



Captive stories

BERLIN (DE) — In German, the name of the Berlin district of 'Moabit' is synonymous with prison. This is due to the number of penitentiaries built here from the mid-nineteenth century, especially one on Lehrter Straße based on the 'Pentonville system'. Planned in the 1840s as a model Prussian institution, it only became notorious when several of those involved in the failed assassination attempt on Hitler of 20 July 1944 were imprisoned there awaiting execution. It was also here that a famous cycle of poems which deal strikingly with freedom and human rights was written: the 'Moabit Sonnets' by the resistance fighter Albrecht Haushofer (executed in the very last days of the war).

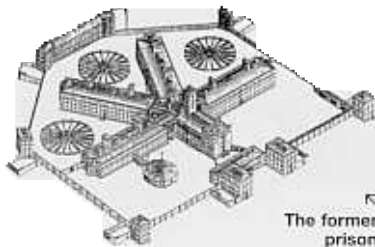
At the end of the 1950s, the building was demolished. After Reunification, the site was once again at the geographical centre of the capital, directly opposite what is now the gigantic new main station. In the early 1990s, the local council decided to convert the vacant lot into a municipal park commemorating the history of the place. It was 13 years before these noble plans were implemented.

Such delays are typical of public sector planning in Berlin, but in this case the

result is convincing: a unique balance of historical tour, garden and leisure facility. It was also created with the participation of local residents, who helped with the historical concept and also with the design of several buildings on the site. Admittedly, their influence shows, which is why it was a good idea to concentrate these elements at the entrance to the park, with the core area left to the professional planners.

Only as an interrelated whole do their generously designed individual elements, built to high standards and possessing an almost playful feel, gel into 'meaning'. This is new for Germany: abstraction instead of didacticism and awkwardness. The design, which evokes associations with 'prison' even for the uninformed visitor, is powerful and distinctive enough not to be compromised by the information boards which were added at a later stage. (CHRISTIAN WELZBACHER)

Geschichtspark Moabit, 2006. Planners: Glaßner and Dagenbach. Address: Lehrter Straße 1-5, Berlin. Open daily, closed at night. Info: www.glada-berlin.de



← Glaßner and Dagenbach designed the park as an architectural garden that uses pavilions, ramps and lines of sight to suggest the old ground plan of the former building. A concrete cube placed at the point where the cell wings converged, stands for the panoptic system discussed by Michel Foucault in 'Discipline and Punish'. The oppressiveness of the individual cells is reflected in a single, folly-like specimen. Groups of trees mark the former prison yards. On the surviving section of original wall, a line from Haushofer's sonnets is painted.

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The former prison