

Anna Bijak (annabijak@yahoo.com)

Kinga Racoń-Leja (krleja@pk.edu.pl)

Institute of Urban Design, Faculty of Architecture, Cracow University of Technology

## POLITICAL ASPECTS OF TEMPELHOF FIELD

### POLITYCZNE ASPEKTY PARKU TEMPELHOF

#### Abstract

Tempelhof Field, one of the most interesting parks in the ever-changing city of Berlin, is not only an attractive, green, open space, but also an example of complex history entangled with the present political conflicts. Formerly, a symbol of Nazi megalomania, a forgotten site of terror, a witness of the heroic Berlin Airlift, an unprecedented example of a modern civil protest against rapid development and recently serving as the biggest refugee camp in Germany – Tempelhof continuously stirs controversy. In an attempt to understand the intricate situation and provide new solutions, the article presents the forgotten history of Tempelhof as well as analyses its significance for the city of Berlin.

**Keywords:** Tempelhof, Berlin, architecture and politics, urban history, city and film

#### Streszczenie

Jeden z najbardziej interesujących parków w Berlinie – Tempelhof jest nie tylko atrakcyjną zieloną przestrzenią, ale również przykładem złożonej historii odzwierciedlającej aktualne konflikty polityczne. Kiedyś symbol nazistowskiej megalomanii, zapomniane miejsce tragedii wielu ludzi, świadek bohaterskich działań alianckich pilotów podczas Blokad Berlina, niezwykle przykład współczesnego protestu obywatelskiego przeciwko nowej zabudowie deweloperskiej, a całkiem niedawno – największy obóz dla uchodźców w Niemczech. Tempelhof ciągle wzbudza kontrowersje. Aby zrozumieć skomplikowaną sytuację polityczną i znaleźć nowe rozwiązania dla tak trudnego miejsca, artykuł prezentuje zapomnianą historię Tempelhof oraz rolę, jaką odgrywa w Berlinie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Tempelhof, Berlin, architektura i polityka, historia urbanistyki, miasto i film

## 1. Intricate history

Berlin is a significant city in Europe, home to almost 3.5 million people [10]. It is not the size, however, but the rich history, which makes Berlin a one-of-a-kind place in the world. No other city was divided for almost half a century with a wall. No other city was so profoundly the focus of the Nazi regime and the Second World War. Berlin was basically a representative of politics and cultural changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. “Paris is always Paris and Berlin is never Berlin”, said Jack Lang, former French Culture Minister [31]. Paris is grounded in its history, but Berlin is constantly changing. Berlin is a city, which opens up an art gallery made out of graffiti next to a bustling street. Berlin is a city where a 2.5 by 2 km piece of land is fiercely protected and cannot be developed. This place is Tempelhof Field, a park in the centre of Berlin, a place with rich and difficult history.



Fig. 1. View of Tempelhof along the Germania axis, around 1948  
(source: National Museum of the U.S. Air Force)

Tempelhof was first mentioned in a document from 1247 as it was established as a unit of the Knights Templar. Nowadays, it refers both to the previous airport and to the borough in Berlin. As the Order of Temple was abolished, the site was sold to the city of Berlin in 1435. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tempelhof was a village and a place for family excursions for Berliners. It also served as a military site for Prussian forces, dating from 1720 to 1914.

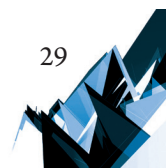
The first Tempelhof Airport was established on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1923. Its origins are associated with the Deutsche Luft Hansa company establishment in 1926. The first terminal at that place was constructed in 1927 and became one of the most important in Europe. At the beginning, while aviation was still in its infancy, the terminal was no more than a shed. Later on, it became a complex of a couple of buildings, which presently would be located in the northern-central part of the airfield. However, in 1934, due to Albert Speer's plan of Germania, the terminal was replaced with a new building, resembling in its form “an eagle”. Since, in Hitler's plans, Berlin

was meant to be “Weltstadt” – a “world capital”, then the shape of terminal had to evoke the intention of Berlin airport to become a gateway to Europe. Tempelhof was supposed to become a European “*Flugkreuz*”, a dominant flight crossing of the continent [13, pp. 112–114]. The size of the terminal reflected the scale of the whole Germania plan, a part of which was only realised. Had Speer’s and Hitler’s vision been realised, Berlin would have been transformed without recognition. That would include erasing around 50.000 buildings along with the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag [11]. The plan centred around two extensive north-south and east-west axes. The most important building, the Great Hall, set on the redirected river Spree, was inspired by Pantheon. It was to be covered by the biggest dome in the world. The plan also featured underground complexes of tunnels planned underneath Tiergarten and in other places around the city. The tunnels below the airport fields were supposed to house highways and railway tracks [45]. The terminal of Tempelhof was also designed with extensive underground structures. Sir Norman Foster called the terminal the “mother of all airports” [29]. Its advantageous location, with proper connectivity to the city centre, made it a busy airport during the first years. The striking structure is still considered as huge. Even though the building was not finished, it still appeared impressive, with an immense concrete skeleton covered with heavy natural stone [1]. Many innovative features were introduced in the design of the terminal, including separate levels for baggage and people. Around 80% of works on the airport have been finished [37].

What is usually left out in the history of Tempelhof is that the area served as one of the first experimental concentration camps. The Columbia Concentration Camp was established in 1933. Its name refers to one of the breaking-record longest flights landing in Tempelhof by Columbia airplane [1]. It was a scary training ground for what would become one of the biggest atrocities of all time. Many of the chiefs of Columbia would later become the chiefs of other big concentration camps. The majority of its 8000 prisoners were men, predominantly political prisoners, communists and intellectuals. Half of them were homosexuals [41]. In 1936, Columbia’s inmates were moved to Sachsenhausen. The buildings of the camp are no longer standing, since they were demolished in 1938; however, the outlines of some of the structures are still visible [41]. Little public attention was given to the camp. The only commemorating sign of its historical presence is a steel sculpture. The monument is located on the other side of the street than the terminal, which, in terms of historical accuracy, should actually be opposite. There is a group of citizens concerned with the necessity of commemorating the place, who propose the creation of a memorial and information centre regarding the former Columbia Concentration Camp [41] (Fig. 2).

What seems interesting is that Tempelhof was not bombed during II WW, since the Allied Forces saw an opportunity to use the terminal after the war. Also, for the Luftwaffe, Tempelhof was not a military airfield. The airport was used mainly for assembling planes, with the use of forced labour. The planes were manufactured in underground tunnels and sent directly to the runways or transported by train. Many of the workers were of east European origin. They lived in miserable conditions, in barracks placed north of the terminal [39].

But this was not the end of the atrocities within the area of Tempelhof. Between 1942 and 1945, another labour camp was placed there, close to the Neukölln cemetery. It was run



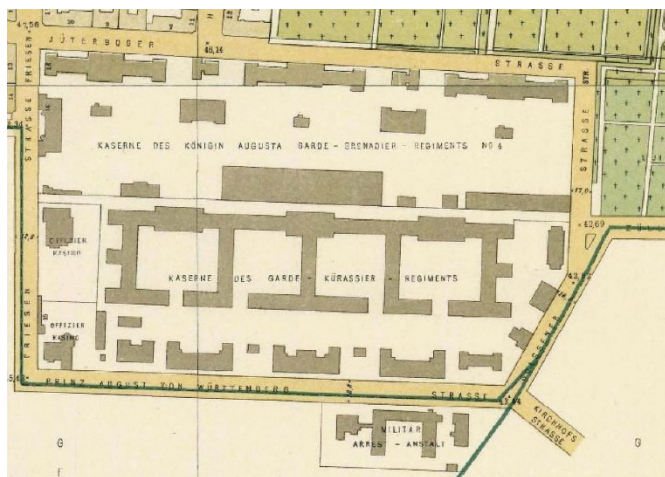


Fig. 2. Map showing the location of the Columbia Concentration Camp  
(source: *City Map of 1895*, Verlag Julius Straube)

by the Protestant church. Around 200 east European prisoners, marked with “Ost” patches, together with some German workers, were forced to work and live there in scary conditions. Their task was to dig graves in cemeteries around the city [3].

The Soviets took over Tempelhof in April 1945. The Yalta Agreement turned the terminal over to the U.S. Army. In August 1945, the Potsdam Agreement formally divided Berlin. The meaning of the airport grew immensely in 1948 with the beginning of the Berlin Blockade. The Soviets ceased all car and water access to the city. The only supply could be provided by air, using one of the three air corridors – coming from Hamburg, Frankfurt (Main) and Bückeburg. There were two options left for the Western forces – either to leave the city without the help, which would mean practically to abandon it, or to supply 2.5 million people with food from the air. Happily, they chose the latter. The “Berlin Airlift”, as it was called, started in June 1948. Because of expanding requirements, new 1800-meter asphalt runways were built in September 1948.

People often stood by the fences of Tempelhof and watched arriving planes. Some of them were children. The airport also became the site of the famous “Candy Droppers”, first of whom was Gail Halvorsen, an American pilot. He once took a walk to the children who gathered to ask about the aircraft. The pilot gave them candies and promised that he would come the next day. Soon, it became a custom for American pilots to drop small parachutes filled with candies to kids. The fact became widely renowned when children from West Germany sent their own candies and even major manufactures followed through. Finally, it became not only a touching custom, but also a big propaganda success, as it was even officially named “Operation Little Vittles”. The last transport touched down on the ground on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1949. The Airlift was celebrated by changing the name of the U-Bahn to Platz der Luftbrücke. The monument, with the names of the pilots who died during the airlift engraved on the stone, is standing to this day on the plaza next to the terminal. Tempelhof became a legend and a hero of the city – a symbol of the resistance towards communism in Berlin [25].



Before 1951, Tempelhof was fully controlled by the American military. Later, it was taken over by civil transport and controlled only in part by military forces [37]. The American forces were deactivated in 1994. In 1996, it was announced that, in the upcoming years, all domestic and international air traffic would be slowly redirected to the Berlin-Schönefeld International Airport. The plan also ensured the closing of other two airports – first, Tempelhof, and then, Tegel. The final decision was confirmed in 2007; however, it faced some backlash. In 2008, a referendum opposing these decisions was carried out. The protest did not gain enough votes and the decision to close-off Tempelhof remained. Finally, the Tempelhof Airport was closed on the midnight of 30<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

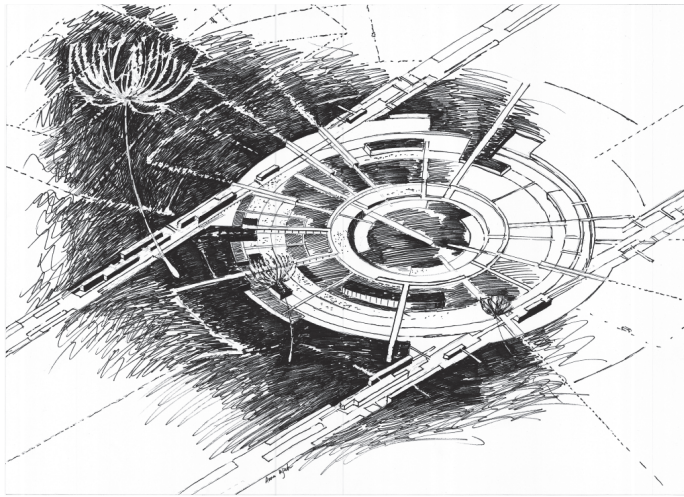


Fig. 3. Freehand drawing, part of “Urban Therapy – Tempelhof Hoffnung” – diploma project by Anna Bijak, promoter: M. Gyurkovich, co-promoter: K. Racoń-Leja [6]

Interestingly, up until today, Tempelhof has been the setting for some of the most interesting or absurd conspiracy theories, including “alien hotspot and sacred pagan ground”, which means that this place exists in the common consciousness as a mysterious site. Some believe that the tower, built by the USA next to the northern edge of the terminal, is a transmitter of low-frequency waves used to test the possibility of brainwashing the population of Berlin and cause illnesses [46]. Tempelhof is also featured in a famous conspiracy theory that Hitler did not die in the bunker, but escaped to Argentina. Some also believe that he fled to Antarctica, where he set up a base with aliens. These theories are based on the assumption that a secret tunnel existed in between U6 metro line and Tempelhof airport.

The Tempelhof Terminal has, in fact, many secrets buried in the underground. There are three underground levels placed underneath the massive structure. The hidden parts contain around 300 air raid shelters, with paintings that still remain untouched after 70 years [40], as well as bunkers [16]. The lowest level was taken over by the storage of photographs, accidentally burnt by the Soviets. Also, some of the bunkers were burnt by Nazi troops, when their commander killed himself.

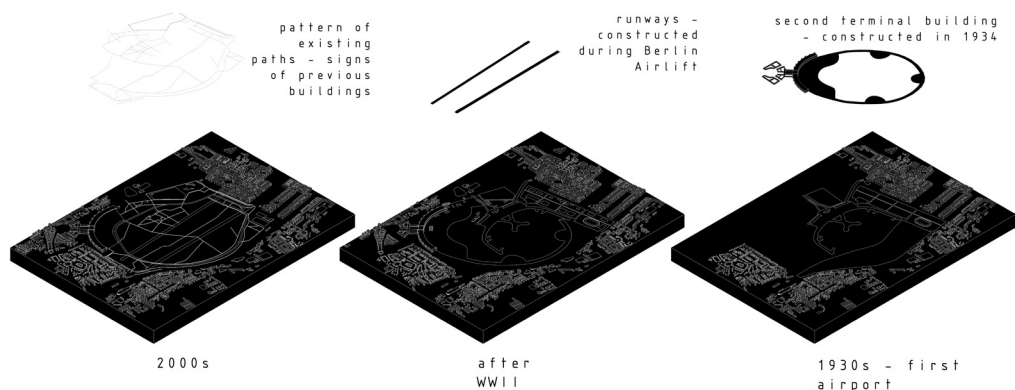


Fig. 4. Historical layers of Tempelhof; part of “Urban Therapy – Tempelhof Hoffnung” – diploma project by Anna Bijak, promoter: M. Gyurkovich, co-promoter: K. Racoń-Leja [6]

## 2. In the search for new ideas

It seems that the area of Tempelhof is an architect’s *dream-come-true*. The huge area is filled with absolutely nothing, ready to be touched by the *hand of a master-architect*. It is just waiting for new ideas, a *carte blanche*, which can be filled with anything possible. At least that is what it seems at first glance. But what about its rich history and cultural connotations?

The competition shortlisted in 2009 has been a source for the new development strategy. Tempelhof has sparked major international interest in the architectural community; many designers have issued their proposals. The selected winning competition entry, a cooperation

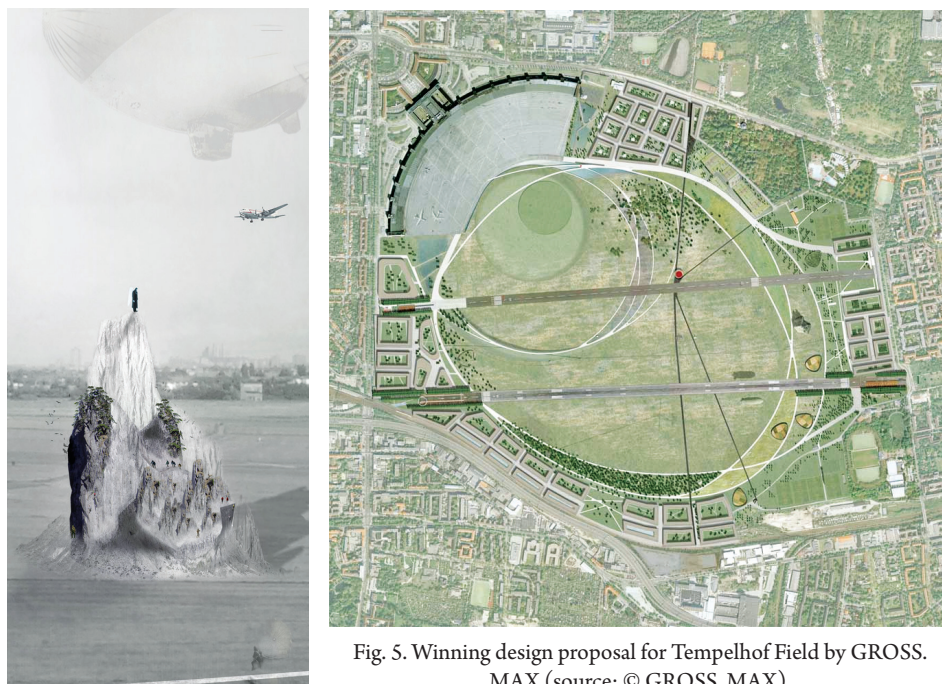


Fig. 5. Winning design proposal for Tempelhof Field by GROSS. MAX (source: © GROSS. MAX)

between three groups, has been awarded with partly commission to design the park as well as redesign the terminal [26], which ultimately did not happen. The landscape architecture was proposed by GROSS.MAX with Sutherland Hussey Architects. Chora was responsible for the architecture and urbanism. Happold office introduced sustainable technologies and infrastructure [26] (Fig. 5).

The proposal included a development in form of city blocks around the circle enclosing the green space. Various circular paths have been created. The circular building of the library stood in a strangely chosen point at the intersection of random paths. What seemed the most interesting part of the solution was the rock monument standing in the eastern part of the site. Illustrated with the inspiration from Wim Wenders' "Wings of Desire", it provided a symbolical meaning; however, with a rather pointlessly chosen location. This proposal did not seem to be providing very clear ideas; it was considered as an organic merger of different programs.



Fig. 6. "The Berg" by Jakob Tigges, one of the competition entries for Tempelhof Field  
(© THE BERG BY MILA/JAKOB TIGGES)

Another design, probably the most outlandish of all, was "The Berg", a "provocative, but not constructive" [27] idea of a phantom mountain designed by Jakob Tigges. The author stated: "I chose the idea of a mountain precisely because it can't be done. Instead it'll awaken people's imaginations" [8] Tigges' proposal was a manifest, which highlighted the dangers of the policy undertaken by the city years ago. In his project, Tigges warned that, by implementing a typical development logic, the city was risking destroying one of the most important landmarks of Berlin. He stated: "We can't lose this site that's got so much cultural and symbolic meaning just for more of the same old, mediocre housing development" [8], highlighting the cultural and historical importance of Tempelhof. It must have worked, along with the protests of the inhabitants of the city, since nothing has been built in Tempelhof and nothing would be. Tempelhof would remain one of the most intriguing parks in Berlin (Fig. 6).



After the competition, new proposals were still being created by students and architects alike. Probably the most interesting idea for developing Tempelhof is a conceptual design *Tempelhof Lu(f/s)twerks*, by Jack Holmes, graduate of Bartlett School of Architecture in London. The idea is presented by interventions transforming Tempelhof into a “landscape of a sublime” [21]. Taking advantage of the soil conditions in Berlin, the site is transformed into a wetland, with many bridges as well as hydro- and wind-powering machines. The strong composition of the site, flying elements as well as the symbolical aspect – connection between heaven and underground – elevate it into a site of sublimity. Of course, one can debate the shapes and axes as well as the strongly implied sci-fi inspirations. It seems that some of these elements may be a little out-of-place, but it is a strong concept, which explores new areas and, as one of the few, provides a strong and specific cultural narrative for this site, avoiding to sentimentally tackle the site as a monument (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. *Tempelhof Lu(f/s)twerks* by Jack Holmes (© J. Holmes, Motionpicturesque)



A concept by Eleonora Viviani implies new public transport solutions adjacent to the Tempelhof area. She proposes adding a U-Bahn line to connect Berlin Mitte and Berlin-Schönefeld Airport with Tempelhof, and building a new S-Bahn station right in the southern edge of the area [42]. However, it is not only about changing the existing patterns, but also creating new ones. The reworked public transportation system is tied together by means of a new mobility ring created in Tempelhof. The ring has a common interchangeable node with the new U-Bahn Line. It connects with a new S-Bahn station as well. The ring is comprised of two elevated bridges, one for pedestrians and another one intended to be used by a light train. In this way, the Tempelhof area becomes more accessible.

Another proposal, which, even though it was part of the competition, seemed to be more forward-thinking than the 2009 entries. It was based on a flexible system of paths, which were cutting through the space on two levels, creating different functions. The project of by Studio SPTA reflected the future of cities, which, due to the lack of space, would have to be developed on several levels in order to sustain their needs [38]. The proposed park consisted of two levels. The upper level was devoted to a park; the lower one was devoted to various activities. The northern runway placed underground was designed as a space used for different functions, serving as a linkage between east and west. The southern runway was filled with water and served as a recreational space. The main goal was to create a lively space, which could be flexible [38]. The preliminary, very good idea of splitting Tempelhof into two levels was diminished by implementing too many elements (Fig. 8).

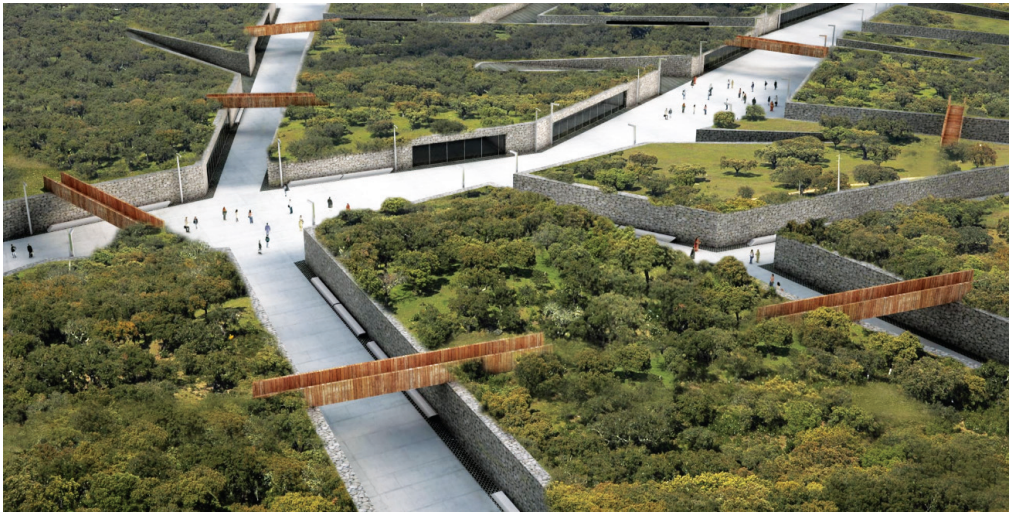


Fig. 8. Studio SPTA's competition entry for Tempelhof Field (©Studio SPTA)

As for the concepts regarding the existing terminal building of the former airport, most of the projects propose to use the space for various functions, such as start-ups, recording studios, film studios and offices. What links all of those designs together is that they never introduce any kind of change in the terminal in a formal sense. They allow for the introduction of new functions inside. These very minor interventions seem understandable, due to the

protected nature of the building. However, the reworking of a monument alike could, in this case, include some kind of an extension or superstructure, done both in a tasteful and also a symbolical way. New interventions should provide some sort of a dialogue with the building, taking into account its historical connotations.

### 3. Facing present conflicts

Tempelhof Field, the largest park in Berlin, has been established in May 2010. There are also other known names for this space, such as Tempelhof Freiheit – Tempelhof Freedom, referring to the Berlin Airlift as well as to the new function of the place, which is a refuge from the city's noise and traffic [15]. Some have expressed their discontent with the new name because, in the past, Tempelhof was not a place of freedom; quite the contrary. Berlin History Workshop [4], a non-profit organisation started in 1981, states that the usage of the word “Freedom” implies the neglect of Berliners to address and remember the history of the place. The organisation tries to commemorate the past of Tempelhof with the booklet *No place of freedom – Tempelhof Feld 1933–1945* as well as with different initiatives attempting to save the memory of the history of the place [22].

The park has been at risk of privatisation in 2014 due to the investors, who cooperated with the city of Berlin, and saw it as a space with huge potential for development. However, by referendum, Berliners supported the local citizens' initiative *100 percent Tempelhofer Feld*, and voted to keep Tempelhof solely as a green space [15]. The strategy of development has already been stated during the 2011 elections, with the project of Klaus Wowereit. The plan implied the usage of only 25% of the site for buildings, which, by the way, covers an area roughly of the size of New York's Central Park [36]. The planned housing was supposed to be an affordable option, highly desirable in a city like Berlin, which suffers from huge apartment shortages. But some critics had voiced their doubts about the purity of the intentions. “This government hasn't built a single social apartment for 10 years – are they going to start right when park-side real estate opens up?”, said John Riceburg for *Exberliner Magazine* [15].

The situation was quite unique. Had it been in London, this huge area in a close proximity to the city centre, with an enormous market potential, would already be filled with apartments. But, in Berlin, Tempelhof Field was left as a completely green space due to the willingness of the inhabitants. If the city developed the space as it was planned, even with only 25% of the area filled with buildings, the character of the space would change forever. With new glitzy commercial buildings and developer housing, more boundaries would have to be marked. The space would no longer be public anymore, it would be a subject of private demands. The accessibility to greenery would be filtered. Like in New York, where the prices of apartments located by the Central Park are skyrocketing, similar situation would apply here. It would have to be a more polished, “classy” space. And sooner or later, it would be gentrified, which is not the case, as how revitalisation is done in Berlin. Even though there were a lot of spaces rebuilt as glamorous urban squares, like Potsdamer Platz, the city has built its legend on the raw charm of post-industrial buildings, now remade into hip bars, restaurants and hotels. Berlin

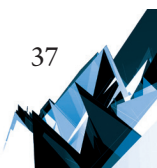
is the *hip capital* of Europe and this is due to filling gaps and reusing them in a creative and edgy way. It is not a *ready-made* city. Berlin is quickly growing and re-living itself after the reunification and it cherishes the process rather than the destination. Ulf Poschardt, editor of “Die Welt”, claimed: “In the Prussian capital, hippie culture is state policy” [15].

Furthermore, Berlin is one of the greenest and environment-friendly cities in Europe. The number of bikers is constantly on the rise; closed zones for cars were first introduced here. And it is only suitable to look at the map of Tempelhof-Schönefeld to see how much the German people love allotment gardens, to understand their approach to green spaces. Also, many shortlisted birds and insects are occupying the area of Tempelhof.

After the incident with the failed plan, a careful policy route has been undertaken. The Tempelhof Conservation Act has been established, with the main presumption that no buildings are allowed to be built anywhere in Tempelhof. Only limited construction is permitted [15]. The growth of new trees is carefully controlled, with the restriction to not even replace the dead ones, and so is even putting new park benches. Participation has become very important for Tempelhof Field in the recent years. Raumlabor is a group of architects who pioneered this approach towards the park. They implemented small test facilities in different areas of the Field. They involved, e.g. Jupipark in Neukölln, which became a meeting point to organise discussions about affordable housing and different issues [2]. By using these facilities and social participation, the architects wanted to test what kind of functions were needed in this place and, most of all, how Berliners envision the regeneration of Tempelhof. The inhabitants of Berlin were also asked for their ideas in 2008, presented within “Tempelhof First Steps”. Many of the ideas were very creative, including the “tallest building in the world, a zoo, a mosque, treehouses, a lake, casino, baseball, gardens, lake, mountain, funfair...” [34].

Since 2008, Tempelhof has been the site of various public events, involving music festivals or sporting events like marathons. The terminal served as a backdrop for fashion shows, product launches and fairs. Tempelhof Field is used on a daily basis for various activities, including biking, running and skateboarding. There are many smaller events (such as barbecues) organised in spontaneous open allotment gardens established in the Hippie Garden. It is hard to deny their charm: “(...) the allotments are often adorned with old couches for gardeners to entertain visitors; others have no gardens but bring their couches anyway. Beer is usually involved” [15]. It goes to show how much Berliners appreciate this sort of freedom, spontaneity and messiness that comes with reclaimed sites.

But the issue of the development of Tempelhof Field remains, and it is now even more plausible than in 2010–2011. There is a desperate need for affordable housing in Berlin in the wake of the refugee crisis. In 2015, Tempelhof Terminal has become the biggest open emergency refugee shelter in Germany. Around 6400 people lived there in one space at that time. There were problems with access to toilets and showers, since the terminal was not equipped with water plunges and canalisation to accommodate such a huge number of people. Most of the time, in order to take a shower, they had to be transported to the swimming pool. In this particular situation, it was difficult to avoid diseases. Also, due to the fact that, at the beginning, there was only one doctor per 2500 people [35]. The other issue was the lack of psychological care, necessary for deeply traumatised people. Refugees could not sleep, had no





privacy and sometimes were also visited by intruders. The very few social workers were not able to keep track of everything. Obviously, in such difficult conditions, conflicts occurred. Refugees' living conditions were miserable and could not promise them a change – simply because of a lack of any affordable housing in the city. According to humanitarian regulations, refugees can be put through these conditions for no longer than two weeks. The situation with the refugees in Germany got so complicated in the meantime that, since 2015, around 1000 of them still have not been relocated and are living in the terminal [12].

What also seemed difficult was that the totalitarian architecture of the terminal could not be altered, apart from having cubicles put inside. Some residents have tried to reshape their living spaces inside anyway, by introducing more colour and providing some sense of privacy and domesticity. At some point, refugees started to put graffiti on the walls of cubicles, which seemed an interesting and sometimes artful attempt of claiming their space. But after some controversial and offensive remarks, the authorities had to order to erase all the paintings. With the heavily scrutinised Tempelhof, where even a small fight in November 2015 has been hugely publicised and politicised, Berlin has been extremely careful not to make the already difficult situation any worse [30], which seemed a pity, because the only attempt at having a dialogue of cultures had to be silenced.

The organisation called “100% Tempelhofer Feld” came up with a proposal to tackle the issue head-on – providing refugees with buildings containing necessary functions and some housing. All of them would be located near the terminal, in a space previously used for events [5]. The main problem was that it was only a temporary proposal, which did not contribute to the plans of the city. The city could not say “we will see” what happens later, because a certain amount of money needed to be invested. And the city would already lose a lot of money due to the cancellation of many major events, for which Tempelhof was the perfect space. However, most of all, the city could not allow to form a ghetto at the space. The prolonged isolation of people would lead to far more serious problems later, which Paris learnt the hard way. It seems, however, that the city overlooked these problems, since it was announced that a similar plan will be undertaken. The construction of 976 temporary prefabricated homes in the area near terminal has already started. The resettlement of residents from Tempelhof altogether is planned in 2019, when the prefabricated houses will be removed [12].

A completely different proposal has been put forward by a former urban planner of Berlin, Bernhard Strecker. In his opinion, Tempelhof should be incorporated into the city tissue and provided with mixed functions of housing, work, recreation, schools etc. But most of all, in his project, Tempelhof becomes an international centre, which would mix people from different backgrounds, also including refugees [5]. From the political point of view, the proposal seems perfect. On the other side, it reinforces the urge to develop the whole site, leaving only the north part of the Fields as a green park, bordering with Volkspark Hasenheide. The proposal rose a very difficult question – is the location of a refugee camp at Tempelhof an excuse for developers to build apartments? [30] This lack of trust should not be surprising considering how easy it was for the city back in 2010 to assume that Berliners will allow for the development to happen.

Finally, Tempelhof is not a regular site in the city. It was already highly controversial before. As T. Parsloe writes: “The decision to use the airport as a camp merely intensified

the complexity of its associations. It now simultaneously acts as an international symbol of totalitarian megalomania and trauma, humanitarian intervention, and cold war propaganda, and is a cinematic icon" [30]. This comment seems very adequate. Maybe it is not good to demand one simple narrative for a piece of history; however, such a politicised site is probably not the best place to house refugees.

It is extremely difficult to build a proper narration for Tempelhof, which would respect all of the aspects of this space. On the other hand, it seems that there is not much willingness from the city to build such a dialog. The issue is approached mostly from the functional and the financial point of view. The authorities choose not to touch the subject of the troubled and ambiguous past, and problems arise.

#### 4. Urban Therapy – “Tempelhof Hoffnung” [6]

The name of this chapter refers to the master thesis project of A. Bijak [6]. The most defining quality of Tempelhof is its ambiguity – as a place that possesses both strongly positive and strongly negative connotations. Now, it is a collage of different random functions scattered around the park. Almost no elements of this place are easy to define – the terminal was an important symbol of the Berlin Airlift, but it has been also a symbol of the horrible Nazi regime, along with its megalomaniac scale and the memories of Nazi gatherings. The runways are similar – place where ground connects with heaven, and from this heaven, food, coal and candies once came to Berlin. But these are also the same runways from which bombing planes were sent to many locations. There are no easy definitions here. And maybe there should be no easy definitions in this case. But, taking into account how much controversy Tempelhof continuously stirs, how many conspiracy theories and myths are built around this place and how much of its history remains forgotten, Tempelhof certainly needs some kind of a narrative.

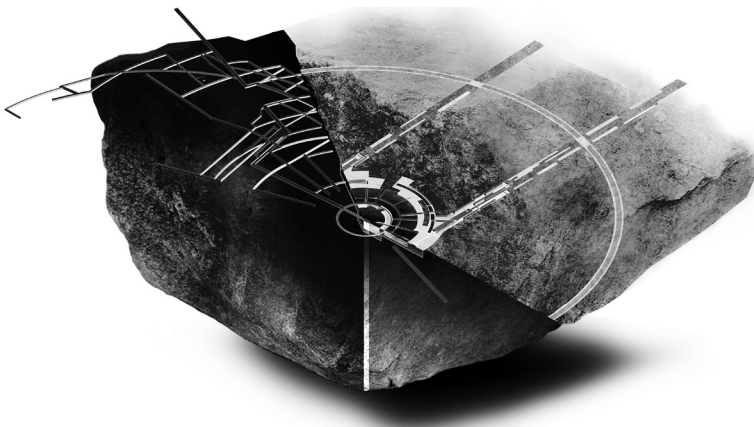


Fig. 9. Part of “Urban Therapy – Tempelhof Hoffnung” – diploma project by Anna Bijak, promoter: M. Gyurkovich, co-promoter: K. Racoń-Leja [6]

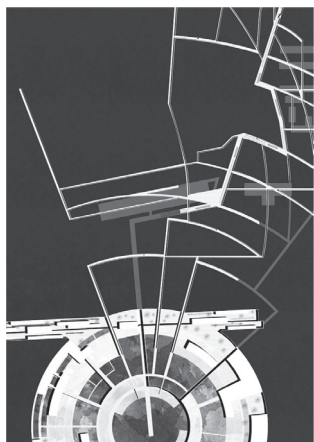


Fig. 10. underground tunnels and  
“Time Machine”– Tempelhof  
Hoffnung” – diploma project by Anna  
Bijak, promoter: M. Gyurkovich,  
co-promoter: K. Racoń-Leja [6]

In psychology, trauma is sometimes followed by holes in the memory. Some patients suffering from PTSD cannot recall certain memories and they repress them. What has to happen during therapy is digging up those memories, reliving them and healing the patient. If this is not done, it can then come up in unsuspected ways, slowly deteriorating the mental health of the patient. Maybe it can also be related to the whole society of Berlin, where “urban therapy” could be a solution for problems related to Tempelhof, a site which has not yet truly been claimed by the inhabitants as their own. Instead, it still belongs to the realm of mystery and darkness with unexplained questions and doubts. Some of the critics have touched on the subject of the history of Tempelhof and its cultural importance as well as the fact that the unresolved historical traumas can be the actual reason why this site is always so controversial. There never was any political and cultural narrative created for this site.

Interestingly, one of the very few supposed attempts to tackle the issue of taboo of Tempelhof seems to be one of the most intriguing movies set in Berlin, *Possession*, directed by Andrzej Żuławski [49]. One of the most important scenes of that film takes place at an underground station, Platz der Luftbrücke, which exists right next to the Tempelhof Airport terminal. The location must have been chosen deliberately, judging from the locations of the scene before and after this one. The main character is being possessed during this scene, or miscarries – it is not really clear. She runs around growling in the metro tunnel, then vomits and bleeds from different parts of her body. Needless to say, it is the most important, most gruesome and most memorable moment in the movie and, at the very same time, seems like the only artistic attempt to touch on the subject of the difficult topic of Tempelhof. In *Possession*, Tempelhof is a residue of evil forces – somehow, it triggers a break-down of the main character and becomes a defining moment in her story. Interestingly, Anna breaks down right when she passes by a supposed secret tunnel, which has been, according to conspiracy theories, dug to accommodate the escape of Hitler. Maybe it is a subtle attempt to involve Tempelhof into the whole narrative of Berlin. Tempelhof is, in this scenario, a dark underbelly of the city; a place where evil resides.

The whole topic of underground areas of the cities seems extremely interesting. The things that lie underneath the cities are probably one of the biggest components of what builds up their legends. The underground is usually mysterious; one can never be sure how many



structures lie underground. Even if one is discovered, something more may still remain. The underground is not seen by the naked eye easily. It usually demands great effort in unearthing its secrets or finding a hidden passage. In *Civilization and its discontents*, Sigmund Freud compared the working of the city to that of the human mind [17]. Later, art has developed metaphors to include the unseen underground – representing subconscious, ID, from which sometimes difficult memories or dark thoughts come out. In the analogy of the city, it could be represented by people on the margin of society.



Fig. 11. Story synopsis “Underground Berlin” by Lebbeus Woods (© Lebbeus Woods)

*Underground Berlin* by Lebbeus Woods, highlighted the power and importance of the underground, relating it to a complicated cultural and political context of Berlin [43]. It showed the hidden and dark parts of cities, but most of all, the prevalent forces, which are always existing, no matter which ideology is currently in power. At the end of the story, the whole power of the underground, throughout the story used for different ideological purposes, is finally sunk in the depths. It is connected to the Nazi past – in L. Woods’ story, the underground structure was built by Third Reich and it was a part of their plan for Berlin. The underground can be a powerful force of both good and evil, but it also has two different sides – as systematically utilised and as wild, unpredictable, primordial force of the city’s subconscious. In the case of Tempelhof, the underground is a residue of darkness. *Possession* shows that fact by unveiling the darkness, which, for everybody, is a constantly existing ghost of the airport. And that makes Tempelhof a point in the city with immense political and cultural importance, not recognised by new architectural proposals.

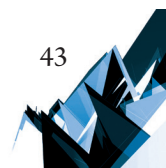
Tempelhof is not just a park, but it does not only collect bad memories. Tempelhof needs to react to them, claim them and use them to teach society, relive the traumas and make itself a positive space, possibly also including a new, multicultural Berlin, where racism, antisemitism and homophobia are not acceptable. It cannot be just a grass, recreational plane. Not many places

in Berlin have a more symbolic meaning than Tempelhof, of which history is ambiguous, difficult and scary. And yet, it still can become the ground for something good. In this way, Tempelhof may become one of the most hopeful places in Berlin, a city of so many complex layers.

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