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Strategies for Urban Development in Leipzig, Germany

Harmonizing Planning and Equity

 Springer

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Introduction

For several years Leipzig was known only as a medium-sized German city in the center of the eastern part of the country. Then in 1989, people took to the streets for weekly Monday demonstrations to protest against the socialist regime of the former East Germany. These demonstrations set the stage for the political turmoil that eventually brought the fall of the Berlin wall and an end to the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Then Leipzig became known as the city of peaceful revolution. In the former East Germany, Leipzig was an industrial center. There were production plants that produced everything from chemical facilities to textiles. But the factories were closed after German reunification and people headed west in search of jobs. Even today, there are many empty apartments and unemployment is high. Nearly a fifth of the population is still living on long-term unemployment benefits (Popp 2012).

German Author Juli Zeh, who studied at the Leipzig Institute for German Literature, wrote an essay in which she describes the attitude toward life in the city: “What does a medium-sized, central-German city do if it has no mountains at its doorstep, no majestically flowing river at its heart, no surrounding forests, no nearby coast, no seat of government, no drug scene, no therapeutic hot springs and otherwise nothing in particular to offer? Naturally, it starts to dream” (*Ibid.*).

And this is exactly what Leipzig did. What could have easily been the start of Leipzig’s decline became the beginning of its transformation. A new group of city leaders headed by civil servants and politicians from the West took control of the city and created a new public policy environment that was welcomed by the citizenry. The main focus of these new leaders was to develop innovative urban policy strategies that will make Leipzig an attractive place to live.

As people started moving a music scene as diverse as in larger German cities developed. The city attracted not only artists and students, but also start-up entrepreneurs who were looking for well-educated employees. The Leipzig Graduate School of Management, a Private Business School, is known for producing company founders. A successful painter, Neo Rauch, and others started what became known worldwide as the New Leipzig School. The airport was expanded, and the city made a bid to host the Olympic Games. Since then the population has been constantly growing. There are now almost 550,000 people living in Leipzig.

This book analyzes the strategies for urban development in Leipzig and shows how civic leaders were able to harmonize planning and equity. They relied heavily on two interesting approaches in that process: the promotion of culture as a key component of urban development and the reconciliation of the inevitable process of gentrification with social equity. For a broader understanding of how this process took place in Leipzig the book discusses the city in the context of German Municipal Administration. The book also looks at the globalization aspect of urban development, reviews research in social equity in urban development in Europe and the United States, and describes sustainability as an important element of urban renaissance.