

Future of a Residential Neighborhood in the Context of Demographic Change

By Ethan Ma

I. Introduction

The residential neighborhood, as one of the essential components of a city, necessarily responds to the pressures and demands that a city faces. It is often the work of planners to anticipate these challenges and to formulate a course of action that adequately addresses them. This paper takes the neighborhood of Weimar-Nord, belonging to the municipality of Weimar in the Federal State of Thüringen, as a case study in order to examine how changes on a regional scale may affect neighborhood life and how local solutions may be influenced by a regional perspective.

Though the paper frequently alludes to challenges facing Thüringen—and which occur within the greater context of demographic shifts in Germany—ultimately, the final proposal is local. As much as it is a response to regional trends and phenomena, it is also shaped by all the specificities of the sites in Weimar-Nord. In considering both the regional and the local, our approach privileges neither one above the other. Instead, both perspectives inform this proposal, reinforcing each other in the process.

The extent to which the following proposal can be applied to other locations within regions facing population loss remains to be seen. But ultimately, this project's aspirations are of a more modest nature. It is my hope that the process undertaken in this project of situating local design within a regional context can shed some light on the many ways in which demographic changes directly affecting one city represent some significance to another community spatially distant from it. If we can suggest an interrelationship between the situation in Gera, a city expected to lose 16% of its population by 2035,¹ and a dirt pathway some 70 kilometers away on the edge of Weimar-Nord, then this project would have been a success.

¹ *Statistischer Bericht*, 15.

II. Shrinking Cities and Regions

The phenomenon of shrinking cities, otherwise known as urban decay, can be summarily defined as the depopulation of an urban area coupled with economic stagnation and disinvestment in that area. A broad and wide-ranging global phenomenon, it is at the same time, an issue which varies from location to location. On the other hand, perhaps the question of shrinking cities should not be viewed apart from other topics such as globalization and the rural to urban migration. Out-migration from certain areas, after all, is often coupled with in-migration to other urban centers. By framing the question of shrinking cities within these terms, we suggest that centers of in-migration should not be excluded from the debate.

A significant point in the history of shrinking cities in the former East German states can be traced back to the German reunification in 1989. The opening of the border between the former FRG and GDR led to a mass exodus from East to West Germany driven largely by the difference in economic conditions between the two areas. This outmigration, coupled with an increasing demand for suburban, single-family dwellings—a new possibility in the reintegrated GDR—resulted in a depopulation of the urban core in many of the East German cities. The inner-city, already in neglect and crippled by its declining population, further suffered from its low priority in the GDR planning scheme, which prioritized funds for the construction of new social housing developments (*Großwohnsiedlungen*), located in greenfield sites away from the city center.

In the East German shrinking cities, which tended to have a primarily industrial heritage and were thus ill-equipped to adjust to the emergent post-Fordist economy, reunification meant not only an integration with the FRG but also an integration into the global economy. As the barrier separating workers in the GDR from external markets fell, the out-migration away from the economically stagnant East towards more competitive areas, especially the West, began. The issue of how to deal with housing surplus, something facing all shrinking cities, is the result of both this out-migration that occurred in the period following the reunification, as well as from the intensive construction of new social housing blocks that occurred throughout the socialist era. Therefore, the specific case of urban decline in the states of the former GDR is largely a product of their history which can be divided into two currents that are nevertheless intertwined: the political transition away from Communism and the economic transition away from Industrialism.

Background

On a broader scale, the demographic trends in shrinking regions, especially in the industrialized nations, falls in line with demographic shifts occurring across national borders. Many European countries are experiencing or have been experiencing a Second Demographic Transition in which the national birth rate falls below the replacement level necessary to maintain no net population change, and natural population decline has set in.² This second transition is linked to increasing individualism in society as well as delayed marriage and childbearing among couples. Another component of the SDT is that of an aging population. The falling birth rate, when paired alongside a rise in life expectancy, means that seniors are making up a greater portion of the population than before.

These shifts exemplified by the SDT, generally align with those of shrinking regions, which also experience a decline in birth-rate and an aging population. While the SDT can explain certain aspects of urban population decline, there are specificities to the urban context which cannot be captured by such a broad model as found in the SDT. Urban population decline is nothing new. Applying the term at its loosest, one might say that there have always been shrinking cities. To be precise, however, the most recent wave of shrinking cities that is the topic of the contemporary debate, has its roots in industrialism.

While industrialism is often credited for the rapid growth of cities, it also made possible their decline. In fact, the exponential growth of population in cities triggered by the Industrial Revolution would ultimately serve as a necessary precursor to the rapid, subsequent depopulation, in many cities especially dependent on their industrial economies.³ Names such as Detroit, Manchester, and Leipzig come to mind. These cities were especially vulnerable to the shift in the global economy and heavily suffered from deindustrialization and globalization.

The transition away from the communist political system also contributed to urban decline in many cities of the former Soviet bloc, and its effect is especially pertinent to the case of Thüringia. This political transition occurred alongside the transition to a post-Fordist economy in the 1990s to the detriment of many of the post-Socialist industrial cities. Just as the removal of the border between East and West Germany opened new possibilities to citizens of the GDR, it also exposed the economic systems of the East, which had been under the protection of the state, to the forces of the global market.⁴ Processes of de-industrialization, which up until then

² van de Kaa, "Europe's Second Demographic Transition."

³ Rieniets, "Shrinking Cities."

⁴ Ibid.

were delayed by state intervention, came as a “shock” to the eastern states.⁵ As a result, the fall of the communist political system led to a rapid economic transition, which many cities were unprepared for. The process of reintegration with a capitalist economic system, something unique to the East German states, also posed a unique challenge and often exacerbated the effects of population loss.⁶ These cities, typically accustomed to planning for economic and population growth, had, for many years following the fall of the Soviet bloc, difficulty adjusting to deindustrialization and the depopulation that accompanied it.

After the turn of the century, several post-socialist cities experienced a kind of reversal to the urban shrinkage. This trend is largely the result of increasing in-migration to the inner-city as well as decreasing suburbanization.⁷ Nonetheless, re-growth is not uniform throughout the city, as some neighborhoods may experiencing growth and even gentrification while others are still losing population.⁸ Furthermore, the growing East German cities are often doing so against a background of regional population loss, which has led to these cities being called “islands of growth.”⁹

Theories for reorganizing a shrinking place

There were several ways that East German cities responded to the shrinkage of the 1990s, though a certain pattern can be identified when considering the so-called “model” examples of cities which recovered from depopulation. The approach these cities took following initial waves of shrinkage can be divided into three phases: demolition, perforation, and rightsizing. Following these phases of reorganization, a formerly shrinking city may experience an “urban renaissance” and see its population rise in certain neighborhoods, while another possibility is that the city’s population will stabilize, neither increasing nor decreasing dramatically, or that the city enters into a period of “smart decline.”

Demolition appears as perhaps the most obvious and immediate response to the surplus of housing, much of which was already in poor condition. In many East German cities, the exodus out of the city left behind many abandoned buildings. At their peak, vacancy reached rates as high as 20% in Leipzig, and by 2004, there were 1.2 million vacant units throughout

⁵ Martinez-Fernandez et al., “Shrinking Cities: Urban Challenges of Globalization.”

⁶ Bontje, “Facing the challenge of shrinking cities,” 14.

⁷ Kabish et al., “Evolving Reurbanisation?,” 971.

⁸ Friedrichs et al., “Housing and Urban Renewal,” 154.

⁹ Kabish et al., “Evolving Reurbanisation?,” 971.

East Germany, 350,000 of which were to be demolished.¹⁰ In many ways, demolition is a necessary process, as shrinking cities, with their diminishing tax-base, do not have the funds to maintain these vacant buildings, many of which inevitably fall into disrepair.

Typically demolition occurred in the social housing developments lying away from the urban core. The socialist policy to replace the housing stock destroyed in World War II ignored the inner-city and instead constructed mass-produced *Plattenbau* on peripheral green-field sites.¹¹ Following re-unification, however, the focus on redeveloping the inner-city returned in urban policy,¹² which was one impetus for the repopulation of the long-neglected urban core.

After the demolition of vacant buildings, what remains can be called a perforated urban pattern. Perforation can generally be defined as a process of de-densification, usually followed by an introduction of open and green space into sites of demolition. Theoretically, this transition makes it possible for a rigid, dense, homogenous urban fabric to become more green, spacious, and heterogeneous.¹³ In practice, however, it is still a question what the end of this process looks like, as many cities are still in the midst of it. Nonetheless, perforation has delivered certain tangible benefits to shrinking cities and is a promising concept.

Brent D. Ryan has proposed “patchwork urbanism” as an approach to planning for shrinkage.¹⁴ Population decline has left behind a porous urban fabric with open and vacant spaces dotting the landscape. In contrast to the totally built-up and built-out environment predicted by a systematic street layout, the environment of a shrinking city has become organic through subtraction. As such, areas in decline are not sites in which it makes much sense to develop large-scale projects because abandonment often occurs in an unpredictable manner. A vacant house may sit next to another property whose residents have no intention of ever leaving. In other words, on a smaller scale, it is much more complex to predict a pattern of abandonment, since these result from the decisions of individual household. Therefore, the “patchiness” of the urban fabric should be accepted as a point of departure for urban design.

Clearly, patchwork urbanism and perforation have much in common, and in many cases it is possible to exchange these terms interchangeably. In both cases, the depopulation of an area is leveraged to improve urban conditions. Providing residents in a shrinking neighborhood

¹⁰ Friedrichs et al., “Housing and Urban Renewal,” 153-4.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Haase, “Urban Ecology.”

¹⁴ Ryan, “Rightsizing Shrinking Cities.”

with open space and nature can incentivize them to stay and can increase their investment in their surroundings. Furthermore, the creation of new space via demolition can open up new possibilities of adjusting street and pedestrian layouts to adjust to the needs of the new urban situation.¹⁵ In areas with high levels of vacancy, the idea is to create small-scale design interventions that take the surrounding context into account.

Ryan refers to “rightsizing” as “the yet-unproved process of bringing cities down to a “right” size, meaning a size proportionate to city government’s ability to pay for itself.”¹⁶ Rightsizing, therefore, involves decision-making processes both within the realm of urban planning and outside of it, for instance: municipal politics and finances. However, Ryan also concedes that to date, there is no clear consensus among scholars and planning professionals as to what rightsizing exactly means or how its development might take place in a city.¹⁷

Nonetheless, rightsizing can essentially be defined as the decreasing of a city’s “development footprint” in response to the surplus of land and infrastructure, which can no longer be supported by the city’s diminishing budget.¹⁸ Silverman et al. identify certain tangible means of “rightsizing” a city including: “changes to existing zoning and land-use regulations, the removal of infrastructure, land banking, placing moratoriums on development in declining areas.” The authors also incorporate certain sustainable elements into the concept of “rightsizing” such as: “green infrastructure, renewable energy, mixed-use development, walkable neighborhoods, recreational amenities, and the preservation of parks and greenspace,”¹⁹ though again, the concept remains quite vague, and it is difficult to see how the inclusion of these elements differ from recommendations for cities in general.

Out of all three phases or stages of reorganizing a shrinking city, rightsizing is the broadest and most amorphous, as it includes more than just planning and design. Just as perforation succeeds demolition by incorporating the physical result of demolition (the opening of space) as a principle of urban design, rightsizing succeeds perforation in a similar way. Rightsizing, as a concept, includes the urban design aspects of perforation, alongside broader strategies such as the restructuring of the municipal budget or the redrawing of urban growth boundaries. With each subsequent phase, there is also a broadening of scope and scale, and

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 281.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Silverman et al., “Social Equity,” 6.

¹⁹ Ibid, 7.

perhaps it is more accurate to say that each subsequent phase does not succeed the previous one so much as it incorporates it into a greater scheme.

Regional context

Shrinking, however, does not only happen on a municipal scale; it also occurs region-wide as in Thüringen. In our case, three centers of growth in Erfurt, Jena, and Weimar are “islands of growth” surrounded by shrinking rural areas. Often, it is the small villages and towns in Thüringen that are the ones experiencing shrinkage, though certain larger cities like Gera and Suhl are losing population as well. Nonetheless, Thüringen is a state made up of many villages and towns, so it makes sense to examine how ideas of polycentricity are related to shrinkage on a regional scale.

A polycentric region comprises of multiple cities of relatively similar size that are separate and, therefore, somewhat independent from, but in proximity to each other.²⁰ These cities often have specialized functions within the region, so for example, a polycentric region would have its industrial, financial, political center situated in different cities.²¹ The division of function to different cities in the region and the relatively equal opportunities for employment found in each city give rise to decentralized and complex commuting patterns, as opposed to the centralized and radial downtown-to-suburb commute in monocentric regions.²²

In a polycentric region, larger municipalities must depend on surrounding villages and towns and vice-versa, which produces a kind of “synergy” or symbiotic relationship by which both the city and the hinterland can benefit.²³ This type of relationship which emerges in a networked region seems to offer a more beneficial and egalitarian alternative to the current situation in Thüringen in which demographic shifts produce winners (Erfurt, Jena, Weimar) and losers (shrinking cities and villages). On the possible development or redevelopment of the hinterland into an important actor in a networked region, Growe writes: “[it] does not result only from relocations of large-scale commerce and industries [...] but from a qualitative enrichment of the region with economic activities where smaller towns become hubs and lose their primary function as living sites.”²⁴ In a similar vein, Domhardt and Troeger-Weiβ write in their article on Germany’s small shrinking towns: “To support small towns in dealing with the threats and

²⁰ Growe, “Emerging Poly-centric Regions in Germany,” 296.

²¹ Ibid, 297.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Growe, “Emerging Poly-centric Regions in Germany,” 296.

opportunities of demographic change, regional development plans are not only helpful but necessary. Only regional development plans are capable of surmounting local limitations and of supporting inter-municipal cooperation.”²⁵

Shrinking villages and towns have the additional burden of holding a peripheral status as “low” or “medium-order centers,” which only compounds the issue of dwindling municipal finances resulting from population decline. There has to be a greater level of coordination between cities, villages, and towns to develop a regional strategy in the face of shrinkage. Furthermore, all these bodies must be reasonably well networked with each other, for the kind of functional reorganization that Growe writes about—in which smaller settlements become economic hubs—to occur.

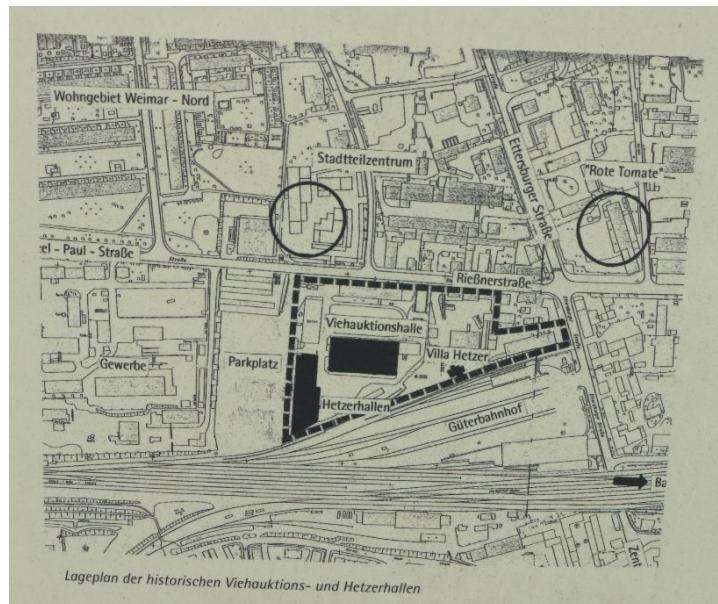
Although there are numberless ways in which networking may be accomplished, transportation seems a good place to start. A seamless exchange of information, goods, and services between the different centers of a region, must be built upon a reasonably well developed transportation network. In this regard, Weimar-Nord has been somewhat fortuitously placed near the train station to become a possible key node within a more networked Thuringia (though, as the rest of the paper shows, it’s never quite so simple).

²⁵ Domhardt and Troeger-Weiß, “Germany’s Shrinkage,” 168.

III. Weimar-Nord

Weimar-Nord is a neighborhood belonging to the municipality of Weimar that, as its name suggests, lies north of the central city just beyond the main train station (*Hauptbahnhof*). It is bounded to the south by the railroad, to the north and west by open land, and to the east by an industrial district (*Industriegebiet*). The history of the area can be traced back in two narratives, as the neighborhood comprises of two areas which developed in parallel: the heavy-commercial or industrial area and the residential area.

The commercial/industrial area of the neighborhood lies south of Marcel-Paul Str. and west of Ettersburger Str. Despite its location west of Rödchenweg/Mattstedter Weiden, which operates as the boundary of the residential district, this area's character has more in common with the industrial district (*Industriegebiet*) to its east. This area has been occupied by various heavy-commercial operations since 1870 when the railroad's goods station (*Güterbahnhof*) was built just west of Ettersburger Str.²⁶ The site has been occupied by various uses since then including a gas facility (*Gaswerk*), a brickyard, a lumber business, and a cattle holding pen among others.

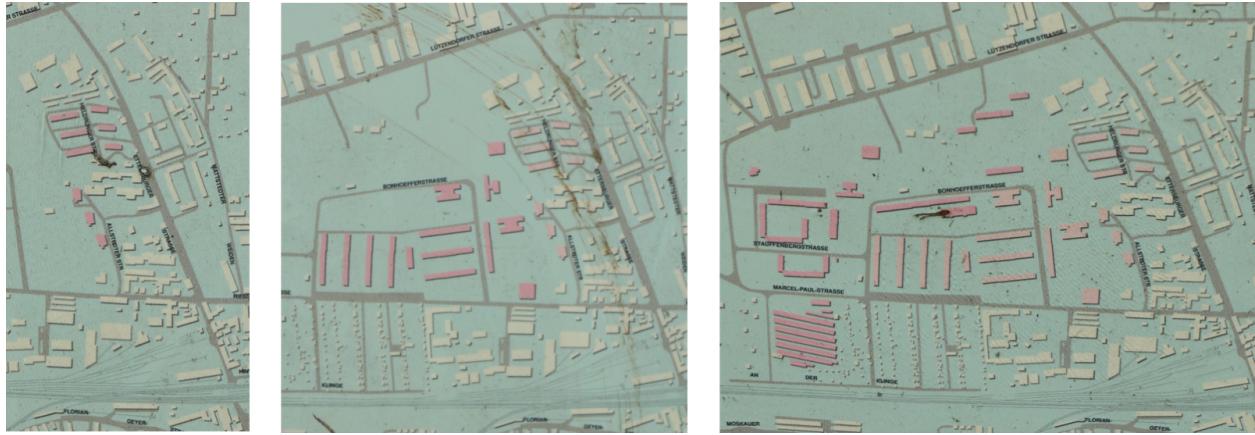


Earlier Use of the "Heavy-Commercial" or Industrial Area

The residential district (*Wohngebiet*) was originally the site of barracks in the 30's. After World War II, occupying troops from the Soviet bloc were housed in these barracks, a situation

²⁶ Diek and Zeh, *Weimar-Nord Chronik*.

which often led to confrontations between residents in the area and the soldiers. Only after the fall of the Soviet bloc did the military leave. Construction of social housing projects occurred in three phases, beginning in the 50's and continuing till the 80's, moving westwards with each phase. These slab housing blocks (*Plattenbau*), made of prefabricated materials, were built in the typical modernist fashion of the time. These buildings have been well preserved, and are the dominant form of housing in this neighborhood. Most of them have undergone renovation and are still standing today.



Three phases of development in the residential district

Weimar-Nord and Shrinking Cities

There are certain characteristics that Weimar-Nord shares with other shrinking cities, and it may prove useful to examine the relationship between Weimar-Nord and shrinking areas in general. As mentioned before, areas of a city reserved for industrial or heavy commercial uses were often victims of shrinkage after deindustrialization, and in this sense, Weimar-Nord fits the mold of a typical shrinking area. Additionally, GDR era social-housing developments (*Großwohnsiedlungen*), such as Weimar-Nord, also heavily suffered from shrinkage. These neighborhoods were typically built on greenfield sites in the periphery of the city and almost exclusively consisted of *Plattenbau*.

Examining solely these characteristics of the neighborhood would lead one to surmise that Weimar-Nord would make a good candidate for a shrinking area, yet its population has

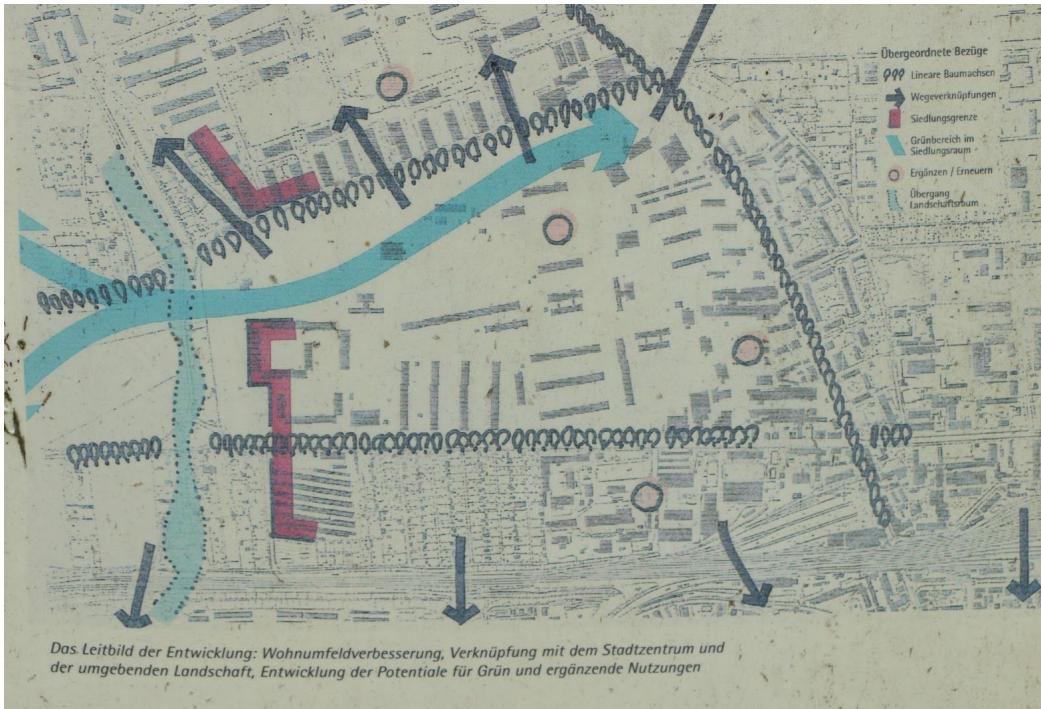
been stable at around 5,000 residents,²⁷ while its vacancy rate at 1% is also lower than that of shrinking regions.²⁸ Is Weimar-Nord shrinking? The simple answer is no. The more interesting question though is what makes Weimar-Nord a stable neighborhood, despite its many similarities, in terms of structure, layout, and function, with other shrinking areas, specifically the GDR era social-housing developments?

Weimar-Nord is much smaller and less dense than the typical social-housing neighborhoods that experienced heavy population decline such as Leipzig-Grünau and Lusan in Gera. Instead of concentrating open space within the housing complex as a sort of interior courtyard, in Weimar-Nord and especially in the areas developed in the third stage of construction (i.e. the periphery), open space surrounds each of the residential estates as an exterior element. In this way, a green field acts not only as a buffer between housing complexes, but also as a surrounding or landscape. It is this characteristic of buildings standing within open space that differentiates the periphery of Weimar-Nord from denser residential neighborhoods in which open space embeds itself within a built structure.

In this regard, Weimar-Nord's periphery can be called "perforated" or at least resembling a perforated urban fabric. In fact, this perforated aspect is embedded within the concept of the neighborhood's development, as seen in the diagram below. Two main objectives can be identified within this scheme: preservation of the natural environment and improvement of the neighborhood's access to its surroundings. In regards to the first objective, the blue, curved arrow represents a green corridor penetrating into the urban fabric. Additionally, the red blocks represent the limit of the neighborhood's growth, thereby preserving the stream which then becomes the edge between Weimar-Nord and the undeveloped land to the west. Regarding the second objective, the black arrows show the new connections between Weimar-Nord and its surroundings.

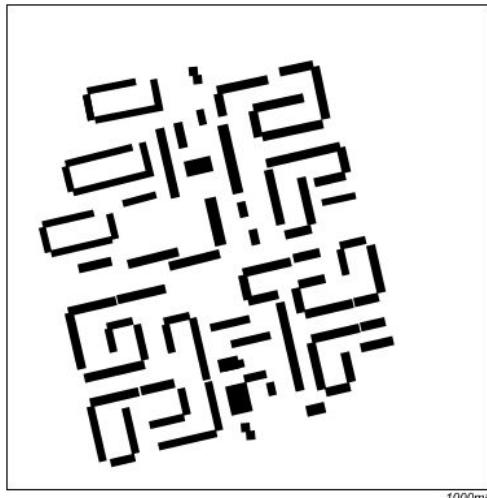
²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Wohnungsmarktkonzept Weimar*.

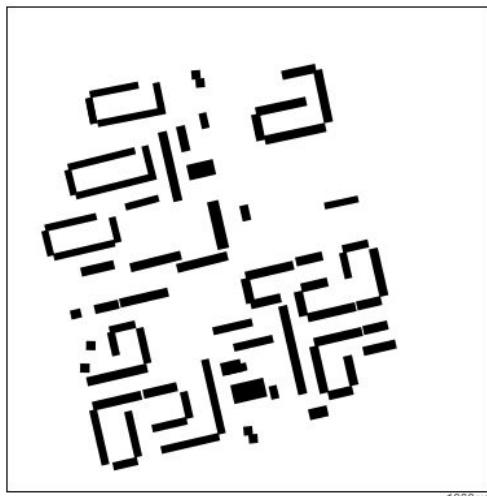


A Model for Weimar-Nord's Development

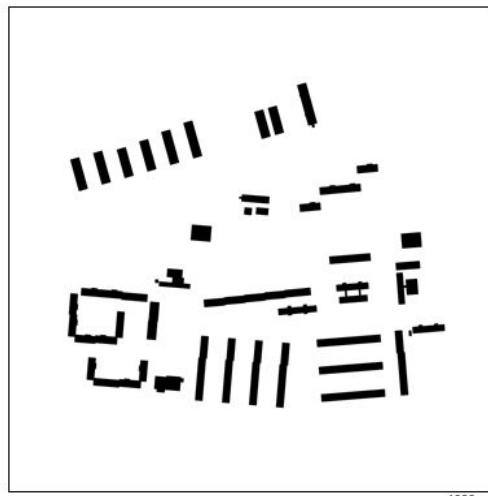
In the context of most shrinking cities, perforation is an unplanned process of reorganization that follows population decline. On the other hand, in Weimar-Nord, the perforated urban fabric came as the result of a deliberate effort to introduce a green corridor and place definite limits on further growth rather than as a reaction to shrinkage. In Leipzig-Grünau, a perforated layout was arrived at following significant population loss in the 90's and the demolitions of abandoned housing complexes. Two gaps were introduced into the urban fabric lying relatively north-east and south-west to the center of the square diagram below. Similarly, in Weimar-Nord, there is a gap formed roughly in the area marked by the green-corridor from the model-concept above. While demolition in Grünau was necessary to adjust to population decline and the perforation of the neighborhood was a step to reach a state of stability, this situation is a given condition, a point of departure for Weimar-Nord. Perforation and the mere inclusion of negative space within the urban fabric does not necessarily lead to stability and should not be considered as an end in and of itself. But it can be taken as an advantageous situation that in Weimar-Nord, this perforation was the result of a deliberate plan and one which lends the neighborhood a great deal of flexibility in adapting and adjusting to population change.



Leipzig-Grünau, 1990



Leipzig-Grünau, 2017



Weimar-Nord 2017

Perforation in Leipzig-Grünau and W-N

Much of the following design intervention deals with the question of what to do with the negative space and the perforated nature of Weimar-Nord's periphery. Open spaces can have a negative effect on a city if they are abandoned, neglected, and isolated. At the same time, they are sites of great potential, a tabula-rasa, in effect, which visions of a place's future can be projected onto. The proposals below live somewhere in between these two poles. Design changes are imagined for many of these open gaps, but only to the extent that the perforated nature of Weimar-Nord's periphery is preserved, as it represents something of importance and value, contributing to the structure of the whole neighborhood.

IV. Design Intervention

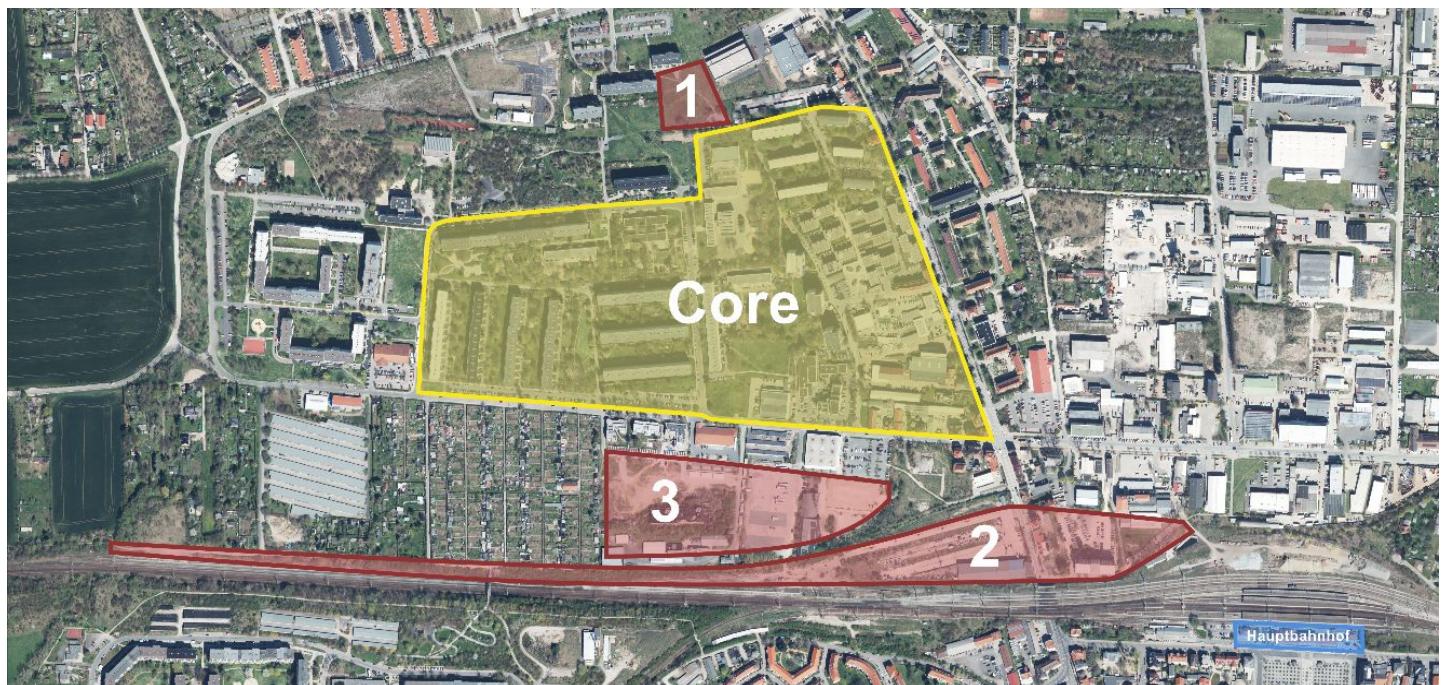
These interventions are grounded in Weimar-Nord's existing conditions and aim as much as possible to preserve the neighborhood's characteristics. At the same time, certain improvements are imagined which may improve qualities of neighborhood life such as walkability, activity, and community. Therefore, the following proposals will tend to be low-scale and low-cost. Instead of trying to supplant what is already there in order to generate a new neighborhood identity, these proposals are based on the belief that there are properties of Weimar-Nord which represent some value to the neighborhood and are important to preserve. As mentioned earlier, the neighborhood has a history going back over one century. This history stands as a counterpoint to Weimar's classical heritage, and, as such, it serves as an important point of reference for any future redesigns in the neighborhood.

The interventions also frequently relate to the relationship between center and periphery. Typically, Weimar-Nord takes on the role as periphery in relation to Weimar's city center and this status is further reinforced by Weimar-Nord's location on the "other" side of the tracks. Nonetheless this project explores the center/periphery relationship through two different angles. First, the relationship between center and periphery *within* Weimar-Nord is examined, and second, the relationship between center and periphery in Thüringia.

The area defined as the neighborhood's core consists of the areas from the neighborhood's first and second phases of development as well as some structures existing prior to these developments, while the periphery is generally all that is outside of the core. When the neighborhood is delineated into two areas as such, many differences emerge. For example, social services such as schools and elderly care tend to be concentrated in the core, while open space and vacant buildings are almost exclusively located in the periphery. In general, the core tends to have a stronger atmosphere of community and cohesion, while in the periphery, there can be a feeling of emptiness. The periphery does contain certain important recreational and cultural institutions such as Nordlicht, the youth club, and Redoute, an arm of the German National Theater, though these buildings stand as isolated islands, as many of the buildings in the periphery do, and do little to alter the emptiness in the space. The proposals below are an attempt at strengthening the connections between the core and periphery while also rehabilitating the abandoned and underutilized areas without relying too heavily on new construction. In general, reprogramming of spaces and making minor alterations are favored over radical transformation.

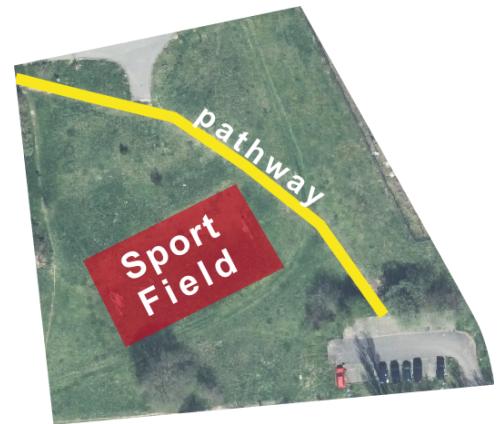
Due to its location within the Erfurt-Weimar-Jena region, Weimar-Nord is imagined as a node belonging to Thüringia's center connected to other nodes within a network. Weimar-Nord's proximity to the Hauptbahnhof is perceived as an asset in this regard, and a large component of the design intervention deals with improving the neighborhood's connection to the main train station. Therefore, the area running alongside the railroad attracts much of this project's attention.

Interventions have been proposed for three sites in Weimar-Nord's periphery for the primary reason that this was the last area in the neighborhood to be developed and offers greater opportunity for redesign than the relatively denser, more built-up core. Each proposal illustrates an element or aspect of Weimar-Nord's composition which are categorized as gaps, pathways, and structures. Though the proposals are organized into these three themes, they are not exclusively defined categories, as concepts outlined one proposal often overlap with those of another.



Site 1: Gaps

The first site is a grassy field, which is a part of the green corridor from the development concept mentioned earlier. Within this site is a pathway connecting a parking lot to a residential area as well as a field for playing sports. It is proposed that this site remain undeveloped, in order to preserve the green corridor and maintain the perforation of the urban fabric. Therefore, only minor improvements are suggested, which are the paving of the pathway, which currently is unpaved, and the construction of a seating area behind the sport field. Stairs or a wheelchair accessible ramp may be built in the section where the path grows steeper.



The main goal of this intervention is to provide the community with a gathering space. This is accomplished by improving access to and through the site as well as adding infrastructure which would encourage people to stay there. The location of this pathway on the edge of the neighborhood's core is also significant. Improving this pathway is one way of strengthening the link between the residential buildings on the periphery and the core. Residents living in the periphery would have easier access to services in the core, while residents in the core may be more inclined to visit and enjoy the open spaces and recreational opportunities in the periphery.

These minor improvements are something that could be made throughout the neighborhood which contain plenty of other open spaces resembling this site. Of course, the specific context of each location should be taken into account, but the underlying idea of improving connectivity and creating a unified place remain the same. Starting from these principles, variations can then be made in the specific design of these gaps in the urban fabric.



Site 2: Pathways

The second site encompasses a strip of area along the railroad going from the western edge of Weimar-Nord to the main train station (*Hauptbahnhof*). The site can further be divided into two parts: the area by the garden-homes (*Kleingärten*) where there is an existing dirt pathway in red, and the industrial area going from the edge of the garden-homes to the main train station, where a new system of pathways is proposed in yellow (the goods station can be seen where the path splits).

This proposal aims to create a unified pedestrian and cycling pathway from one edge of Weimar-Nord to the train station. New pathways are designed to connect the existing pathway behind the garden-homes to the tunnel, demarcated by the dotted line, running from the entrance of the train station, underneath the tracks, to Weimar-Nord's industrial district. Proposed improvements include paving the existing dirt pathway and adding lighting to ease travel by night.





Currently, a well-developed network of pathways exist in the neighborhood's core, which is also well served by two bus lines that run through the train station to the city center. As of yet, though, there is no single uninterrupted pathway one can use to walk or bike to the train station. The most common way of walking to the train station right now—going along Marcel-Paul Str. before making a right on Ettersburger Str.—is certainly suitable and not especially inconvenient. However, in addition to improving the connection between the train station and Weimar-Nord, creating these pathways could lay the foundation for the renovation of the industrial area directly to its north. Furthermore, there is a pedestrian bridge connecting Weimar-West with the existing pathway behind the garden-homes, and extending these pathways could also benefit residents in Weimar-West.

One foreseeable drawback of the developing this pathway could be that it ends up drawing pedestrian activity away from Marcel-Paul Str., the main east-west axis where many of the neighborhood's commercial uses lie. Ideally, though, the new pathways would complement activity along Marcel-Paul Str., so long as connections exist to facilitate travel between these two arteries.

Site 3: Structure

The third site chosen lies just north of the second site. It is the area occupied by Weimar-Nord's earliest commercial and industrial structures dating back to the late 19th century, many of which are now either vacant or neglected. This proposal calls for the renovation and re-use of these abandoned structures to meet the needs of Erfurt-Weimar-Jena's growing population insofar as it is a more economical alternative than new construction. Three alleys marked in yellow provide access to site from Marcel-Paul Str., the main east-west corridor in the area. This proposal builds on the previous proposal of extending the pathway to the train station, as this pathway would also improve access to this site.



Even in the cases when buildings are recognized as having historic value, they are generally not well preserved. In the example below, a plaque commemorates the founder of the lumber business "Otto Hetzer," which once occupied this site. The hall which originally housed this business has no clear use now, and graffiti and broken windows suggest it is not being well kept after either. This part of the neighborhood possesses a character distinct from the residential core. Not only is Weimar-Nord's industrial heritage mostly localized to this area, but the care and upkeep clearly present in the core falls away here, and along with it the feeling of community.

While the Otto Hetzer hall may represent an important period in the neighborhood's development, in its present state, it is difficult to uncover any emotional resonance the place might have. Graffiti on the walls signifies an act of appropriation which complicates the notions of monumentality and historic preservation. The taggers' interest in the hall stems not from its historicity but from its abandonment which confirms the building's role as a blank canvas, in other words its role-lessness. Does painting on a historic building constitute vandalism, if that building is neglected? Is the contribution of public art to a structure equally valid as the memorialization of that structure with a plaque? These questions suggest that in Weimar-Nord, historic preservation must be conceived of outside the traditional paradigm operating in Weimar's inner city. As the past is formally memorialized, it must simultaneously be reconciled with present-day reinterpretations and resignifications.



Historic hall of the Otto Hetzer company



Memorial Plaque

In certain cases rehabilitating abandoned buildings may be a more economical way to address demand for housing than constructing new units. If certain structures are unfit to live in, they can also be used as co-working or community spaces. Non-traditional means of public ownership should be experimented with to determine a suitable working model that addresses the community's demand for such spaces. The point is to renovate these structures to the point that they can be utilized in some manner. In Halle Neustadt, vacant spaces have been transformed into art galleries, performative spaces, and through one neighborhood management program, are even being given away for free to short-term commercial and cultural enterprises.²⁹ Halle Neustadt is a good example of how vacant structures can be repurposed as gathering points, and the programs and practices there can be applied to Weimar-Nord.

²⁹ Eckardt, "Neighborhood Centers," 63-4.



The abandoned structure in the photo above could potentially be converted into a mix-use building with community or commercial spaces on the ground floor and residential units located on the upper two floors. In the case that the building is not suitable for residential occupation, it could still house temporary events or exhibitions as in Halle Neustadt. Certainly, any type of activity would be an improvement over the current situation, in which the building is fenced off and inaccessible. Structures such as these can be an important asset when turned over to the public. Unfortunately in Weimar-Nord, they tend to stay unused or uncared for.

Perhaps there are already plans to redevelop the site. However, it would truly be a missed opportunity if the building were simply demolished and replaced by new housing units. Here is a chance to take a structure which currently has little worth or function and hand it over to the community to make it their own project. This prospect of having the community members become more involved in the management of their neighborhood can strengthen residents' investment in their neighborhood. Additionally, few buildings in Weimar-Nord remain that are built in this "*Fabrik*" style, and so it could serve as a reminder of the neighborhood's industrial past.



The image above is of an open vacant lot adjacent to the *Güterbahnhof*. In the middle of the lot is what seems like the ruin of some building. The area around the ruin is paved over with concrete and overgrown with wild plants. This area already contains certain characteristics of a public space and could potentially be transformed into a park or a square. The ruin is to be preserved as a sort of anti-monument. As a symbol, it evokes an image of Weimar-Nord's industrial history, yet at the same time, its physical deterioration makes it an odd thing to be proud of. It is precisely this ambiguous status that makes the ruin a suitable representation of Weimar-Nord's periphery, which floats in a space neither of the past nor future.





Herderkirche (left) and abandoned ruin (right)

The outline of the ruin, taken from the image above, nearly resembles that of the Herderkirche, a church in the city center. But whereas a church is a well-defined structure, with its schedule of activities, its codes, decorum, and traditions, the ruin—undefined, incomplete, and unvisited—is in many ways the opposite. Emptiness permeates the structure of the ruin, and in this emptiness lies possibility. The ruin is a relic from the past, but it also stands as a demonstration against the notion of capturing the past as a definite memory. With no face, with no name, the ruin eludes the rigid clasp of classification and memorialization. Perhaps there is nothing better than a ruin to mark the passage of time, and to return us to the situation, yet undecided, at hand.

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