
Dear Visitors, Hello and welcome to the Women`s Research, Education and Information Center, that we founded in 1978 at Charlottenburg, but that has moved here to the East of Berlin to become subtenants of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation. You now can find two archives with international reputation under one new roof in an interesting old brick building.

Thank you for your interest in this place and – also – in gender politics in Germany. We now are sitting in the hay barn on top of the smallest of the cowsheds of the former Berlin slaughterhouses or abbatoirs. It was built in 1895 and survived two World Wars.

Slaughterhouses are needed primarily to serve the large-scale demands for meat in urban areas where there is no live-stock. Thus the slaughterhouse area in this city developed as an adjunct to the process of urbanisation and modernization of Berlin during the 19th century. Liberal scientists as well as politicians at this time advocated a system of canalisation and of centralisation of animal slaughter according to strict public hygienic controls after Berlin had had an outbreak of Cholera in 1867.

Already in 1827 an innkeeper with the name of Klaeger had established a cattle-market for 1000 neats, 4000 pigs and 6000 whethers at these outskirts of the city, but it was closed in 1871 after an epidemic of neat disease.

However, here as already in Thomas More`s Utopia and in London as elsewhere, open-air slaughter by individual butchers inside cities arose a lot of public sentiment. In many societies, cultural and religious aversion to slaughter also led to prejudice against the people involved. And we know, that this held true also here, at least during the time of the GDR. You all do know Upton Sinclair`s novel The Jungle which detailed unsanitary and revolting conditions in slaughterhouses and the meatpacking industries at Chicago that led to an legislative act in 1906.

Now, here in Berlin, the development startet with the physician Rudolf Virchow and with a construction plan of James Hobrecht in 1862. In 1876 the city could buy the ground for much bigger “shambles” at Eldenaerstrasse. This was still the outskirts of the city then, yet it was already connected with the railway, an investment by the famous Henry Strousberg, so that the cattle could be brought in from agricultural areas far away. The architects Hermann Blankenstein and August Lindemann built what was called the “central cattle court and slaughterhouses” after 1877, when they had closely studied the models of Vienna, Paris and London. After most of the buildings had been completed the area was structured into two big parts: the slaughterhouses in the west and the cattle court behind a big wall to the east. There were four big sales halls, several sheds, two administrative buildings and the stock-exchange. Far to the east was an area for cattle with supposed infections.

Cattle-traders and butchers, but also all kind of leather traders and – last not least – pubs and prostitutes moved into the area, where twenty years after the opening of the central slaughterhouses many tenement houses had been built around them. The slaughterhouse area itself became something like a – bad smelling – city within the city.

The further development of the area came to stagnation due to inflation between 1914 and 1923. After 1924 a new boom with following modernizations set in when a new big meat market hall was built at the other side of Landsberger Allee.

During the Second World War a 420 m long steel-crosswalk-bridge for pedestrians with roof and opaque windows was finally built from Eldenaerstrasse to the railway station and is still known under the name “long lasting lamentation”. It became also a movie object within the GDR criminal-tv-series: “Polizeiruf 110”. And during the beginning organizing of opposition groups in the GDR, the then so called “tunnel”, the windows of which had been

closed with wood, was painted with critical slogans and paintings by young people in 1983, who got heavily reprimanded by the "Staatssicherheitspolizei".

Talking about gender: slaughtering was heavy masculine work. However, cattle-trading, meat production and other sectors of the business were not.

About 1935 there were also female cattle traders and merchants in the area, one of whom, Marie Rosenberg, continued the business after her husband had died. Berta Bils was a tradeswoman for sticks and whips, and there must have been other forgotten women earning their money as well. When Jewish traders were being boycotted and discriminated against by high taxes during the thirties, Marie Rosenberg, who was a British citizen, fought successfully back.

Heavy bombing affected about 80% of the area in 1945 only. But reconstruction started directly after the armistice, and the area became the biggest meat processing establishment of the GDR. Already about the turn of 1946 to '47 wardrobes, wash- and shower rooms and a recreation room for women were built, from which we can guess how gendered the work had become now. There was even a Kindergarten and a baby nursery. Women at this time and during the whole period of the GDR worked mostly as cleaners of intestines or as inspectors for trichina. Other women handled the bristle extraction machines or the coat and skin preparation. Wages were low, and there was but little reputation for most of the occupations. After 1963 about 2700 people were working for the "VEB Fleischkombinat Berlin"; and young students from befriended socialist nations were hired and sometimes against their own knowledge recruited for work, as has been documented by an interesting essay of Daniela Dahn in her book: "Prenzlauer Bergtour".

After 1991 the area fell fallow. But when Berlin started preparations for an application for Olympic Games in 2000 the whole area was again taken into consideration and all kinds of restructuring plans were developed: an Olympic media city, new living quarters and recreation areas as well as futuristic habitats for at least 4500 inhabitants were planned, but not realized after Sydney won the competition for Olympic summer games. In 1992 a new city development society was established that finally divided the area in 5 different districts and heavily called for the establishment of service enterprises. Since 1998 the population was invited to comment on the planning; however, most of the glamorous visions and most of the articulated wishes of the population came to but rather humble realization due to lacking public money and refraining private investors.

Nevertheless, supermarkets were built, the railway station renovated, a public park with the iron construction-body of the mutton-market-hall as a preserved monument was opened in 2004, lanes and streets have been constructed and many trees planted. The neat auction hall, the neat sheds, the administrative buildings and the rest of the pedestrian bridge were put under preservation regulations.

You are very welcome to visit us in such a historical place!