RELAUNCHING TITANIC
MEMORY AND MARKETING IN THE NEW BELFAST

Edited by William J. V. Neill, Michael Murray and Berna Grist
Relaunching Titanic

*Relaunching Titanic* critically considers the invocation of Titanic heritage in Belfast in contributing to a new ‘post-conflict’ understanding of the city. The authors address how the memory of Titanic is being and should be represented in the place of its origin, from where it was launched into the collective consciousness and unconsciousness of western civilization.

*Relaunching Titanic* examines these issues in the context of international debates on the tension between place marketing of cities and other alternative portrayals of memory and meaning in places. Key questions include the extent to which the goals of economic development are congruous with the ‘contemplative city’ and especially the need for mature and creative reflection in the ‘post-conflict’ city, whether development interests have taken precedence over the need for a deeper appreciation of a more nuanced Titanic legacy in the city of Belfast, and what Belfast shares with other places in considering the sacred and profane in memory construction.

While *Relaunching Titanic* focuses on the conflicted history of Belfast and the Titanic, it provides lessons for planners and scholars of city branding, tourism and urban reimagining across the globe.

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Relaunching Titanic
Memory and marketing in the New Belfast

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In memory of
Tom Neill
1956–2011
A journey cut short
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Günter Schlusche has worked in urban planning, architecture and environmental projects for more than 30 years. From 1981 to 1987 he was Project Manager for the International Building Exhibition (IBA 1987) in West Berlin. After managing the unique restructuring process of Berlin’s...
urban development for the Stadtforum Berlin following the fall of the Wall, he was from 1996 until 2005 Chief Planner for the realisation of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe designed for Berlin’s centre by Peter Eisenman. He is now responsible for the Berlin Wall Memorial which is aimed at recalling the division of Berlin, Germany and Europe during the Cold War, as well as its successful ending by the peaceful revolution of the East German people. Dr Schlusche studied architecture in Berlin, completed a master’s degree in Urban Planning at the London School of Economics, and completed a PhD in Urban Development at the Technical University Berlin.

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Shattered illusions – nothing inserts its way so clearly into memory, into the collective human faculty of remembering. With the sinking of the Titanic, our belief in nature being controlled by man and science was shown to be flawed. The command to ‘subdue … and have dominion over every living thing that moveth upon the earth’ does imply the conviction that man is able to do such a thing. The blazing wreck of the Hindenburg disaster on the 6th of May 1937 was in this respect more than a ‘déjà-vu’ experience. It destroyed at the same time German belief in the superiority of their engineering skills. Surely not one of us has forgotten precisely what we were doing or exactly where we were when the news broke of the two passenger planes hijacked by terrorists diving into the Twin Towers in Manhattan. American conviction that they were invulnerable in their own country was buried deep down, along with 3,000 innocent murder victims. This list might be prolonged at will – going on to the nuclear meltdown in Fukushima. Of course, there was Chernobyl, but this disaster happened in a Communist nuclear power station, not in the West.

Events such as these build, to a not inconsiderable degree, our self-perception and our identity. They bring into play psychologists, sociologists, technicians or technocrats, maybe even theologians, philosophers and politicians. In cases where catastrophes shattering illusions take place at or are linked to a location, i.e. can be physically identified, then urban and physical planners are also called upon. How can such places of memory be created; what is their ‘genius loci’? How can they be incorporated into city-wide structure; what comprises their function? Numerous planning and architectural questions weave around places like these. They will be studied in this publication. But one thing is always certain: planning ideas about places like these also impact on the perception of events and our remembrance of them. In this context, planners shape our view of history.

There is an additional aspect to consider in divided cities: whether they are torn between religions and ethnicity, as in for example Belfast or Jerusalem, or if there are two opposing political systems, as in Berlin or Nicosia. If not before, then at the latest when the wounds of the division are slowly beginning to heal – or even when a scar has formed – the question of places
of memory remains even more virulent than is the case in a ‘normal’ city. Because remembering is always modified by societal trends, at least two memory patterns exist – and they are frequently divergent. Dealing with these places of memory from the planning perspective needs to be addressed with extreme sensitivity.

There is an ever-present danger that places such as these are forgotten in urban planning – until grass has grown or concrete laid over them. Or perhaps they form a basis for commerce and monetary gains. This is the more straightforward way of dealing with such sensitive sites. Their potential, their societal profits, the ability to further greater harmony, to contribute towards a joint or common identity being created, indeed to contribute to real education and wisdom, may in this way be thoughtlessly squandered.

Here in Berlin we have experience with nearly all the ways of coming to terms with places of memory. We commemorate by means of the impressive, oppressive memorial designed by Peter Eisenman, located in the centre of Berlin near the Federal Parliament buildings, the memory of six million Jews murdered by Germans. To date, we do not yet have a comparable place of memory for people persecuted for political reasons or for victims of the Nazi euthanasia policies. It took a very long time for the Berlin City Government to give the Berlin Wall memorial sites their support. By then, almost all the final remnants of the Wall within the city had disappeared. At both these memorial sites – at the Holocaust memorial and at the Berlin Wall Museum – intensive educational, instructing and informing activities are conducted as well. The sites are the destination of countless Berliners and tourists, and also for school groups. The potential of the GDR monumental building, known as the Palace of the Republic, to exemplify the history of the GDR is not being used. We chose rather to pull it down. In its place, the plan is to rebuild the former Hohenzollern palace – or rather, a replica of it. At best, this may remind many of us of the romanticised castles built for Ludwig II, the King of Bavaria; at worst, of the Sleeping Beauty Castle in Disneyland near Paris.

The questions posed in this book, and many of the answers, may perhaps help in avoiding those mistakes which have been made in one or two places in Berlin or elsewhere. The book cannot give directions on how to deal with history or places of memory. However, it can make us aware of the fact that while many things can be done properly, a lot of things can be done wrongly.

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Berlin, October 2012