

Ingram, Susan, York University, Canada

Poor but Sexy: The Metrobranding of Berlin's Enterprising Culture

The financial challenges that cultural groups worldwide face are proving increasingly prohibitive, and while the situation in Berlin is no exception, it also has some specific qualities that demonstrate how corporate and creative interests can be mobilized to position a city advantageously in the global market. Berlin's reputation as "poor but sexy" dates back to at least November 2003, when Mayor Wowereit responded negatively when an interviewer from FOCUS-Money asked him whether money made one more sexually appealing: "No. You can see this with Berlin. We may be poor, but we're still sexy." Berlin's financial plight has worsened considerably since then, in no small part due to the decision of the German Constitutional Court in October 2006 that Berlin had no right to any federal funds to offset its huge budget deficit (at that time 61.6 billion Euros). The city's much vaunted high-culture scene – its over 150 theatres and museums, three opera houses, seven symphony orchestras, eight choirs, etc. –, has necessarily come under considerable scrutiny on account of the city's grave financial plight; however, it has been managing to stay afloat in part because of the growth of other cultural sectors. The city's techno scene is thriving, its international film festival enjoys ongoing success and is ranked among the "big five," new ownership has invigorated the Babelsberg film studios, and reorganization of the museal sphere has encouraged the sprouting up of new private museums like the ones which commemorate Heinrich Zille and Helmut Newton as well as the acquisition of the renowned Kamer/Ruf fashion collection by the Kunstgewerbemuseum. This presentation will survey Berlin's cultural sphere and examine the challenges and advantages of sustaining Berlin's "poor but sexy" image.