

Adi, Audi, Aldi

By Theo Deutinger Over the last decade,

the debate on the future of the German welfare state has been rising to a catastrophic climax: can Germany maintain the high quality' middle class economical giant while simultaneously keeping its intricate welfare system? Can Germany hold on to its 'Vorsprung durch Technik' or is it already too late? I argue that Germany has had an unconscious revolution, and become the country where Porsche owners shop at Aldi. In the following article he presents the unfolding of the mythical stages of Germany's modernization, from Adi's projective Third Reich to the Wirtschaftswunder to the triumph of cheapness...

Adi

(born 1889)

Kraft durch Freude

Follow

March

Wochenschau

Black

Hell

Marlene Dietrich

Berlin

World War

Audi

(founded 1909)

Vorsprung durch Technik

Produce



Red

Limbo

Beate Uhse

Bonn

Wirtschaftswunder

Aldi

(founded 1948)

Geiz ist Geil

Consume

Fly

Gute Zeiten, Schlechte Zeiten

Gold

Paradise

Sabine Christiansen

Borna

Wiedervereinigung

Adi - "FOLLOW": The masses in the 3rd Reich were seen as powerful instrument that could be used for the realization of political and military goals. The mastermind of this period, Adolf Hitler made promises to give work to everybody and lift the prosperity so that consumer goods would be affordable. Recognizing the need for leisure, projects like the Prora on Rügen were initiated to serve the masses, part of an intensive campaign to create a "healthy middle class" (see insert). But the taste of the middle class is mediocre and the monumentality of architecture is too sublime and frightening.

Contrary to the propaganda in the program of the NSDAP, the 3rd Reich with its racial, nationalistic and idiosyncratic policies was not suitable for the creation of a middle class. Since the phenomenon of a middle class is not defined by racial or geographical parameters and it is, rather, based on giving everybody the same opportunity to contribute to the whole out of its own will.

Hitler's aggressive expansionist dreams left middle class projects like the Volkswagen linger in favor of conquering the whole of Europe, abusing the power of the masses instead of contributing to their individual benefits. The basic needs of a stable middle class, personal freedom, good education for everybody and trust in the governmental institutions were not there: the creation of a middle class was not the aim...

Point 16 of the NSDAP program:

We demand the creation and maintenance of a healthy middle class, the immediate communalizing of big department stores, and their lease to small merchants at cheap rates, and that the utmost consideration shall be given to all small merchants in the allocation of State and municipal orders.

Audi - "PRODUCE": After the Second World War, the German economy grew, fueled by the Marshall-Plan, at an unprecedented speed. Miraculous growth above 10% was achieved, generated by highly motivated Germans that put all their energy in rebuilding the nation and its economy. Disciplined by the former regime it was uncannily obvious for a society of a whole nation that their only task was to produce.

Building on the theory of "social market economy" (soziale Marktwirtschaft), a concept propagated by the architect of the Wirtschaftswunder Ludwig Erhard in his book "Wohlstand für Alle", the market was stimulated and competition became the essential element of regulation. The whole theory was based on growth. The distribution of wealth to the masses was a mere side effect. Erhard explained it with an example: "if the "cake" becomes big enough, everybody will get a little piece." And so it was. As the national economy grew, the average personal income grew and the average German became rich.

Due to the vast damages of the war and the unsuitability of the existing residential building stock, the shortage of appropriate living space was enormous. By the year 1949, only 94 million residential units had to serve 14.6 million households. Huge subsidies by the German government stimulated the real estate market and the building industry became the driving force of the German Wirtschaftswunder. An extraordinary building boom followed. Whole cities reappeared in the blink of an eye, designed according to a single formula: convenience. As a theory this city of convenience was phrased as "structured, dispersed city" ("gegliederte aufgelockerte Stadt") and because of the extreme speed of development the theory became narrowed down to easy access of the city by car. Everything had to serve the practical needs of this time. Everything heroic was wrong and suspicious.

The city of convenience is a trivial movement in construction determined by mediocrity and built by architects nobody ever heard of. It is amazing that in such an enormous period of production, where brands like Porsche, BMW, Mercedes became big, in architectural terms not one single building was worth mentioning. The building industry, the motor of the German Wirtschaftswunder, left behind its cities and buildings as fallout. Cities like Bochum, Essen and Erlangen standing there like an old worn out Beetle uninteresting for the masses because their lack of luxury, uninteresting for the expert because of the lack of maintenance and extraordinarity. Coinciding with the end of the building boom in the 80s, the basis of the German economy made the transition from manufacturing to service. Although growth slowed, income levels remained high and working hours were reduced; this provided people with time and money, the two main ingredients for consumption. With the removal of the Berlin Wall an architectonic element finally disappeared which separated two Germanys.

A new era seems to begin. A bigger middle class = more consumers = more wealth.

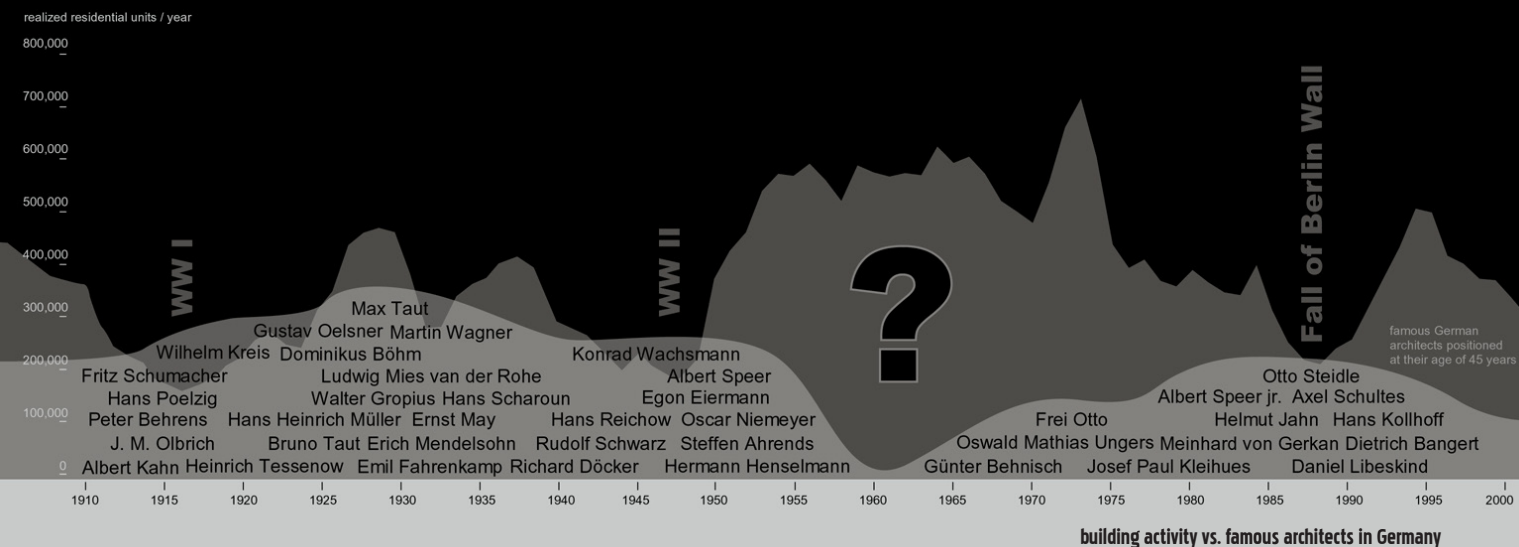
*We are living in the culture of middle class. Here in Holland Pim Fortuyn, a populist politician that was killed by a fanatic animal welfare activist, is our hero. Populists are the ones who understand us. Coming home from Mc Donalds, H&M is what we undress before we have sex in our IKEA bed. Staring at the ceiling out of sheet-rock from Knauf or Rigips. The only architect we know is Friedensreich Hundertwasser (*best known architect in the western world, source: AD/3 2004), an Austrian Artist who made colorful designs for apartment blocks, churches, restaurants and a spa.*

Source: Volkskrant-Magazine, Dec. 2004

Aldi - "CONSUME" : With consumption as the new task of the middle class, new companies entered the stage. Industrial corporations like VW, Miele and AEG were suddenly joined by Aldi, Media Markt and RTL, etc. The Wirtschaftswunder' already left Germany for a global trip to Japan, going further to the 'Tiger States' and will finally arrive in China, where it will give birth to the biggest middle class ever. Together with this economic wonder the companies went on tour in search of cheap and motivated work force, leaving behind the unified Germans with their expensive cars.

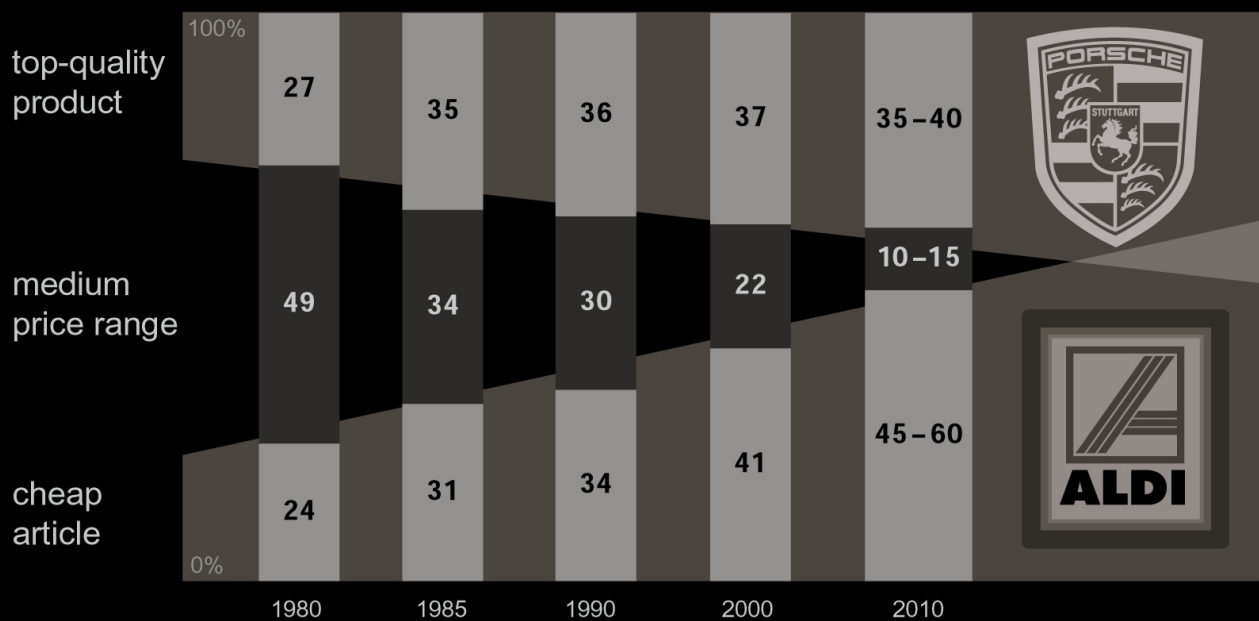
Yet the German middle class became mobile too, joining a larger movement throughout Europe, set in motion by holidays and events. The formation of this European middle class coincided with globalization, the IT-boom and a huge wave of privatization, as the new dogma of European politics. As if private consumption needed a political counteraction, governments started to sell all their assets, gained in the period of production in order to simulate growth. Government's intervention decreased and left everything up to the market forces.

In this environment discount-companies evolved, luring with no-frills offers enabling the realization of dreams for little money to vast parts of the society and thus stimulating them to consume. Especially the ability to travel distances with almost no money changed the urban system completely. As mass-mobility initiated the



suburb as the 20th century city structure, cheap flights and fast train connections transformed a whole continent into a huge fragmented patchwork. No city can serve these exclusive needs of the middle class, treating cities like homes and a continent like a city. The public space is not the urban park anymore but the Mediterranean coast in summertime and the Alps in winter. The quick shift from here (Germany) to there (Ibiza) is massive, making the Airport of Palma de Mallorca the fastest growing airport in Europe and the 23rd largest airport on the planet (*http://www.a2a.aero/stats_traffic.cfm)! Cities like London, Paris or Amsterdam retain no other meaning than being huge shopping malls or nice open-air museums. Culture is dissolved in phenomena formerly described as banal. The biggest cultural events are the Oktoberfest in Munich (6,3 million visitors), the car fair in Frankfurt (14 million visitors) and the Euro2004 in Portugal (0,5 million visitors) but if one considers smaller events like erotic fairs, tuner meetings, dog shows, etc., middle class culture would cover Europe. Just like the middle class in its adolescence did not care about status, now in its phase of maturity, luxury and cheapness is key. And the market is stretching out its helping hand. After lowering prices for air-flights to a point that flying becomes cheaper than hitchhiking now cruises, once known as the symbol of ultimate splendor become affordable for everyone. EasyCruise is starting this year with a new, no-frills cruise concept based on a day-to-day pay rate docking every day at a different Mediterranean seaport. The adjustment of the market to the consumer with no-frills products, especially in the infrastructure sector is reinforcing the model of the patchwork city. Proximities become more important than size - extremism is chosen instead of mediocrity. If the middle class in the period of production was about mediocrity, the middle class of consumption is about excellence.

Polarization of the market



Source: BBE - Unternehmensberatung GmbH

Conclusion According to the latest study about the trust of the German society in their companies, Porsche and Aldi were at the top. Looking at the consumer behavior one recognizes that there is no such thing as segregation in society (Zweiklassengesellschaft) but freedom of choice is so refined that people choose driving a Porsche and shopping at Aldi. You buy what you believe is worth the price.

Germany manages to be expensive and cheap at the same time! Similar to London, the only European capital that attracts high-end as well as low-end flights and establishes a crucial position as European air-hub. So it turns out that the cheapest way by air from Amsterdam to Vienna is via London! Our scope as urban planners needs to be extended. Urban design as it is practiced currently is nothing more than large-scale architecture. It is lacking any kind of basic understanding of how a middle class family is planning its destination for the next summer vacation. The inter-urban scale is the scale that people experience their daily lives and how they choose their living. Cities can only be understood, organized and managed if we see them and its infrastructure in an international and global context. It is not anymore about how to design the city but how to position it.

Theo Deutinger is an architect and lives in Rotterdam.

This essay about the three essential periods of European modernity marks the starting point of a more thorough investigation that should contribute to a better understanding of planning in Europe. Currently we are looking for a university / institution that provide us a platform to extend our investigation. If you are interested in contributing in any form please contact: t.deutinger@hetnet.nl