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# Mass Housing, Late Modernism, and the Forging of Community in New York City and East Berlin, 1965–1989

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FROM CLICHY-SOUS-BOIS OUTSIDE PARIS to Zahradní Město-východ outside Prague, and from Singapore's Toa Payoh to Rio de Janeiro's Realengo, mass-produced modernist high-rise housing estates span the globe. For decades these housing developments stood as iconic symbols of the failure of social engineering.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, however, modernist mass housing has had a revival of sorts. Architectural and cultural historians have explored the variety of its manifestations around the globe.<sup>2</sup> Historians of Eastern Europe have discovered a vibrant array of modern architectural experiments that echoed, but did not imitate, their Western counterparts.<sup>3</sup> The transnational culture of borrowing and exchange that marked modernism's heyday has been a further subject of historical inquiry.<sup>4</sup> Motivated in part by nostalgia for his

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<sup>1</sup> On housing projects in the United States, see Sudhir Alladi Venkatesh, *American Project: The Rise and Fall of a Modern Ghetto* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002); D. Bradford Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing* (Chicago, 2010). On the social crisis in Paris's banlieue, see Gilles Kepel, *Banlieue de la République: Société, politique et religion à Clichy-sous-Bois et Montfermeil* (Paris, 2012); Jean-Marc Stébé, *La crise des banlieues: Sociologie des quartiers sensibles*, 4th ed. (Paris, 2010); Jacques Donzelot, *Quand la ville se défait: Quelle politique face à la crise des banlieues?* (Paris, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Kulić, Timothy Parker, and Monica Penick, eds., *Sanctioning Modernism: Architecture and the Making of Postwar Identities* (Austin, Tex., 2014); Sarah Williams Goldhagen and Réjean Legault, eds., *Anxious Modernisms: Experimentation in Postwar Architectural Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); Kenny Cupers, *The Social Project: Housing Postwar France* (Minneapolis, 2014); Florian Urban, *Tower and Slab: Histories of Global Mass Housing* (New York, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Kimberly Elman Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity: Housing in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960* (Pittsburgh, 2011); Virág Molnár, *Building the State: Architecture, Politics and the State in Post-War Central Europe* (New York, 2013); Vladimir Kulić, Maroje Mrdjulaš, and Wolfgang Thaler, *Modernism In-Between: The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia* (Berlin, 2012); Brigitte Le Normand, *Designing Tito's Capital: Urban Planning, Modernism, and Socialism in Belgrade* (Pittsburgh, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Elidor Mëhilli, "The Socialist Design: Urban Dilemmas in Postwar Europe and the Soviet Union," *Kritika* 13, no. 3 (2012): 635–665.

ability to get things done, even New York's long-vilified Robert Moses has been partially rehabilitated.<sup>5</sup>

And yet despite this newfound attention, the declensionist narrative of modernism's rise and fall remains surprisingly intact. Drawing in large measure from the work of the Swiss architect Le Corbusier, postwar modernists sought to make cities more efficient, hygienic, and rational through architecture and urban planning. The high-rise superblocks that are their most visible legacy were intended to give residents "sunshine, clear air, and silence," set apart from the chaotic, foul-smelling streets that dominated older cities.<sup>6</sup> Designing these urban spaces marked by residential towers and efficient traffic was a godlike planner, who displayed an aesthetic approach to the cities he designed and an imperious relationship to the citizens who populated them.<sup>7</sup> His social goal was to create public harmony and avoid revolutionary upheaval.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, he sought to "negat[e] the past by reference to a new future."<sup>9</sup> In the aftermath of World War II, architects and urban planners influenced by these principles were responsible for projects as diverse as the capital city of Brasília, the Sarcelles *grand ensembles* in the Parisian suburbs, and the high-rise Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, along with other housing estates around the world. In the United States, postwar modernism was connected with urban renewal, in which older, often dilapidated housing was destroyed to make way for a more modern and efficient city.<sup>10</sup>

By the early 1960s, misgivings about modernist planning that had been pushed to the sidelines burst into public consciousness. Most famously voiced by Jane Jacobs, these concerns reflected a new appreciation for established neighborhoods and a resistance to the sterile products of modernist architecture.<sup>11</sup> Opposition to modernism and urban renewal spread rapidly, and by the late 1960s they had "been discredited and [were] largely done as both policy and vision."<sup>12</sup> Since then, "new urbanists" have dominated popular conceptions of the ideal urban environment. Today, rich and poor alike privilege authentic charm, a lively street life, and community input in planning decisions. Following the outlines of this history, the story of postwar modernism is often assumed to have stopped in 1965, with later modernist initiatives receiving little attention from historians.<sup>13</sup>

This narrative is primarily located in an American and Western European set of experiences, but it has had repercussions for the history of Eastern European archi-

<sup>5</sup> Hilary Ballon and Kenneth T. Jackson, eds., *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York* (New York, 2008); Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Athens Charter [1943], Article 16, [http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/research\\_resources/charters/charter04.html](http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/research_resources/charters/charter04.html); Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier* (New York, 1977), 200.

<sup>7</sup> James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasília* (Chicago, 1989), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century*, 187. See also Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris, 1923).

<sup>9</sup> Holston, *The Modernist City*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, 1961).

<sup>12</sup> Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the chronologies in two excellent recent books on postwar modernism and urban renewal: Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, and Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago, 2011).

ecture and urban planning as well. Even if a growing number of historians of Eastern Europe have begun to take the ambitions of modernist urban planners in the Eastern Bloc seriously, the projects of the 1970s and 1980s are still condemned as “represent[ing] everything that was wrong with communism.”<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Florian Urban and others have used the existence of neo-historical planning in the Eastern Bloc to create a variant on the narrative of urban modernism’s decline in the West. Here, architects and urban planners realized the folly of their modernist ways, but were stymied by the shortsightedness of government officials.<sup>15</sup>

But urban modernism’s collapse was neither so inevitable nor so precipitous as this narrative suggests. The crisis of the city experienced on both sides of the Cold War did not lead to the end of urban ambition or of architectural modernism. Rather, urban modernism proved to be both flexible and resilient, at least until the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s. Without abandoning modernism, urban planners, architects, and residents on both sides of the Iron Curtain rethought the meaning of cities and communities and the purpose of architecture and urban planning as a result of the challenge offered by both new urbanist ideas and urban crisis. Thus, a new chronology of urban modernism is needed, one in which the 1960s and 1970s are viewed as a period not of decline but of transformation. This transformation, which can be characterized as “late modernism,” was located not so much in a metamorphosis of the physical form of modernist architecture as in a social and ideological evolution that stressed the transformational potential of communities rather than the architectural determinism of the immediate postwar decades.

Late modernism is explored here through an examination of two housing developments—Co-op City in New York City and Marzahn in East Berlin.<sup>16</sup> First occupied in 1968, Co-op City had room for 65,000 residents.<sup>17</sup> Built a decade later, Marzahn could accommodate up to 175,000 residents in 59,646 apartments.<sup>18</sup> Co-op City is the largest cooperative development ever constructed; at the time of its

<sup>14</sup> Zarecor, *Manufacturing a Socialist Modernity*, 294.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Ladd, “Socialist Planning and the Rediscovery of the Old City in the German Democratic Republic,” *Journal of Urban History* 27, no. 5 (2001): 584–603; Florian Urban, *Neo-Historical East Berlin: Architecture and Urban Design in the German Democratic Republic, 1970–1990* (Burlington, Vt., 2009); Emily Pugh, *Architecture, Politics, and Identity in Divided Berlin* (Pittsburgh, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> The only book on a development similar to Co-op City is Peter Eisenstadt, *Rochdale Village: Robert Moses, 6,000 Families, and New York City’s Great Experiment in Integrated Housing* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2010). Co-op City is not discussed in depth in either Joel Schwartz, *The New York Approach: Robert Moses, Urban Liberals, and Redevelopment of the Inner City* (Columbus, Ohio, 1993), or Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since 1945* (New York, 2000); and it is dismissed as architecturally and socially sterile in Evelyn Gonzalez, *The Bronx* (New York, 2009). Even the recent reconsideration of Robert Moses’s legacy has not led to a rethinking of Co-op City and its legacy. Ballon and Jackson, *Robert Moses and the Modern City*. East German planned housing in general has been addressed by only a few general studies, including Alice Kahl, *Erlebnis Plattenbau: Eine Langzeitstudie* (Opladen, 2003); Christine Hannemann, *Die Platte: Industrialisierter Wohnungsbau in der DDR*, 3rd ed. (Berlin, 2005); Hannsjörg F. Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert: Die Wohnungspolitik der DDR* (Münster, 2004); Jay Rowell, *Le totalitarisme au concret: Les politiques de logement en RDA* (Paris, 2006). Eli Rubin’s *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford, 2016), which addresses Marzahn from the perspective of East German material culture, is the only study to look at the development specifically.

<sup>17</sup> “December 10th Move-in a Happy, Family Event,” *Co-op City Times* 3, no. 1 (1968): 1.

<sup>18</sup> Christa Hübner, Herbert Nicolaus, and Manfred Teresiak, *20 Jahre Marzahn: Chronik eines Berliner Bezirkes* (Berlin, 1998), 10; Günter Peters, “Zur Baugeschichte—Drei Gründerzeiten,” in Gerrit Engel, ed., *Marzahn* (Cologne, 1999), 15–17, here 15.



FIGURE 1: Aerial view of Co-op City, ca. the 1960s. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, N.Y.

completion, it would have been the eighth-largest city in New York State.<sup>19</sup> The sprawling new developments anchored by Marzahn in northeast Berlin would have been the fourth-largest city in East Germany when they were finished.<sup>20</sup> Built after the supposed heyday of modernism, Co-op City and Marzahn were the physical embodiment of massive amounts of social, political, and economic capital. Marzahn was the showpiece development for the East German Wohnungsbauprogramm (Housing Program) in the 1970s and 1980s. Co-op City represented the culmination of decades of struggle against urban blight in New York. They, and developments like them, represented a significant component of the lived experience of millions of people on either side of the Iron Curtain in the later decades of the Cold War.

The builders of Co-op City and Marzahn were barely aware of one another, and the settlements they constructed were products of their own specific national and

<sup>19</sup> "What NAHC Is—and What It Can Do," *Cooperative Housing*, Summer 1967, 4.

<sup>20</sup> Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, chap. 2.



FIGURE 2: Aerial view of Marzahn, 1984. BA-Berlin Bild 183-1984-0601-008 / Zimmermann.

local contexts. There is no East German analogue to the racial dynamics that motivated so many of Co-op City's pioneers; nor did Co-op City's builders seek to reconstruct an Eastern European surveillance state in the Northeast Bronx. The East German socialist ethos was not the cooperative vision that inspired the builders of Co-op City, however much each was a response to consumerism and individualism. Nonetheless, the architects and urban planners who built these two developments responded in some similar ways to the simultaneous challenges of social crisis and the intellectual critique of modernist urban planning.

Late modernism as demonstrated in Co-op City and Marzahn differed in six key ways from the modernism of the first two postwar decades. First, like postwar modernists, late modernists saw urban planning as an engine of social transformation. The goal of that transformation, however, was the creation of a new kind of community. Indeed, not only did community constitute the objective of late modernist urban planning, but it was the means of social transformation in late modernism on both sides of the Iron Curtain. This notion of a transformational community differed both from postwar modernism, which stressed the transformational power of architecture itself, and from new urbanism, which viewed communities as a source of stability and succor rather than transformation.

Second, postwar modernism was largely rationalist and technocratic, but late modernism marked a return of sorts to modernism's interwar radical roots. The practitioners of late modernism in the Eastern Bloc and the United States built upon their shared heritage of interwar progressivism. The Bauhaus goal of using modern architecture to create a "human brotherhood, with organic community ties" was a conscious precursor to the late modernist vision of architects in the Communist Eastern Bloc and postwar New York City alike.<sup>21</sup> Co-op City's architect, Herman Jessor, paid direct homage to both the physical form and the social function of housing in interwar Red Vienna, which had sought to marry socialist communitarianism and modern architecture.<sup>22</sup>

Third, rather than eschewing the past of the communities they built in, late modernist planners recognized the attraction of older neighborhoods and viewed the spaces and communities they created as a bridge between the past and the future. Fourth, in late modernism the planner was crucially important. That planner, however, was not a godlike figure standing above humanity, but rather a link in a feedback loop—constantly responding to the desires and needs of the ordinary people who populated housing developments. Fifth, late modernist developments were located on the fringes of the city and built on a scale that dwarfed anything seen previously, which allowed people to live in a self-enclosed world. In this sense, they were simultaneously more ambitious and more defensive than their earlier progenitors. And sixth, late modernism was a response not only to critiques of urban modernism, but also to the rise of consumerism during the Cold War. Late modernist housing developments tried to provide a kind of good life for residents that reconceived ownership in collective terms.

<sup>21</sup> Bruno Taut quoted in Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 49; Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City: Dwelling Type and Social Change in the American Metropolis* (New York, 1990), 165.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 402; Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919–1934* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

In the end, the story of late modernist housing belongs not to the developers who constructed Co-op City and Marzahn, but to the men, women, and children who lived in them. Both complexes were quite popular with residents, at least initially. And from the beginning, the residents of Marzahn and Co-op City made their developments their own, forging communities but also proving stubbornly resistant to the transformational plans their developers had for them.

THE UNITED HOUSING FOUNDATION (UHF), which constructed Co-op City, was not the only cooperative housing organization in the postwar United States, but it was by far the largest. The UHF grew out of the cooperative housing projects built in the Bronx by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America in the 1920s and 1930s. Its leader, Abraham Kazan, saw cooperative housing as “the nucleus of the metropolis of the future.”<sup>23</sup> Kazan emerged from the trade union activism of the Lower East Side, where a host of labor organizations constructed housing developments for their members. However, he was less interested in union politics or even housing for its own sake, but rather saw in cooperative housing the means for creating a utopian cooperative society.<sup>24</sup> Kazan founded the UHF in 1951 to take advantage of federal funding for affordable housing made available through Title 1 of the 1949 Housing Act. The organization offered the possibility of cooperative housing to a broad swath of working- and middle-class New Yorkers, and did not have the explicit left-wing and union orientation that had marked interwar union housing efforts.<sup>25</sup> Residents of its housing ventures were able to purchase cooperatively owned properties at a reduced price and paid a relatively low monthly “maintenance fee.” They also received the tax benefits that accrued to property owners. However, they could not realize any profit (or loss) from the sale of their apartments. UHF cooperatives offered a kind of qualified and cooperative home ownership that bore little resemblance to the single-family housing market that was then taking off elsewhere in the U.S. The organization’s first project was the Mutual Housing Association, near the original Amalgamated Co-ops in the Bronx. It was completed in 1955 as a single-building cooperative with space for 123 families.<sup>26</sup> Each successive UHF development was larger than the previous one; Rochdale Village, which opened in eastern Queens in 1961 on land that had previously been home to the Jamaica Racetrack, contains 5,860 units.<sup>27</sup> Altogether, in the 1950s and 1960s, the UHF was responsible for more than half of the new housing built in New York City. Co-op City would be its last and largest development.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Eisenstadt, *Rochdale Village*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Hilary Ann Botein, “‘Solid Testimony of Labor’s Present Status’: Unions and Housing in Postwar New York City” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2005). See chap. 2 for a discussion of the uneasy relationship of Kazan and the UHF to other proponents of labor housing.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>26</sup> United Housing Foundation, *Twenty Years of Accomplishment* (New York, 1971), 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. Other developments include East River Houses in Manhattan, completed in 1956 (with 4 buildings and 1,672 apartments), and Amalgamated Warbasse Houses near Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, completed in 1965 (with 5 buildings and 2,585 apartments). On the history of Rochdale from the perspective of a former resident and with a view to its embeddedness in New York history, see Eisenstadt, *Rochdale Village*.

<sup>28</sup> Botein, “‘Solid Testimony of Labor’s Present Status,’” 76.

For all its utopianism, the UHF was a major player in New York's urban establishment. The city's "master builder," Robert Moses, was a close political ally of Kazan's, drawn to the UHF's proven ability to build large amounts of housing for a comparatively cheap price. Seeing Kazan as someone who shared his goal of large-scale urban renewal, Moses was willing to lend his considerable political clout to the organization, ushering UHF projects through the thickets of New York City's planning bureaucracy and ensuring it a steady stream of financial and political capital. Even as elsewhere in the United States subsidized housing became associated with the urban underclass as the New Deal receded into history, New York City remained something of an exception. The UHF and other developers who built middle-class housing could rely upon Mitchell-Lama funding, a series of New York State tax breaks and subsidies that encouraged the construction of rental housing for the middle class.<sup>29</sup> The UHF's reliance upon a combination of union and state resources had more in common with European-style social democracy than with the housing landscape in other American cities.<sup>30</sup>

Yet if the context in which Co-op City was built was unique to New York City, it was also a response to the broader social transformation of the American city after World War II. By the mid-1960s, the problems of the "inner city" had become a focus of national concern, with deteriorating conditions on numerous fronts across the nation, including white flight to the suburbs, declining infrastructure, economic deindustrialization, and growing violence.<sup>31</sup> As much as the urban crisis rocked the economic and social foundations of America's cities, the UHF viewed it as an opportunity to remake America's crumbling and exploitative cities in a new and more cooperative form.<sup>32</sup>

On July 14, 1965, the UHF signed a \$250,900,000 mortgage through the New York State Housing Finance Agency for the construction of a new development, Co-op City, on the site of a failed amusement park, Freedomland, in the Northeast Bronx.<sup>33</sup> In addition to this low-interest mortgage, Co-op City enjoyed a 50 percent municipal tax abatement for its first thirty years of existence.<sup>34</sup> The new development was an order of magnitude larger than anything the UHF had done, with plans for 15,382 apartments.<sup>35</sup> A number of important politicians celebrated the cooperative at its groundbreaking ceremony. Moses took the opportunity to herald "democracy in action, socialism without communism, self-government without bureaucracy," adding, "Rochdale and Co-op City are names to conjure with."<sup>36</sup> Governor Nelson Rockefeller

<sup>29</sup> For more on New York's financing of urban middle-class housing, see Hilary Botein, "New York State Housing Policy in Postwar New York City: The Enduring Rockefeller Legacy," *Journal of Urban History* 35, no. 6 (2009): 833–852. Botein writes that the vast majority of Mitchell-Lama funding went to New York City (838).

<sup>30</sup> Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, chap. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Wendell E. Pritchett, "Which Urban Crisis? Regionalism, Race and Urban Policy, 1960–1974," *Journal of Urban History* 34, no. 2 (2008): 266–286, here 273.

<sup>32</sup> Bayard Rustin, "Housing, the Ghetto and the Urban Crisis," *Co-op Contact*, Fall 1967, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Special Meeting of the UHF Board, September 17, 1965, United Housing Foundation, Selected Files, Collection Number: 6129, Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, N.Y. [hereafter KC], box 17. On Freedomland, see Tom Vanderbilt, "Stagecoach Wreck Injures 10 in Bronx," *New York Times*, September 1, 2002; David Gonzalez, "Celebrating the Short, Sweet Ride of Freedomland," *New York Times*, June 19, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Edith Evans Asbury, "Ground Broken for Bronx Co-ops," *New York Times*, May 15, 1966, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Ostroff to UHF Board, January 28, 1965, KC, box 17.

<sup>36</sup> "The Wisdom of Moses—Remarks at the Co-op City Groundbreaking," *Co-op Contact*, Fall 1966, 5.



ler praised the development as “our greatest effort to meet one of New York’s greatest needs.”<sup>37</sup> The *New York Times* congratulated Co-op City’s founders for providing a “lesson in . . . social progress.”<sup>38</sup> Even President Lyndon Johnson sent a telegram thanking the UHF for its “farsighted endeavor.”<sup>39</sup> Co-op City was also popular among prospective and new residents; more than 12,000 applications for apartments were submitted within the first three months after the development opened.<sup>40</sup>

IN CONTRAST TO NEW YORK CITY’S social and racial upheaval, East Berlin’s urban crisis had origins that reached back into the hasty and unplanned urbanization of the nineteenth century. The housing shortage there was compounded by the destruction of the city during World War II. In the central districts of Berlin, which witnessed the fiercest street fighting at the end of the war, up to 60 percent of the buildings were destroyed.<sup>41</sup> Yet despite these issues, housing was not a priority for the state for the first two decades of its existence.<sup>42</sup> As late as 1971, 80 percent of the housing stock in the German Democratic Republic was pre-1945, and of that, most had been constructed prior to World War I.<sup>43</sup> More than 60 percent of apartments did not have their own shower or a private toilet, and less than one-quarter even had warm water.<sup>44</sup> The housing crisis directly influenced people’s satisfaction with the East German state. Complaints about inadequate housing made up the majority of *Eingaben* (citizen petitions) to the state and the governing party, the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party [SED]), while a 1972 study revealed that 70 percent of East Germans believed that the housing situation should be the state’s highest priority.<sup>45</sup> In 1971, Erich Honecker, the new SED chairman, announced the GDR’s new Housing Program. Approved by the Central Committee in 1973, it promised to solve the “housing problem as a social problem” by 1990 through the construction of between 2.8 and 3 million new apartments for East Germans.<sup>46</sup> These apartments would be built using serialized concrete panel (*Plattenbau*) architecture, which had become ubiquitous in the Eastern Bloc.<sup>47</sup> In order to build the millions of apartments promised in the Housing Program, the party called for large-scale *Plattenbau* suburbs on the outskirts of cities across East Germany.

<sup>37</sup> Asbury, “Ground Broken for Bronx Co-ops.”

<sup>38</sup> “Co-op City,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1966, 23.

<sup>39</sup> Telegram from Lyndon Johnson to Potofsky, KC, box 6.

<sup>40</sup> “At Foundation’s Annual Meeting, Cheers Greet Announcement of 12,400 Co-op City Applications,” *Co-op City Times* 3, no. 3 (1969): 1.

<sup>41</sup> Jörg Echternkamp, *Nach dem Krieg: Alltagsnot, Neuorientierung und die Last der Vergangenheit, 1945–1949* (Zurich, 2003), 19–20.

<sup>42</sup> Jay Rowell, “Wohnungspolitik,” in Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz, eds., *Deutsche Demokratische Republik, 1949–1961: Im Zeichen des Aufbaus des Sozialismus* (Baden-Baden, 2004), 699–726, here 712.

<sup>43</sup> Ladd, “Socialist Planning and the Rediscovery of the Old City in the German Democratic Republic,” 588.

<sup>44</sup> Gunnar Winkler, ed., *Sozialreport ’90: Daten und Fakten zur sozialen Lage in der DDR* (Berlin, 1990), 158.

<sup>45</sup> Institut für Meinungsforschung beim ZK der SED, Bericht zu Problemen der Politik und der Wirtschaft, September 13, 1972, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR, Bundesarchiv-Berlin [hereafter BA-Berlin], DY 30 Vorl. SED 14350.

<sup>46</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert*, 389.

<sup>47</sup> Rowell, “Wohnungspolitik,” 711.

The number of new apartments dwarfed what had been achieved in the previous two decades of SED rule. It also reflected the arrival of “Real Existing Socialism,” in which the regime proclaimed that industrial development had advanced to the point at which East Germans could begin to reap its benefits, including the production of more and higher-quality consumer goods.<sup>48</sup> With Real Existing Socialism, the engine for social transformation shifted from industry and economics to social and political life, with the home at the center. The Deutsche Bauakademie—Institut für Städtebau und Architektur (German Construction Academy—Institute for Urban Planning and Architecture [DBA]) saw its task as the creation of new living situations to serve as the building blocks of socialist society.<sup>49</sup>

Berlin-Marzahn, built on the site of a small village on the northeast edge of Berlin, was the largest and most ambitious of East Germany’s new satellite towns—a showpiece for the entire East German Housing Program. On March 21, 1973, the SED Central Committee ordered the construction of the Marzahn settlement for approximately 100,000 Berliners, with the first apartments to be occupied in 1977.<sup>50</sup> This was a massive undertaking involving the extension of several transit lines, the lengthening of streets (and the construction of new ones), and the provision of water, sewer, and power lines.<sup>51</sup> After three years of preparatory work under the leadership of Berlin’s chief urban planner, Günter Peters, and chief architect, Heinz Graffunder, the first concrete slabs were laid on July 8, 1977. The first residents arrived five months later.<sup>52</sup>

REFLECTING THE PLANNING PRECEPTS espoused by Corbusier, the plans for Co-op City and Marzahn had several features in common—high-rise buildings, a separation of the spaces for pedestrian and vehicular traffic, and relatively large apartments featuring the latest amenities. Marzahn’s buildings were designed in three basic styles—five, eleven, and twenty-two stories, primarily utilizing the Wohnungsbaue Serie 70 (WBS-70) model for prefabricated concrete slab apartments.<sup>53</sup> Co-op City also features three main building styles—the Tower, which consists of thirty-three stories; the twenty-six-story Triple Core; and the Chevron, a high-rise with twenty-two stories—along with 236 three-story townhouses placed in clusters around the site. In both Marzahn and Co-op City, these large apartment buildings were designed with minimal ornamentation but with plenty of windows and balconies, in an effort to provide residents with Corbusier’s trio of “light, air, and sun.” In both cases, the choice to use this architecture had simultaneous practical and ideological rationales. The

<sup>48</sup> Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne, 1999).

<sup>49</sup> Jay Rowell, “Wohnungspolitik,” in Christoph Boyer, Klaus-Dietmar Henke, and Peter Skyba, eds., *Deutsche Demokratische Republik, 1971–1989: Bewegung in der Sozialpolitik, Erstarrung und Niedergang* (Baden-Baden, 2008), 679–701, here 681; Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 111.

<sup>50</sup> Günter Peters, *Hütten, Platten, Wohnquartiere: Berlin-Marzahn, ein junger Bezirk mit altem Namen* (Berlin, 1998), 77, 90. By 1980, plans had expanded to accommodate 172,000 residents. Hübner, Nicolaus, and Teresiak, *20 Jahre Marzahn*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Beschlussvorlage—Magistrat von Gross-Berlin—Grundlagen für den Aufbau des Gebietes Biesdorf/Marzahn, July 18, 1973, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), C. Rep. 107/1197, Vorlagen-Nr 166/73.

<sup>52</sup> Peters, “Zur Baugeschichte—Drei Gründerzeiten,” 15.

<sup>53</sup> Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 97.

structures could be built quickly and cheaply, and high-rise towers would allow for a dense population surrounded by nature.<sup>54</sup>

In both Co-op City and Marzahn, the apartments were modern and spacious, designed with a nuclear family in mind. In the case of Co-op City, their modernity was reflected in the availability of central air-conditioning; for Marzahn, modernity meant central heating and private bathrooms with warm water. The floor plan for a six-room (three-bedroom) apartment with a balcony in one of the Tower buildings in Co-op City was 1,210 square feet. A three-room WBS-70 apartment designed for a family with children in Marzahn was smaller, at 68 square meters (or 732 square feet). Both apartments emphasized almost identically sized living rooms (225 or 226 square feet, respectively) and balconies (70 and 75 square feet, respectively); the Co-op City apartment, however, had considerably larger bedrooms, an additional half-bathroom, and numerous built-in closets. Finally, both the UHF and the GDR Ministry of Finance were aware that cheap rents were crucial to the popularity of these new homes. A three-room apartment in Marzahn cost 123.85 marks per month, approximately one-tenth the average salary of a GDR worker.<sup>55</sup> The original plan was for Co-op City residents to pay \$22–23 per room per month. That brought the total cost for this six-room apartment to \$216 per month, after a \$450 down payment due upon initial occupancy.<sup>56</sup> The rents on the Co-op City apartments were approximately 30 percent below the market rate for an equivalent non-UHF apartment.<sup>57</sup>

People were enthusiastic from the outset about their apartments in Marzahn and Co-op City. When Anne Sullivan arrived at Co-op City, her movers exclaimed, “Wait till you see what you’ve got!” Indeed, on a clear day she could see from her twenty-fourth-story window all the way to LaGuardia Airport. The apartment was spacious, and like many of the development’s other residents, she was thrilled about her new home, saying she felt like she “had died and gone to heaven.”<sup>58</sup> Judy Rabinowitz, another early resident, stated in 1969 how much she enjoyed living in Co-op City: “The apartment is great. There’s air-conditioning and the kitchen has a lot of cabinets. There are a lot of closets, and there are parquet floors and the rooms are a nice size.”<sup>59</sup> For Jutta Wormbs, her apartment in Marzahn with central heating was “like heaven on earth.”<sup>60</sup> Karin Matthees described her apartment as “wonderful: hot water from the faucet, central heating, a six-meter-long balcony, an elevator, and—

<sup>54</sup> Jessor quoted in Tony Schuman, “Labor and Housing in New York City: Architect Herman Jessor and the Cooperative Housing Movement,” 6, <http://urbanomnibus.net/redux/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/LABOR-AND-HOUSING-IN-NEW-YORK-CITY.pdf>. Original plans to build Co-op City as a “miniature Venice” with canals to let water run through the marshy ground rather than constructing atop landfill were scrapped due to cost concerns. Herman Jessor, “Comments upon the Author’s Text,” *Progressive Architecture* 51, no. 2 (1970): 72–73, here 72.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Marcuse and Wolfgang Schumann, “Housing in the Colours of the GDR,” in Bengt Turner, József Hegedüs, and Iván Tosics, eds., *The Reform of Housing in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York, 1992), 59–113, here 92.

<sup>56</sup> Ostroff to UHF Board, January 28, 1965, KC, box 17.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas W. Ennis, “Huge Bronx Co-op a Staggering Job,” *New York Times*, February 14, 1965, R1.

<sup>58</sup> Anne Sullivan, interview with author, November 15, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> William E. Farrell, “In Co-op City, the ‘Pioneers’ are Genial,” *New York Times*, November 9, 1969, R1.

<sup>60</sup> Jutta Wormbs, “Wohnqualität ist Lebensqualität,” in Verein Kids & Co., ed., *Marzahn-Südspitze: Leben im ersten Wohngebiet der Berliner Großsiedlung* (Berlin, 2002), 36.

super-fancy—a garbage incinerator.”<sup>61</sup> As late as 2000, 80 percent of Marzahn’s residents expressed satisfaction with their apartments.<sup>62</sup>

Like the apartments themselves, the overall organization of each development bears the stamp of Corbusier’s model in various ways. Both developments eschewed rectilinear organization in favor of courtyards and curving walkways. Planners isolated the living spaces from traffic noise and incorporated pedestrian paths that made it possible for children to get to school without having to cross main streets.<sup>63</sup> And both developments contain substantial green space, which in Co-op City amounts to 80 percent of the land area.<sup>64</sup> While plans for a riverfront park there fell through, the first four sections and an educational park are arrayed around a central greenway, a large lawn used for occasional community events and otherwise open for community members to bike, jog, and play in.<sup>65</sup> A park more than 250 acres in size was included in the plans for Marzahn, although it was not completed until after the Berlin Wall fell.

While the physical design of the complexes was recognizably Corbusian, their ideology was not. Corbusier believed that the power of architecture to transform consciousness worked directly on individuals. The only positive mention of the collective in the Athens Charter, the 1943 CIAM (Congrès International d’Architecture Moderne) statement of principles that provides the most concise statement of Corbusier’s ideals, comes in a discussion of the “advantages of collective action,” although even here it stresses the need to balance this against individual liberty.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, community was absolutely fundamental to both the UHF and the DBA on multiple levels. They respected, albeit in differing and sometimes diffuse ways, the communities that residents came from. Indeed, rather than seeing the past as something merely to be overcome, they viewed these communities as connected to the past. Moreover, as believers in the voices and power of communities, both the UHF and the DBA eschewed the godlike role claimed by earlier modernists, seeking to please their residents as much as they sought to transform them. Indeed, Abraham Kazan of the UHF specifically dismissed Corbusier’s architectural determinism.<sup>67</sup> Instead, he and the planners at the DBA believed that social transformation was itself fundamentally communal—cooperative and socialist ways of life were assumed to be better because they were oriented toward the benefit of the group as a whole, rather than the individual.

Community-building was always central to the UHF mission. As Kazan wrote as early as 1937, “only co-operative housing can . . . greatly revise the relationship of man to man in the big city.”<sup>68</sup> This vision of a cooperative community sharpened as the scale of UHF projects grew. At a conference in Detroit in 1966, Harold Ostroff, vice president of the UHF, rejected the idea that cooperatives were merely a means to “provide a balance wheel for capitalism in order to prevent or correct the worst

<sup>61</sup> Karin Matthees, “Marzahn—meine Heimat,” in Engel, *Marzahn*, 7–12, here 7.

<sup>62</sup> Siegfried Scheffler, “Wohnungs- und Städtebau in den neuen Ländern,” in Bezirksamt Marzahn von Berlin, ed., *Marzahn: Ein Stadtteil mit Zukunft* (Berlin, 2000), 16–22, here 16.

<sup>63</sup> Hübner, Nicolaus, and Teresiak, *20 Jahre Marzahn*, 90.

<sup>64</sup> Schuman, “Labor and Housing in New York City,” 4.

<sup>65</sup> Ada Louise Huxtable, “Co-op City’s Grounds: After 3 Years, a Success,” *New York Times*, October 26, 1971, 43.

<sup>66</sup> Athens Charter, Article 75.

<sup>67</sup> Eisenstadt, *Rochdale Village*, 39.

<sup>68</sup> Kazan as quoted *ibid.*, 106.

excesses of the profit system.” Instead, he insisted that cooperatives offered the means “to eliminate the profit system. Eliminate it that is by putting the interest of people first . . . Cooperatives offer a tremendous outlet for the energies of those who really want to change society in a fundamental way.”<sup>69</sup>

With developments on the scale of Rochdale Village and Co-op City, for the first time the UHF had the ability to create a self-enclosed world that empowered cooperatives as a transformative force. Co-op City contains three shopping centers, each outfitted with meeting rooms for organizations, cooperative supermarkets, restaurants, banks, and other service centers. Six schools are located in the twenty-five-acre educational park, along with an Olympic-size swimming pool and a planetarium. In 1960, Kazan explained his expansive vision for a world in which consumers could fulfill all of their needs in a consumer cooperative: “We need consumers with vision to see the advantages of using their own savings and purchasing power to own and operate their own automobile agencies and repair shops, bakeries, barber shops, beauty parlors, baby-sitting services, book and record stores, credit unions . . . bowling alleys, gymnasiums, radio stations, repair shops, shoe stores, travel agencies, transportation facilities . . . tailor shops, telephone and telegraph services, etc., etc., etc.”<sup>70</sup> Co-op City’s scale allowed it to come as close as anywhere to fulfilling this vision. Ten years later, in 1970, Jacob Potofsky, the president of the UHF, described how a resident of Co-op City could “buy in our co-operative food stores. He buys his furniture in a co-operative furniture store. He buys his cosmetics and drugs in a co-operative drug store . . . He opens his account in the Amalgamated Bank, which is union owned . . . we have our own insurance company.”<sup>71</sup>

With a capacity of more than 60,000 residents, Co-op City was able to provide a variety of services that earlier cooperative ventures could not match. However, its self-sufficiency was not merely a function of its size, but was also a response to the urban crisis that was its birthright. Between 1940 and 1970 in the West Bronx neighborhoods from which much of the development’s initial population was drawn, the percentage of whites dropped from 90 to 47 percent, the percentage of blacks rose from 6 percent to 28 percent, and the percentage of Puerto Ricans increased from 3 percent to 25 percent.<sup>72</sup> Crime also rose over the same period. In the Morris Heights and High Bridge zip codes, felonies increased 69 percent just in the year between 1968 and 1969. In the first ten months of 1969, the 41st Precinct, which covered the Bronx’s Hunts Point and nearby neighborhoods, ranked first in New York City for reported burglaries, third for murders, and fourth in assaults.<sup>73</sup> A study of the elderly living on the Grand Concourse conducted by the Bronx Planning Commission found that more than a third of them had been mugged at least once.<sup>74</sup> The resulting sense

<sup>69</sup> Harold Ostroff, “The Impact of Housing Cooperatives in Urban Areas: Speech from the National Association of Housing Cooperatives, February 19, 1966,” *Co-op Contact*, Spring 1966, 14–20, here 20.

<sup>70</sup> Kazan quoted in Eisenstadt, *Rochdale Village*, 31.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Jacob Potofsky, Roosevelt University Oral History Project, August 4, 1970, 29–30.

<sup>72</sup> Constance Rosenblum, *Boulevard of Dreams: Heady Times, Heartbreak, and Hope along the Grand Concourse in the Bronx* (New York, 2009), 181. See also Gonzalez, *The Bronx*, chap. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Michael R. Greenberg and Thomas D. Boswell, “Neighborhood Deterioration as a Factor in Intraurban Migration: A Case Study in New York City,” *Professional Geographer* 24, no. 1 (1972): 11–16, here 11.

<sup>74</sup> Kenneth H. Brook, “A Defensive Community and Its Elderly Population” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1974), 65.



FIGURE 3: Map of New York City showing the location of Co-op City in the Bronx. Courtesy of Jason Glatz, Western Michigan University Mapping Services.

of besiegement was as much as anything the motivating factor for people to move to Co-op City. As Ostroff admitted about the development's early residents, "There is no sense in denying that a lot of people are trying to escape from . . . changing neighborhoods."<sup>75</sup>

This desire to escape was reflected in the paucity of linkages between Co-op City and the surrounding neighborhoods. While there were buses that connected the development to the rest of the Bronx and Manhattan, they were infrequent, and there was no subway station in the development. When the Bronx Planning Commission attempted to build a highway overpass and underpass in 1973 to give the residents easier access to other neighborhoods, they rejected it as "an affront to Co-op City and its residents" and a "blight on the community."<sup>76</sup> The physical isolation of the complex was simultaneously an escape from the rest of the city, which appeared to many of its residents to be descending into violence and chaos, and a way to foster a new kind of community, apart from the corrupting influence of the profit motive.

In contrast to the UHF's longstanding interest in the transformational power of residential community, the East German interest in neighborhoods was a relatively recent development. Although the importance of residential community for the development of socialism had been an explicit facet of socialist urban planning in many "new towns" of the 1950s, from Poland's Nowa Huta to East Germany's own Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt, the workplace remained the focus of East European efforts to create a new socialist society during this era.<sup>77</sup> This changed during the post-Stalinist thaw, when urban planners in the Eastern Bloc began to stress the importance of the microraiion (Russian *mikroraion*, microdistrict), or neighborhood, as a site for the creation of a new social order. The microraiion arose in the context of Khrushchev's post-1957 housing program, which also saw the shift to modernist forms and industrial construction technologies. Each microraiion was a district of approximately 12,000 residents designed to be the location of the awakening of residents' socialist consciousness. Communal educational and cultural facilities were provided, with the intention that they would enhance the lives of residents, while party-government agencies would foster and channel residential energies toward the good of the community.<sup>78</sup> The microraiion already contained many of the elements of late modernism—a desire to foster community, an (often quite intrusive) interest in the lives of residents, and the belief that social transformation should originate in the neighborhood. These aspects developed further as East Germany adapted the concept when it began its own housing program.

While the Soviet Union's housing program dates to 1957, East Germany's did not get underway until nearly fifteen years later. This belated implementation meant that the DBA began studying communities well before it began building them, starting

<sup>75</sup> Steven D. Roberts, "Co-op City Blend of Races Sought: Administration Is Cautious in North Bronx Effort," *New York Times*, April 30, 1967, 31.

<sup>76</sup> "Community Says No to Overpass," *Co-op City Times*, January 20, 1973, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism, and Polish Society, 1949–56* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2013); Timothy C. Dowling, "Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt: A Model for (Socialist) Life in the German Democratic Republic, 1950–1968" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1999).

<sup>78</sup> Mark B. Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb, Ill., 2010), 116–121; Juliana Maxim, "Mass Housing and Collective Experience: On the Notion of *Microraiion* in Romania in the 1950s and 1960s," *Journal of Architecture* 14, no. 1 (2009): 7–26.

with a series of sociological studies of ten GDR cities in 1967.<sup>79</sup> In the following years, a series of East German sociologists and urban planners, including Loni Niederländer, Georg Aßmann, and Gunnar Winkler at the Humboldt University in Berlin and Alice Kahl in Leipzig, undertook studies of the “socialist way of life” in neighborhoods across the GDR. Working from these studies, “architects and urban planners, sociologists, economists, historians, specialists in medicine, traffic, and historic preservation, and many others” at the DBA decided that they needed to develop ever more holistic models, which would meet the needs of residents.<sup>80</sup> With these models, they sought to analyze and plan everything, from the ideal percentages of apartments of different sizes, to the ideal ratio of residents to recreational facilities, to the ideal ratio of vehicular traffic to residents.<sup>81</sup> The gargantuan size of the housing program gave the DBA the opportunity to turn these studies into reality.<sup>82</sup>

The DBA further refined its ideas of neighborhood and community in response to the new urbanist critiques of modernist housing that were becoming hegemonic in Western Europe and the United States by the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is well known that East German architects and urban planners exchanged structural ideas and building practices with their Western colleagues.<sup>83</sup> Less well known is that the DBA’s architects and urban planners were given an unusual amount of freedom to read Western publications on urban planning and urban community.<sup>84</sup> Jane Jacobs, in particular, found eager readers at the DBA.<sup>85</sup> Jacobs’s book on U.S. cities was translated into German in 1963, and by the late 1960s had been embraced both by the New Left and by West German urban planners and sociologists, who shared her interest in citizen participation and the revitalization of older neighborhoods.<sup>86</sup> In the GDR, DBA architects and planners found her descriptions of the “sidewalk ballet” in Greenwich Village appealing. Roland Korn, Marzahn’s original architect, hoped that each neighborhood’s “distinctive elements will make new residents look upon them as ‘their *Kiez* [neighborhood].’”<sup>87</sup> Rather than referring to Marzahn as a housing estate, a residential district, or a microrraion, Korn and other architects used

<sup>79</sup> Autorenkollektiv, “Soziologische Forschung für den sozialistischen Städtebau—eine Studie zu grundlegenden Fragen der Städtebau Soziologie in der DDR” (1972), BA-Berlin, DH 2/23534, 4.

<sup>80</sup> Bruno Flierl, “Gesellschaft und Architektur in unserer Epoch: Ein Beitrag zur architekturtheoretischen Forschung in der ideologischen Auseinandersetzung zwischen Sozialismus und Kapitalismus” (1972), BA-Berlin, DH 2/21729, 2.

<sup>81</sup> Ing. W. Rietdorf, “Sozialistische Umgestaltung der Städte und Siedlungszentren” (1971), BA-Berlin, DH 2/23503, 73.

<sup>82</sup> Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 144.

<sup>83</sup> Werner Durth, Jörn Düwel, and Niels Gutschow, *Architektur und Städtebau der DDR* (Frankfurt a.M., 1999), 481–482; Elmar Kossel, “Oscar Niemeyer und Deutschland: Die Rezeption in der DDR,” in Paul Andreas and Ingeborg Flagge, eds., *Oscar Niemeyer: Eine Legende der Moderne* (Frankfurt a.M., 2003), 59–68; “Studienreise nach England” (1967), BA-Berlin, DH 2/21710. On the pan-Eastern Bloc context of architecture and building technologies, see Mëhilli, “The Socialist Design.”

<sup>84</sup> Rowell, *Le totalitarisme au concret*, 128–137; Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 125–137.

<sup>85</sup> Jacobs’s influence is mentioned in Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 126. See also Klaus Andrä, “Möglichkeiten und Grenzen städtebaulicher Mittel,” *Deutsche Architektur* 16 (1967): 178–180; Autorenkollektiv, “Soziologische Forschung für den sozialistischen Städtebau,” 12–13; Autorenkollektiv, “Soziologische Kriterien zur Gemeinschaftsbildung und Kommunikation im Wohnbereich” (1971), BA-Berlin, DH 2/23502, 33–35.

<sup>86</sup> Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*; translated into German as *Tod und Leben großer amerikanischer Städte* (Berlin, 1963); Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*, 229.

<sup>87</sup> Roland Korn, “Ergebnisse und Aufgaben in Städtebau und Architektur bei der weiteren Ausgestaltung der Hauptstadt der DDR,” *Architektur der DDR* 9 (September 1979): 526–536, here 530; Autorenkollektiv, “Soziologische Forschung für den sozialistischen Städtebau,” 147.



the local Berlin term *Kiez*, conjuring up images of community, tradition, and rootedness. Like Jacobs, Korn and other DBA architects and urban planners heralded a community that was small in scale, rooted in neighborly bonds, and non-monotonous.<sup>88</sup>

For the DBA, the modernist planning that Jacobs was so critical of was problematic not because it was too totalitarian, but rather because it was not totalizing enough.<sup>89</sup> In the East German context of state planning and control, Jacobs's insistence on the organic development of urban space was incomprehensible.<sup>90</sup> DBA urban planner Alfred Schwandt believed that the East Germans had an advantage over Western readers of Jacobs, who could only "contemplate" her work, while the East Germans had the means to use "a greater integration of sociological theory and urban planning" to create the ideal Jacobian neighborhood.<sup>91</sup> The DBA made it clear that its urban projects were not intended to be a wholesale rejection of older urban communities, but rather were an attempt to adapt and dialectically transcend them in the new *Kieze* of Marzahn. In its special issue on Marzahn, the East German magazine *Kultur im Heim* recognized that Marzahn did not yet possess the familiar traditions of the old *Kiez*, but it stressed that they would evolve in time.<sup>92</sup>

Much like Co-op City, Marzahn was designed to be a "closed, relatively self-contained functional unit to serve three purposes: housing, work, and recreation."<sup>93</sup> The complex contains a post office, a dance club, several bars, a shopping center, swimming pools, saunas, schools, daycare centers, and an old-age home.<sup>94</sup> And like Co-op City, Marzahn was located on the edge of the city. The decision to build it in northeast Berlin was in part a recognition of the greater cost involved in reworking the older urban center, but it was also a result of the desire to escape the miserable living conditions and capitalist traces of the city's nineteenth-century proletarian neighborhoods.<sup>95</sup> However, just as the DBA simultaneously appreciated the newness of communities such as Marzahn and hoped that it could reproduce the cozy ambience of the *Kiez*, so too both the DBA and the development's residents were more ambivalent about its location than was the case with Co-op City. People who came from inner-city neighborhoods in Berlin were the most likely to be critical of Marzahn, and

<sup>88</sup> The desire to create a *Kiez* (also *Kietz*) or neighborhood appeared not only in the language of East German architects, but also in the regime-friendly *Marzahn aktuell* as one of the primary goals for Marzahn and other new settlements.

<sup>89</sup> Siegfried Kress, Werner Rietdorf, et al., "Grundlagen für die Entwicklung neuer Wohnungsformen" (1970), BA-Berlin, DH 2/23501, 22.

<sup>90</sup> Here specifically Autorenkollektiv, "Soziologische Kriterien zur Gemeinschaftsbildung und Kommunikation im Wohnbereich," 35. See also Heinz Graffunder, "Ergebnisse der Zusammenarbeit von Architekten und bildenden Künstlern bei der Gestaltung von Berlin-Marzahn," *Deutsche Architektur* 30, no. 10 (1981): 597–605, here 597; Wolf-Rüdiger Eisentraut, "Industrielles Bauen—ein abgeschlossenes Kapitel?," in Tag der Regional- und Heimatgeschichte Marzahn-Hellersdorf 2001, *Geschichte und Zukunft des industriellen Bauens* (Berlin, 2002), 13–22, here 18.

<sup>91</sup> Autorenkollektiv, "Soziologische Forschung für den sozialistischen Städtebau," 13, 15.

<sup>92</sup> "Leben in Marzahn," *Kultur im Heim* 2 (1986): 2–3, here 2.

<sup>93</sup> Vorlagen-Nr 166/73, Beschlussvorlage—Magistrat von Gross-Berlin—Grundlagen für den Aufbau des Gebietes Biesdorf/Marzahn, July 18, 1973, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), C. Rep. 107/1197; Georg ABmann and Gunnar Winkler, *Zwischen Alex und Marzahn: Studie zur Lebensweise in Berlin* (Berlin, 1987), 130.

<sup>94</sup> "Der 2. Bauabschnitt des 1. Wohngebietes," *Marzahn aktuell* 3, no. 8 (1979): 4.

<sup>95</sup> On the decision to proceed with new construction instead of renovating old neighborhoods, see Eli Rubin, "Amnesiopolis: From *Mietskaserne* to *Wohnungsbauserie 70* in East Berlin's Northeast," *Central European History* 47, no. 2 (2014): 334–374, here 352.



FIGURE 4: Map of East Berlin in 1989, showing the location of Marzahn. BA-Berlin Bild 183-1989-0524-017.

97 percent of its residents reported in 1980 that they regularly traveled to the city center.<sup>96</sup> Marzahn's network of transit connections was considerably more developed than Co-op City's. The community was serviced by surface rail (S-Bahn), as well as trams and buses that ran frequently to central Berlin and work districts in nearby Lichtenberg. It took no more than a half-hour for Marzahnners to get to the center of the city.<sup>97</sup>

In planning Co-op City, the UHF stressed the isolation of the development from a city it saw as beset by racial strife and capitalist exploitation. The organization's members were similarly combative when encountering the ideas of their fellow New Yorker Jane Jacobs. George Schechter of the UHF stated, "If people live out on Jane Jacobs' streets, it is because the insides of their buildings are so unpleasant."<sup>98</sup> In contrast, the DBA expressed a greater degree of openness both toward the city that Marzahn was a part of and toward the ideas of new urbanism. And yet the UHF and the DBA shared with one another, and indeed with Jacobs herself, substantial commonalities in how they thought about urban communities. For the UHF, the DBA, and Jacobs alike, community was the crucial category for analyzing the success or failure of urban form. Indeed, communities as envisioned by the UHF and DBA were places where people built relationships by living together and interacting with one another; this was not so different from Jacobs's urban neighborhood. The key distinction was that the UHF and DBA both prized politicized communities, mobilized to transform themselves and those around them.

THE PLANS FOR CREATING these mobilized communities in Co-op City and Marzahn consisted of three components: the selection of residents, the aesthetic design of the development, and pedagogical and political programs. Although both developments wanted a variety of residents from all age groups, they both considered young families to be especially important.<sup>99</sup> In 1979, nearly a third of Marzahn's population was under the age of eighteen (with a shocking 17.2 percent under the age of seven).<sup>100</sup> The images that appeared in *Marzahn aktuell* and other publications repeatedly showcased children who would "grow along with the new housing district."<sup>101</sup> Young families gave Marzahn the image of an up-and-coming district, but they also had an ideological function. Children who grew up there would be exposed to an all-encompassing socialist way of life that would have the effect of creating superior socialist citizens.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Loni Niederländer, "Forschungsbericht zum 1. Intervall der Untersuchung 'Wohnen 1980—Marzahn.' Zur Entwicklung eines Neugebietes der Hauptstadt der DDR, Berlin" (Humboldt Universität Berlin, Institut für Soziologie, 1981), 59; Niederländer, "Forschungsbericht zum 2. Intervall der Untersuchung 'Wohnen 1982—Marzahn.' Zur Entwicklung eines Neugebietes der Hauptstadt der DR, Berlin" (Humboldt Universität Berlin, Institut für Soziologie, 1983), 62–63.

<sup>97</sup> Marianne Fränzel, "Geplant, gebaut—und bald ausgelastet," in Verein Kids & Co., *Marzahn-Südspitze*, 36.

<sup>98</sup> Schechter quoted in Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, "Co-op City: Learning to Like It," *Progressive Architecture* 51, no. 2 (1971): 64–73, here 69–70.

<sup>99</sup> Co-op City contained one- through three-bedroom apartments, designed with this diversity in mind. Marzahn contained several *Feierabendheime* (retirement homes), which were to be integrated into the life of the community. Lilo Erbstößer, "1 Jahr Danach," *Marzahn aktuell*, December 21, 1978, 4.

<sup>100</sup> Niederländer, "Wohnen 1980," 2.

<sup>101</sup> "Was gibt es Neues auf dem Bau?," *Marzahn aktuell*, January 25, 1979, 4.

<sup>102</sup> Aßmann and Winkler, *Zwischen Alex und Marzahn*, 111.



FIGURE 5: Children playing in Marzahn, 1981. BA-Berlin Bild 183-Z0513-020 / Karl-Heinz Schindler.

Co-op City was also interested in families with young children. One ad stressed that the development was a “Young Family’s World,” while another announced, “If you have children, you will love the wonderful new world of Co-op City.”<sup>103</sup> The educational park was included specifically to attract younger families.<sup>104</sup> The UHF located its idealism specifically in children. Ostroff explained that in cooperative developments, “children will be educated for the purpose of being creative, to utilize leisure profitably, to enjoy life in a society based on abundance and cooperation rather than a system based on scarcity and competition.”<sup>105</sup>

The DBA and the UHF diverged in their interest (or lack thereof) in social and economic diversity. In Marzahn, planners wished to create a microcosm of the desired new society, bringing together people from various occupations. Demographically, the state had certain quotas: 60 percent of residents should come from the working class, 30 percent should be young couples, and families with multiple children and disabled people had an “absolute priority” for housing in new developments.<sup>106</sup> A mix of people of different backgrounds would make Marzahn superior to capitalist cities, where living situations were income-dependent.<sup>107</sup> Indeed, to foster

<sup>103</sup> “It’s a Young Family’s World at Co-op City,” advertisement, *New York Times*, November 12, 1967, 378; “If You Have Children, You Will Love the Wonderful New World of Co-op City,” advertisement, *New York Times*, June 4, 1967, R9.

<sup>104</sup> Adhoc Committee to Riverbay Board, May 28, 1971, KC, box 12.

<sup>105</sup> Ostroff, “The Impact of Housing Cooperatives in Urban Areas,” 19.

<sup>106</sup> Rowell, “Wohnungspolitik” (2008), 693.

<sup>107</sup> Aßmann and Winkler, *Zwischen Alex und Marzahn*, 128.



FIGURE 6: Children at play on the Co-op City grounds, 1972. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University Library, Ithaca, N.Y.

egalitarianism, there were restrictions on how much the apartments could vary.<sup>108</sup> Of course, this diversity was not absolute, as those who demonstrated opposition to the regime were placed at the bottom of the list for a new apartment, meaning that the population that moved in tended to be more loyal to the regime than the East German population as a whole.<sup>109</sup>

In contrast, the UHF stressed that Co-op City was specifically for people of “modest means,” caught between the expensive homes they could not afford and the increasingly poor neighborhoods they sought desperately to leave. Following Mitchell-Lama guidelines, Co-op City levied surcharges on those whose income exceeded a certain level. On the other hand, the UHF refused to allow the city to buy apartments to rent out to low-income families.<sup>110</sup> The organization also had an ambivalent relationship to racial diversity. When Rochdale Village, Co-op City’s immediate predecessor, was built by the UHF in the early 1960s, it was planned as an experiment in integration in two senses: it consciously sought to attract white and black residents, and it was to be integrated with the surrounding, largely poor, black neighborhood.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 112.

<sup>109</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert*, 368.

<sup>110</sup> Joseph P. Fried, “Debate Still Swirls around Co-op City,” *New York Times*, March 17, 1968, R1, R6.

<sup>111</sup> Eisenstadt, *Rochdale Village*. See especially chap. 9.

While Rochdale Village had been an ambitious attempt to transform New York into a more racially egalitarian city, Co-op City was designed more as a retreat from racial conflict. By 1968, when Co-op City was first occupied, race relations had declined in New York, with tensions between blacks and Jews, in particular, at a nadir. The UHF resisted attempts by community groups to reserve 33–40 percent of apartments for non-white applicants.<sup>112</sup> As a result, Co-op City's early residents were overwhelmingly white and Jewish.<sup>113</sup>

This is not to say that the UHF entirely abandoned its earlier ideals. Its leadership believed that by living together, people could overcome their racial prejudices. Co-op City officials repeatedly emphasized that the community was “an open city, open to all people with various backgrounds both racially and ethnically.”<sup>114</sup> The much-publicized recipients of the first apartments included a black family, the “Leroy Smiths.”<sup>115</sup> Potential tenants who expressed blatant racism in their applications were often turned away.<sup>116</sup> Co-op City offered a fantasy of racial understanding, one that many residents bought into. However, in the racially fraught late 1960s, the UHF's leaders were unwilling to push too far. Indeed, it is striking that while Co-op City represented a ratcheting-up for the UHF's ambitions in every other respect, this was the one arena in which they retreated.

Aesthetic planning was considerably more important for the planners of Marzahn than for those of Co-op City. The architects and urban planners in charge of Marzahn were sensitive to the issue of visual uniformity, and saw aesthetic differentiation as a means to foster community. Although cost concerns meant that the development's master plan was never realized, it originally called for artistic “organizing principles” for each of the development's three districts, in an effort to avoid “architectural monotony” and to create a sense of neighborhood belonging.<sup>117</sup> In contrast, the UHF seemed to take an almost perverse pride in Co-op City's lack of beauty.<sup>118</sup> A decision to allow bricks of several different colors along with “beige concrete blocks” was their sole concession to aesthetic fashion.<sup>119</sup> Admitting to the possibility that residents might find the development difficult to navigate, the UHF also divided Co-op City into five sections, and the street names for each section began with a single letter, in order to provide a sense of belonging and orientation.<sup>120</sup>

For both the DBA and the UHF, teaching residents proper socialist or cooperative values was crucial to the success of the kinds of community they were trying to build in Marzahn and Co-op City. At Co-op City, such training ideally began before people even moved in. Herman Liebman, former director of the Amalgamated Housing cooperative, organized a program of orientation meetings for new residents. Each cooperator was to attend a forty-minute orientation meeting at least four times

<sup>112</sup> Fried, “Debate Still Swirls around Co-op City,” R6.

<sup>113</sup> Co-op City's population when first fully occupied was 70 percent Jewish and 20 percent black and Puerto Rican. Brook, “A Defensive Community and Its Elderly Population,” 89–90.

<sup>114</sup> Ostroff to Riverbay Board, August 24, 1972, KC, box 14.

<sup>115</sup> “First Co-op City Residents Selecting Their Apartments,” *The Cooperator*, April 1966, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Kitty Braun to Ostroff, n.d., KC, box 6.

<sup>117</sup> Hübner, Nicolaus, and Teresiak, *20 Jahre Marzahn*, 12.

<sup>118</sup> “Please Tell Us,” *Co-op Contact*, Winter 1966, 3.

<sup>119</sup> “Varied Bricks Averting Monotony at Co-op City,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1968, R9.

<sup>120</sup> “Co-op Living: A Guide for Members,” n.d., 13.

in an effort to teach them the “meaning of cooperation.”<sup>121</sup> These meetings tapered off over the next couple of years, as the UHF more generally was forced to scale back its greatest ambitions. However, the weekly *Co-op City Times* contained article after article stressing the benefits of cooperative living. And a Department of Co-operative Education and Activities aimed to foster this spirit among residents through support for social groups, lecture series, and an annual community fair.<sup>122</sup> Residents voted for floor captains, building representatives, and a development-wide advisory council for each section, and they also elected five representatives to a fifteen-member Board of Directors for the Riverbay Corporation, which had been set up by the UHF to manage the development.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, cooperative consumption was intended to be pedagogic. The UHF saw cooperative living and shopping as a “social instrument,” to be used by residents to create an alternative economy and culture that would enable them to escape the tyranny of the profit motive.<sup>124</sup>

If consumer behavior—shopping at the right stores, living in the right housing—was the basis for social transformation according to the UHF, for the DBA the desire for consumer goods was but one out of a number of needs that planners needed to satisfy.<sup>125</sup> Instead, the DBA saw quasi-voluntary initiatives as central to inculcating community in the development. Key among these were the annual Join In! (*Mach mit!*) campaigns. Join In! was founded by the National Front in 1958, with the idea that collectives across the state would commit to “voluntary” activities to better their homeland. According to Walter Ulbricht and other SED officials, Join In! was a demonstration of socialist democracy and an active citizenry.<sup>126</sup> The East German sociologists Aßmann and Winkler argued that it was especially important for nurturing community in new developments such as Marzahn: “It is through such activities that citizens become happy and secure in their new living situation and that they become aware of their relationship to state and society.”<sup>127</sup> A resident was quoted in the pages of the *Marzahn aktuell* as saying, “You don’t become a Marzahner by moving here, but rather to the extent that you join in.”<sup>128</sup>

There were Join In! initiatives for many things in Marzahn, including the building and painting of homes, the creation of playgrounds for children, and especially the planting of trees and community gardens outside of buildings and in courtyards. The National Front boasted in 1979 of 10,000 new trees that had been planted, and in 1983 of more than 700,000 square meters of green space that had been created by Join In! groups in Marzahn. Join In! was intended to be useful in several ways: it would create a community among residents working together to beautify their surroundings; residents would later enjoy the fruits of their labor in common; and the

<sup>121</sup> Minutes of the Annual Meeting of UHF, June 2, 1966, KC, box 6.

<sup>122</sup> Report of the Department of Co-operative Education and Activities, January 11, 1971, KC, box 17.

<sup>123</sup> Richard J. Margolis, *Coming Together the Cooperative Way: Its Origins, Development and Prospects*, Special Issue, *The New Leader*, April 17, 1972, 28; Brook, “A Defensive Community and Its Elderly Population,” 118.

<sup>124</sup> Ostroff, “The Impact of Housing Cooperatives in Urban Areas,” 20.

<sup>125</sup> Grotewohl, “Grundlagen für die Entwicklung neuer Wohnungsformen” (1970), 22.

<sup>126</sup> Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945–1990* (Cambridge, 2009), chap. 5.

<sup>127</sup> Aßmann and Winkler, *Zwischen Alex und Marzahn*, 135.

<sup>128</sup> “Leserpost: Indem Man Marzahner wir,” *Marzahn aktuell*, November 2, 1984, 8.

very process of designing and working on an initiative would lead residents to think purposefully about the community they were a part of, creating tangible benefits that others might enjoy.<sup>129</sup> To encourage participation in Join In! and similar initiatives, residents of a given block were often provided with funds to be used for neighborhood get-togethers after their work was completed.<sup>130</sup> Festivals such as the yearly Spring Festival (Marzahner Frühling), begun in 1980, were supposed to foster the development of community as well.<sup>131</sup>

Marzahners were expected to take part in the political life of the development.<sup>132</sup> This activity was publicly exercised through two bodies—the Hausgemeinschaften (Housing Communities [HG]) and the Stadtbezirksversammlung (District Council). HGs were established in the early 1950s as a means of rationalizing residential life while also creating a sense of community among neighbors. After the inauguration of the Housing Program, they were considered a crucial link in the relationship between state and citizen in planned communities such as Marzahn.<sup>133</sup> In practical terms, the HGs in Marzahn were in charge of roughly the same activities as were Co-op City's building associations: organizing events and fielding complaints from dissatisfied residents.

ENTHUSIASM WAS INITIALLY HIGH among residents of both developments, who saw themselves as living *da draußen*, in the middle of nowhere, a feeling that tended to increase the sense of communality with other “pioneers” in an unfamiliar landscape consisting of mounds of dirt and construction equipment.<sup>134</sup> Living in a construction zone could create difficulties, but as often as not, it was a unifying element among residents. Edeltraut Engling wrote that when she ventured outside Marzahn, others could identify her by the mud on her shoes.<sup>135</sup> Children played on construction debris that was left lying around and in buildings that were not yet occupied.<sup>136</sup>

The sheer population density of Marzahn and Co-op City contributed to the creation of a sense of community in both developments. Debra Genender, who moved to Co-op City as a child, said that her most vivid memory of growing up there was that “there was always somebody around. You’d just go outside and there would be kids outside, on the playground, in the street, kids everywhere. There were kids always available to play with.”<sup>137</sup> Residents of Marzahn echoed this sense of being part of, and indeed sometimes overwhelmed by, a dense population. Wilfried Nünthel, who moved to Marzahn from a small village in 1981, stated that despite her initial

<sup>129</sup> “Leser Post: Lieber Redaktion,” *Marzahn aktuell*, January 6, 1982, 7.

<sup>130</sup> Dagmar Pohle, “. . . und das Ganze auch pflegen,” in Verein Kids & Co., *Marzahn-Südspitze*, 51.

<sup>131</sup> “Wohnlich ist es im 1. Wohngebiet,” *Marzahn aktuell*, May 22, 1980, 4.

<sup>132</sup> Aßmann and Winkler, *Zwischen Alex und Marzahn*, 133.

<sup>133</sup> Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford, 2010), 28–30.

<sup>134</sup> Matthees, “Marzahn—meine Heimat,” 8.

<sup>135</sup> Edeltraut Engling, “Die Kann Doch nur Aus Marzahn Kommen!,” in Bezirksamt Marzahn von Berlin, ed., *20 Jahre Bezirk Marzahn, 1979–1999: Festschrift—So sehe ich mein Marzahn* (Berlin, 1999), 64.

<sup>136</sup> Torsten Preußing, “Den Hof Gemacht,” *ibid.*, 56–57, here 56; Lynn Sjogren, interview with author, November 22, 2011.

<sup>137</sup> Debra Genender, interview with author, November 6, 2011.



impression of an impossibly “large number of neighbors,” she gradually found friendships through politics and sports that turned the development into “a home.”<sup>138</sup>

In both Co-op City and Marzahn, economic constraints meant that the developments failed to fulfill some of the most ambitious plans of their founding years. Neither the planned subway extension nor a waterfront park for Co-op City was ever completed. In Marzahn, material constraints led to more densely packed and smaller apartments, repeated cuts to aesthetic projects such as murals and landscaping, and less extensive and more conventional shopping and entertainment facilities. Sociologists and architects at the DBA lamented the fact that such things “created great difficulties for the evolution of the socialist way of life.”<sup>139</sup>

The lack of community facilities was especially a problem in the early years, but it continued to plague both developments long thereafter. In 1980, only 9 percent of Marzahn residents were satisfied with leisure activities in the development.<sup>140</sup> While similar numbers are not available for Co-op City, it is clear that many residents found entertainment options in the development to be lacking.<sup>141</sup> However, they also reported a vibrant social scene based around individual buildings and courtyards. In both developments, apartment houses contained meeting rooms that could be used for children’s parties or social club meetings. In Marzahn, state funds were used for barbecues, birthday parties, and other informal activities after residents worked together on community projects.<sup>142</sup> Residents later reported that this informal socialization was an arena where “people spoke with each other, learned to trust each other, helped each other.”<sup>143</sup> Just as often, spontaneous encounters were the basis of friendships. Marzahners made friends with others waiting in apartment lobbies for the elevator.<sup>144</sup> Older Co-op City residents made friends in the laundry rooms that were located in the basement of each building, while teenagers hung out in front of buildings or, in the winter, on heated vents.<sup>145</sup> The relative youth of both new districts meant that parents often became friends with other parents of similarly aged children.<sup>146</sup>

Although many residents sought to escape racial turmoil by moving to Co-op City, it turned out not to be immune from such issues. The most heated ones related to education and the potential busing of white students from the development to surrounding schools while bringing nearby black and Hispanic students to the schools in Co-op City’s new educational park.<sup>147</sup> When busing plans were presented at a school board meeting in April 1971, several months before the first schools were to open, one parent who attended described the reaction as a “lynch mob in the auditorium,” with

<sup>138</sup> Nünthel, “Mein Marzahn-Erlebnis,” in Bezirksamt Marzahn von Berlin, *20 Jahre Bezirk Marzahn*, 42–43, here 43.

<sup>139</sup> Hannemann, *Die Platte*, 127.

<sup>140</sup> Niederländer, “Wohnen 1980,” 51.

<sup>141</sup> Josephine Finkelstein Acre, interview with author, November 18, 2011.

<sup>142</sup> Pohle, “. . . und das Ganze auch pflegen,” 51.

<sup>143</sup> Matthees, “Marzahn—meine Heimat,” 8.

<sup>144</sup> Niederländer, “Wohnen 1982,” 92.

<sup>145</sup> Sullivan interview, November 15, 2011; Sjogren interview, November 22, 2011; Genender interview, November 6, 2011.

<sup>146</sup> Isolde Baumgarten, “Küche und Bad mit Fenster sagte uns zu,” in Ylva Queisser and Lidia Tirri, eds., *Allee der Kosmonauten: Einblicke und Ausblicke aus der Platte* (Berlin, 2005), 30–33, here 31; Sullivan interview, November 15, 2011.

<sup>147</sup> Leonard Buder, “First Unit in ‘Educational Park’ System to Open Monday,” *New York Times*, September 11, 1971, 29.

people screaming that good schools were one of the main reasons they had moved to the development in the first place.<sup>148</sup> The New York City Board of Education backpedaled, insisting that they would not require children from the development to be bused elsewhere.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, according to sociologist Judith Perez, the solidarity of early residents could extend across racial groups. One African American man later reflected on that sense of cohesion: “I never felt a sense of racism . . . I didn’t know anyone who was on welfare or Section 8 . . . We were all ‘haves,’ not ‘have nots.’”<sup>150</sup> Both black and white residents spoke positively of the development as a “melting pot.”<sup>151</sup>

The SED faced a different challenge of its own making. The heavy presence of the Stasi secret police, who found the serialized buildings and apartments an ideal panopticon, created an environment of fear that could compel participation but not necessarily commitment.<sup>152</sup> A combination of apathy and outright opposition meant that informal social engagement often did not lead to political activism as the DBA had hoped.<sup>153</sup> Residents were often bullied into “volunteering” by the threat of blackmail, or, if not enough declared themselves willing to participate, were simply appointed. Moreover, those who joined were often more interested in building-specific issues such as cleanliness and security than in broader political engagement.<sup>154</sup> For some residents, the existence of a “we feeling” was independent from “what was decided by the higher-ups.”<sup>155</sup> For others, to the degree that a politically engaged community emerged in Marzahn, it may well have been in opposition to “the thousand shortages of everyday life in East Germany” rather than in support of the East German state.<sup>156</sup>

Co-op City, in contrast, was the site of a vibrant political life from the outset. Organizations ranging from the Black Caucus to B’nai B’rith to the Peace Committee to the Co-op City Anglers and no fewer than three different bowling leagues sprang up within the first few years after residents moved in.<sup>157</sup> Mille Vogel, who moved to Co-op City in 1971, saw this as a function of the development’s initial population: “When Co-op City opened, it drew all the people who lived on the Concourse, who were union-oriented, who belonged to things . . . they brought their activism to the community.”<sup>158</sup>

IF THESE LATE MODERNIST developments were popular with their residents and were capable of fostering—or at least not hindering—a sense of community, then the reason

<sup>148</sup> Sullivan interview, November 15, 2011.

<sup>149</sup> Aronov to Board of Directors, Riverbay, April 29, 1971, KC, box 12.

<sup>150</sup> Judith Perez, “‘Movin’ On Up!’ Pioneer African-American Families Living in an Integrated Neighborhood in the Bronx, New York,” *Bronx County Historical Society Journal* 43 (2006): 69–93, here 83–84.

<sup>151</sup> Acre interview, November 18, 2011.

<sup>152</sup> Irmgard Steinbach, “Diese Zeiten sind Gott sei Dank vorbei!,” in Queisser and Tirri, *Allee der Kosmonauten*, 45–47, here 46; Ursula Günter, “Marzahn war ein potemkinsches Dorf,” *ibid.*, 27–28, here 28.

<sup>153</sup> Niederländer, “Wohnen 1982,” 27.

<sup>154</sup> Aribert Kautz, in “Wir taten es für uns,” in Queisser and Tirri, *Allee der Kosmonauten*, 67–69, here 68.

<sup>155</sup> Wilfried Klenner, in “Auch wir bekamen irgendwann den Betonblock-Rappel,” *ibid.*, 37–39, here 38.

<sup>156</sup> Matthees, “Marzahn—meine Heimat,” 8.

<sup>157</sup> Co-op City Organizations and Leaders, January 11, 1971, KC, box 17.

<sup>158</sup> Barbara Selvin, “A Towering Presence,” *New York Newsday*, September 7, 1991, 32–33.

for their later problems must be sought elsewhere, and it is found, rather prosaically, in the realm of finance. In an ironic twist, perhaps the greatest proof of the existence of a politically engaged community in Co-op City was the action that destroyed the UHF: the 1975/1976 rent strike. Spiraling construction costs, high interest rates, labor strikes, and growing energy costs created a perfect storm of financial problems for the organization. It was forced to pass some of these costs on to the residents, so that by 1974 the carrying charge had ballooned from the originally promised \$23.05/room to a projected \$42.57/room in 1974, an increase of more than 80 percent.<sup>159</sup> This rise engendered significant opposition among cooperators, which the UHF was ill-prepared to respond to. By mid-1975, the organization was faced with a rent strike organized by resident Charles Rosen and supported by more than 80 percent of residents.<sup>160</sup> The rent strike lasted for thirteen months, and it broke the UHF and nearly bankrupted the New York State Housing Finance Agency.<sup>161</sup> In the end, cooperators won control of the development for themselves, although this proved to be something of a pyrrhic victory.

The cooperative ideal that the UHF espoused was based on communal ownership—the belief that by owning and managing something (such as a grocery store or a housing development) in common, cooperators would build solidarity with one another and achieve financial stability. It turns out that solidarity was more attainable than financial stability or material savings, and indeed, the solidarity of Co-op City's residents, 80 percent of whom participated in the rent strike, was based on a fundamentally different understanding of economics and ownership.<sup>162</sup> Instead of taking financial responsibility as owners in a traditional sense, they believed that as residents and consumers they added value. As Rosen explained, "The construction [of Co-op City] was only possible because of the tax-abatement incentive to builders. Every cent in taxes from Co-op City is one more cent than before. Rather than sucking the treasury dry, we are helping to fill it." Moreover, he insisted that the ability to pay be part of the state's financial calculations: "Mitchell-Lama tenants pass an economic means test each year. If we make enough to pay market value, we are legally required to pay a rent premium. If Co-op City tenants could pay the latest increase, they would have been legally ineligible to move here."<sup>163</sup>

Marzahn and the SED faced even greater financial problems than Co-op City and the UHF. The rent for a three-room apartment in 1980 was 123.85 marks. However, operating costs and repairs alone added up to 420 marks for such an apartment. In order to cover all the associated costs, including the construction of infrastructure and amortization of initial building costs, the rent would have needed to be 848.75 marks. In other words, the state was subsidizing 71 percent of operating costs and 84 percent of the total cost of living in a Marzahn apartment.<sup>164</sup> Although repeated economic crises during the 1980s led to calls for allowing rents to rise, Honecker resisted

<sup>159</sup> Edward Hudson, "Co-op City Tenants Charge Fraud in Sale of Units," *New York Times*, September 20, 1972, 51; "Residents Lose Suit on Co-op City Fraud," *New York Times*, September 7, 1973, 70.

<sup>160</sup> Minutes of Community Services Board Meeting, September 18, 1975, KC, box 17.

<sup>161</sup> Frances X. Clines, "A State Financing Agency Warns It Faces Bond Crisis," *New York Times*, September 13, 1975, 1.

<sup>162</sup> Murray Schumach, "Co-op City: A Symptom of Mitchell-Lama Ills," *New York Times*, June 18, 1975, 86.

<sup>163</sup> Charles Rosen, "What Co-op City Residents Want," letter to the editor, *New York Times*, January 21, 1976, 34.

<sup>164</sup> Marcuse and Schumann, "Housing in the Colours of the GDR," 92.

these requests, staking his and his party's legitimacy on the provision of low-cost housing.<sup>165</sup> Instead, the state made cuts to the plans for Marzahn, packing the development more densely with apartments, changing plans for entertainment and shopping districts, and financing 90 percent of the costs of the Housing Program through credit.<sup>166</sup> By the late 1980s, massive outlays for housing had taxed the East German regime past its breaking point. Like the UHF, the SED was ultimately doomed by the problems involved with financing large-scale housing.<sup>167</sup>

Marzahners behaved like many other East Germans during the year 1989/1990, as the Berlin Wall fell and Germany was united. Marzahn had its own "round table" where representatives of various political parties met.<sup>168</sup> Some Marzahners enjoyed the new political freedoms available after communism fell, while others were less sanguine about West German society. This should not be surprising. After all, Marzahn was designed as a microcosm of East German society, and by the time the wall fell, half of East Germans lived in prefabricated housing, and nearly a quarter lived in large housing districts constructed as part of the housing program.<sup>169</sup>

THE STANDARD STORY OF urban modernism's rise and fall is a morality tale, in which the hubris of planners, the overreach of the state, and the sterility of the architecture were ultimately rejected by the very public they were intended to aid and educate. But the history of Co-op City and Marzahn, as well as the many other developments built in their image at roughly the same time, reveals that modernism persisted well beyond its supposed collapse.<sup>170</sup> Moreover, while modernist developments may have lost favor with elites within and beyond the planning establishment by the 1960s, modernism continued to evolve after this date, and modernist buildings were, sometimes, at least, quite popular with residents.<sup>171</sup> Recognizing the evolution of modernism, rather than its precipitous downfall, challenges broader narratives of the history of consumption during the Cold War.

This historiography largely assumes that the model of consumption that transfixed citizens on both sides of the Iron Curtain was the postwar American model, anchored by the single-family suburban home, which "seemed to promise a surefire way of incorporating a wide range of Americans into a mass consumption-based middle class."<sup>172</sup> Indeed, Ina Merkel, Greg Castillo, and others have claimed that

<sup>165</sup> Rowell, "Wohnungspolitik" (2008), 697.

<sup>166</sup> Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert*, 373.

<sup>167</sup> Günter Peters, *Kleine Berliner Baugeschichte: Von der Stadtgründung bis zur Bundeshauptstadt* (Berlin, 1995), 218; Buck, *Mit hohem Anspruch gescheitert*, 377.

<sup>168</sup> Ernst Ollech, "Ein historisches Ereignis," in Bezirksamt Marzahn von Berlin, *20 Jahre Bezirk Marzahn*, 98–99.

<sup>169</sup> Christine Hannemann, in Queisser and Tirri, *Allee der Kosmonauten*, 14.

<sup>170</sup> See Le Normand, *Designing Tito's Capital*; David Heachcote, *Barbican: Penthouse over the City* (Hoboken, N.J., 2004); Cupers, *The Social Project*; Anthony Alexander, *Britain's New Towns: Garden Cities to Sustainable Communities* (New York, 2009); Rosemary Wakeman, *Modernizing the Provincial City: Toulouse, 1945–1975* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

<sup>171</sup> For the decline of modernism among elites, see both Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal*, and Suleiman Osman, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York* (New York, 2010).

<sup>172</sup> Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (2002; repr., New York, 2008), 196. On the move to the suburbs in the 1950s, see Kenneth T. Jackson,

East Germany's failure to compete with this model was a significant factor in the GDR's collapse.<sup>173</sup> This narrative of the triumph of American capitalist consumerism elides the fact that the late modernist alternative refashioning of consumerism in communal terms is also a part of the shared history of the Cold War. In both Co-op City and Marzahn, residents had a right to the apartments they occupied, and their ownership also gave them the right to participate in the communities built in each development, and yet they were not able to realize a profit from the sale of their apartments. Thus consumption was rewritten as fundamentally collective and participatory rather than economic and individual.<sup>174</sup> The popularity of this model can be attested to, in ironic fashion, by the fact that Co-op City's rent strikers asserted this very claim—that their residency in Co-op City gave them the right to an affordable home—in their resistance to the UHF. Similarly, even after the demise of the GDR, residents of Marzahn continued in many cases to own and operate their apartments collectively.<sup>175</sup> This model of radicalized collective consumption, rooted in privation rather than plenty, was not merely a critique of the postwar capitalist model; it echoed the politicized citizen consumer of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>176</sup>

The ideology and experience of late modernism reveals the fundamental error made by critics of modernism: the assumption that all urban modernism was marked by the arrogance of Le Corbusier and Moses, who demonstrated an aesthetic disregard for the lives of the human beings who would live in their cities and an authoritarian refusal to take their needs into account.<sup>177</sup> If we acknowledge the flexibility and adaptability of modernism, as well as its popularity, then we reopen the question of how large-scale planning has been and can be a force for good in people's lives.

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*Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York, 1987). On the *longue durée* of suburban living in the United States and England, see Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York, 1989). In addition to Cohen, on the hegemony and political potential/consequences of postwar American consumer society, see Lawrence B. Glickman, *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1999); William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a New America* (New York, 1994); Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York, 2002). On the appeal of American consumerism in Europe across the Cold War divide, see Greg Castillo, *Cold War on the Home Front: The Soft Power of Midcentury Design* (Minneapolis, 2010); Victoria de Grazia, *Iresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005). See also Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley, Calif., 1993); Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture since World War II* (New York, 1997); Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton, eds., *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America* (Oxford, 2001); Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern, and Matthias Judt, eds., *Getting and Spending: European and American Consumer Societies in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, 1998); John Brewer and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Consuming Cultures, Global Perspectives: Historical Trajectories, Transnational Exchanges* (Oxford, 2006).

<sup>173</sup> Mark Landsman, *Dictatorship and Demand: The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 186. See also Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis*; Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany* (Oxford, 2005); Katherine Pence, *Rations to Fashions: Gender and Consumer Politics in Cold War Germany* (New York, forthcoming); Milena Veenis, "Consumption in East Germany: The Seduction and Betrayal of Things," *Journal of Material Culture* 4, no. 1 (1999): 79–112; Jonathan Zatlin, "Consuming Ideology: Socialist Consumerism and the Intershops, 1970–1989," in Peter Hübner and Klaus Tenfelde, eds., *Arbeiter in der SBZ-DDR* (Essen, 1999), 555–573.

<sup>174</sup> See Smith, *Property of Communists*, chap. 5, for an exploration of how ownership functioned in the Soviet Union during this period.

<sup>175</sup> See, for example, the Erste Marzahner Wohnungsgenossenschaft, <http://www.emwg-eg.de>.

<sup>176</sup> Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, chap. 1.

<sup>177</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, Conn., 1998); Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

To be sure, Co-op City and Marzahn do not provide evidence that late modernism was the solution to the problems of the 1960s and 1970s on either side of the Iron Curtain. They were and continue to be beset by considerable problems. From the start, both developments struggled with a lack of adequate and attractive recreational and commercial space. Both the UHF and the DBA discovered that it is exceedingly difficult, and perhaps impossible, to direct a community's political life in the ways that planners originally intended. Co-op City was engulfed by the same urban crisis it sought to escape. And for all the utopian rhetoric that accompanied Marzahn's construction, it proved amenable to the same dynamics of surveillance and repression that characterized the GDR more broadly. Nevertheless, when late modernism—and indeed modernism more generally—is taken out of the moralistic teleology of its inevitable and welcome demise, it becomes clear that a more nuanced verdict is in order. Late modernist collective housing may not have been a panacea in the 1960s and 1970s, and it may not be so today. However, it is worth reflecting that the fundamental issues Marzahn and Co-op City were designed to address—namely, how to provide decent housing for people of modest means and how to create a society built on communitarian principles—remain unresolved to this day.

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