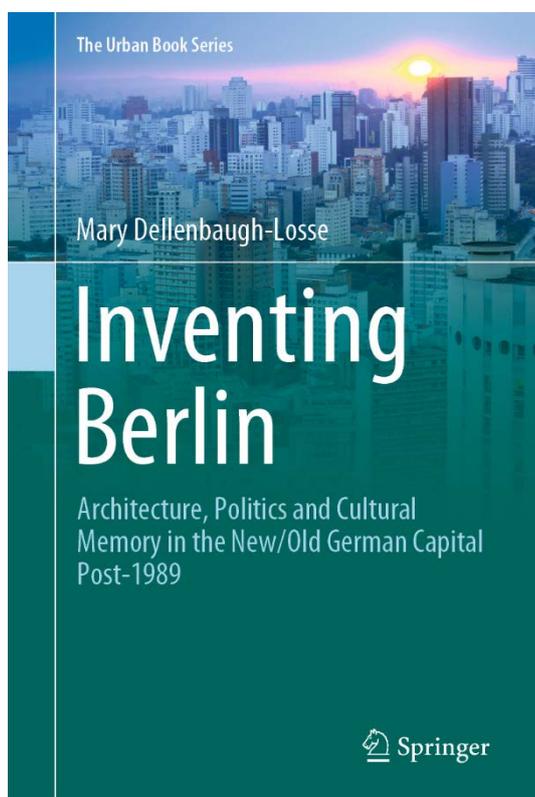# INVENTING BERLIN. CULTURAL LANDSCAPES AND NATION-BUILDING

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This book is a sophisticated product in the field of Cultural Geography, showing how the city-text of East Berlin has been written, especially after 1989, discussing the role of architecture, urban planning and memory to create the legitimate history within a post-socialist urban area, illustrating its path-dependency concerning urban symbols, history and cultural landscape. It answers questions about official narratives on German identity post-1989.

The book is made of seven chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. It is complemented by an Appendix, on street (re)naming through toponymy – "remediating the toponymic landscape" (Dellenbaugh-Losse, 2020, p. 95) – for the period 1947-1995, highly useful for the purpose of the book, showing how cultural memory is (re)produced through naming. The book ends with an Index, including main concepts discussed, as well as names of persons and places.

The *Introduction* (Chapter 1) foregrounds the research questions of this contribution, in close relation to identity politics. Mary Dellenbaugh-Losse underlines the key concepts – the cultural landscape and the city-text – in the context of the New Cultural Geography and the usefulness of her methodological choice – discourse and semiotic analyses – to deconstruct the signifiers of East Berlin's landscape. In this introductory chapter, the author also briefly presents the following chapters of her book.

Oana-Ramona ILOVAN
Inventing Berlin. Cultural Landscapes and Nation-Building

2

In Chapter 2, space and spatial symbols are defined as "politicised goods", taking part at the construction of national narratives and, therefore, at the nation-building process. Dellenbaugh-Losse sets "the stage for a wider discussion of post-socialist cultural landscapes" (2020, p. 7), by examining how space was politicised in Eastern Europe during and after the Cold War. She demonstrates in detail the use of semiotics in order to interpret urban cultural landscapes and the embedded power relations. Then, the author brings on stage the landscape features she focuses on to show how Berlin was invented during the last three decades: urban planning, architectural styles, monuments and street names. Starting with this second chapter, the reader is introduced into a fascinating analysis and discussion of official discursive practices (re)creating past and present stories about Berliners and their cultural landscape. As such, the concept of representation is central to the entire book.

Chapter 3 presents and discusses how ideology shaped spatial symbolism of Berlin's urban landscape during the Cold War. This incursion into the connection between propaganda, on both sides of the Wall, and architectural discourse, is necessary to show the path-dependency after 1990 in what the political instrumentalisation of architecture and its products (e.g. Stalinallee, Alexanderplatz, Palace of the Republic, etc.) is concerned.

Chapter 4, *Identity, Politics, and the Creation of Consensus*, introduces the people who were the main decision-makers concerning the spatial restructuring of Berlin after the German reunification. Dellenbaugh-Losse points out the simulated democratic participation within a context where, in fact, consensus was engendered by delegitimising alternative opposing discourses about city development and urban planning. Tropes of identity based on memory and the European city narrative were effectively used to legitimise changes in the built space of Berlin. The author skillfully deconstructs the discourses and strategies of power to show how officially supported narratives were normalised:

> "a small number of key actors who were socialized on the western side of the Berlin Wall dominated the discourse through an effective, self-reinforcing selection of instruments and tropes which were a functional extension of western Cold War discourses and tactics. These actors used technocratic instruments to create the semblance of objectivity and neutrality and to legitimize pre-determined endpoints" (Dellenbaugh-Losse, 2020, p. 84).

Discussions of "legitimate memory and identity" are continued in Chapter 5, *The Cultural Landscape of the Berliner Republic: Undoing the Socialist Past*, through a series of case studies: "street renaming, Alexanderplatz, Planwerk Innenstadt, critical reconstruction, and the Palace of the Republic/Prussian city Palace debate" (Dellenbaugh-Losse, 2020, p. 87). The author discusses identity politics during a lengthy process of establishing the new urban symbols, where architecture and planning confirm or delegitimise previous urban planning measures (i.e. industrial-era and socialist-era ones).

Chapter 6 is the last one before *Conclusion* and is titled *Putting It All Together: Spatial Symbolism, Cultural Memory, Nation Building, and Berlin's Urban Development After 1989*. The author discusses identity politics within the national identity narrative, aiming to answer whether Berlin is a post-socialist city or not, considering belonging and identity for East Germans and East Berliners. Besides the spatial analysis, a temporal analysis relative to political events and the monument protection status is realised, for the five case studies examined in the previous chapter. These are complemented by the results of the syntagmatic and strategic analyses of the present urban landscape.

Chapter 7 draws the conclusion of the book: *Current Outlook, Recent Developments, and Wider Relevance*. The author shows the shift in priorities in urban planning and cultural representation:

Oana-Ramona ILOVAN
Inventing Berlin. Cultural Landscapes and Nation-Building

3

from a focus on signifiers to solutions – that is to an "unideological approach to the built space of the GDR" (Dellenbaugh-Losse, 2020, p. 174). However, Dellenbaugh-Losse underlines the continued significance of cultural memory and its representations:

> "Now, in the age of symbols and soft qualities, where image dominates and representation often carries more weight than materiality, the relative and absolute positioning of symbols is paramount" (Dellenbaugh-Losse, 2020, p. 180).

In addition, the author points out that lessons from Berlin resonate beyond this city, as her book shows that "space has become a critical theatre of identity politics" (Dellenbaugh-Losse, 2020, p. 180) and that semiotics, like the entire book, can make visible the invisible symbolic infrastructure of the city, thus placing it in the foreground of both political and civil society discussions.

The book includes many images from archives or realised by the author, illustrating richly the chosen case studies, with a total of 58 figures, both colour and black and white (drawings, photographs, maps).

This book, on the symbolic landscape of Berlin, discusses the relationship of nation-building and cultural memory by analysing the changes in the urban built space since before the Cold War to present. It shows the context of "spatial and historiographical revision" (Dellenbaugh-Losse, 2020, p. 105), impacting the urban cultural landscape of Berlin, seen as a palimpsest. It brings to fore case studies on the construction of cultural landscapes and territorial identities, developing compelling arguments, and appealing both to academic and non-academic audiences; a fascinating demonstration, from theoretical and methodological perspectives.