

Skateboards at the airport – Berlin in 2020



Michael Hegarty
Hertie School, Berlin

Tempelhofer Feld began public life as a parade ground for the Prussian military. But as a huge green space lying just a few kilometres to the south of the city centre, it was naturally used for recreation by Berliners when the soldiers weren't marching.

In the twentieth century it underwent a number of career changes, firstly as Flughafen Berlin-Tempelhof: one of a handful of iconic pre-war European airports and later the site of the Berlin airlift. In one of history's cyclical moments, the airport was designated as a park in 2008 and the sunloungers came out once more. In a less cyclical moment – and as if to show how the city had changed – Albert Speer's airport terminal building was used to shelter refugees in the winter of the 2015 Mediterranean migrant crisis.

I live on the edge of the airport in Schillerkiez. Amidst the stream of kiteboarders, guerrilla gardeners and general-issue Neukölln expats

flowing from Boddinstraße U-Bahn to Tempelhofer Feld, it's hard to imagine where I live as a working community sandwiched between the wall and the airport, with planes rumbling overhead. But the signs are still there. The church on my street had its spire removed in the 1940s so incoming planes could approach at a lower altitude, and it has never been replaced.

In London, history is everywhere if you go looking. In Berlin, it's much harder to avoid. This was one of the reasons I wanted to study here. A few months in, I found a plug-in that overlays the shape of the Berlin Wall onto Google Maps in my phone. It's a healthy reminder as I walk from my university in Mitte, crossing a red line to get to my student job in Kreuzberg, that freedom of movement shouldn't be taken for granted.

I studied history in the U.K. (surprise, surprise), but am now enrolled in the Master of International Affairs program at the Hertie School here in Berlin, with the assistance of the BCCG Anglo-German Club Award. As an applied course in international relations and public policy, my studies couldn't find a better setting. The idea of Berlin as a testing ground for the kind of society we want now plays out in a different way. Putting aside the weight of its twentieth century, the only constant here is change. |