

Re-positioning after the Fall of the German Wall: World Trade Centers Development in Cities of the former German Democratic Republic: Rostock, Dresden and Frankfurt (Oder)

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Abstract: The fall of the German Wall in 1989 symbolizes a fundamental system change for the entire global world order. As a physical boundary, the „Iron Curtain“ had symbolized the separation of Europe into an Eastern and Western block. After this divide, following the German Reunification, cities and regions in the former East took various efforts to re-position themselves within the new world order and its encompassing cultural, economic and political codes, with architecture serving as an agent to represent the new global system. During the early 1990s, for example, World Trade Centers have been established in cities like Rostock, Dresden and Frankfurt (Oder), utilizing the trademark licensed by the World Trade Centers Association, a global organisation that aims to foster a global trade infrastructure by referencing the iconic World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York. This paper asks: What were the intentions behind the establishments of World Trade Centers in cities of the former German Democratic Republic shortly after the fall of the wall, what were the effects? The aim of this investigation is to give an example of how architecture has been instrumentalized as representation of the global system within this transition period.

Keywords: German Reunification, Globalisation, Global Trade, Representation, World Trade Center

Introduction: ‘Wende’ as transition

Today, 30 years after the fall of the German Wall in 1989 and the following German reunification, a system change broadly referred to as ‘Wende’ (German: ‘turn’), remains subject to a variety of research fields far beyond the social, economic, historical and political sciences. The massive ideological, political and territorial changes following the fall of the German Wall obviously had a fast impact on the global system, Europe, and, in its most immediate societal dimension, in Eastern Germany, the area of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR).

The political, economic and societal system change has impacted the built environment in the former GDR on every scale, including rural areas, small and medium-sized cities, state capital cities and, most strongly due to its symbolic impact, the then re-united and reconstituted capital of Germany, Berlin. Large cities such as Berlin, Leipzig and Dresden commissioned star architecture firms for the production of iconic architecture, that would symbolize the new belonging to the global system and its encompassing values. At the same time, a wave of

historic reconstruction projects, pursued in the spirit to symbolically connect to an at times idealised German past and sometimes with an identitarian connotation. In between these two highly visible and critically discussed strains of post-socialist urban development in the former GDR, there has been a quieter and less visual urban development, mostly in small and mediums-sized cities, that reflects the societal transformations since 1989. With the new political system, every-day life changed in vital aspects such as housing, job market and work environment, education, retail, leisure time, public life, the media, etc. In all these areas, an orientation towards the Western capitalist culture, its practices and symbols, took place as part of a societal re-positioning. A certain idealization of Western values has served as narrative to support the ideological transition from one political and economic system to the other. At the same time, the political, economic and financial opening, supported by financial development subsidiaries, allowed foreign countries to invest in the new regions and profit from the new market under the narrative of reinforcing national reunification.

The term ‘Wende’ describes the socio-political change within the GDR, eventually leading to its end and to the beginning of a united Germany. It also describes a system change, the transition from one state to the other. Other terminologies used are *revolution* and *reunification*. The transition taking part with the ‘Wende’ is one from a bipolar to a multipolar world order, from communism to capitalism, from planning economy to market economy, from a one-party system to a parliamentary democracy, from separation to unity, from a territorial position at the edge of Europe to the Center of Europe, from closed borders to open boundaries and, finally, from a state-governed urban planning system to an urban planning environment, which is dominated by public and private partnerships, developments and investors and highly driven by the global real estate market.

Most research literature describes the developments in post-socialist urbanism as ‘transformations’, considering the processual character of urban transformations. Oleg Golubchikov differentiates the terms *transformation* and *transition*, describing transformation as a particularized, area-related process, while transition is seen as a political and even ideological, totalizing tool of systemic change, implementing power. He suggests that transition should not be equated with contextual transformations, or else the totalizing power of transitions would be obscured. „Urbanization is a major institutional dimension of transition, not simply its playground“, he concludes. (Golubchikov, 2016)

This paper aims to provide an example of urban repositioning following the years after 1989, that reflects cultural change and its impact on architecture and the urban environment. During the early 1990s, urban planners and developers established World Trade Centers in the East German cities Rostock, Dresden and Frankfurt (Oder), utilizing the trademark licensed by the World Trade Centers Association, a global organisation, headquartered in New York, that aims to develop and strengthen a global trade infrastructure by referencing the iconic World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York as representation of not only world trade, but the global system itself. It aims to show how World Trade Centers have served as a tool to represent global trade and with it the global political and economic system of the free market economy, thus supporting the transition from one ideological system to another. In the following, this paper will first elaborate the specific role of World Trade Center development within the global system. Second, it will specify „World Trade Centerness“ at the examples of World Trade Centers developed in Rostock, Dresden and Frankfurt (Oder) after the ‘Wende’, describing intentions behind the development and effects. It will conclude by pointing out how architecture is being instrumentalized as representation of the global system within this transition period.

World Trade Centers, architecture and the global system

The term ‘World Trade Center’ is associated with the iconic New York Twin Tower buildings, which opened in 1974 and were destroyed in 2011 during the terror attacks on 9/11. Designed by Minoru Yamasaki and commissioned by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey within a decade-long urban transformation of lower Manhattan. At the time, the Twin Towers were intended to serve as a globally visible symbol of power,

wealth and stability. The strong connotation of the World Trade Center name to the New York Twin Towers prevails widely across the world, many years after the physical destruction of the Twin Tower buildings. In fact, it is commonly unknown, that today, more than 300 buildings carrying the name „World Trade Center“ exist worldwide, more of them having been planned since the World Trade Centers Association had started to multiply the concept of World Trade Centers by offering the trademark and with it the promise of belonging to a global network to local planners, city governments, developers and investors. Looking at urban development in the early 1990s in the former GDR, the question arises why private developers together with cities like Dresden, Rostock and Frankfurt (Oder) decided to include the development of World Trade Centers within the process of urban transformation after the ‘Wende’ and the transition from one ideological system to the other.



Figure 1, World Trade Center Twin Towers, New York, 1974

Viewing the history of global World Trade Center development by the World Trade Centers Association, it becomes apparent that, often, World Trade Center development has been part of an urban transition process under the premise to re-position the identity of the specific location. Examples are an increased World Trade Center development in China in the context of China’s economic expansion and opening to the global economy, World Trade Center development in Southern Europe in the context of the global financial crisis in 2008, World Trade Center development in light of the territorial expansion of the European Union, or, as discussed in this paper, the transition of post-socialist cities after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In the following, the concept of using the New York Twin Tower buildings as representation of world trade by the World Trade Centers Association is being outlined. The global organisation is briefly introduced to provide an understanding of how it operates in developing its global network and brand. Further, it will be argued that the World Trade Centers Association can be used as an example for a global organisation, which is both an effect of the global system and at the same time functioning as an agent of its permanent reaffirmation. Using the term ‘global system’, this paper refers to the process of globalization as it has emerged since the beginning of the 1970s, a timely coincidence with the completion of the New York Twin Towers. The establishment of a globally interrelated unstable currency system, which is seen as the beginning of a Post-Fordist socio-economic

system, along with the emergence of internet technologies, are considered to be key drivers of a paradigm shift, leading to a global society which would be prone to political, economic and financial instabilities and crises. (Spencer 2016). Characteristics of the condition described are increasing privatisation, marketization, competition, commodification in almost all aspects of life, often termed as neoliberalism. The role of cities under this condition has been widely analysed in urban and social studies, geography: Within this global system, cities function as hubs of financialization, inscribing a specific agency to the city, its buildings, places and inhabitants (Sassen, 2001). In response to the paradigm shift in the 1970s, cultural theoreticians started to engage in a broad examination of the cultural conditions of global capitalism, with a particular interest in architecture as representation of capital and as symbolic object. Marxist thinkers examining the conditions of postmodernity, such as David Harvey or Fredric Jameson, took on Marx' critique of ideology and his preoccupation with the dissonance between reality and appearance, the presented and its representation (Jameson 1991, Harvey 1990). In parallel to the preoccupation with representation in the socio-economic and political domain, new, semiotic and linguistic works emerged, discussing representation in the context of meaning, the relation of signifier and signified and the existence of a symbolic system of inter-referring signs. (Architecture, with its inherent double coding of both instantiating society and representing society (Delitz 2010) has been one of the centers of discussion in the discourse about representation and the economic conditions of cultural production. A closer look at this intersection of symbolic representation and the material production of space in European cities shows how these qualities are interwoven and cooperate in the production of the urban environment.

The described global system very much relies upon the narrative of its unity: the unisphere, the one world, the all-embracing global. This unity, however, can also be described as a totality, one that evokes terror and exploitation, as Jean Baudrillard writes in a provoking essay about the destruction of the New York Twin Towers during 9/11, in which he claims that the Twin Towers, representing global unity and the almost absolute exclusion of any other, were built to be destroyed by terror (Baudrillard 2012). As an effect, the unity of the global is presented in cities as well: Here, an exclusive *center* functions both as place and image of global power and connectivity, symbolizing its position and belonging to the global system. This unity, displayed for example in corporate towers, is maintained by the exclusion of the other, creating a system of devalorisation and exclusion. In this system, access and distance to the center is controlled by borders and other access-restricting barriers. The center is always exclusive, a symbol, power and with boundaries. The center itself has become a symbol of the unity and ubiquity of the global.

The World Trade Centers Association was founded in New York in 1970 by Guy Tozzoli, who was then overseeing the Twin Towers World Trade Center design and development in his role as Director of the World Trade Department of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (Glanz, Lipton 2011). In 1987, he managed to transfer the licencing fee to the rights of the World Trade Center name from the Port Authority to the World Trade Centers Association for the symbolic amount of 10 US Dollars. Since then, the association has been developing an „international ecosystem' of global connections, iconic properties, and integrated trade services“. (WTCA annual report 2018)

By acquiring the World Trade Center name, the World Trade Centers Association was able to reproduce the World Trade center effect, relying on its symbolic value and the recognizability of that meaning within the global sign system. But how do the World Trade Center buildings in Dresden, Rostock and Frankfurt (Oder) relate to the Twin Towers in New York other than by name, how do they relate to the more than 300 World Trade Centers globally? Contextualizing the building of the Twin Towers, the World Trade Centers Association and the global system, it argues, that the development of World Trade Centers in post-socialist urban planning in the former GDR happened to support the transition from one ideological system to another, the subsumption of the former Eastern Bloc by the global value system of the Western world. The presence of a building in an urban environment that is signified as World Trade Center symbolizes the belonging to the same system, which the

‘original’ World Trade Center, the New York Twin Towers, represents. It hence acts as an agent for unification. (Baudrillard 2012, Golubchikov 2016)

World Trade Center development in cities of the former GDR: Dresden, Rostock, Frankfurt (Oder)

In the following, the concept of „World Trade Centerness“ is being exemplified by looking at the World Trade Center development in three cities in the former GDR, which all took place immediately during the years following the ‘Wende’ in 1989. While the cities of Dresden, Rostock and Frankfurt (Oder) differ from each other in many aspects such as size, number of inhabitants, economic rates and heritage, it is argued in this paper that the World Trade Center development after the ‘Wende’, followed a similar agenda in all three cities: to re-position itself in light of the transition to an already existing global system. In an ongoing doctoral research, a closer comparative investigation into the various World Trade Center developments is underway. Within the restricted frame of this paper, however, a first overview on position, re-positioning effort, World Trade Center development within the transitional character of the ‘Wende’ are briefly laid out and put into context.

With more than half a million inhabitants, Dresden is by far the largest of the three cities in the former GDR featuring World Trade Centers today. The capital city of Saxony is the third largest city in the former GDR after Berlin and Leipzig, bordering the Czech Republic and situated at the river Elbe. Due to its rich heritage as a former royal residence, it features historic buildings, some of them lavishly reconstructed after the ‘Wende’ in an effort to reconnect to its pre-war identity, which had been disregarded and neglected during the times of the GDR. In addition, global star architecture, such as the UFA Filmpalast by Coop Himmelb(l)au had been added to the city. The World Trade Center in Dresden is positioned in the inner city, next to the city ring. Unlike the World Trade Centers in Rostock and Frankfurt (Oder), the World Trade Center Dresden inhabits a building that has been specifically commissioned and designed as such. Situated in the center of the city of Dresden, the building complex features a tower within a multi-functional ensemble, intending to symbolize the global connectivity of the World Trade center network with a filigree roof, spanning over the building complex.



Figure 2, World Trade Center Dresden, 1992

Half the size of Dresden, Rostock's urban identity is very much defined by its position at the Baltic Sea and the river Warnow. As a port city, it is culturally coined by the respective industries, tourism, as well as the connectivity to the bordering Baltic countries. While explicitly relating in its mission statement to the World Trade Centers Association with its chair in New York and the worldwide network, the World Trade Center building in Rostock features a highly inconspicuous morphology. Labeled „World Trade Center“, the Rostock World Trade Center has not much else in common with the New York Twin Towers other than its waterfront location. Situated at the shore, the building complex houses a Best Western Hotel and various business services in relation to international trade, portraying itself as a hub within global business network and its respective symbols of business travel, trade fair, congresses and corporate office culture.

Frankfurt at the river Oder is by far the smallest city of the three World Trade Center cities in the former GDR, with just below 60 thousand inhabitants. Its World Trade Center is positioned within an industrial area just outside the city, in its green belt. The World Trade Center is part of an industrial building complex and merely a nameplate among others. The building housing the World Trade Center is not designed for its specific function, it solemnly serves as address provider, signifying nothing. In lack of the signifier, the World Trade Center in Frankfurt (Oder) uses for its branding activities the image of the most iconic and visible building in the center of Frankfurt (Oder), the Oder Tower. Designed and built during the times of the GDR between 1968 and 1976 and renovated after the 'Wende' in 1992-1994, the Oder Tower serves as a symbol of the city's identity and as cohesion between the pre- and post-, 'Wende' era. Unlike Dresden, who managed to resume its previous wealth and cultural visibility, Frankfurt (Oder) is since suffering from urban shrinkage as well as poorer economic and social conditions such as high unemployment rates. Separated from Poland only by the river Oder, it also functions as territorial border and has been divided as a city since the Oder-Neiße Peace Contract, when a former district of Frankfurt (Oder) became the Polish town Slubice. As such, Frankfurt (Oder) became a symbol of the German separation, with the river functioning as territorial border between the Western and Eastern Bloc, dividing the city. While the city's marginal position before the 'Wende', situated at the edge of Germany, Europe, symbolizing the then bipolar world order shaped its economic and cultural identity, this changed with the end of the Iron Curtain. Suddenly, Frankfurt (Oder) found itself in the territorial center of Europe rather than at its edge, confronted with the opportunities of open borders rather than closed boundaries. As such, the World Trade Center Frankfurt (Oder)-Slubice positions itself as a door opener for Polish German business relations, building on its identity as bridge-maker, the symbolic place of the Oder-Neiße peace contract and cross border relations.



Figure 3, Oder Tower, Frankfurt (Oder), 1976



Figure 4, World Trade Center Frankfurt (Oder)-Slubice, 1992, Figure 5, World Trade Center Rostock, 1990

The cities of Dresden, Rostock and Frankfurt (Oder) implemented World Trade Centers during the same time in the early 1990s, following the end of the GDR and the beginning of a united Germany. Despite their differing sizes, positions, economic and societal situations, public-private endeavours were undertaken to implement World Trade Centers into the city within this post-‘Wende’ transition period. By joining the World Trade Centers Association, a relation to the Yamasaki-designed Twin Towers from 1974, symbolizing World Trade Centerness, is spanned. This relation is obvious in mission statements and other branding narratives; however, it varies in its modes and degrees of representation. While the World Trade Center in Dresden is positioned in the City Center, designed as World Trade Center, designed by an architectural firm, featuring a Tower and aiming to add to the city’s skyline and architectural identity, the World Trade Center in Rostock is less centered and is architecturally un-ambitious. Even more imperceptible is the World Trade Center in Frankfurt (Oder), which has an address within a peripheral industry park, and uses, in lack of an image of a real morphological building, the iconic image of the existing Oder Tower in the city centre as symbolic substitute. Regardless of these different scenarios, in all cases elements of World Trade Centerness and its function within the global system can be seen: the relevance of centerness, marketization, top-down development, the narrative of unity, the role of accessibility and visibility. When lacking visibility, the image of the New York Twin Towers, which is being evoked by the association with the World Trade Center Association, serves as image.

Conclusion: Unity, unification and the representation of world trade

With the geopolitical changes evoked by the ‘Wende’, the territorial, political and economic positions of all cities in the former GDR changed fundamentally; in its position within Germany, Europe, as well as the global infrastructure. This paper has outlined, how the establishment of World Trade Centers has served as a tool for the cities of Dresden, Rostock and Frankfurt (Oder) to re-position themselves within the new post-socialist global system. The three cities in the former GDR are different in many aspects such as population size, economic situation, heritage or industries, as are the World Trade Centers, that have been developed in the three cities in the early 1990s shortly after the ‘Wende’. While they vary in terms such as morphology, use, position, they are all examples of how the World Trade Centers Twin Towers, designed by Minoru Yamasaki in New York serve as representation and symbolic object of world trade and the belonging of the global system, even after their physical destruction. During the transition from one ideological system to another, the need for cities to re-position themselves in the new geopolitical and territorial system, symbolic representation of world trade served as a tool not only for the German unification, but also for the new unity of the global. With referring to the World Trade Center Twin Towers in New York, cities seek to position themselves as hubs within the global network, as participants of the one global system.

Figures

Figure 1, World Trade Center Twin Towers, New York, 1974, Photo: dpa, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/reise/world-trade-center-vor-40-jahren-eroeffnet-wo-einst-die-tuerme-der-welt-standen-1.1639997>, *Date of access: 31/05/2019*.

Figure 2, World Trade Center Dresden, Photo: Michael Wortmann

Figure 3, Oder Tower, Frankfurt (Oder), 1976, <http://www.wtcbb.de/content/>, *Date of access: 31/05/2019*.

Figure 4, World Trade Center Frankfurt (Oder)-Slubice, 1992, <https://www.luftbildsuche.de/info/luftbilder/ihp-gmbh-innovations-for-high-performance-microelectronics-frankfurt-oder-brandenburg-167211.html>. *Date of access: 31/05/2019*.

Figure 5, World Trade Center Rostock, 1990, Photo: Frank Eiche, https://www.google.com/maps/uv?hl=de&pb=!1s0x47ac5603b45d0773:0x1ca2a90a3c87d818!2m2!2m2!1i80!2i80!3m1!2i20!1m1!1e1!2m2!1m1!1e3!2m2!1m1!1e5!2m2!1m1!1e4!2m2!1m1!1e6!3m1!7e1!5!4shttps://lh5.googleusercontent.com/p/AF1QipOs8DWuHg_sez16c2PwG1QPvie9SCRtrdxIU0N-%3Dw286-h160-k-no!5sworld+trade+center+rostock+-+Google-Suche&imagekey=!1e10!2sAF1QipOs8DWuHg_sez16c2PwG1QPvie9SCRtrdxIU0N-&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjSntne2MXiAhVP26QKHVbjAEsQoiowD3oECA4QBg, *Date of access: 31/05/2019*.

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