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## THE COLLECTIVE DREAM BOUNDARIES AND THE CITY

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Paul Rabinow interviews Michelf Foucault about his interview for the Herodotus<sup>1</sup>. In reply to Rabinow's question about the political nature of architecture at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Foucault says that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century we start seeing political literature about techniques for governance in society where architecture and urbanism play an important role. Reflecting deeper on the social order, asking what is a city, the need to eradicate epidemics, prevent coups and promote family life (according to accepted morality of the 18<sup>th</sup> century), representing the collective, infrastructure and how to build houses.

Architecture has always been a tool in the hand of governors, priests and those who wish to demonstrate or communicate power. In the current search for an architecture that represents the period and the free democratic regimes, it is important to examine not only the style, but the whole procedure and the relevance of local politics that as for today outlines the boundaries and planning conditions.

### The Berlin Palace

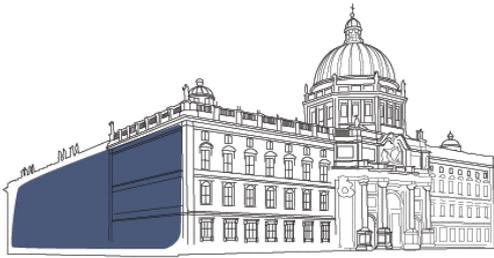
The Stadtschloss also known as the Berlin Palace is the perfect example to start this paper with. It has it all. Layers of historical conflicts and power demonstration through architecture. It tells the story of the city but also demonstrate a national identity conflict of the whole German nation. It holds the evolution of private-civic initiative intervention, in one strategic location that shapes the heart of the city, metaphorically and literally.

Since its completion in 1443 until 1918 the Berlin Palace, was the home of the monarchy and the Prussian center of power. During the Weimar Republic (1918-1933) the palace was used partly for state purposes but also as public museum. In 1945 under the Nazi regime and during the second world war, the building suffered severe damage however, its structure and content was left sound and could be restored. In fact, the building was partly repaired and was used as an exhibition space. Although recent documents from 2016 reveal the intentions of the GDR to reconstruct the palace, it was decided to demolish it. Demolishing the palace took much effort and 19 ton of dynamite. Alongside the decision to preserve the original balcony<sup>2</sup> of the palace and to attach it to the Council of State building and the new

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<sup>1</sup> *Des Espaces Autres, Michel Foucault/* Translation series in Resling Publication, translation by Ariela Azoulay, Resling, Itamar Ben-Zvi 1, Tel- Aviv.

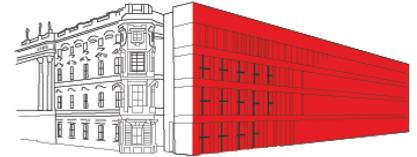
<sup>2</sup> The balcony from which Karl Liebknecht declared the German Socialist Republic



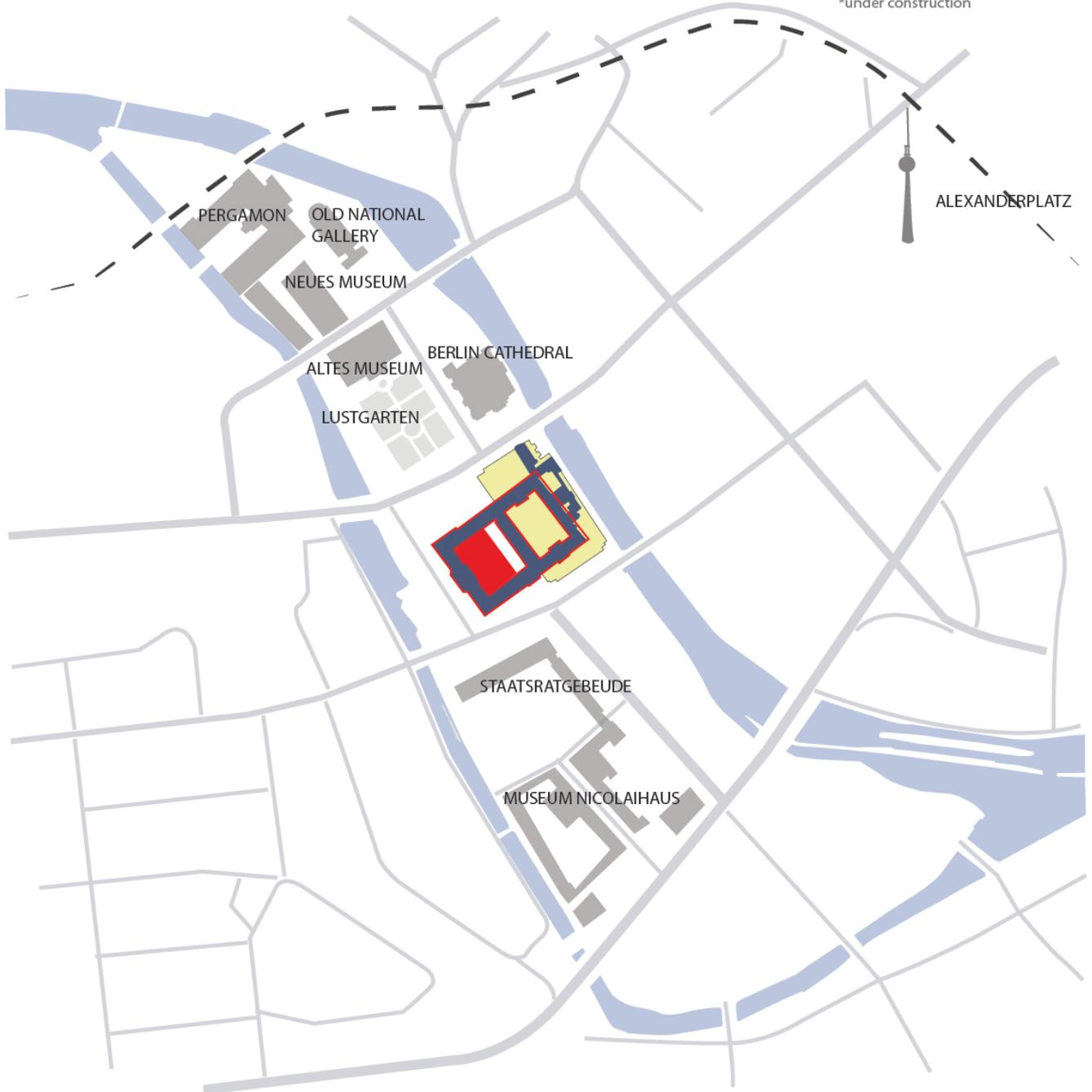
BERLIN PALACE 1443- 1918



PALAST DER REPUBLIK 1951- 1994



HUMBOLDT FORUM 2020\*  
\*under construction



MUSEUM ISLAND  
BERLIN

purpose of the empty plot turned into parade area named Marx- Engels- Square<sup>3</sup>, it is inevitable conclusion that the demolition of the palace remains was a political decision that seeks to demonstrate governmental power.

In 1973, it was the GDR turn to build their own architectural power demonstration on the same plot- Palast der Republik which was mainly used for cultural purposes for the public. In 1990, the building was closed to public due to asbestos contamination and though the government made the effort of removing the asbestos, after the reunification they also decided to demolish the Palast der Republik altogether and have a parking lot instead.

Considering its location and role in the urban scenario as well as demolition duration and high costs (after going through decontamination effort), the act of demolishing the Palas der Republik and turning it into a parking lot doesn't seem like an urban design decision based on the spatial examination but another power of demonstration sponsored by the government. Nothing demonstrate the superior of the west and contempt to the communism values more than demolishing its eastern symbol occupying a central plot in the heart of the city. As if that's not enough, the decision to convert the plot into a parking area adds a ton of condescension and contempt. Here the intention can be interpreted in two ways- one is to convey a message saying the building is not good enough and even a messy parking lot would be preferable so now, people can park their car here until we have a better idea of what to do with the plot. The other way to perceive the decision of creating a parking lot, is that it was made in order to empower the west superior. Using the prime location and clear it for the symbol of progress (back then) - the cars.

When restoring a building one must decide on its most important era or rather the building's role at that time but the decision on what to restore and perpetuate, also perpetuating what you want to delete while shaping a narrative image for the future.

*"The story of the Stadtschloss encapsulates much of what has played out in Berlin over the past three decades — from charged debates about architectural aesthetics and practical questions about urban planning, to how a country deals with a troubled past and how it seeks to present itself to the world in the future."*<sup>4</sup>

At this point, though it seems as history simply repeats. Not like past decisions and acts, new actor was introduced and influenced the future architectural- urban declaration- the private initiative arising from the public.

When first completed in the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, the palace was constructed to serve the royals, to serve their needs and to be built according to their vision. In the GDR, there was a shift and the building was constructed by the government, for the government but also for the public and now days the process of the decision making was done with the public and for the public.

The latest evolution that will end soon in the form of the Humboldt Forum, started with agricultural machinery salesman from north Germany by the name Wilhelm von Boddien.

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<sup>3</sup> Summery from wikipedia.org

<sup>4</sup> *Berlin's Stadtschloss and the trouble with history/* F.Studemann Financial Times September 13 2019

Von Boddien actively promoted the idea of reconstructing the Berlin Palace in its Prussian Baroque style. Von Boddien raised money and political connections for the benefit of the project and managed to transform the initiative into a national effort resulting with reconstructing a building on the same plot. The new constructed building, named Humboldt Forum, will be opened to the public in December 2020 and will consist of classical and modern elements and will contain cultural functions that will try to represent the new German vision, as well as the historical complexity. The new building, designed by the architect Franco Stella is a politically correct, democratic building declaring that it just wants to keep everyone happy and bring an era of conflicts to its end.

### **Evolution of decisions making**

Saying that architecture is a reflection of its time might not always be accurate. Simply because public buildings and urban plans take more time to execute rather than legislate a law or replace a government. Demolishing on the other end, might go faster. Both methods are used as political statement for the short term. However, in the long term they influence and shape the urban scenario and could change or preserve cultural/ social climate.

The question that rises is who should have a voice and whom should lead the process? Is it the state, using legislation following 'one size fit for all'? Is it the public represented by local citizens whom not always have the wide context and professional tools? What is the role of the planner? Is it really keeping all parties involved satisfied?

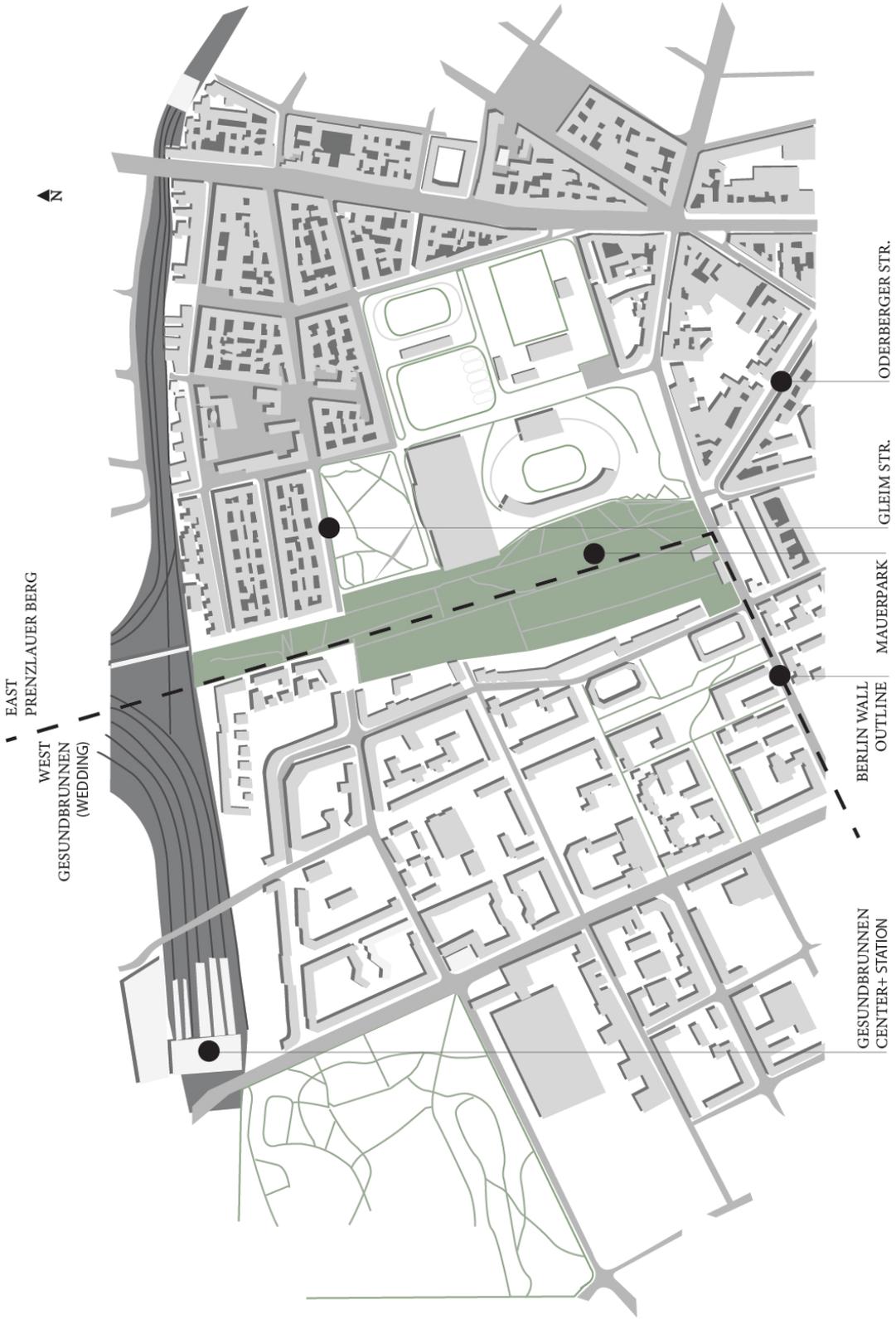
There are two case studies to relate to in this context, the first is the seam line between two neighborhoods in Berlin, Wedding (Gesundbrunnen) and Prenzlauer Berg, the seam itself is known as the Mower Park. This case study shows the long-term implication of the Berlin wall and the role of the public in the decision-making process. The second case study is Curitiba, Brazil and the role of Jaime Lerner, an architect and urban planner as the mayor. The second case study highlights the impact of professional urban planner as the urban process leader.

### **Urban Barrier, the long-term effect**

The Berlin wall was constructed in 1961 and was taken down in 1989. The 155-km length wall was built by the GDR in order to prevent migration of their citizens to the western part of Berlin and from there to the western part of Germany.

There is nothing more political than a wall defining a border between two different political Entities. However, whereas the wall was an immediate reaction to temporary political state, the wall and its implication as an urban barrier are still evident today, years after the wall was taken down.

Today, the image we have of The Berlin wall is of huge concrete blocks (3.6-meter-high, 1.20-meter length) which are in fact only one layer in the Death Strip that was tens of



EAST  
PRENZLAUER BERG  
WEST  
GESUNDBRUNNEN  
(WEDDING)

GESUNDBRUNNEN  
CENTER+ STATION  
BERLIN WALL  
OUTLINE  
MAUERPARK  
GLEIM STR.  
ODERBERGER STR.

## . and the city

meters length of buffer zone and known as the 4<sup>th</sup> generation in the evolution of the Berliner wall.

In some areas, the width of this Buffer Zone (the Death Strip) got to hundreds of meters. So, once the wall was taken down, beside the economic, social and cultural gaps between the west and east parts, there was a massive urban incision dividing the city and at the same time presenting potential. The urban challenge was to heal the incision and characterize the scar of the urban tissue.

During the second world war, about 80% of Berlin was destroyed, about one third of Berlin housing was non-habitable<sup>5</sup>. With the division of the city to East and West (4 quarters: American, British, French - later united under West and Soviet), each political entity had its own method to reconstruct their side of the city.

The west (until the early 80's), in order to not perpetuate an acceptance of the city division acted with no urban master plan and their method was demolition and evacuation of the ruins to clear the way for new social, modern buildings with emphasize of green open spaces. Whereas in the east, they reconstructed the ruins with minimum investment and so kept the traditional typology of the dense housing alongside wide boulevards for the party's parades. So once the wall fell down, there were not only two very different cultures but also different urban layout and housing typologies on both sides of the incision.

Once the wall was gone, the discussions regarding the nature of the urban scar tissue's construction started. The discussion focused on the seam between East and West and dealt mainly with the debate over regulation and architectural artistic expression and less about how to bring the two culturally, socially divided sides of the broken city together.

Today, more than 20 years after the wall was taken down and with no clear master plan it is still present. The scar tissue perpetuated the incision. The situation might have change but the wall's path is still a strong urban barrier. An interesting location is the area around the Mauer Park.

In Between the two neighborhoods, Gesundbrunnen (Wedding) in the west side and Prenzlauer Berg in the east side, on the route of the former wall (Mauer in German) there is a wide park. The story of the park start after the deterioration of the wall and demonstrates a local civic initiative translated into an urban planning as well as the importance of street level perspective that reveals what a wide master plan might miss.

At first, city planners suggested to use the empty path as a highway ramp to connect the center of berlin with the Berliner Ring, a main road surrounding the city<sup>6</sup>.

Residence from the Gleim neighborhood and Odenberger street, both in Prenzlauer Berg on the east side (where the houses are built in a denser manner and have less open spaces) objected to the plan and pushed to convert the road into an urban park. Today, the Muerpark is a green, creative island, a microcosm connecting the north part of Prenzlauer Berg with the city center via pedestrian path, playgrounds and greenery thanks to the residents of the neighborhood initiative Freunde des Mauerpark (Friends of Mauer park)

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<sup>5</sup> Berlin's Search for a "Democratic" Architecture: Post-World War II and Post-unification /Deborah Howell-Ardila, Berkeley, California.

<sup>6</sup> From the Freude des Mauerparks e.V. [www.mauerpark.info](http://www.mauerpark.info)

organization that *“puts a special focus on the transparent involvement of citizens and a fair balance of interests.”*<sup>7</sup>

The Mauer park, though performing as an interesting seam hosting diverse population representation for wide range of leisure activities, due to its size and the fact that it breaks an urban sequence also perpetuate a cultural, socio- economic gap.

On the one hand, Prenzlauer Berg. Characterized by Wilhelmine<sup>8</sup> buildings that survived the second world war and offers mix use street with yuppie lifestyle. A neighborhood that went through intense gentrification attracting young, creative people looking for cheap and/or alternative lifestyle and housing at first alongside the process of foreign investors purchased the previously state owned property, renovating them and increasing their value pushing the previous GDR tenants out. At a later stage arrived affluent people from south Germany following by immigrants from west European countries maintaining a young age population with high birth rate.

On the other hand, from the west side, Gesundbrunnen (Wedding). Before the wall was built in 1961, the area between the Humboldt Park and the nowadays Gesundbrunnen- Center, was a popular leisure street attracting many people from the east side due to its proximity to the east and fresh merchandise<sup>9</sup>. Once the wall was constructed and Gesundbrunnen area was abounded from people the whole neighborhood started to decline. Parallel, the German government signed an agreement with Turkey resulted with work migration of 825,383 people arriving mainly from the countryside of Turkey, looking for cheap housing and so they found their new home in Gesundbrunnen. In the mid 50's and early 70's there were interventions of social governmental initiatives by development of new housing typologies and urban renewal however, today, Wedding is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Berlin with about 17% of the population being welfare supported about 26% unemployment rates, 27% live below poverty line.

The Mauer park is a successful island in the city. However, it does not bridge the gap between the west and east as the park answered a need rose on the east side while the west needed an urban continuum encouraging passage between the neighborhoods and not urban boundaries. A border, even if it functions as a positive spatial element is still a barrier. So, while the civic initiative has worked well, the broad and non-politically motivated planning leadership is absent and is needed to repair a long-term influence of a political decision taken 60 years ago.

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<sup>7</sup> From the Freude des Mauerparks e.V. [www.mauerpark.info](http://www.mauerpark.info)

<sup>8</sup> “The Wilhelmine Ring is the name for a belt of distinctive multi-occupancy rental housing blocks constructed in the second half of the 19th century around the historic city centre of Berlin. It is characterized by a dense settlement pattern with four- to five-story residential buildings with side and rear wings around an inner courtyard.” ([wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org))

<sup>9</sup> [Wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org)

## The collective Dream

Time and political stability is needed in order to execute significant public projects. In order to execute innovative project that requires new way of thinking and acting, the public must be harnessed to the task as significant change requires collective effort.

*“Politics is about providing a collective dream,” Lerner says, “and creating a scenario that everyone can understand and see is desirable. Then they will help you make it happen.”<sup>10</sup>*

The architect and urban planner Jaime Lerner was acting mayor of Curitiba, Brazil 3 times and he was the one to lead the changes that transformed Curitiba into a role model green city in the world.

The challenges Lerner described<sup>11</sup> are political and bureaucratic obstacles alongside traditional, conceptual fixation of the public. Lerner planned, without social-political distinction between neighborhoods nor people, a multilayer transverse change simultaneously with the understanding that things are interdependent. It was a new vision for a new city lifestyle needed in order to prepare and push the city towards a healthy and sustain growth in the future.

It seems as the discussion was already there but Lerner was the one to translate the long dissections into actions overcoming the load of mental barriers originated in outdated tradition and fixated habits.

*Lerner’s first project in 1972 earned him an early reputation as an enforcer. He proposed transforming the Rua Quinze de Novembro from an automobile thoroughfare into a pedestrian mall. “At first, the shopkeepers were furious with the mayor,” Rabinovitch says. “People had the habit of stopping their cars in front of the stores, buying what they wanted, and then getting back into their cars. But that meant that when the shops closed down, the city centre was dead.... “Every time, you always have a big resistance,” Lerner says. “When we first proposed the project, we tried to convince the merchants. We showed them designs, information ... it was a big discussion. Then we realised we had to have a demonstration effect.” So, Lerner took the plan to his director of public works, saying: “I need this [built] in 48 hours ... He looked at me and asked, ‘Are you crazy? It will take at least four months’ ... “If I’d received a juridical demand to stop the project, we would never have made it,” Lerner recalls. “So, we finished in 72 hours... at the end, one of the merchants who wrote the petition to stop the work told me: ‘Keep this petition as a souvenir, because now we want the whole street, the whole sector pedestrianised!’”<sup>12</sup>*

Lerner’s philosophy of taking action immediately and adjust later had proved itself as it considers the fact that changes must follow as the future is not really predictable and so, the

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<sup>10</sup> *Story of cities #37: how radical ideas turned Curitiba into Brazil’s ‘green capital’/ David Adler, Cities, The Guardian Friday 6 May 2016*

<sup>11</sup> *Story of cities #37: how radical ideas turned Curitiba into Brazil’s ‘green capital’/ David Adler, Cities, The Guardian Friday 6 May 2016*

<sup>12</sup> *Story of cities #37: how radical ideas turned Curitiba into Brazil’s ‘green capital’/ David Adler, Cities, The Guardian Friday 6 May 2016*

plan to act now left room for adjustments but once you get to the adjustments you already have the collaboration of the public.

In the discussion of democratic architecture and urban planning, Lerner had another approach than the one implemented on the Berliner Palace plot (the Forum). He didn't try to make everyone happy at all times, but he managed based on his wide perspective and strong drive to action, to take the collective vision and navigate it through the political obstacles into realisation in short time.

### **Democratic urban planning**

Lerner's architectural and urban planning office is taking action in the political front and is guiding candidates before elected to office with how to make sure that previous urban related decisions and action will have continuation once they are elected<sup>13</sup>. This action while having clear political agenda is an innovative step for acknowledging the value of well though sustain urban planning and its long-term benefits for both, culture and nature.

Architecture is the art of creation, politics is the art debate. The two were strongly binded since the dawn of monarchy in human history with unequal subordination relations where the politics dominates the planning. The search for democratic planning is ongoing. Democratic architecture or urban planning is not necessarily a search for a new aesthetics or style but the method of creation and decision making process. Perhaps the utopic concept, radical as it is, is to separate the urban planning from government by establishing a separate and independent democratic establishment and free the public from political subtexts allowing the urban planning, lead by professionals and including the public, take significant steps and improve the cities to better accommodate the people and be kinder to the planet that host us.

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<sup>13</sup> From a conversation with colleague working in Lerner's office August 17<sup>th</sup> 2020