

## Book review: **Integrated Perspectives on Places of Modernity** By Kai J. Jonas

In 2004 a book was published with a remarkable concept, in German though, but nonetheless. The two sociologists, Joachim Fischer and Michael Makropoulos, identified a prototypical place of modernity, the Potsdam Square in Berlin and presented an profound analysis using seven current approaches in sociological reasoning. The historical scope of the approaches differ, some go back to the early days of the double-square Potsdamer Platz/Leipziger Platz, other only look at the reconstruction after 1989.

The reason why I am taken by this book is twofold. First, defining places of modernity such as the Potsdam Square and using them as prototypes for a profound analysis is a method of combined social scientific and architectural/planning endeavours that I believe to be rather fruitful for the future. Since need more comprehensive analyses for decision making processes in the field of urban planning when we want to go beyond monolithic and thus random planning in accelerated areas of growth, we also need exemplary places, prototypes as "laboratories" and units of analysis. We should devise a framework to detect those urban prototypes. Some theorists have, astounded themselves by highspeed growth, posited that planning in economically uprising nations is anachronistic because planning errors are simply rebuilt. This may be fascinating, but it is wrong. Humans continuously strive for behavioral security and not continuous change. Secondly, the book is widening the theoretical scope of existing debates of architectural sites. It can help architects and urban planning to enrich their analytical framework. Furthermore, it puts all social sciences in demand to partake in this analysis. Some, as demonstrated in this book are already apt and able to do so. Others, such as psychology have lost or at least not developed their initial expertise.

The seven chapters cover the following perspectives. In the first chapter, by Joachim Fischer, marks a demanding introduction into the topic. On the basis of Plessner's philosophical anthropology, the author, by means of a succession of elegant phenomenon-commentary figures throughout the text, posits that the Potsdam Square is a project of civil society that tries to manifest itself again at this place of construction and destruction. The following chapter is driven by a rational choice perspective tries to analyze the planning and construction of a common good by looking at the behavioral options of the relevant players. The approach unfortunately falls short of an in depth analysis. To do so, classified information above and beyond the official sources and protocols would have been necessary to allow for a reasoning that goes beyond official views in some instances. The next three chapters employing a system theory approach, a cultural studies and a critical theory position. In the case of system theory it is a novel approach that definitely should spark discussion, and overall these are worth reading pieces that add up to a deeper understanding of the Potsdam Square. Using gender studies as a standpoint to analyze the Potsdam Square may certainly have its entitlement, yet the chapter also offers an insight into the development of the underlying theory, compared to the other perspectives in the book. Hannelore Bublitz and Dierk Spreen describe the Potsdam Square as a "bachelors machine" as a looking glass that unveils the power structures in society. Michael Makropoulos take on the square is rooted in discourse analysis. In a well written integration of historical developments he generates a comprehensive understanding of the myth of masscultured urbanity. The final chapter is comprised of a detailed chronological depiction of the development of the Potsdam Square. For the better understanding of some chapters, I would recommend to first read this chapter and thus brush up one's historical knowledge.

In sum, the strength of the book lies in its novel approach, defining a prototypical place of modernity and analyzing it from multiple perspectives. This character is both demand for architecture and planning to integrate other perspectives and for social sciences to further this path of integrated analyses.

Fischer, J. & Makropoulos, M. (Eds.) (2004). *Potsdamer Platz. Soziologische Theorien zu einem Ort der Moderne*. Wilhelm Fink Verlag: München.

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