
The impact of Islamic culture on public urban space in Berlin, Germany

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ABSTRACT

Since decades immigrants have come to Germany and they have changed the appearance, culture and urban experience in cities and neighbourhoods in a significant way. There are certain neighbourhoods like Kreuzberg, Wedding and Neukölln in Berlin that have gained a new identity through the mix and interchange of people with different backgrounds - visible in the context of urban space. There are three main topics that will be analysed within this context: Small family businesses and their influence on their surrounding space; form and use of public space; and significant architecture types like mosques and their role for urban space.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic culture is present in everyday life in Germany, especially in its capital, Berlin. The everyday culture and how it shapes and changes urban space and public life in Berlin is the focal point of this paper. It is based on empiric data collection and critical observation in three distinct neighbourhoods, that have a big Islamic population: Kreuzberg, Neukölln and Wedding. This bottom-up method also presents a new and contemporary approach to the research of everyday culture and public space.

This paper investigates the three main streets of three distinct neighbourhoods in the light of its everyday life, it shows how the Islamic culture shapes the street life, the small businesses, a new type of architecture in Germany, the mosque and its presence on the street. An additional focus is the life in the public parks and public spaces in the warmer seasons.

2. ARCHITECTURAL APPEARANCE OF BERLIN AND ITS THREE “MIGRANT” NEIGHBOURHOODS

Berlin is the capital of Germany and at the same time one of the sixteen German states. Geographically it is embedded in the European glacier plains and influenced by a temperate seasonal climate. Generally speaking the city is recognised for its contemporary art, diverse architecture, scientific research and for a high quality of living due to a multicultural atmosphere and to moderate cost of living.

With a population of 3.4 million people, Berlin also is Germany's largest city located in the centre of the Berlin-Brandenburg metropolitan area, which is comprised of 5 million people. 13,9 % are from over 190 nations. The largest group of foreign nationals are from Turkey (111,285). Large numbers of Turks, but also Greeks and Italians originally came as “guest workers” in the 1960s. Today many citizens with foreign roots are second or third generation “migrants”, a large number of them have adopted the German nationality or have double citizenship.

Most ethnic groups in Berlin live in the three neighbourhoods called Kreuzberg, Neukölln and Wedding, located in the former western part of Berlin. All three neighbourhoods basically have the same urban history. They date back to the Industrial Revolution, which transformed Berlin during the 19th century. The city's economy and population expanded dramatically during that time, and it became the economic centre of Germany. Additional suburbs soon developed and increased the area and population of Berlin. In 1861, outlying suburbs were

incorporated into Berlin. In 1871, Berlin became the capital of the newly founded German Empire. Most of the three neighbourhoods investigated here were built during the industrial revolution. This period dates from the end of the German-French war in 1871 to the beginning of the second world war in 1914. During that time, numerous industrial plants and manufacturing businesses were founded in German cities. Berlin grew extensively during this time. Hundreds of thousands of factory workers came from all over the country and from neighbouring European countries to find work. They all had to find housing. New neighbourhoods relatively close to the centre were developed in a grid system during the second half of the 19th century based on an urban planning design from 1862 by James Hobrecht, the so-called Hobrecht Plan for Berlin.

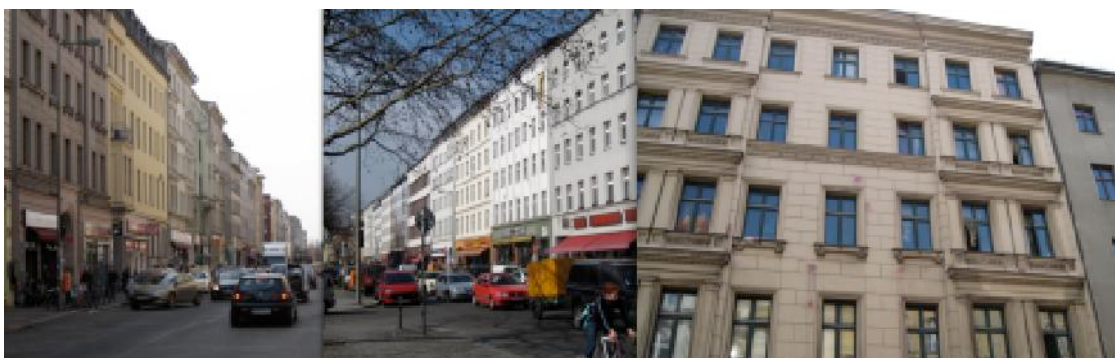


Fig. 1: Typical Street (Oranienstraße in Kreuzberg)

With regard to urban planning, the districts form a relatively uniform picture. They are predominantly characterized by five-story, multiple dwelling units in closed blocks, the majority of which date from the turn of the century (1889 to 1905). Due to the long property lots, the blocks are very large and have backyards. Today, they form a nearly homogeneous historic building area (Geist, 1980). Envisioned as working-class districts, building blocks were composed of tenement houses (“Mietskasernen“) with front houses containing larger apartments, and one or more rear buildings with small apartments or industrial lofts in the backyards. The streets were 22 m wide, the height of the buildings was 22m. These measurements were designed this way due to fire regulations. If a facade collapsed because of fire it would not destroy the building across the street. The old buildings still give an impression of the days when the boroughs were part of so-called Steinernes Berlin (Rocky Berlin) (Hegemann, 1930).

2.1 Kreuzberg

Kreuzberg has emerged from its history as one of the poorest quarters in Berlin, located south of the centre of Berlin. The borough is known for its very large percentage of immigrants and second-generation immigrants, many of whom are of Turkish ancestry. As of 2006, 31.6% of Kreuzberg's inhabitants did not have German citizenship. While Kreuzberg thrives on its diverse culture and is still an attractive area for migrants and students, the district is also characterized by high levels of unemployment and some of the lowest average incomes in Berlin.

Far into the 20th century, Kreuzberg was the most populous of Berlin's boroughs even in absolute numbers, with more than 400,000 people, although it was and still is geographically the smallest. As a result, with more than 60,000 people per square kilometre, Kreuzberg had the highest population density in Berlin. In addition to housing, Kreuzberg was also one centre of Berlin's industry. The so-called export quarter along Ritter Street consisted of many small

businesses, and the "press quarter" along Kochstraße was the home of most of Germany's large newspapers.

After World War II, Kreuzberg's housing rents were regulated by law which made investments unattractive. As a result, housing was of low quality, but cheap. Starting in the late 1960s, increasing numbers of students, artists, and immigrants began moving to Kreuzberg. In the eighties, the International Building Exhibition (IBA) was located in Kreuzberg, called "gentle urban renewal" ("Behutsame Stadterneuerung"). Many buildings were renovated and subsidized by the government, so that the rents remained affordable.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Kreuzberg suddenly found itself in the middle of the city again. The initially cheap rents and many 19th century houses made some parts of the neighbourhood more attractive as a residential area for a richer variety of people. This led to gentrification in parts of the neighbourhood. But immigrants and many students are still living there. Today, Kreuzberg has one of the youngest populations of all European city boroughs.

2.1.1. Kreuzberg, Oranienstraße

Oranienstraße is the main street of the neighbourhood Kreuzberg. Its one-kilometre-stretch from Moritzplatz to Wiener Straße forms a mixed neighbourhood centre with many family businesses, clubs, restaurants and bars. Festivals and also demonstrations take place here on a regular basis.

2.2. Neukölln

Neukölln is an inner-city neighbourhood at the southern border of Kreuzberg. The district is densely settled with a population of 150,756 inhabitants (2008). It is characterized by a high percentage of immigrants, especially of Turkish and Arab descent. In the past few years, northern Neukölln, frequently known as Kreuzkölln (Kreuzberg + Neukölln), has undergone a transformation and has seen a huge influx of students and artists as the area becomes increasingly popular. Gentrification has not really taken place here (yet), rents are still very affordable.

2.2.1. Neukölln, Sonnenallee

Sonnenallee is a long street starting at Hermannplatz, at the border of Kreuzberg and continuing into the eastern part of the city, the neighbourhood of Treptow. The most central part at a length of one kilometre from Hermannplatz to Elbestraße is a busy street with many Turkish and Arabian businesses like restaurants, bakeries, driving schools, shisha lounges. In recent years an originally African population found their new home here as well and opened a variety of shops.

2.3. Wedding

Wedding is located north-west of the inner city. In a way it is the northern counterpart to Kreuzberg and Neukölln. The constant migration of country-dwellers into the city at the end of the 19th century converted Wedding into a working-class district. The labourers lived in similar cramped tenement blocks as described above. Today, Wedding is one of the poorest areas of Berlin, with a high unemployment rate (almost 26%). Almost 17% of the population live on social welfare; 27% live below the poverty line. Foreigners make up almost 30% of the population. Wedding has so far not experienced the boom and gentrification of the 1990s that then happened in many parts in Berlin. Unlike many other 19th century working class districts like Kreuzberg and the northern part of Neukölln, the original character of Wedding and its

population has been preserved, but there are currently artists and students moving there. Rents still remain cheap.

2.3.1. Wedding, Badstraße

Badstraße is one main shopping street of the district of Wedding. It starts at the transportation hub “Gesundbrunnen” where there also is a big shopping mall. On the one kilometre to Koloniestraße this street has numerous textile and fashion shops, mostly run by people of Turkish origin.

3. Small family businesses

Ethnic economies - and especially the Turkish economy - already have become and are predicted to become even more important for the German national economy in the near future. These family businesses have developed a successful structure in a foreign country that is highly accepted and used not only by their compatriots but also by German people. This implies that the entrepreneurs, who live and work in a culturally mixed context, have the necessary skills and cultural competencies to handle this complexity (Gesemann, Höpp, Sweis, 2002). The multicultural atmosphere is often visible in bilingual shop signs (predominantly German and Turkish or German and Arabic).

3.1. Shops

Shops for bridal wear, evening dresses, shoes, gift articles or furniture are geared towards the immigrant population. The fashion, culture and taste are too different to have customers from both populations.

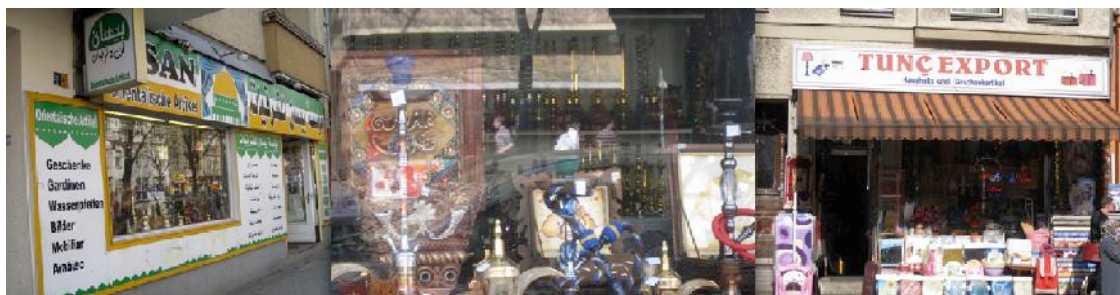


Fig. 2: Gift shops

Another important branch of the family businesses are the food shops, that sell fresh fruits, vegetables, bread, pastry, meat and other original food items. Like newsstands they are frequented by large numbers of all kinds of population (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2000).



Fig. 3: Food shops: bakery, pastry, fruit

3.2. Services

The services cater to the immigrant population as well. They are mainly comprised of telephone and internet shops, copy shops, photo studios, barbers, taxi and driving schools, religious schools and travel agencies (Lemmen, Miehl, 2001).



Fig. 4: Barbers



Fig. 5: Wedding shop and services: bridal wear, wedding car, photo studio



Fig. 6: Internet café, travel agency, copy shop

3.3. Food

Berlin is a Doner/Falafel/Shawarma capital. It is not known who opened the first Doner Kebab snack bar in Germany. Legend says that it took place at the beginning of the 1970s in Berlin-Kreuzberg. First in Berlin, then all over Germany, Doner became a popular lunch or evening snack or meal (Steinbach, 2000). There are more than 15.000 Doner/Sharwarma snack bars in Germany. 200 to 300 tons are being produced daily.

The yearly turnover is around 1,5 Billion Euro. The Doner Kebab served in Germany is different from the one in the Arabic countries. It adds salad, tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage and sauces. These snack bars are popular by Germans and immigrants. They are mostly integrated in the ground floor of the buildings. The German building code allows this mixed use in apartment buildings. There are some detached kiosk style snack bars as well, predominantly at street corners to attract more customers.



Fig. 7: Snack bars: at street corner or in the ground floor of apartment building



Fig. 8: Snack bar advertisement in two languages

3.4. Culture

There are many oriental culture associations (Schimmel, 2002). Dance, wellness and music are among the creative industries that sprung up during the last twenty years (Angeles, Bonifacio, 2009). Kreuzberg-based Turkish/German rapper Killa Hakan mentions Kreuzberg in most of his songs, most notably in his 2007 single "Kreuzberg City". There is a very vibrant rap, hip hop and saz scene in Berlin (Bendixsen, 2009).



Fig. 9: Music and DVD shops

A Turkish film festival has been established in Berlin and took place five years in a row. Turkish-German filmmaker Neco Celik who portrays the American influence over the youth culture in Kreuzberg in his first film "Alltag" (Daily Life) notes, "Kreuzberg is a kind of biotope where different nationalities live, but the environment determines their lives, not their nationalities."

4. Form and use of public space

While urban space is the most commonly experienced feature of the city, it possesses different meanings and serves various purposes for the individuals engaging with it. The urban landscape is thus a space changing all the time according to the habits of its inhabitants. As a dynamic space, it carries the narratives and symbolic meanings of the past, present, and future. The economic, social, and cultural uses of space showcase the everyday culture.

4.1. Streets

Shop owners display their goods in front of their shops. This changes the appearance of the sidewalk in a very animated and colourful way during the day and in warm summer nights (Welzbacher, 2008). You can observe a similar effect in front of the snack bars and restaurants. Chairs and tables are put out in front, guests are invited to stay, and this animates the street life. The sidewalks in Berlin are wide enough to accommodate this additional use.



Fig. 10: Use of sidewalk

Many immigrants are also active business people on several markets, that take place once or twice a week in the neighbourhoods. In Neukölln at the border to Kreuzberg a so-called "Türkenmarkt" (Turkish market) has been established and successfully organized for decades. It is very popular by all kinds of shoppers and visitors, even by tourists because it is written up in several guide books. Streets and plazas are in some areas also being used for informal trade.



Fig. 11: Market on Hermannplatz (border between Kreuzberg and Neukölln)

4.2. Parks

In the summer the central park of Berlin, the "Tiergarten" is known for being used for barbecues. Large Turkish and Arabian families gather here on weekends, they bring food like salad and meat to be barbecued, tea, chairs, tables, blankets and children's games and spend the day. The Berlin city council changed the regulation, since several years it is only allowed to put up a barbecue in certain areas of the park to prevent bush fires but also because some people complained about the fume all over the park.



Fig. 12: Use of park



Fig. 13: Activities in park

Also the small neighbourhood parks (Görlitzer Park in Kreuzberg, Hasenheide in Neukölln and Humboldthain in Wedding) are being used for family picnics the minute the weather permits it.

5. Significant architecture types like mosques and their role for urban space

Mosques as centres of the religious, cultural and social life have first been accommodated in backyards or cellars of the quarters with a high number of Muslim inhabitants (Knöfel, 2008). There are currently about 2,600 Islamic centres of worship in Germany along with 200 structures that can be classified as mosques (Kraft, 2002). According to current plans, this last figure is now expected to double (Beinhauer-Köhler, Leggewie, 2009; Dechau, 2008).

In recent years several mosques have been constructed in Berlin (Jonker, Kapphahn 1999). This also represents the evolution of Islamic heritage from the private to the public sphere. It has become part of the cityscape (Zemke, 2008). German building code allows the building of

mosques and minarets, the buildings have to comply with the German regulations (e.g. height of buildings, fire regulations). Some resistance by the German population could be observed, conservative citizens did not want the presence on the street, and they were afraid that the mosques would attract too much street traffic.



Fig. 14: Religious centres in backyards in Kreuzberg

Whereas some mosques are typically neighbourhood mosques where members live close by, other mosques attract Muslims from all over Berlin. Many mosques are combined with cultural centres. Mosques and businesses serve the particular needs of the Muslim community. They are examples of spaces in which minority groups feel accepted while not necessarily segregating themselves from the rest of the city. In this sense members can move between minority (city) and majority (mosque) communities.



Fig. 15: Umar Ibn Al-Khattab Mosque in Kreuzberg

There are eighty mosques in Berlin, 56 of them Turkish. In Kreuzberg the big Umar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque has been completed in 2008, it can house 700 people (Minarette über

Kreuzberg, 2010). Located at a street corner, it forms part of the typical Berlin block of 22 m height, a necessity to get a building permit in this urban location. The mosque has four minarets. The Sehitlik mosque was constructed in 1983 in Neukölln, it was expanded in 2005 (Moscheearchitektur, 2010). It is located on a former Turkish cemetery, next to a Christian cemetery, it is a singular building, not part of an urban block structure. It has its own bus stop and traffic light regulated pedestrian crossing in front.



Fig. 16: Sehitlik Mosque in Neukölln

The visualisation of a religious minority through mosques is a cultural diversification of urban space.

6. Conclusion: Presence of Islamic heritage in the everyday life of Berlin

The built environment provides perhaps the most immediate visual impression of a city. However, not only the physical structures, monuments, residential areas and public spaces shape a city, but also the everyday life of the city residents. They imprint their own mark on urban spaces through everyday interaction.

Migration is changing the cityscape. Migrants bring with them own cultures, experiences, religions and histories through which they shape the environment in which they settle. New urban patterns are emerging, and they are also influenced or created by the Islamic way of life.



Fig. 17: Imprint on urban fabric

In Berlin, these urban patterns and experiences are mostly visible in the three migrant neighbourhoods of Kreuzberg, Neukölln and Wedding. The inhabitants and their heritage shape the streets and sidewalks concerning form, use and appearance, and they also influence the sensual experiences of a space in terms of view, smell, and sound. For the most part, the spaces are influenced and/or changed through culture, business and religion or the mixture of those. There is a rich culture of small family businesses and services in the migrant societies. First of all the snack bars (Doner, Shawarma, nuts, pastry) form a successful business model. Small or medium sized food shops are second in number, selling fresh fruits, vegetables, bread, pastry, meat and other original food items. Also newsstands are among the businesses often run by migrant families. All of them are frequented by migrants and Germans alike. Other shops like bridal wear, evening dresses, shoes, gift articles, furniture, or services like barbers, travel agencies, driving and taxi schools, copy shops, photo studios, internet services are rather geared towards the migrant population. Many migrants are also active business people on several markets. The public space also serves as a place for small and informal trade. In the warmer season, migrant families use the parks of Berlin for barbecues and picnics on weekends.

Parts of the migrant population are also emerging into the creative industries. Businesses in the areas of music, dance or wellness are growing. Musicians (mostly men) tend to combine their Islamic heritage with their everyday experience of living in Berlin in their music. Dance and wellness businesses are mostly run by women, catering to women of all backgrounds.

The architectural type of the mosque currently develops a significant role for urban space. Centres of the religious, cultural and social life were first accommodated almost invisibly in

backyards or cellars, but in recent years a number of mosques were built along the streets or are currently in planning. Prominently located on major streets or on public plazas, they gain more visibility, and they shape the city scape. Having a significant impact on the neighbourhoods, they often serve as a point of identification. Many of them welcome different or mixed religious groups and make efforts to relate to all neighbours, e.g. through certain events or open days.

Migrants have changed the face and the cultural characteristics of places in the living environment in Berlin. Islamic culture is present in everyday life every day. It is important to respect and appreciate these trends. Everyone has to make an effort on tolerance, making Berlin and other cities a more multicultural and diverse place to live.

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