

REMAINING VISIBLE: THE VISUAL TRAJECTORY OF A DEMOLISHED GASOMETER IN THE CONFLICTING DISCOURSES ABOUT SOCIALIST HERITAGE IN THE FORMER EAST BERLIN SINCE THE 1970s

Kathrin Meissner

Abstract

The urban landscape is more than just its structural manifestation. It is subject to ongoing transformations as a result of everyday usage, narratives, and long-term social changes. It represents a materialisation of socio-spatial discourses and practices. In the historical transition process, the urban space becomes a palimpsest of shifting appropriations, interpretations, and thus multiple realities. We need to critically reflect on these layers of attributions to understand the complex interrelation of built space, cultural heritage, and constructions of identity. Analysing them in terms of visual relevance and transformation offers a new approach.

This chapter traces the social-discursive negotiation and narrative of a visual symbol derived from the structural form of the gasometers in the East Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg. In the early 1980s, the gasometers formed a landmark within an outdated industrial plant. With the modernisation of the gas supply, the area was to be transformed into a large, green park. As identification points visible from afar due to their size and metal construction, the gasholders were recognised as possessing architectural value and were even considered by some to be historic monuments.

After years during which both East Berlin society as a whole and professionals in relevant fields assumed that the gasometers would be preserved and converted, in 1983 this view was marginalised in favour of prestige projects favoured by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). The sudden political decision to demolish the gasometer containers, which had been considered "untouchable", provoked widespread public disapproval. In the end, even organised protests were unable to prevent their demolition in July 1984. However, the material disappearance of these significant structures from the urban landscape by no means entailed their disappearance from people's minds. Instead, the demolition provoked a new visual discourse around the buildings. Particularly during the GDR's crisis years, caused largely by the SED leaders' inability to act and unwillingness to undertake state reform, the gasometers became a symbol of civic resistance to the authoritarian dictatorship that supposedly represented "actually existing socialism" (*Real-sozialismus*).

This chapter argues that this immaterial significance of the gasometers emerged particularly through their physical and material absence. The collective experience of the collapse of the GDR in 1989/90 and the political and social transformation in the 1990s led to their recognition as local intangible heritage. To this day, a visual image of the gasometers manifests itself in many ways in the local discourse on the history and presence of Prenzlauer Berg as an essential part of local realities.

Here, the focus lies on two negotiation processes. Firstly, between the political decision to demolish and societal efforts to preserve the (industrial) heritage in the context of socialist urban renewal and GDR planning culture. Second, the text focuses on how the immaterial significance

of the gasometers transferred into the current area of conflict between local GDR remembrance culture and local everyday discourses. While the gasometers were lost as industrial monuments in the socialist planning culture, they became intangible heritage of the GDR's social(ist) history.

Keywords

Industrial heritage; visualisation; GDR; urban renewal; socialist heritage culture; intangible heritage

1 INTRODUCTION

It is July 28, 2024, and I am walking through *Ernst Thälmann Park* in Berlin on a sunny Sunday. This park, inaugurated in 1986/87, is a notable example of socialist urban planning from the late GDR and was designated a protected heritage ensemble in 2014. To this day, it remains a controversial topic. Narrow paths wind through the park, which is named after Ernst Thälmann (1866–1944), a communist politician and key figure in GDR antifascism culture. Passing the significant monument of Thälmann built by the Soviet sculptor Lev Kerbel (1917–2003) between 1981 and 1986, the noise of the nearby main roads becomes quieter along a small lake and between the 15-storey apartment blocks. I walk by a primary school and an indoor swimming pool built in the late East German modernist style. At the end of the park, I reach the *Zeiss Planetarium*. Forty years ago, on 28 July 1984, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) leadership had three gasometers blown up on the exact spot where the popular planetarium stands today. Nothing would tell me about this if I did not know already.

Interestingly, on my way along the main avenue connecting the planetarium with the former East Berlin city centre of Alexanderplatz, the shape of the gasometer looms. I can see the schematic sketch of the gasometer above the words “*Museum Pankow*” on large exhibition banners flapping in the wind at the side of the road. The museum is located about a kilometre further south of the park. It has been exhibiting the history of the Prenzlauer Berg district since 1992 and uses the gasometer silhouette as a prominent visual image. This chapter illustrates why the widely visible gasholders in the middle of the densely built-up residential neighbourhood of Prenzlauer Berg in inner-city East Berlin disappeared from the urban landscape forty years ago. It also explains how they reappeared just a few years later, during the socio-spatial and political transformation process of the early 1990s, as part of a critical cultural processing of the SED regime, and remain present to this day.

This chapter illustrates an aspect of industrial heritage (Oevermann & Mieg, 2014) in terms of the (disputed) understanding and adaptation of the gasometers in everyday life via their visual significance. To undertake this, the analysis is located in an interdisciplinary research context that touches upon transformative planning culture (Christmann et al., 2020; Healey, 1992; Hein, 2018), the urban social history of the GDR (Barth, 2001; Breßler & Kurth, 2022; Saldern, 2003), and heritage culture (Atmadi, 2012; Keltsch, 2012; Klemstein, 2021; Weirick, 2018; Wüllner, 2016). The shifting discursive approach to the gasometers as “socialist heritage” will be traced with reference to two negotiation processes. Firstly, between the political decision for demolition and social strategies, such as professional (industrial) heritage preservation, in

socialist urban renewal and GDR planning culture. Second, the text examines how the immaterial significance of the gasometers transferred into the area of conflict between local GDR remembrance culture and local everyday discourses. While the gasometers were lost as industrial monuments in the socialist planning culture, they became part of the intangible heritage of GDR socialism. In particular the text traces the visual manifestations of the multiple productions and renegotiations of meanings of the monuments (Oevermann et al., 2016) within different individual and collective experiences, such as retrospective assignments of meaning or value by local residents, gasworks employees, urban planners, artists, or critics of the state. It addresses how the demolition of the gasholders became part of a formal commemoration culture, linking it with the socio-spatial manifestation of (im)material cultural heritage in the urban space of Prenzlauer Berg.

This example is not just well-documented but offers a variety of different types of sources. Visualisations are a product of individual and collective attributions of meaning/value and are aspects of communication, historical storytelling, and projections of future visions (Singh & Meißner, 2021). Examining the significance of visibility as an instrument and a tool within communication can provide a valuable alternative to the dominance of written sources (Benke & Betker, 2010; Fischer & Altrock, 2018). Furthermore, as a third type of primary source, alongside written and oral data, visual data offer another methodological approach that expands the established methods of oral and visual history (Shanken, 2018; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009) and stimulates a “visual urban history”. This approach seems particularly fruitful when focusing on urban planning culture, a discipline with many immanent visualisations. In this case, the visual representation of the gasometer site and its effect on various social practices reveals how powerful the visual element is for socio-spatial re- and de-construction as an approach for interdisciplinary urban historical analysis.

This text is based on a detailed analysis of communication and interaction practices around urban renewal negotiations as part of the culture of social planning and everyday life in the late GDR (Meissner, upcoming). This previous research highlighted how various layers of individual and collective perception were brought together in social identification and urban transformation. This text applies these findings to the discourse on the industrial heritage of gasometers (Bogner et al., 2018; Mieg et al., 2014; Oevermann, 2012). It questions who shaped the local heritage by critically reflecting on power hierarchies, influential positions, and sovereignty of interpretation within the local society and their impact on the narrative of the gasometer as intangible heritage. An actor-centred approach allows us to examine multiple conflicting and ambivalent positions by subjecting samples of visual documents, such as contemporary oral eyewitness reports and retrospective interviews about the visual appearance of the gasometers, to discourse analysis. Here, four of the semi-structured, anonymised interviews conducted by the author in 2022/2023 as part of the aforementioned research are used to present a variety of voices and perspectives in the negotiation process. These voices include those of actors from top-level planning policy and academia alongside neighbourhood residents.

In undertaking this, the text questions how the accessible source material reproduces the imbalance of opinions and marginalises experiences and to what extent this narrative was passed from a generation of former GDR citizens and eyewitnesses of the demolition to younger generations in Prenzlauer Berg. In this way, the text demonstrates how the intangible heritage discourse shapes the appearance of a city (Ethington & Schwartz, 2006; Hauser, 2018; Kamleithner & Meyer, 2011) and, by doing so, expands on established oral and visual history methods (Shanken, 2018; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009) to stimulate a “visual urban history”.

2 THE EMPIRICAL DISCOURSE

2.1 The state of urban renewal and heritage in the mid-1970s

The three gasometers belonged to the fourth municipal gasworks, commissioned in 1871 during the industrial urbanisation of Berlin’s outskirts. Berlin’s rapid growth from the residence of the Prussian rulers to the capital of the German Empire and a modern metropolis in the early 20th century meant that a densely built-up tenement structure enclosed the gasworks. Prenzlauer Berg emerged from this residential area as an independent district in 1920. The large local energy requirements of the growing city made the gasworks indispensable. Although severely outdated, they operated for over 100 years until the 1970s (Bärthel, 1997).

In the GDR, the gasworks were perceived as significant in many ways: not just as an important workplace for many people but also as a source of air pollution, fumes, and noise. As one resident describes: “We lived nearby. And there was always dirt – the shutters were always black”¹ (Meissner, anonymised interview on 6 October 2022). Another resident described a childhood memory of soot fluttering through the air: “The gasworks were always present. It always stank. Sometimes more, sometimes less. [...] And black flakes. I found that quite nice. In summer there was black snow, in winter both [black and white]” (Kuntzsch, 2021). The chimneys and domes of the gas tanks were also a local reference point and a significant architectural landmark in the urban landscape of East Berlin (Figure 1). “I always remember a foggy image of the smoking chimneys and the growing domes when I returned from the city train,” as a young construction worker described her view during the daily commute to a nearby building site (Meissner, interview on 27 October 2022). This was just one of many memories of passengers on public transport or pedestrians (Brotfabrik, 2014). One of the gasometers had an iron dome and was visible from afar. Artists and creative people living in the district captured its presence in contemporary works of local everyday culture in various forms (Figure 2). Several times, local planners or architects referred to the iron dome as the “Colosseum of Prenzlauer Berg” (Tacke, 2011) – a unique structure.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, this and all subsequent translations from non-English-language sources are by the author.



FIGURE 1 Photograph of the three gas holders. The significance of the gasometer with the iron roof dome in the city skyline is particularly obvious. (Photo by Betina Kuntzsch, photo series “Filmstaub Altes Gaswerk”, 1982/83, CC BY-NC-SA)

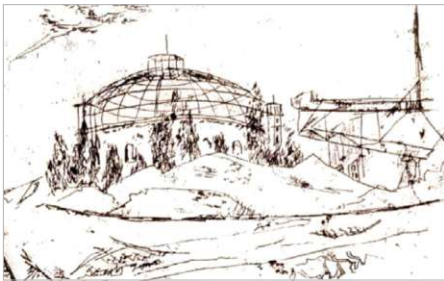
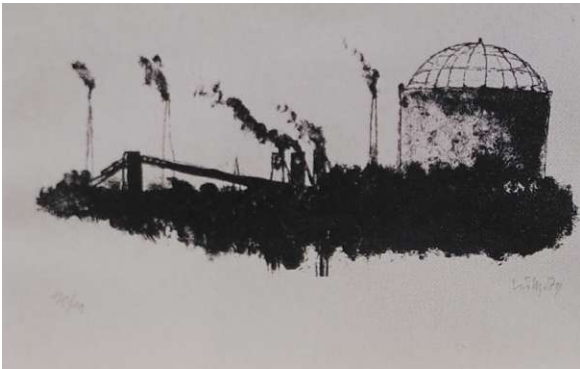


FIGURE 2 Various illustrations showing perceptions of the dominant character of the gasometer in everyday culture. (top left picture: lithograph by Roland Nicolaus, undated, Kunstsammlung Pankow, CC BY-SA; lower left picture: Harry Lüttger, radiation, Gaswerk, 1979, Kunstarchiv Beeskow, CC BY-SA; right picture: photo by Roger Melis, Gaswerk Dimitroffstraße, 1978, CC BY-SA; all printed in Bielefeld et al. 2014, pp. 57 and 105)

While the gasometers were mainly a reference point for the local population, they became the focus of national discourses in two regards. On the one hand, the socialist planning culture of the GDR had been focusing on dealing with the existing and decaying stock of old buildings since the European Year of Heritage Conservation in 1975. This international event proclaimed the relevance of industrial heritage conservation and initiated a debate on industrial monuments (Wächter & Wagenbreth, 1973). On the other hand, GDR planning policy was shifting its orientation toward socialist modernisation and urban renewal. Erich Honecker (1912–1988) proclaimed that the ambitious housing programme of 1973 manifested the unity of economic and social policy (Topfstedt, 1999). Thenceforth, the political narrative of progress and modernity was supposed to materialise structurally and socially in the appearance of East Germany's cities. The confrontation of the Cold War required a prominent public demonstration of state sovereignty, especially in divided Berlin. From 1976 onwards, the party government intended to transform East Berlin into a "socialist capital" (Bernhardt & Reif, 2009).

Like many other districts, Prenzlauer Berg suffered from the lack of green and open spaces back then. Large radial highways from the city centre cut through residential areas. Backyards provided space for small businesses and workshops. The socialist ideology rejected the contemporary image of the industrial workers' district. It explained the housing shortage and poor living conditions as the legacy of capitalist urbanisation (Betker & Bräuer, 2006). The urgently needed improvements and the homogenous building structure led the *Büro für Städtebau* (Office for Urban Planning, BfS) to declare Prenzlauer Berg as the first inner-city redevelopment area in 1977. As a result, the district became a primary construction site for experimental planning projects that aimed to overcome the negative perception of Berlin's urban fabric.

Accordingly, the shutdown of the gasworks, publicly announced by SED State Secretary Honecker himself at the party's conference in 1976, was driven by political motives. Alongside the modern infrastructure of a long-distance heating and gas supply from the Soviet Union, he emphasised: "The site of the Dimitroffstraße plant can then be used for a park or housing construction" (Anonymous Author, 1976, p. 3). The new approach to planning culture took account of both local urban characteristics and everyday social practices. Thus, the urban development master plan envisaged a multifunctional community centre to "improve design quality through [...] dominant urban landmarks [...] reflecting the socialist and communist mindset" (Bauakademie, 1977, pp. 6, 10). In practice, prestigious projects meant demonstrating the party's power on site (Meuschel, 1992). Street names and monuments were also dedicated to the antifascist resistance (Roder & Tacke, 2004). The local history of working-class struggles in Prenzlauer Berg was highlighted, too.

Interestingly, arguments about industrial heritage and its value for preservation had to fit into the official socialist narrative of GDR politics (Lehmann, 2021; Atmadi, 2012). Here, the gasworks were seen as an outdated building from the ideologically rejected Gründerzeit period (ca. 1840–1918), a structural relic that needed to be replaced (Bielefeld et al., 2014).

2.2 Creating a “presumptive” monument

Urban renewal in the inner-city and addressing extraordinary structures like gasometers required new approaches and strategies. The planning commission concluded that their demolition would be expensive and technically complicated (Bezirksbauamt Berlin, 1978). The construction sector was subordinated to the Ministry of Economics at the Central Committee of the SED party (*SED-Zentralkomitee*). It was therefore primarily subject to the political interests of the centrally planned economy (*Planwirtschaft*). By contrast, the Ministry of Culture was in charge of matters related to urban planning, aesthetics, and architectural design, as well as the preservation of cultural heritage. The government aimed to quickly achieve visible “successes” in urban modernisation and initially neglected to make any specific plans to deal with the gasholders. This lack of political interest left an opportunity for the creation of plans for the industrial area containing the gasworks. As a result, the relevant planning authorities, such as the Municipal Bureau for Construction (*Bezirksbauamt*, BBA) and the Office for Urban Planning (BfS), developed conversion plans. Proposed designs (Figure 3) suggested the demolition of the industrial plant followed by a transformation into the *Ernst-Thälmann Kultur- und Erholungspark* (Ernst Thälmann Culture and Recreation Park)

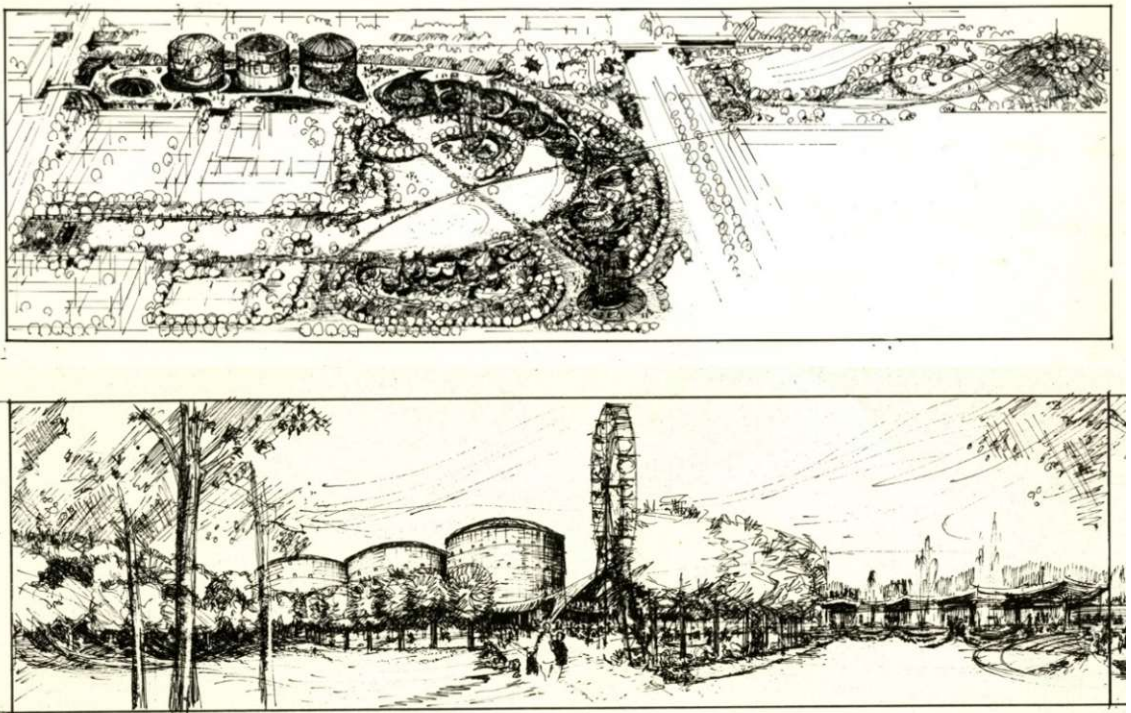


FIGURE 3 Perspective studies for the redesign of the gasworks site by the Office for Urban Planning (BfS). The converted gasometers were widely visible, while the Ernst Thälmann memorial was located at the edge of the site at the bottom right on Prenzlauer Allee with a direct view of the gasholders. (From Archive IRS Erkner, stock of Hubert Matthes, C14_U4-001 and 002, 1978, CC BY-SA)

(Bezirksbauamt, 1978). Internal correspondence shows that representatives of the construction authorities, planning office, and heritage conservation argued for preservation and rejected demolition (Büro für Städtebau, 1980).

Though these negotiations were held behind closed doors, their results were reported in the media (Otten, 1981) and fostered public discourse over heritage. Construction experts confirmed that the gasometers were in good structural condition. This legitimised the preservation of the gasometers as architecturally significant urban landmarks and their preservation as part of the GDR's flagship urban renewal programme (Bielefeld et al., 2014). Shortly afterwards, several media reports carried the argument further and labelled them "industrial monuments" (Schulz, 1981, p. 11; Trost, 1983, p. 411). As a result of this, public opinion consolidated resolutely in favour of the preservation of the urban landmarks and their conversion into historical monuments – (visual) testimony of the past.

Meanwhile, the overambitious housing construction programme was severely behind schedule. This led the Council of Ministers (*Ministerrat*) to proclaim in February 1981 that residential buildings would be added to the original park and open space design (Ministerrat, 1981) and to assume responsibility for planning. In addition, Honecker commissioned the renowned Soviet sculptor Lev Kerbel to design the monument to Ernst Thälmann (Bielefeld et al., 2014). They wanted the complex project to be completed by Thälmann's 100th birthday in April 1986, or for Berlin's 750th anniversary celebrations in 1987 at the latest. This placed even more "pressure to succeed" on the flagship project, now renamed *Ernst Thälmann Park*. Due to the change in planning authority, all previously made plans were withdrawn. Designs by local GDR artists for the conversion of the gasometers, e.g., into a technology museum, a theatre, a swimming area, or a planetarium, were rejected without further explanation (Roder & Tacke, 2004).

The expensive prestige project absorbed enormous resources in the construction industry, which was already suffering from shortages and delays. Nevertheless, the key organ of the Central Committee, the *Politburo*, launched an architectural competition in 1982 to demonstrate socialist participation in the planning process to design the area as a residential park. Its central objective was to "strengthen the impact of the monument" and "combine it into a design unit of high urban quality" (Aufbauleitung Sondervorhaben, 1982, p. 2). Since the conversion of the gasometers was not part of the planning or the political decision-making process, it was left out of the competition stipulations (Figure 4). Considering the gasometers as sites of industrial heritage and identification was not compatible with the ideologically charged urban development ideas of socialist modernism. Hence, they were not formally included in the redevelopment process and contributions were not supposed to contain any proposals for their future usage. The state-run media coverage and public presentation of the competition reproduced this absence.

By then, not only were the design of the *Ernst Thälmann Park* and the development of the gasworks treated separately in terms of redevelopment plans, both projects appeared almost entirely disconnected in (official) public documents and statements. At the same time, the park served as a symbol of modernist socialist planning and political sovereignty. By contrast, dismantling

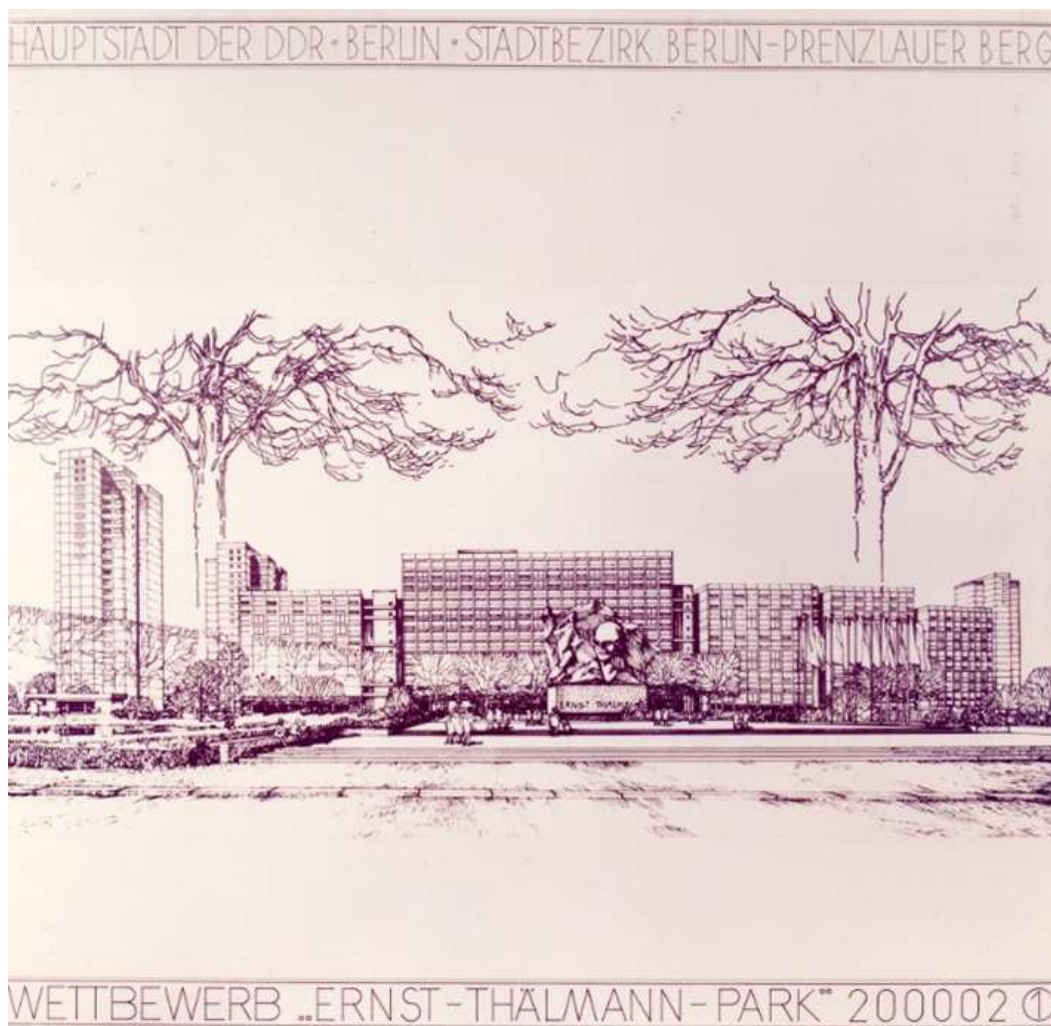


FIGURE 4 Design by the collective of the Academy for Construction (Bauakademie der DDR) led by Wilfried Stallknecht. In a realistic localisation of the design, the perspective would have shown the gasometers on the right-hand edge of the picture, behind the modern residential housing blocks. This design proposal was ultimately awarded third prize. (From Archive IRS Erkner, stock of Wilfried Stallknecht, C22_9-002, 1982, CC BY-SA)

the industrial plant embodied a turning away from – a kind of “clearing out of” – historical legacies and structures. The characteristic visual appearance of the gasometers thus became invisible in this authorised socialist urban vision in two ways: visually and discursively.

By contrast, media reports, including those in national and local newspapers and magazines less tightly controlled by the state apparatus, referred to everyday matters of interest to the local population. From 1981 onwards, this included energy supply issues, and related matters such as efforts to improve the quality of life and to secure jobs. In addition, magazine photo features and documentary films focused on human-interest stories, such as everyday life, and people’s memories, and anecdotes. Such local reports

defined the significance of the gasworks and its gasholders by connecting them to emotionally affecting stories of local society and identity.

Up to the spring of 1984, both specialist journals and daily newspapers continued to consider the gasometers as industrial heritage: “The three gasometers along the Reichsbahn site will be preserved as monuments and later put to a new use” (Gißke et al., 1983, p. 598). The repeated calls for their preservation and the visual appropriation of the gasometers in media reports, underlined by planners’ arguments, manifested their presumptive status as landmarks and heritage buildings. As a result, the gasometers were firmly embedded in the cultural heritage of many Prenzlauer Berg residents – leaving no doubt that their future as converted heritage sites was assured.

2.3 Negotiating over a “socialist” monument

Precisely how the decision to demolish the gasometers in the spring of 1984 was made cannot be reconstructed. It was determined by the political significance of the *prestigious Ernst Thälmann Park* project, the sculptor Lev Kerbel’s dominant influence, and the need to complete preparations for the 1986/87 celebrations. In addition, the immense costs of dismantling the gasworks, the remediation of the contaminated soil, and the lack of a binding concept for the redesign increased the sense of urgency (Bielefeldt et al., 2014). This led to the previously isolated matters of the park and the gasometers being joined. The new plan was to extend the residential park and remove the gasholders. Aware of potential disagreement, information in media reports about the new plan was vague, and no mention at all was made of the planned demolition of the buildings. Only attentive readers could recognise from the attached planning model that the gasometers were absent.

At the same time, rumours that the gasometers were going to be demolished began to spread, originating with construction companies involved in the work. This was the first time that either the general public or relevant professionals became aware of the plans. Many citizens and planners reached out to political officials, asking for reliable information via formal and informal communication channels. Many people, especially those who were used to addressing complaints to the authorities, expressed their concerns and disapproval verbally during office hours and by handing in written complaints and petitions. Their most serious argument against demolition was the value of the building as an “identifying structure” for the urban landscape and residents. Interestingly, the petitioners often referred to previous heritage discourse in the media, legitimising the relevance of the gasometers as a socialist memorial commemorating a local “labour tradition, [...] monument to cultural history and proletarian productivity” (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, 1984, p. 9).

Their comments also addressed the gasometers’ presumptive monument status based on previously published information: “At the beginning of the year, the listed buildings were presented to citizens on the model in our Palace of the Republic and in the daily press as part of the project to build a *Thälmann Park*” (Anonymous Author, 1984, p. 1). Most of the complaints were argument-based and attempt to negotiate using socialist language (Fix, 1996;

Kotkin, 1995). They often included detailed proposals of how to avoid the demolition, e.g., by remodelling or compensating for increased maintenance costs. Ultimately, they did not affect the political decision, which had already been made (Flierl, 1992).

In the early summer of 1984, a debate emerged between social and professional actors, on the one hand, and those responsible for planning policy, such as the *Politburo*, on the other, over the legitimacy of the planned demolitions. Much of the communication – both written and oral – took place out of the public eye. Thus, reconstruction of the authors' motives, biographies, and social functions remains fragmentary. At this time, the volume of communication expressing disagreement with the decision in provocative and reproachful ways increased. Some authors even accused the state leadership of acting unconstitutionally:

Indeed, you are also aware that a review procedure for recognition as a “technical monument” has been underway for over a year and that, according to the applicable laws of the GDR, no interventions may be carried out on the buildings in question during this time. Demolition would, therefore, be tantamount to an illegal act. (Anonymous Author, 1984, p. 1)

The *Politburo* had not yet issued an official written statement on the demolition. This suggests no information and communication strategy existed at the time. Reconstruction of internal correspondence shows that an ad hoc public announcement was prepared carefully with written, oral, and visual components (Bielefeld et al., 2014). Firstly, the employees of the building and planning offices were forbidden to provide any information. As one planner reported: “As employees of the subordinate institution of the district planning office, we are not allowed to comment on the gasometers. That is a decision!” (Meissner, interview on August 11, 2022). Second, the planning model that had been used so far was redesigned rapidly to suit the new political argument (Zentralkomitee der SED, 1984). Third, planning experts such as East Berlin's chief architect, Roland Korn, and the general conservator of the *Institut für Denkmalpflege* (Institute for Monument Preservation), Ludwig Deiters, acted as ideological puppets by publicly giving the plans apparent professional legitimacy. Finally, a newspaper article was published explaining the demolition, including arguments about high maintenance costs, the fragility of the structure, soil contamination, and the government's duty to care for society (Rehfeldt, 1984, p. 3).

These political attempts to calm things down by providing a minimum of transparency and artificial arguments did not match the civic demand for a public debate. On the contrary, the public confirmation of the demolition resulted in broad civil unrest. As one local design student reported: “And many people got angry. Now we are being patronised again. [...] Now we have to do something” (Meissner, interview on February 1, 2023). Many residents realised they could not influence the demolition decision by articulating their interests formally. Although they possessed valid arguments, some people were also willing to explore new possibilities for action to express their disapproval.

Looking back, one participant reported: “I do not know anymore. I can imagine that I did not write a [petition] but decided to take part in this action. I am making a statement. We are against it, and I am in. And I am taking a stand.” (Meissner, interview on February 1, 2023). Others consider that these protests involved only a small group of intellectuals and artists:

I did not experience any protests. I experienced feelings of shock and outrage. However, this anger was not expressed in equivalent actions. It did not result in any serious or perceptible expression of discontent [...] It was more of an expression of anger on the part of the local intellectuals and artists or those who were moved in any way, but not for the average person. [...] People certainly talked about it, but the general tone was resignation. (Bielefeld, 2014, p. 110)

Nevertheless, images of the gasometer now emerged as a central element in the expression of dissent and protest. Shortly before the demolition date was formally announced – at short notice – citizens expressed their disapproval using posters, leaflets, banners, flyers, exhibitions, badges, and photomontages (Figure 5).

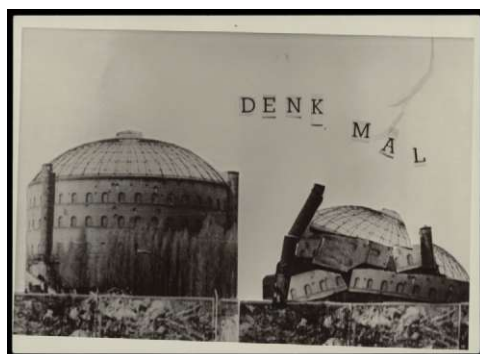
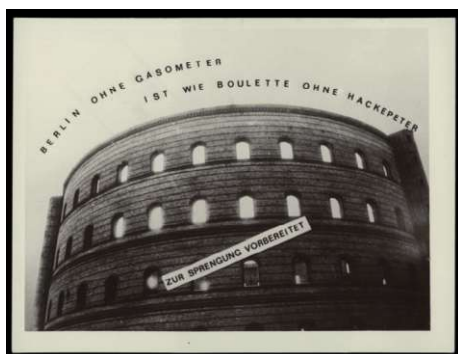
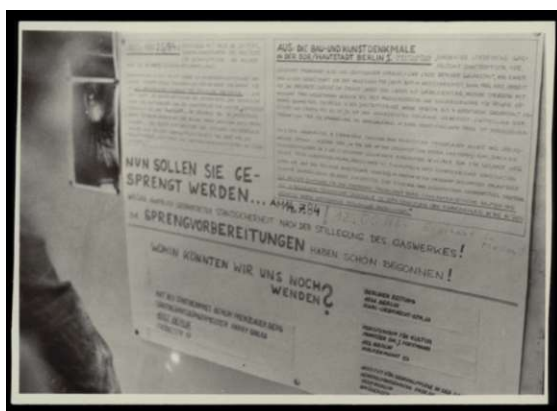


FIGURE 5 Sample of protest material showing gasometer motifs documented by the Ministry of State Security. The aim was to stimulate local awareness of the heritage value of the structure and criticism of the state decision to demolish it. (From Federal Archive Berlin, MfS, BV Bln, XX, Nr. 3520 and MfS, BV Bln, AKG, Nr. 4601, CC BY-SA)



FIGURE 6 Photographs of spectators observing the demolition of the gasometer in 1984. People gathered on the street and particularly rooftops, which offered a great view of the event. Among those observing the demolition, various individual and collective practices of witnessing, artistic and photographic documentation and observation were recorded. (From Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, Photo Stock, WF216 and WF225, CC BY-SA)

While the number of written statements to the state leadership did not decrease, images of the gasometers – above all, the gas container with the iron rooftop – were explicitly included in the campaigns. Alongside the written statements, the public space in the neighbourhoods near the gasworks became part of a visual protest; the conflict became visible in public. The protestors aimed to reach a critical public, show solidarity, and thus counter the individual sentiment of powerlessness. Even though the amount of material was limited, and the number of activists was relatively small, their disapproval, which was visible in letterboxes, hallways, windscreens, and suburban train entrances, significantly impacted the local public. Many residents doubted that it was possible to influence the political decision. Yet the protest activities represented a more fundamental opposition to the state authority of the SED regime. Both the *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (MfS; State Security aka the “Stasi”) and the West German media were interested in this public criticism (Halbrock, 2004). The Politburo reacted with repression and increased surveillance to demonstrate its power in public. In doing so, they attempted to regain public control over the public discourse.

On the day of the demolition, 28 July 1984, crowds gathered on the surrounding streets, bridges, and rooftops to witness the explosions. Despite the ban on public gatherings, filming, and photography, many people documented the vanishing of these local landmarks from the urban landscape. In doing so, their experience of loss and the visual documentation of that sentiment created the foundation for the later (visual) appropriation of the gasometers (Figure 6). An employee of the unit in charge of the demolition described the atmosphere on site as follows: “Prenzlauer Allee was blocked off [...], but the surrounding streets, the windows of the flats and stairwells, the roofs were full of people [...] within 20 seconds it was all over [...]” (Wagner, 1988, p. 102).

The loss of the buildings did not eliminate the social dissatisfaction; it rather intensified residents’ overall criticism of the state. By facing the demolition

with a hitherto unknown level of critical public discourse, new forms of solidarity were encouraged. One eyewitness and activist emphasised the importance of the demolition protest as an identity-forming moment, which ultimately outdid the actual significance of the gasometers themselves:

It was great that so many people were there, painting, with cameras, talking to each other, and there were discussions. [...] That was the first time I thought: Something is happening, not just us. It had great symbolism: the demolition. (Tacke, 2011, p. 120)

A new scope for action joined the widespread feeling of civic powerlessness in the face of the party's hegemony, and the latter's incapacity to act became more apparent. In the late 1980s, these impulses led to more informal and critical bottom-up engagement (e.g., on issues of monument protection, or the environmental and peace movements). The overall frustration of many citizens with the socialist politics of the GDR found expression, for instance, in the growing number of applications to leave the country (Dietrich, 2019). Thus, the positive perception of the completed *Ernst Thälmann Park* as an inner-city residential area, but above all as a park and recreational area, was accompanied by critical voices after its completion in 1987 (Bielefeld et al., 2014).

The demolition of the gasometers became a symbol of the SED's hegemony, which served to bolster the party's ideological self-representation and its hold on power rather than the *Realsozialismus* it claimed to stand for. The multiple visual experiences people had of the gasometers – from seeing them in the urban skyline, in the various plans members of the public proposed or helped to make for converting and repurposing them, in the discourses over protecting them as public monuments, in failed negotiation attempts, and finally in witnessing of the demolition action itself – created an emotional reference. Hence, these individual and collective experiences were manifested not just in memories but also in the narrative of an arbitrary decision by the state, one that affected the social construction of the gasometers as intangible heritage.

2.4 Appropriating a “lost” monument

Shortly after the GDR's collapse in 1989/90, public debates occurred on how to deal with socialism's own built legacy (Adam, 1992). The sentiment of a missed opportunity to transform and reform socialism and the rapid conclusion of German reunification in 1990 shaped this period of systemic transformation as a collective and individual experience during the 1990s (Brückweh & Zöller, 2019).

As the former capital and centre of power of the SED regime, Berlin in particular faced debates on how to deal with the socialist heritage and authoritarian remains in the cityscape (Engler, 2020; Wigger, 2022). Making space for new narratives by eradicating the public monument culture of the GDR seemed to offer a fast track to overcoming the socialist past. Consequently, one immediate result was the demolition of the Lenin Monument and renaming of the eponymous square in the neighbouring district of Berlin Friedrichshain

in 1991. The Prenzlauer Berg local authority decided in 1993 to take down the Ernst Thälmann monument, too. However, the decision was never realised, despite being listed (along with the whole park and residential area) as a heritage site in 2014, one that illustrates a unique architectural ensemble and identity-building site of GDR socialism (Bielefeld et al., 2014). Thus, the monument remains a visible and material aspect of the urban landscape today.

East Germany's official heritage discourse failed to take into account the appropriation of the gasometers as valuable heritage by the civil population. Similarly, the disappeared urban silhouette of the gasometer was adopted by local actors as a visual motif for their coming to terms with the SED dictatorship and the social history of the GDR. Critical voices who led the civic protest at the demolition and were prominent in the negotiations of the "Peaceful Revolution" of 1989 shaped the transformation of the gasometers into intangible heritage. Former GDR citizens and Prenzlauer Berg locals who were now involved in urban politics, education, or the arts, such as the photographers Harald Hauswald, Volker Döring, and Werner Fischer; the artists and writers Uwe Warnke and Siegmur Körner; the urban activists Matthias Klipp and Bernd Holtfreter; and the graphic artist Katharina Kosak reflected upon the gasometer protests as a crucial event in the process of civic political self-empowerment leading to the "Peaceful Revolution". They and others spoke publicly about the repressive policies of the SED regime and started a process of reflection and political education in the district. In processing the GDR's system of political injustice, the details of the processes and responsibilities that led to the demolition of the gasometers were reconstructed. Even if the documents still do not make it possible to name those in charge conclusively, it has been proven that there was no justification for the decision and that the demolition was illegal (Bielefeld et al., 2014). The ambivalence felt towards the remaining monument to Ernst Thälmann and the lost monument of the gasometers influenced the local public discourse in the early 1990s. Again, a state decision about the urban structure seemed to take precedence over the local civic sentiments about what is relevant to preserve and identify with.

The *Museum Pankow* (Pankow District Museum) mainly concerns local cultural heritage. It was founded in 1992 by consolidating the existing local museum collections of the three districts Prenzlauer Berg, Weißensee, and Pankow, which were merged to form a single municipal district in that year. As a resident and historian of the area, the museum's director, Bernt Roder, has integrated everyday perspectives and experiences into the design of the exhibitions. Interestingly, the museum's official trademark is now the iconic silhouette of the gasometer with its iron roof construction. The museum is located in a civic complex that also comprises a public library, community college, archive, and exhibition space: a lively open space for the neighbourhoods of Prenzlauer Berg. The museum's permanent exhibition, "*Gegenentwürfe*" ("Changes of Perspective") opened in 2009, its title calling back to local counter-narratives and dynamics within the civic upheaval in the GDR. Unsurprisingly, one exhibit focuses on the history of *Ernst Thälmann Park* and the process – here critically researched – that led to the demolition of the gasometers. Highlighting "socially explosive power" (Roder & Tacke,

2004), the exhibition draws a strong connection between the visual experience of the demolition and the public civic protest. On flyers and leaflets, banners in front of the museum building, and the museum's website, the gasometer appears repeatedly as a silhouette – a symbol of the local people's self-perception and identity with the local urban space (Figure 7).

This “new” gasometer narrative has been highlighted on specific occasions, such as the 30th anniversary of the demolition in 2014, which coincided with the listing of the *Ernst Thälmann Park* as a heritage ensemble. Local media coverage and various events at the time made citizens even more aware of the gasometers and their destruction. During these events, many references were made to well-known photographs and views of the gasometers. “Anyone with a sense for symbols had to recognise them,” wrote the popular *Tagesspiegel* newspaper on this occasion (Zajonz, 2014, p. 1). The same year, the local art and cultural association (*Brotfabrik*) dedicated an exhibition to the social upheaval caused by the demolition. Its title, *Gasometer sprengt man nicht* (“You do not blow up gasometers”) was one of the most identifiable slogans used during the demolition protests in 1984. The exhibition was held in the local cultural centre, *Kulturzentrum Wabe*, which opened on the site of the former gasworks in 1986, close to the former location of the gasometer (Brotfabrik, 2014). Film screenings and a commemorative publication reproduced the narrative visually, examining the entire history of the gasworks and their gasometer (Rothe, 2014). As *Tagesspiegel* commented at the time: “The absence of imagination on the part of the state authorities is still a reminder of the system's inability to deal with the creativity and goodwill of its own people. The stories of the gasometer are also about misplaced trust [...]. Many of those involved are still alive. Emotions are still running high [...].” (Zajonz, 2014, p. 1). The icon of the gasometer became part of the oft-cited “myth of Prenzlauer Berg” – a vision of the socio-material structure and dynamics of the district that gave space for a unique mix and niche of subculture and opposition and shaped the GDR cultural scene during the 1980s (Felsmann & Gröschner, 2012).

Although urban renewal, gentrification, and generational shifts have drastically changed Prenzlauer Berg's appearance, the gasometers' cultural heritage is kept alive in the collective memory of this generation of actively engaged eyewitnesses. However, the discourse and the visual focus have both changed with the shift of generations and issues. Recently, a gradual



FIGURE 7 A selection of images depicting the current use of the gasometer silhouette in an abstract form. The building is still clearly recognizable in a variety of ways – on the website, logo and flags in front of the exhibition building of Museum Pankow. (top and centre picture: Museum Pankow, undated, <https://www.berlin.de/museum-pankow/>, CC BY-SA; bottom picture: photo by Kathrin Meissner, 2019, CC BY-SA)



re-contextualisation has taken place, driven by younger generations, who have different associations with the place and whose meanings now overlap with those of older residents. The gasometer is now referred to in debates on affordable housing and gentrification. Its value as a symbol of civic empowerment under the GDR's SED regime has been re-contextualised and embedded in the ongoing "Right to the City" discourse by asking the question "Who owns the city?" as a bottom-up social protest (Flierl & Marcuse, 2012).

Since then, the gasometer has become less visible to the public beyond specific events such as special exhibitions or guided tours of the district. Still, the visual impact of the gasometer remains evident. It is remarkable that, although a large amount of image material exists and is accessible via photo agencies and open-access databases, the same motifs and perspectives of the gasometers have tended to be used again and again (Figure 8 & 9). For example, exhibitions such as "Ost-Berlin" (2019) and "Ernst-Thälmann-Park" (2021/22) used the usual images to reproduce their narratives. And the same motifs are reproduced in the foyer of the planetarium that now stands where the gasometers once were. Another approach has been taken by artistic projects such as the 2019/20 competition to comment on the highly debated Ernst Thälmann monument by the artist and eyewitness Betina Kuntzsch. By arranging red blocks with inscriptions such as "Gasometer" in the urban space of the park ensemble, this project recreated the gasholders physically in their urban surroundings. In doing so, the artist created implicit references processing the ongoing trauma of a generation of GDR citizens who experienced the conflicts and transformations of the late 1980s and 1990s (Kuntzsch, 2021).

In these ways, the visual narrative is passed on to an audience with no personal emotional reference to the lost industrial sites, de- and re-contextualising the demolition discourse within the history of GDR and East Berlin, and keeping the materially lost gasometers alive as intangible visual heritage.

FIGURE 8 Various visual appearances of the gasometer silhouette in several exhibitions and an art installation. (from top to bottom: photo of the exhibition "Stadtwerke", 2021; art installation „Vom Sockel Her Denken“ by Betina Kuntzsch, 2019; photo of the exhibition "Ost-Berlin", 2019; all three Kathrin Meissner, CC BY-SA)

FIGURE 9 Visual appearance of the gasometer silhouette in an art installation. (Artistic installation by Joachim Völkner in 1984, Gerd Danigel, 2022, CC BY-NC-SA)

3 CONCLUSION

The striking appearance of gasometers in European cityscapes has been a subject of public debate ever since their industrial uses began to decline: The public calls to stop the demolition of the gasometer in Oberhausen from 1988 led to its conversion as part of the International Building Exhibition (*Internationale Bauausstellung*, IBA) in 1993/94. In contrast, many GDR gasometers remained vacant after the closure of the gasworks in the mid and late 1970s; some fell into disrepair, while others were at least overhauled, as in Leipzig in the 2000s. Recent conversion projects in Vienna, London, and Berlin have demonstrated the conflicting interests that currently exist regarding the re- or de-construction of these significant elements of the urban appearance and how they shape the cultural heritage. Ultimately, each case is unique: both each monument consisting of a gasometer in its urban surroundings and the surrounding negotiations and discourse. The variety of national and regional planning regimes, and specific local factors, such as the diverse social agents and societal discourses involved, make every case unique. But each case also demonstrates that heritage values are deeply interwoven in the historical fabric of the site and the city.

In conclusion, this chapter has illustrated how gasometers, as material and intangible buildings, served as surfaces for the projection of narratives of socialist heritage. It also illustrated the variety of approaches that can be taken to interpretational sovereignty in determining what should be preserved from the past for future generations. It showed that heritage is not just a matter of material objects, structures, and traditions but also includes social process that frequently reshape these objects' meaning. The conflicting heritage discourses about the gasometers in Prenzlauer Berg are more than just a specific and unique example. The subject is thus relevant for the broader research discourse on cultural heritage, socialist planning culture, and GDR history for three reasons.

First, the processes that determined the fate of the gasometers occurred at a time when the relevance of heritage preservation had just reached a broader public. Dealing with the decay of historic urban structures and mass housing stock was an issue within the culture of transformative planning. The political narrative of socialist urban renewal of the mid-to-late 1970s became a public matter within the symbolic politics of the Cold War, but, in practical terms, clashed with the structural focus on industrial production in the GDR's construction economy. Here, the authoritarian political process conflicted with the interests and initiatives of the local community in preserving historic structures. In the context of these challenges around urban renewal, the arguments of experts quickly spread to a broader audience. The debates evoked broad public interest and discussions on how to deal with the remains of the gasometers. The gasometer discourse examined here was one of the earliest examples dealing with the demolition and preservation of industrial heritage. It promoted broad public debate and engagement in participatory action, active criticism, constructive conversion plans, and the reuse of designs.

Second, the conflicting discourse (preservation vs. demolition) resulted in the actual material disappearing of the buildings and, hence, their transformation

into an immaterial monument whose meanings were no longer related to their initial architectural and aesthetic significance as an industrial site. This chapter has demonstrated how the gasometers have been the subject of expert and informed advocacy, which promoted the demolition discourse and triggered broad public protest. After an extensive public debate and efforts to preserve the buildings, their loss, combined with local frustration regarding GDR socialist policies during the 1980s, led to their transformation into intangible cultural heritage. This process of “heritage construction” reflected less the industrial past than the repressive actions and practices of the SED regime. Here, the driving force for this discursive transformation and the production of a new narrative was the local society and their experiences. Initially feeling that their views had been ignored and suppressed in the negotiations, these actors were mostly part of creative groups, state-critical initiatives, and renewal activist organisations during the 1970s and 1980s. They had solid local relations and acted implicitly or explicitly as social advocates, becoming the dominant voices in the discourse of transformation. Because they held relevant local positions both during and after the transition from socialism to the democratic reunited Germany, they could initiate early reflection and processing of the authoritarian SED regime. They have thus shaped the cultural commemoration and heritage narrative to the present day – the monument status of the gasometer played a significant role in this.

Third, the “visual appropriation” of the demolished gasometer functioned as a participatory instrument and strategy throughout the negotiation process concerning the perception of the intangible cultural heritage of the socialist past. The broad reception of visual materials within the conversion discourse and the production of protest materials associated the buildings and practices around them with visionary ideas and gave them emotional resonance. The actors referred to the appearance of the gasometers to underline their argument – whether promoting demolition or preservation – and the sites ultimately became a symbol of civic upheaval against the SED dictatorship. Producing visual artefacts required specific resources such as expertise, materials, and a willingness to take risks in production and public dissemination. Although the active use of visual materials as a central argument in the conflicting discourses was limited to a small group of politicised and oppositional actors with expert knowledge in planning, aesthetics, and art, their work affected a broader public. The repeating silhouette of the one gasometer with its iron rooftop shaped the narrative significantly. Due to the variety of sources analysed from an actor-centred perspective, this chapter has demonstrated that citizens have used several practices, such as taking photographs or making drawings, to document their perception of the gasometer’s appearance. As well as active engagement, emotional bonding through debates and protests and ultimately witnessing the demolition also produced vivid but varied memories for many people living nearby, which can be remembered more easily when depicted visually.

The chapter emphasised elements and strategies, such as the impact of visibility alongside language, as aspects of communicative mediation, negotiation, and public legitimisation. Hence, it demonstrated how a materially lost building remained visible and how its visual trajectory from industrial to socialist monument affected and finally reproduced local cultural heritage over time.

REFERENCES

- Adam, H. (1992). Erinnerungsrituale – Erinnerungsdiskurse – Erinnerungstabus: Politische Denkmäler der DDR zwischen Verhinderung, Veränderung und Realisierung, kritische berichte. *Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften*, 20(3), 10–35.
- Anonymous Author (1976, September 14). Unsere Erfolge zeigen die Vorzüge des Sozialismus. Erich Honecker sprach im Palast der Republik vor 4500 Parteiaktivisten der Hauptstadt, *Neues Deutschland*, p. 3.
- Anonymous Author (1984, July 2). Letter of Petition. Archive Museum Pankow (4 PB Slg. Gaswerk, 5.2 Zeiteugen) Berlin.
- Atmadi, S. (2012). *Die komplexe sozialistische Rekonstruktion von Altbaugebieten im ehemaligen Ost-Berlin* [Doctoral Dissertation, Technical University Berlin].
- Aufbauleitung Sondervorhaben (1982, February). Wettbewerb Städtebauliche, architektonische und konstruktive Gestaltung des Wohnungsneubaus im Ernst-Thälmann-Park: Anlage Wettbewerbsprogramm. Scientific Collection IRS (WS: C24) Erkner.
- Bärthel, H. (1997). *Die Geschichte der Gasversorgung in Berlin: Eine Chronik*. Nicolai.
- Barth, H. (2001). Einleitung: Gebauter und sozialer Raum. In H. Barth (Ed.), *Grammatik sozialistischer Architekturen: Lesarten historischer Städtebauforschung der DDR* (pp. 9–20). Reimer.
- Bauakademie (1977, June). Städtebauliche Leitplanung: Anlage 3. Gesellschaftliche Einrichtungen. Federal Archive Berlin (DH 2/23475).
- Benke, C., & Betker, F. (2010). Stadt und Region in der DDR im multiperspektivischen Fokus der Bau und Planungsgeschichte. In C. Benke, F. Betker & C. Bernhardt (Eds.), *Paradigmenwechsel und Kontinuitätslinien im DDR-Städtebau: Neue Forschungen zur ostdeutschen Architektur- und Planungsgeschichte* (pp. 7–25). IRS.
- Bernhardt, C., & Reif, H. (Eds.) (2009). *Sozialistische Städte zwischen Herrschaft und Selbstbehauptung: Kommunalpolitik, Stadtplanung und Alltag in der DDR*. Franz-Steiner.
- Betker, F., & Bräuer, F. (2006). Stadtplanung als öffentliche Angelegenheit. In K. Selle (Ed.), *Planung neu denken: Zur räumlichen Entwicklung beitragen. Konzepte. Theorien. Impulse* (pp. 85–102). Rohn.
- Bezirksbauamt (1978). Studie Ernst-Thälmann-Park Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg. Federal Archive Berlin (DH 1/33333).
- Bielefeld, F. (2014). Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Stadt. In Brotfabrik (Ed.), *Gasometer sprengt man nicht! Ein Ausstellungsprojekt von Glashaus e.V. in Kooperation mit dem Bezirksamt Pankow/Fachbereich Kunst und Kultur* (pp. 104–111).
- Bielefeld F., Moldt, D., & Schröck P. (2014). *Gasometer sprengt man nicht: Ausstellungskatalog*. Brotfabrik.
- Bogner, S., Franz, B., Meier H. R., & Steiner M. (Eds.) (2018). *Denkmal – Erbe – Heritage. Begriffshorizonte am Beispiel der Industriekultur*. Jörg Mitkat.
- Breßler, J., & Kurth, D. (2022). Erinnerungsdiskurse in Ost und West: Der Einfluss des deutsch-deutschen Fachdiskurses auf die Stadterneuerungspolitik. In J. Breßler, H. Engler, H. Kegler, C. Kummer, D. Kurth, J. Noeske, W. Reinert & M. Welch Guerra (Eds.), *Stadtwende: Bürgerengagement und Altstadterneuerung in der DDR und Ostdeutschland* (pp. 210–223). Ch. Links.
- Brotfabrik (Ed.) (2014). *Gasometer sprengt man nicht! Ein Ausstellungsprojekt von Glashaus e.V. in Kooperation mit dem Bezirksamt Pankow/Fachbereich Kunst und Kultur*.

- Brückweh, K., & Zöller, K. (2019). Transformation research and the *longue durée* of 1989: Combining qualitative and quantitative data, *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 15(1), 72–91.
- Büro für Städtebau (1980, July 8), Korrespondenz mit VEB Energiekombinat am 8.7.1980 zur Demontage der Gasspeicher. Municipal Archive Berlin (C Rep. 110-01, Nr. 3082).
- Christmann, G., Bernhardt, C., Singh, A., & Stollmann, J. (2020). Visual communication in urban design and planning: The impact of mediatization(s) on the construction of urban futures, *Urban Planning*, 5(2), 1–9.
- Dietrich F. (2019). *Kulturgeschichte der DDR III*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Engler, H. (2020). Transformation und Nachwende: Bau- und Planungsgeschichte der DDR in der Nach-Wende und das IRS in Erkner. In H. Kegler (Ed.), *Industrielles Gartenreich: Bauhaus Wende Perspektiven* (pp. 188–193). Wirtschaftsförderungsgesellschaft Anhalt-Bitterfeld.
- Ethington, P. J., & Schwartz, V. R. (Eds.) (2006). Special Issue: Urban Icons, *Urban History*, 33(1).
- Felsmann, B., & Gröschner, A. (Eds.). (2012), *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer Berg: Eine Berliner Künstlersozialgeschichte der 1970er und 1980er Jahre in Selbstauskünften*. Lukas Verlag.
- Fischer, K. F., & Altrock, U. (Eds.). (2018). *Windows upon planning history*. Routledge.
- Fix, U. (1996). Rituelle Kommunikation im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch der DDR und ihre Begleitumstände. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der selbstbestimmten und mitbestimmenden Kommunikation in der DDR. In G. Lerchner (Ed.), *Sprachgebrauch im Wandel* (pp. 11–63). Peter Lang.
- Flierl, T. (1992). Gegen den Abriß eines Baudenkmals: Eine Rede aus dem Jahr 1984. *kritische berichte. Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften*, 20(3), 53–57.
- Flierl, B., & Marcuse, P. (2012). Socialist cities, for people or for power? In N. Brenner, P. Marcuse & M. Mayer (Eds.), *Cities for people not for profit: Critical urban theory and the right to the city* (pp. 231–249). Routledge.
- Halbrock, C. (2004). Vom Widerstand zum Umbruch: Die oppositionelle Szene in den 80er Jahren. In B. Roder & B. Tacke (Eds.), *Prenzlauer Berg im Wandel der Geschichte: Leben rund um den Helmholtzplatz* (pp. 98–124). be.bra Verlag.
- Hauser, S. (2018). Signs and symbols in planning processes (1975–1995). In K. F. Fischer & U. Altrock (Eds.), *Windows upon planning history* (pp. 231–246). Routledge.
- Healey, P. (1992). Planning through debate: The communicative turn in planning theory. *The Town Planning Review*, 63(2), 143–162.
- Hein, C. (Ed.) (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Planning History*. Routledge.
- Gißke, E., Krause, D., & Battke, M. (1983). Städtebauliche, architektonische und künstlerische Konzeption zur Gestaltung des Ernst-Thälmann-Parkes in Berlin, Hauptstadt der DDR. *Architektur der DDR*, 32(19), 594–599.
- Kamleithner, C., & Meyer, R. (2011). Urban Icons: Architektur und globale Bildzirkulation. *Informationen zur Modernen Stadtgeschichte*, 2, 17–31.
- Keltsch, S. (2012). *Stadterneuerung und städtebauliche Denkmalpflege in der DDR zwischen 1970 und 1990: Dargestellt an der Entwicklung von Denkmalstädten in Sachsen-Anhalt* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Leipzig].

- Klemstein, F. (2021). *Denkmalpflege zwischen System und Gesellschaft: Vielfalt denkmalpflegerischer Prozesse in der DDR (1962–1975)* [Doctoral Dissertation, University Bielefeld].
- Kotkin, S. (1995). *Magnetic mountain: Stalinism as a civilization*. University of California Press.
- Kuntzsch, B. (2021). *Vom Sockel Denken* [Video, Director B. Kuntzsch]. <https://www.betinakuntzsch.de/arbeiten/vom-sockel-denken/>
- Lehmann, N.-H. (2021). Socialism and the rise of industrial heritage: The preservation of industrial monuments in the German Democratic Republic. In E. Gantner, C. Geering & P. Vickers (Eds.), *Heritage under socialism: Preservation in Eastern and Central Europe, 1945–1991*. Berghan Books.
- Meissner, K. (upcoming). *Städterneuerung als sozialistischer Aushandlungsprozess? Anspruch und Realität von DDR-Planungskommunikation am Beispiel des Ost-Berliner Stadtbezirks Prenzlauer Berg 1971–1989* [Doctoral Dissertation, Technical University Berlin].
- Meuschel, S. (1992). *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft in der DDR*. Suhrkamp.
- Mieg, H. A., Oevermann, H., Cossons, N., Cramer, J., Ringbeck, B., & Watson, M. (2014). Discussing industrial heritage conservation and planning. In H. Oevermann & H. A. Mieg (Eds.), *Industrial heritage sites in transformation* (pp. 201–218). Routledge.
- Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (1984, July). Bericht. Archive Museum Pankow (4 PB Slg. Gaswerk, 5.2 Zeitzeugen) Berlin.
- Ministerrat (1981, February 2), Sitzungsbeschluss zur Information über Maßnahmen zur Stilllegung des Berliner Gaswerkes Dimitroffstraße und der nachfolgenden Nutzung des Geländes. Federal Archive Berlin (DC 20-1/4/4718).
- Oevermann, H. (2012). *Über den Umgang mit dem industriellen Erbe: Eine diskursanalytische Untersuchung städtischer Transformationsprozesse am Beispiel der Zeche Zollverein* [Doctoral Dissertation, Technical University Berlin].
- Oevermann, H., Gantner, E., & Frank, S. (2016). Städtisches Erbe – Urban Heritage. *Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte* (1), 5–10.
- Oevermann, H., & Mieg, H. A. (2014). Transformations of industrial heritage sites: Heritage and planning. In H. Oevermann & H. A. Mieg (Eds.), *Industrial Heritage Sites in Transformation* (pp. 3–11). Routledge.
- Otten, C. (1981). Das letzte Feuer. *Neue Berliner Illustrierte*, 38(27), 14–18.
- Rehfeldt, T. (1984, July 13). Mit Tempo und Qualität errichten die Bauleute das neue Wohngebiet, *Neues Deutschland*, p. 3.
- Roder, B., & Tacke, B. (Eds.) (2004). *Prenzlauer Berg im Wandel der Geschichte: Leben rund um den Helmholtzplatz*. be.bra Verlag.
- Rothe, K. (Director) (2014), *Wildwest im Thälmannpark* [Video]. Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/360546930>
- Saldern, A. v. (2003). Herrschaft und Repräsentation in DDR-Städten. In A. v. Saldern (Ed.), *Inszenierte Einigkeit: Herrschaftsrepräsentationen in DDR-Städten* (pp. 9–58). Franz Steiner-Verlag.
- Schulz, K. (1981, August 4). Nun wird also das Gaswerk abgetragen, *Berliner Zeitung*, p. 11.
- Shanken, A. M. (2018). The visual culture of planning. *Journal of Planning History*, 17(4), 300–319.
- Singh, A., & Meißner, K. (2021). Geplante Erinnerung: Vom Raumwissen zum Erinnerungsort in der kooperativen Stadtplanung. *Moderne Stadtgeschichte* 1, 69–82.

- Sturken, M., & Cartwright L. (2009). *Practices of looking: An introduction to visual, culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Tacke, B. (2011). Sozialistische Stadtplanung: Der Ernst-Thälmann-Park oder Das Beglückungsprogramm des Staates. In B. Roder & B. Tacke (Eds.), *Gegenentwürfe: Der Prenzlauer Berg vor, während und nach dem Mauerfall* (pp. 114–125).
- Topfstedt, T. (1999). Wohnen und Städtebau in der DDR. In I. Flagge (Ed.), *Geschichte des Wohnens V: 1945 bis heute Aufbau Neubau Umbau* (pp. 419–562). Wüstenrot Verlag.
- Trost, H. (1983). *Bau- und Kunstdenkmale in der DDR: Hauptstadt Berlin*. Henschelverlag.
- Wächter, E., & Wagenbreth, O. (1973). *Technische Denkmale in der DDR*. Kulturbund der DDR.
- Wagner, B. (1988). *Der Griff ins Leere: Elf Versuche*. Transit.
- Weirick, J. (2018). Heritage, community activism and urban development: A window on the personification of planning history. In K. Fischer & U. Altrock (Eds.), *Windows Upon Planning History* (pp. 220–230). Routledge.
- Wigger, J. (2022). In Transformation: Bürgerschaftliches Engagement und Protest für die historische Bausubstanz seit den 1980er Jahren. In J. Breßler, H. Engler, H. Kegler, C. Kummer, D. Kurth, J. Noeske, W. Reinert & M. Welch Guerra (Eds.), *Stadtwende: Bürgerengagement und Altstadterneuerung in der DDR und Ostdeutschland* (pp. 132–143). Ch. Links.
- Wüllner, K. (2016). *Hinter der Fassade: Das institutionelle System der Denkmalpflege in der DDR untersucht am Beispiel der thüringischen Städte Erfurt, Weimar und Eisenach* [Doctoral Dissertation, Cottbus University].
- Zajonz, M. (2014, August 13). DDR-Architekturskandal in Berlin Prenzlauer Berg. "Gasometer sprengt man nicht!" *Tagesspiegel*. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/gasometer-sprengt-man-nicht-3578761.html>
- Zentralkomitee der SED (1984, July 4). Protocol Number 76/84. Federal Archive Berlin (DY 30/59313).

BIOGRAPHY

Kathrin Meissner is an urban historian and human geographer. She completed her doctoral thesis at the Technische Universität Berlin in 2024 on social negotiation processes in urban renewal in socialist planning culture by analysing local (non-)public communication practices in East Berlin from 1971 to 1989. Her research focuses on the (re)construction of the narratives and (visual) discourses of Berlin's urban society in the 20th and 21st centuries and the related dynamics of media change and communication processes in the context of planning cultures and urban heritage. Her previous work includes studies on urban development in Portuguese colonies in Africa during the Salazar regime and grassroots initiatives, conflicts and forms of societal engagement in urban discourses in West Berlin and the UK since the late 1960s.