become a central node in the evolving railway network and a growing industrial location with iron production, railway engineering and textiles manufacturing (often in the hands of Huguenot families). Engineers, inventors and industrialists *Werner von Siemens* and *Emil Rathenau* laid the foundation stone for Berlin's electrical industry, the former with his inventions like the dynamo machine, the latter by buying *Edison's* patents in the U.S. and using them for mass production for the growing European markets in his company AEG. From being a seat of power, Berlin had become an industrial capital. In the interwar years, Berlin was one of the most dynamic centres in Europe, one commentator called it “the fastest city in the world” – a very lively place in science, education and manufacturing, but also in areas like the media or entertainment. Nazi rule destroyed all this. In 1945, Berlin, where the “total war” had been declared not long before, was a place of defeat and destruction. This was followed by division and the wall. For 40 years, the city was separated by the border between the two world systems, between East and West. As a matter of fact, it was the Hungarians in 1989 who began to cut a small hole into this European and global fence – an act which triggered a tremendous change in 1989: the end of the Soviet communist rule over Eastern Europe and the path towards German as well as European unification.

Re-united, the city has to find a new role. Following a narrow vote in the Bundestag in 1991, it has become the capital as well as the seat of parliament and government for Germany. *Elmar Kulke*, in his contribution, takes up the decisive question: is Berlin again on its way to becoming a global city – and if not, why not? Comparison to the pre-war situation, when Berlin indeed functioned as a glo-

bal city, is interesting in this context. The confidently expected economic growth and population increase of Berlin “after the wall” have not materialised. On the contrary: The city faces severe economic problems following the drastic reduction of state funds supporting the economy in both East and West Berlin. As a consequence, massive deindustrialisation has swept over the city, with services not being able to compensate completely for the losses. Unemployment is rising to high levels, while the city’s income from business taxes is extraordinarily low. In terms of spatial change, post-unification suburbanisation and a functional rearrangement in the inner city are most notable.

Population growth is of course the first and major indicator for urban development. In this respect Berlin has seen a phase of increase, right after unification, when in-migration from abroad exceeded the natural decrease within the city, and a phase of decrease in the late 1990s, largely due to suburbanisation, i.e. migration towards neighbouring communes on the metropolitan periphery, as *Franz-Josef Kemper* writes in his article. Internal differences are substantial: especially the large modern housing areas in East Berlin have lost population during the last 15 years. East-west differences in migration behaviour, which had been remarkable before unification, have been decreased by the most dynamic population changes in East Berlin, where the migration volume has increased substantially. Spaces of ethnic concentration as well as of poverty are, nevertheless, still heavily localised in specific parts of West Berlin.

The largest ethnic minority in Berlin is the Turkish community. With over 160 000 people of Turkish origin, of whom roughly 40 000 now have a German passport, Berlin is in fact the largest Turkish city outside Turkey. Bound together by language – a lot of Berlin’s Turks speak only limited German – the Turkish community is a closely-knit network of networks, where all kinds of opportunities and life chances are distributed internally, including housing and labour. Whether the Turkish businesses can, however, be regarded as an “ethnic business” is the central question which *Robert Pütz* has raised in his article. Although he registers many phenomena of business interaction along ethnic

lines, he remains profoundly critical of the concept of “ethnic business”.

For a city with three million inhabitants Berlin is surprisingly “green”, and urban ecology is well established in the city, as an academic discipline, as an arena of local and regional politics – also involving a large number of non-governmental organisations and initiatives in the field – and as a factor of urban planning. Large parks, numerous tree-lined avenues from late 19th century Prussian urban planning, the functional mix and, above all, its situation as a compact city inherited from the division period make Berlin an interesting place for “urban greening”. Urban ecology has a renowned institute at Berlin’s Technical University which is *Herbert Sukopp*’s base. At the Humboldt University’s Geography Department a special Postgraduate Research and Study Programme “Perspectives on Urban Ecology – the Example of the European Metropolis of Berlin” has been introduced, from which *Wilfried Endlicher* and *Norbert Lanfer* report on meso- and micro-climatic aspects of the city, detailing investigations into the inner-urban spatial differentiation of the urban heat island effect. The neophytes which they use as indicators are also presented in *Herbert Sukopp*’s contribution on flora and vegetation change over the centuries in Berlin, based on decades of research into the archaeology, botany, pre-history and history of Berlin.

Hans-Dietrich Schultz concludes this issue with biographical notes on a highly notable though often forgotten Berlin geographer of the first third of the 20th century: *Alfred Rühl*. Trained as a physical geographer, essentially a geomorphologist, *Rühl* turned into an economic geographer with highly original ideas on the spatial dimension of national economics, emancipating himself from the geo-deterministic attitude of his masters, especially *Albrecht Penck*, towards a socio-deterministic approach to economic space which focuses on societal organisation and social psychology as fundamental factors of spatial development. The Department of Geography at the Humboldt University has, in consequence, named its brand-new building (inaugurated in late 2003) after *Alfred Rühl*, in commemoration of this “nonconformist” among German, and among Berlin, geographers.

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