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**Architecture as Ideology:
Industrialization of Housing in the GDR**

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This text is the revised and updated version of a paper from June 1995. It is also a summary of my publication “Die Platte. Industrialisierter Wohnungsbau in der DDR”, first published in 1996 and republished in 2000. Look for “Hannemann 2000” in the register of literature. The third edition is forthcoming in 2004.

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1. The sociological view of the technical object “slab”

Since the political changes of 1989, the *Platte* (Slab) - the large housing complexes built in and around many cities in the former GDR, but also found in industrialized building production¹ in general - have been stigmatized, due mainly to the uniform character and the appalling monotony of the buildings as well as their former below-standard technical conditions. (see Fig. 1: 19 and Fig. 2: 19) This general criticisms of the *Platte* by the public, is however in contrast with the growing scientific exploration of the many technical, historical and sociological aspects of this type of housing. Slabs and the industrialization of building and housing are important topics for scholars interested in the socio-political and socio-cultural meaning of the *Platte* as the urban and architectural translation of socialism into daily life of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Industrialization of housing in the GDR demonstrates the attempt to implement the „Socialism“ in a socio-spatial context. In this way, the slab is a symbol which indicates the complex interplay between the ideology of the GDR and the physical configuration of social action.

In this paper I will analyze the background of the industrialization of housing in the GDR, not from a narrow architectural analysis or an architectural-historical standpoint, but rather from a

¹ There is no clear definition of „industrialization of housing“. I’m using this term like Grubb/Phares 1972: „Industrialization [...] is the process of converting to the systems, methods, and objectives of large-scale manufacturing and technically productive enterprises. In terms of housing, it means to corporate capabilities existing throughout U.S. industry today - that is, its systems, methods, and management skills and techniques - would be applied to all segments of the housing process.“ (: 97)

sociological perspective. That is, I will take an architectural-sociological approach towards the history, the meaning and the future of industrialized mass housing in the GDR. The analysis will highlight the *Platte* as a code of several projects from which I will select two:

- a) The *Platte* as a technical ‘Leitbild’ (model): the imposition of modern industrialized building techniques in the (pre- and postwar) housing sector in East and West Germany;
- b) The *Platte* as a sociological ‘Leitbild’ (model) or the ideology of the *Platte* in the GDR with themes like the socialist nuclear family, housing policy and socialist lifestyle, belief in technique as the basis for progress, and the ideology of social equality.

Please note: I will use the term *Platte* - slab - as it is used today in common German language. The word indicates not just the basic element of a specific building system - panel or slab - but also the spatial expression of it in large-scale housing projects in urban residential districts often denoted locally as *Plattenbaugebiete* or *DDR-Neubaugebiete*.

The application of the slabs in the GDR was predominantly restricted to large scale housing developments. The questions, which I would like to answer here, is what were the reasons for this type of building policy? To what extent did this policy create special societal circumstances in the GDR? And finally, what ideological premises informed housing and building policy in general? In the case of the GDR, the ideological conception of the ‘slab’ has to be carefully handled. As a matter of fact, the relation between “GDR-ideology” and the architectural and urban configuration of mass produced housing is anything but simple or rectilinear. Housing complexes in urban residential areas in the GDR cannot be analyzed in terms of simple spatial translations of abstract ideological issues. Any socio-historical reconstruction of industrialized buildings and building processes in the GDR should consider three political and historical premises: firstly, the importance of the political and institutional context not only in the GDR, as a specific type of society, but of all societies in the Eastern Block based on a bureaucratic ‘state-socialism’. Secondly, the difference between the idea of industrialized mass housing as experienced in the twenties and thirties by the Modern Movement (for example in the Weimar Republic) and the realization of these technocratic ideas by means of the GDR housing policy. Thirdly, the need to understand the origins and content of socialist concepts of housing and living in the historical context of GDR, especially the view of the leading socialist party SED on dwelling and family.

The empirical scope of my analysis asks for a model of interpretation that goes beyond such general concepts like „state-society of GDR“ or „Marxism-Leninism ideology“. Instead of

these I propose the above mentioned three specific basic aspects of received-ideology that accounts for the various contextual relationships of the ‘slab’. Industrial housing construction used in the large GDR housing estates refers neither to an ultimate moment of modernization, nor does the classical ground plan of the newly constructed apartments follow silently the ideological premises found in Marxism-Leninism. The argument that would support a specific socialist ground plan would be rather found in Soviet Russia, during the beginning of the twenties when collective housing forms were debated and realized (Chan-Magomedow 1983: 344 cont.; Kreis 1985: 20 cont.).

2. Technique as a Model: The „Problem of Housing“ and Industrialization of Housing

The foundation of the large housing developments is to be found in the unconditional imposition of industrial construction methods in the housing sector. This adoption of a fully industrialized (building) production was decided by the Socialist Party (SED) and the State leadership as the one and only way to stabilize and reinforce a socialist society during a Building Conference held in Berlin in April 1955. This political decision was preceded by the *Allunion Conference on Building Construction* held in Moscow, on December 7th, 1954. On that occasion, Nikita Chruschtschow’s² gave his famous speech referring to the “dear but too expensive architects“, which led the entire Eastern block to change its direction: The architectural designs turned away from neo-classicism (Stalinist design) and moved towards cost-effective building and housing production (cp. Martiny 1983: 91 cont.). Before this political decision there were of course constructive-technological experiments with the panel building systems. So, for instance, the first application of the large panel system (Großtafelbauweise) in Berlin-Johannisthal in 1953 (see Fig. 9: 24): The development of the slab in this time followed still the neoclassical style. But in connection with an urban development context, large prefabricated panel construction was implemented for the first time in May 1957, in Hoyerswerda under the direction of the East German architect Richard Paulick (Chronik 1974: 127). The solemn foundation of the second new socialist city, after Stalinstadt (now Eisenhüttenstadt), was planned as a residential town for the brown coal mining industry - Schwarze Pumpe. The settlement was designed on the base of huge multi-storey blocks with large prefabricated panel construction. A special event marked the year of

² The exact title of this speech was “On the introduction of industrialized methods in a large scale, on the improved quality and on the reduced costs of construction”. The title that was used in the GDR in 1955 for the prompt publication in East German referred to the political bauen” (“Towards a better, faster and cheaper building”). (cp. Chruschtschow 1955) implication of the important change in the building policy: "Besser, billiger und schneller

1957 - the creation of the first fully mechanized housing factory for large concrete panels of the GDR. Its annual capacity was 7,000 living units.

This time was the beginning of the disastrous linkage between large housing estates and large prefabricated panel construction. It was based on a post-war modernism urban model – that of the open city and its rational organized neighborhood units -, and was a clear demonstration of how mass produced building was compatible with the (Western) idea of the functional city. At this time the model was not officially implemented in the GDR but urban design was advancing towards the described direction. (cp. Hoscislawski 1991: 219 cont.) As opposed to Eisenhüttenstadt the urban form and design of Hoyerswerda „New Town“ (Neustadt) was primarily dependent on the technological requirements of the tracks of the building crane. In this first phase architects, planners and engineers tried to combine the demands of new industrial building techniques with a friendly garden-city layout of a closed building block with several public facilities on the enclosed greenery (Topfstedt 1975, Hoscislawski 1991). However, during the planning phase of the first housing block in Hoyerswerda, planners came to realize that it was impossible to create small-scale urban structures with modern industrial building techniques. Thus, open structures became the dominating form of building with the building crane as its main architect. This urban structure, determined by a technological factor, was declared by the leading GDR architectural theorist Hans Schmidt, as the most appropriate form for a socialist city (cp. Schmidt 1959: 29).

Hans Schmidt was one of the few living Western protagonists of industrial building in the GDR, and was heavily influenced by technical discussions on ‘rationalization of the building production’ during the twenties and early thirties in Soviet Union. With his theoretical texts, manifestos and barely realized projects Hans Schmidt is a clear illustration of how large scale housing construction in the GDR was dependent on the theoretical debates on the ‘socialist city’ in the Soviet Union during the prewar Stalinist period. And it seems that due to this theoretical thinking about the technological essence of the new socialist city, that GDR planners and engineers were looking during the fifties and early sixties. This leads, in turn, to the conclusion that the traditional linkage between the housing question and modernist industrial building in western Europe during the twenties - which was the central thinking behind the innovation of the „*Neues Bauen*“ - was far less reflected in the building tradition of the GDR as commonly supposed.

Further developments were marked by the experience gleaned from the twenties and the early thirties, which Martin Wagner has detailed in his essay „Großsiedlungen. Der Weg zur Rationalisierung des Wohnungsbaus“³ (1926). Central to these theoretical issues are the different attitudes towards modern technology as a ‘solution’ to political, social and economic problems in capitalist and socialist societies, respectively. The modernist developments of the twenties can be considered as the final point of a development that had started at the beginning of industrialization at the end of the 18th century. The catastrophic housing conditions in the early 19th century were seen clearly as the resulting from industrialization. For the first time, housing was seen as a social problem for society and, thus, housing reform became a central consideration for public policy. However, it was only in the 20th century that various concepts about housing shortages were combined with technology and mass housing. Henry Ford’s concept of mass production and consumption was the main issues. His concept of mass production through the assembly line was further developed and used in the field of building by architects, such as Walter Gropius, who saw themselves as progressive.

In the 1920’s the fascinating ideology of Fordism as the base for finding a solution to the housing question became the matrix of modern architecture. Many of the leading architects at this time such as Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Bruno Taut and Ernst May dealt with technological requirements and aesthetic aspects of the industrialization of housing. Although, only a few examples could be realized in the twenties and early thirties, one basic realization of this century was made, and it influenced housing and urban construction in all industrialized nations. This realization resembles the linkage between economics and rationality, in this case the only correct building solution for large housing estates is combining the housing question with industrialized building. Mies van der Rohe noted this in his famous essay about industrialized building: „The industrialization of the building sector is from my point of view the main problem for construction in our time. If we are successful in implementing this industrialization, the social, economical, technical and artistic question will be answered.“ (Mies van der Rohe 1924: 305)

Due to growing national economies, growing pressures on the housing market, and an increase of social democratic governments in industrialized nations after World War II, a new social-political framework was developed for housing. This framework finally allowed the breakthrough of housing ideas from the twenties. Industrialization of housing in the form of

³ Large Housing Developments: The Way of the Rationalization of Housing Construction

large housing estates became the world-wide favored form of building and acted as a solution to the housing question. This type of building was not only the central framework of the state housing policy in Eastern block countries, but also in Western countries, such as in Great Britain, in Scandinavian countries and particularly in France (cp. Hannemann 1993; Hannemann 2000). The socio-political idea of a homogeneous “middle-class society” in the East and in the West, as it was the case after World War II, was supposed to be realized on the spatial level through uniform apartments for nuclear families. Particularly, the rationalized housing sector was highly viewed as compatible with the dominating urban model of the fifties and the sixties – that of the structured and loosely organized town.

In comparison to the Western countries, where industrialized housing construction and technological issues were only discussed as a question of technology, the socialist countries, especially in the GDR imposed the ‘slab’ as a political doctrine. Beginning in the 1950’s socialist countries linked the planning and realization of newly constructed housing areas with the debate about the „socialist city“ which originated in the late twenties and early thirties. During the same time period the Soviet Union conceived numerous urban projects for „new socialist cities“ in Siberia, such as Magnitogorsk, Orsk and Nowokusnezk. These projects were developed in co-operation with representatives of modern architecture, such as Ernst May and Hans Schmidt. These urban development projects were based on the concept of Fordism, respectively organizing the city by function. Within specific housing areas of the town a certain socialist life-style was supposed to be developed. A city block included not only housing, but also community facilities, buildings and green spaces, and was supposed to be spatially seen and used as one entity. During these years the essential theoretical and practical foundation for the „socialist housing complex“ was developed - this uniform brick resembled the „socialist city“. (see Fig. 3: 20)

In the GDR, just as in all other socialist countries the „socialist housing complex“ became the dominating urban model during the mid 1950’s. The transition to industrial housing construction was connected with the standardization and the formation of a building typology for building production and housing scheme. (cp. Sozialistischer Wohnkomplex 1959). The size of these housing schemes were planned for a catchment area, with a school, for about 4,000 to 5,000 inhabitants. Furthermore, the walking distance between an individual housing block and common facilities, such as day-care centers, schools, stores and public transportation was used as a standard to determine measurements and spatial constructions.

These housing schemes were planned to be strictly residential areas and offered few employment possibilities. The spatial division between public and private that one finds in the bourgeois model of societies was not present since private space was renounced (Fig. 4: 20). On the basis of the distances between the buildings and the open spaces, areas were planned and realized in the form of undifferentiated green areas, play grounds and places where laundry could be dried.

This first generation of newly constructed housing development was based on the guidelines of „socialist housing complexes“ and on the increasing usage of the slabs. The repetitive patterns and additions of uniform housing complexes, independently constructed from their existing surrounding led finally to spatial and architectural monotony. This monotony is the very characteristic of the large housing schemes the basic feature of which is the „dedifferentiation“ of dwelling types. The mono-functional and uniform lay-out of the living environment (Grosssiedlungen) was the result and logical consequence of the socialist concept of society. Crucial element of this concept was the formula of *‘die sozialistische Lebensweise’*. Following the official SED ideology, people were supposed to realize and fulfill their identity as a socialist human being in all societal dimensions of collective life: that is the nuclear family, the orientation towards *“Hausgemeinschaft”* (households that shared the same staircase in the same building), the political activities of the *“Nationale Front”*⁴ and all other clubs and societies for sport, leisure, culture and consumption. (cp. Engelberger 1958/59) In terms of urban planning, architects and engineers were supposed not to work on the endless differentiation of the typology of the individual dwelling but, on the contrary, to materialize the collective essence of socialist life into the living environment. In other words to design a clear and almost readable relationship between the individual household (family), the housing block, the housing estate (“neighborhood”) and the heart or center of the city itself. A strong programmatic concept that at the same time was put forward as the very ideological argument for a fully rationalized and industrialized system of building construction.

Also, the apparent „change of paradigm“ from the „socialist housing complex“ to „complex housing construction“ in the nineteen seventies did not bring any substantial changes for fordistic housing and urban building. Rather, it implied a continuation of the fordistic residential quarters in a new form of quality and quantity. An important technological change

⁴ Political merging of all parties and societal organizations by the instruction of the SED

with this new central guideline for housing construction was the rise of density of development. So for instance more high-rise buildings (buildings with 11 and more floors) were built. (cp. Empfehlung 1968)

At this time, with the beginning of the Honecker era in the GDR, economic and social policy was linked to a new orientation. The politics of the SED party were directed towards increasing power and continued to penetrate all social areas of public life. The positive economic development at that time allowed an optimistic interpretation for future developments in the GDR. This led to a socio-political strategy that strove to increase inner stability by raising the standards of living. The central component that was used to legitimize this program, which shared similarities with the western consumption and welfare model, was the neglected housing construction sector under Ulbricht. During the VIIIth party convention of the SED, held in 1971, the „housing program“ became the core of the new societal policy. In reformulation of the former GDR slogan of “How we work today is how we are going to live tomorrow”, the immediate improvement of the living standard became the main aim of the societal policy. And one of the main fields for this new political program of the SED was the housing sector. The general goal „Solution to the Housing Question as a Social Problem up to the Year 1990“ caused state-run and co-operative housing organizations to use a equalized system of housing construction: The WBS 70.⁵

Up to this point of time, the evolved structure of the building sector and the continuous focus on concentrating all resources for housing, was the cause for the uniform apartment as a material technical base of a political program. Proclaimed in a document from 1971, the “*Wohnungsbausystem 70* is an open and dynamic system that is in accordance with the principles of the ‘uniform way of building’ and the stated goals of the GDR’s housing construction policy. It is a system that in its present phase of adaptation follows the conditions of mass housing construction, of dormitories and of preschool institutions as well as the widest possible use of already extant and to-be-reconstructed slab factories.”

(*Wohnungsbausystem 1971*: 9) The WBS 70 was the uniform basis of the accelerated housing construction until the end of the GDR. The introduction of the uniform apartment hardly influenced or changed the concept of housing that is located at the outskirts of the city. Thus,

⁵ The structural and technological basis of the WBS 70 derives from the teamwork in the early seventies of the Deutsche Bauakademie, five former GDR Wohnungsbaukombinate and the Technische Universität of Dresden. The Wohnungsbaukombinat in Neubrandenburg began the production of the WBS 70 in 1972. It was later included in to the production programme of all Wohnungsbaukombinaten.

the second generation of the large housing development areas was born (Fig 7: 22). Within this frame the budget for housing construction and for modernization of apartments was increased drastically. The systematic neglect of old buildings and the maximum building usage of the slab led to the abandonment of the former. This building type, likewise its further developments – so the WBS 85, was increasingly used in inner-city areas.

With the nation-wide introduction of WBS 70 (Fig 6: 21) and its urban implication in the form of large housing developments, a linkage with the continuing reduction of the built-spatial living structure was formed. This one housing type was „stacked“ on top of another, so that the lay-out of an apartment reproduced itself, visible on each level. The standardization of the WBS 70 meant: one to four rooms, a hall way, a kitchen and a bath (a cell without windows), as well as a matching order among rooms and functions. This ‘classical’ apartment type was reproduced about 1,5 million times. The largest room of an apartment was conceived as the living room. The middle-sized room which was usually located on the quieter side of the house was to be used as the parents’ bedroom, and the smallest rooms were to be used as the children’s’ bedrooms. The hall-way offers access to the other rooms and in addition to a reception room it was a place for coats, household utensils and furniture (Fig 8: 23). Clearly, parallels can be seen in respect to the ground lay-out of social housing during the twenties and early thirties. The entire developments of state housing and its ground plan was based on the concept of a nuclear family in a ‘nuclear’ apartment combined in socialist housing complexes, later called housing areas, and structured by functional division.

Today, public opinion about the problematic large housing estates is dominated by developments that are combined with the idea „crises in the fordistic urban planning“. With the turning away from the international urban planning idea of the „functional city“ and the rediscovery of the old city and of post-modernism, large housing estates in Western industrialized nations became both a social and an urban renewal problem. The rediscovery of the old town was connected with the stigmatization and loss of value of the large housing estates. As a political consequence a lot of improvement measures were developed, not only because of poor condition of housing stock but also a measure to avoid social conflicts. These experiences and developments in West Germany influenced the treatment of East German large housing estates after reunification.

3. Ideology of the 'Slab': Elements of Ideology of Industrialized Housing Construction in the GDR

Housing was always an important factor in the GDR for legitimizing ideology. The constitution guaranteed every person the right to housing. Therefore, the State and political leadership felt obliged to build and provide state housing. For instance, this claim was stated as following: „Our workers' and peasants' state was and is the instrument to the solution of the urgent housing problems". Therefore, the housing policy of the SED was characterized by follow attributes: 1. All activities of housing was established by political priorities. 2. The ownership of housing was shaped after socialist pattern; especially the proportion of state and cooperative ownership was heavy increased. 3. The rents were subsidized on a low level. 4. The allocation of housing (also most private homes) was organized by the SED-State. That was an important instrument of gratification for good political and economical conduct. Generally, one can identify three theoretical aspects of ideology which were the driving force behind industrialized building. First, the belief in technology/techniques and progress by industrialization based on Marxism-Leninism; second, the fixation on the socialist nuclear family and third, the ideology of social equality. The following sections will discuss these three elements.

1: Since the Moscow „Allunionskongreß“ held in 1954, the new political direction for the GDR was clearly laid out: The only possible way to realize socialist housing was seen in the adoption of mass production techniques in the building sector.

In the early years of the GDR, the fundamental principals of the unlimited monostructured industrialization of building were laid down by the KPD⁶/SED and the Soviet Military Administration in East Germany (SMAD). In a matter of a few years these two organisations were able to instigate in the Soviet Zone (SBZ⁷) a political and socio-economical change. This in turn removed the independent bureaucratic institutions that are based on the central democratic system. Thus, the Soviet Union model was pursued. This also meant that up to Gorbatschow's Perestroika policy, all socio-political changes in the Soviet Union were followed by the GDR.

⁶ Communist Party of Germany

⁷ Zone occupied by the soviet power after World War II

Certainly, one could view the application of industrial production methods as a necessity that acted as a solution to the housing shortage. In comparison to West Germany, East Germany chose a central system that was reinforced in the seventies by the introduction of the *Wohnungsbaukombinate* (building cooperatives). Primarily, ideological and political grounds were the driving forces. The goal of industrializing the building sector corresponded with the basic concept of socialism since the beginning of Lenin. Socialism was to set free the productivity forces which as a base, allowed the transition to communism. Therefore, the industrialization of building did not resemble a pure technical problem, but was the incarnation of social progress. This process resembling the Marxist-Leninist theory gave the historical necessary base, „...overcoming ‘crafting’ in the production. This refers to the process from primitive manual production to industrial mass production“ (Vogée 1967: 30). The theory’s goal was to put forth technological progress (Fig. 3: 20).

In respect to improving the post-war building sector the GDR’s conceptions did not really differ too much from the Western ones. In West Germany, the concept of social housing was not accomplished for various reasons, even though the building industry and government made enormous efforts trying to implement this strategy in the sixties and seventies.

Within the frame of this topic, I find the following aspect of great importance: The industrialization of housing was viewed internationally as a means of development of modernization and rationalization of construction technology: Industrialized nations such as France, Germany, the United States and the Scandinavian countries etc. were participants.

The concepts mentioned above demonstrate the metaphoric symbolism of the ‘slabs’: the belief in progress. Within architectural theory, the ‘slab’ follows the ideas of modernism⁸ in the twenties, and within social and political theory it follows the tradition of Leninism. Leninism hoped to establish through socialism a political avant-garde that in turn was supposed to enforce modernism. The socialist method of industrialization was to satisfy the economic principles of socialism. Instead of having disproportional anarchical developments, as seen in a capitalist industry, a conscious direction of the national economy was to be based on the peoples’ needs. On the other hand, this abstract theory did not include a strategy for industrialized building. Since the beginning of the GDR, structural problems such as shortage of building materials, of management and of planning were never overcome (cp. Reidemeister

⁸ In this context modernism is viewed as industrialization of building.

1972), and in fact grew due to the economic policies of the 1980s. In order to justify industrialization of housing, passages from Marx's „Das Kapital“ about the “machinery and the large industry” were cited, even though he never wrote about socialist industrialization. The most important result of all the theoretical considerations was the „being“ of socialist building as a type. Thereupon, all state and political ideologies were used as means to enforce the typology of building in the field of housing. This development found its height in the seventies with the nationwide introduction of the WBS 70.

2: The concept of the socialist family was also a determining configurative factor for housing construction in the GDR. The socialist family was viewed as the smallest cell of society. The sociology of the family in the GDR proved that this main form of living corresponded with the political-ideological goal. The composition of the nuclear family was defined as one or two parents with one or more children. It was stated by Gysi (1988: 510) that „91.5 % of all households⁹ in the GDR fit this definition“. In the GDR, differentiated forms of life were rare; encompassing two generations, it was the nuclear family that determined the development and layout of industrialized housing. The development itself succeeded through the diverse apartment types from the Q3A model up to the WBS 70 model. The parameter of each type of apartment was limited by how wide the ceiling was, and by the location of kitchen and bath. Although the theoretical choices were numerous, the economic regulations and the technological organization of the building process allowed, in the case of WBS 70, only seven ground plan possibilities.

Not only the concept of the ground plan but also the interior of the housing scheme had consequences: Since the nuclear family model had to be combined with full-employment among women, it was necessary to include social facilities within the planning, so that families could be relieved from some burdens. Parallel to housing the goal was to build a nursery school and a kindergarten, a school, a supermarket and a service center; however practically this was not always the case. This variant offered the minimum amount of social infrastructure which was a prerequisite for the working force, particularly for women. This not only corresponded with the given situation but also, resembled the concept of society at that time: The ideal picture of communism was „labor as the primary need“.

⁹ households with more than one person

3: Generally, social change in the GDR was marked by the state's and political party's claim that the development of social structure was to be centrally planned and it had to correspond with economic goals. The main structural components were ownership, education, professional qualification, labor and income. Hereby, the central ideological leitmotif was *the convergence of class and stratification* in regard to essential living conditions such as income, education and housing. Siegfried Grundmann, an urban sociologist practicing at the scientific research institute of the SED – the Academy of Social Sciences by the central committee of the SED – described this concept for instance as following: “Not the existence of class struggles and the deepening of social differences, but rather *the convergence of class and stratification* and the step by step decrease of social differences is from now on the basic rule for the social structure of cities“ (Grundmann 1984: 205). Implementing this claim meant that equal and decent housing had to be created for everybody.

This claim appeared in urban concepts especially in the late sixties and seventies. The „best“ example can be seen in the urban and housing plans of Halle-Neustadt. „The city housing complex in socialism is not marked by the differentiations of job-levels, income or any other differences.“ Furthermore, „there are no socially caused differences in a residential quarter. Everybody lives under the same circumstances in the same apartment. A general director and delivery man from the chemical plant, live side by side in the same building, and a town mayor lives in the same housing block as a janitor from the energy plant and a urban planner, who planned the town.“ (Autorenkollektiv 1972: 85)

If one tries to search for a deep rooted reason for this unique intellectual path regarding housing one will come across the debates of the 1920s. The GDR's housing debate followed this discussion in a one-sided fashion and thus, had already arrived at a standstill by this point in time. The roots of the WBS 70 and other fore-runners of this type are found in the so-called „Minimum of Existence“ apartment models of the twenties. During the twenties the apartment ground plan in social and government subsidized housing was about 45 Square meters. With this step, necessary conditions were created for social housing construction, so that the desperately needed apartments could be built.

Astonishingly enough, this housing type continued to be used not only during the Third Reich, but also in the GDR and in the first years of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The principal development of the WBS and its fore-runners was marked by the clear usage of

the rooms, the necessary space for furniture and last but not least the course of human movement. Finally, these steps followed the idea of functionalism within a social course and established the specified room usage. Gerd Kähler, a German architectural critic, says in this regard: „The functionalizing of the flat according to operational activities (Gropius) was a social accomplishment of the twenties because it replaced a way of living in which all processes took place, out of necessity, in one room. Now that smooth “functioning” in the realms of both work and society can be regarded as a “secondary virtue” at best, the functionalizing of the apartment according to operational activities must be judged differently today; [...]. “ (Kähler 1989: 44) But this “secondary virtue” was for the GDR a primary virtue. The design of apartments, buildings and housing settlements followed the concepts of „unproblematic functions“. It corresponded with the technocratic demands on the family, as seen for example in unifying motherhood and work.

4. A short outlook: present situation of the slabs in Eastern Germany

Reunification and the integration of the GDR into the Federal Republic's political and economic structure has caused radical change in Germany: Today the economy of East Germany is disintegrating: There has been an extensive dissemination of the economic structure of the East German cities. After 13 years, East Germany is still one of the EU's most underdeveloped regions. Economic growth is stagnant and shrinking; there is no improvement in sight. Most of the GDR's nationalized economic structures have disappeared - industry, agrarian- and military sector, administration structure -, and this and the associated job losses have led to emigration to West Germany – about 1,2 million people since 1989 (cp. Hannemann 2003). The consequences for the cities and especially the slabs in East Germany are dramatic. The population loss will continue into the future, as the overall German population is also diminishing. Also the change of the birth-rate and the migration process since the fall of the Wall will cause a further increase of the unoccupied housing figures. And furthermore: The shrinking of East German cities was further exacerbated by increasing suburbanization – anyone who had money built a little house in the countryside on cheap land in the outskirts. Moreover, the ruling in the unification treaty between the two German states of “return before compensation” made it almost impossible to reinvigorate the city centers, which had already been neglected by socialist planning – a quarter of the ownership decisions about older properties have still not been made, which prevents any sensible development. So

the East German cities are suffering due to de-economization, depopulation suburbanization and decentralization. (see Fig. 10: 2525)

The image offered by most East German cities and areas of large housing developments is difficult today: Wherever you walk you encounter derelict buildings with empty windows and boarded-up entrances. An enormous amount of money was certainly spent on refurbishing isolated historic urban structures and on revitalization of slabs, but also whole streets were simply pulled down. In a town like Magdeburg, for example, a third of the housing is already empty – most of them in the area of large housing developments, and this is a rising tendency. People are moving out continually, and we have to assume that in many towns up to 50 % of the buildings will fall into disrepair over the next 20 years. Outside the cities, property funds financed by West German developers have built countless housing developments (*Wohnparks*), and in between these there are the obligatory boxes for do-it-yourself stores, supermarkets and factory outlets. (see Fig. 11: 25) At the same time demand is stagnating, and the property market will not develop except in a very few prosperous cities like Potsdam or Jena. The collapse of the East German economy has led to de-urbanization. Great holes are being punched in East German towns by the specially developed state demolition program, so called “*Stadtumbau-Ost*” (Remodeling East German Cities)- about 300,000 to 400,000 of the approximately 1,07 million empty homes are to be demolished to “adjust the market”. (cp. BMVBW 2003) But this a new subject: Demolishing flats should be an unimaginable project for a world where most of the people would be happy to have a flat with the quality of the “slab”. (see Fig. 12: 266 and Fig. 13: 26)

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Fig. 1 Typical residential yard with green space and play areas in Berlin Marzahn



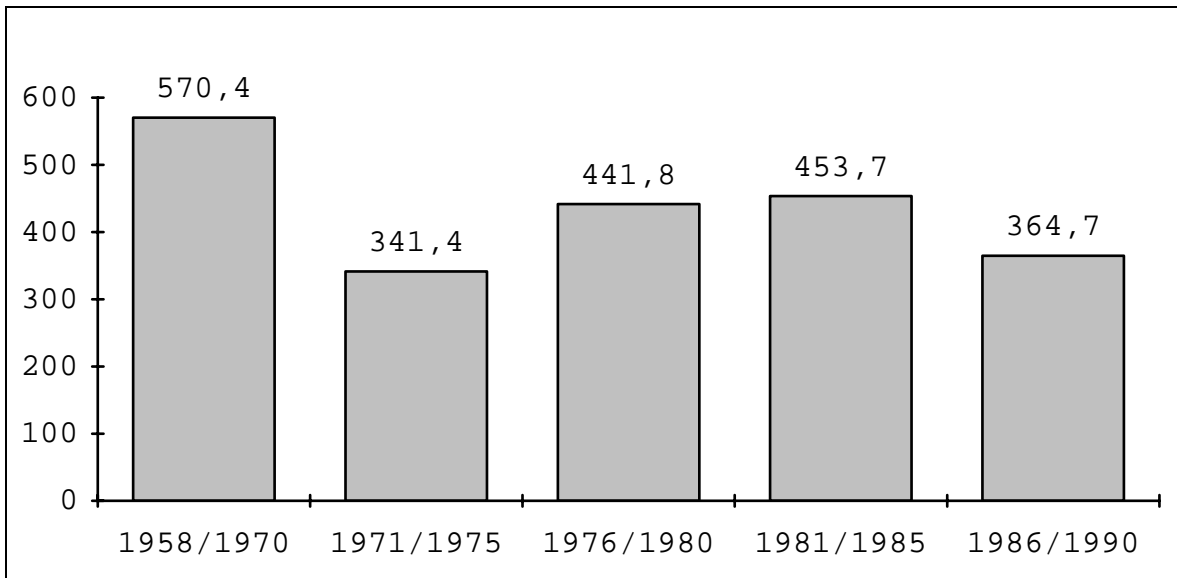
Photo: Students ISR, Technical University Berlin 1992

Fig. 2 Playground for children between 8 and 12 in Berlin-Marzahn



Photo: Students ISR/Technical University Berlin 1992

Fig. 3 Apartments in industrialized built multi-storey buildings in GDR (in 1000 ap.)



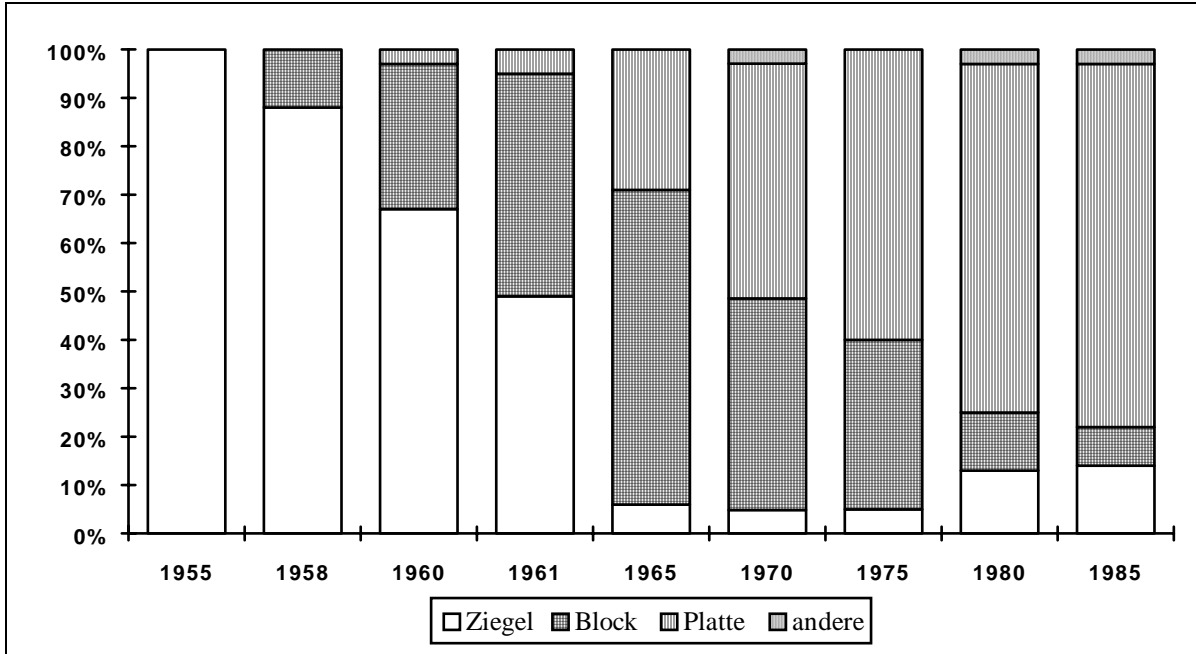
Source: Großsiedlungsbericht 1994: 132

Fig. 4 Unshaped area between individual (Apartments in residential block, QP 71) and societal (area for laundry drying) space in Berlin-Marzahn



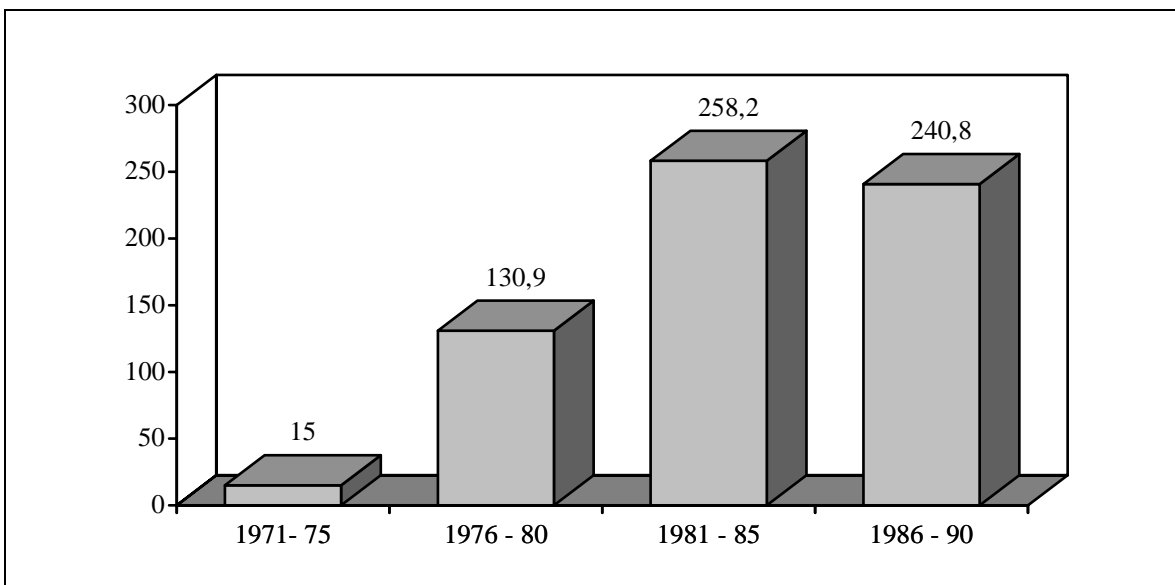
Photo: Students ISR/Technical University Berlin 1992

Fig. 5 Interest of building construction methods in GDR-housing (1955-1985) (in percent)



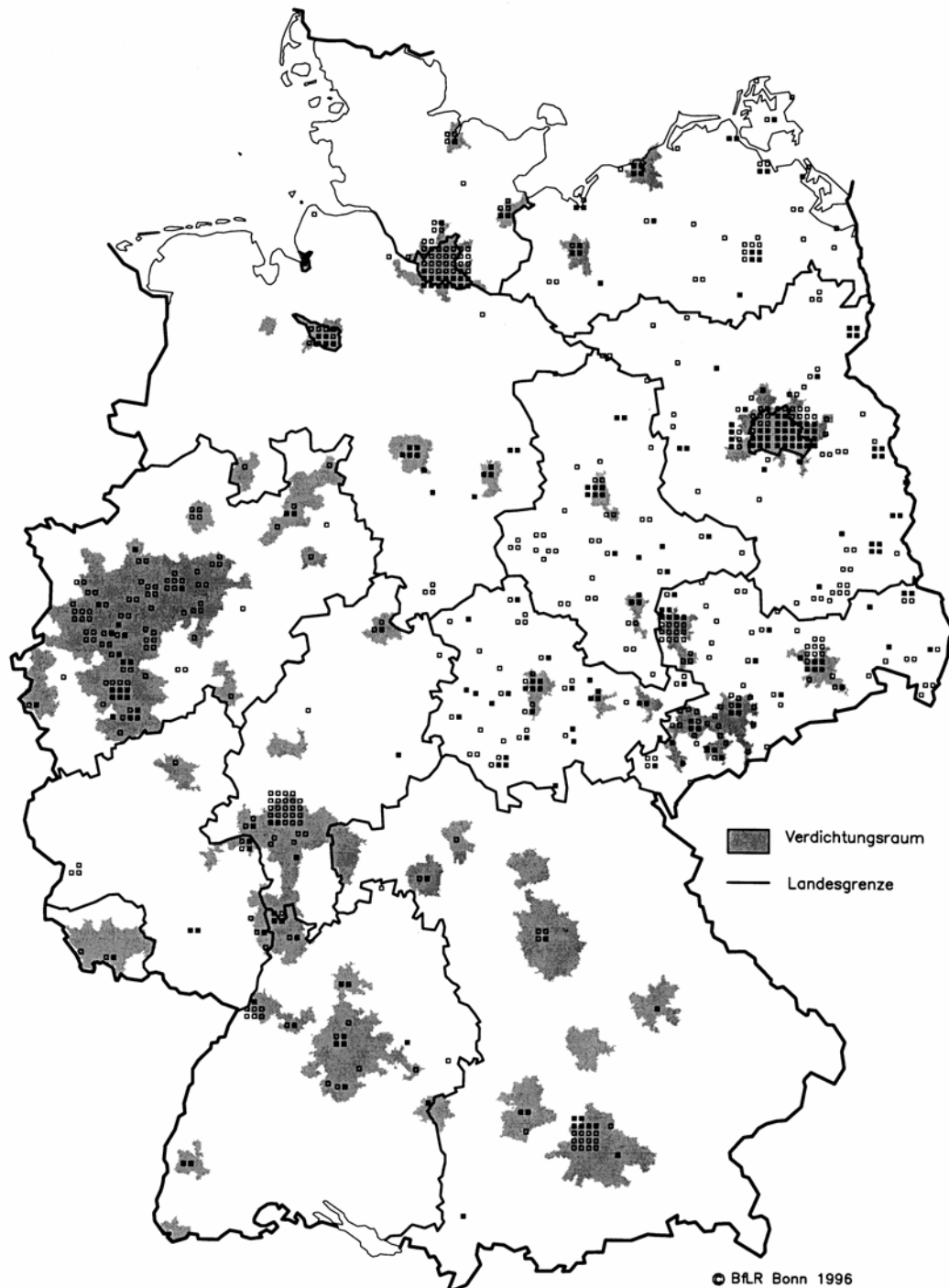
Source: Hoscislawski 1991: 158

Fig. 6 Built numbers of WBS 70-apartments from 1972 to 1990 (in thousand ap.)



Source: BMBau 1992: 1

Fig. 7 Large housing developments with 2500 and more apartments in Germany

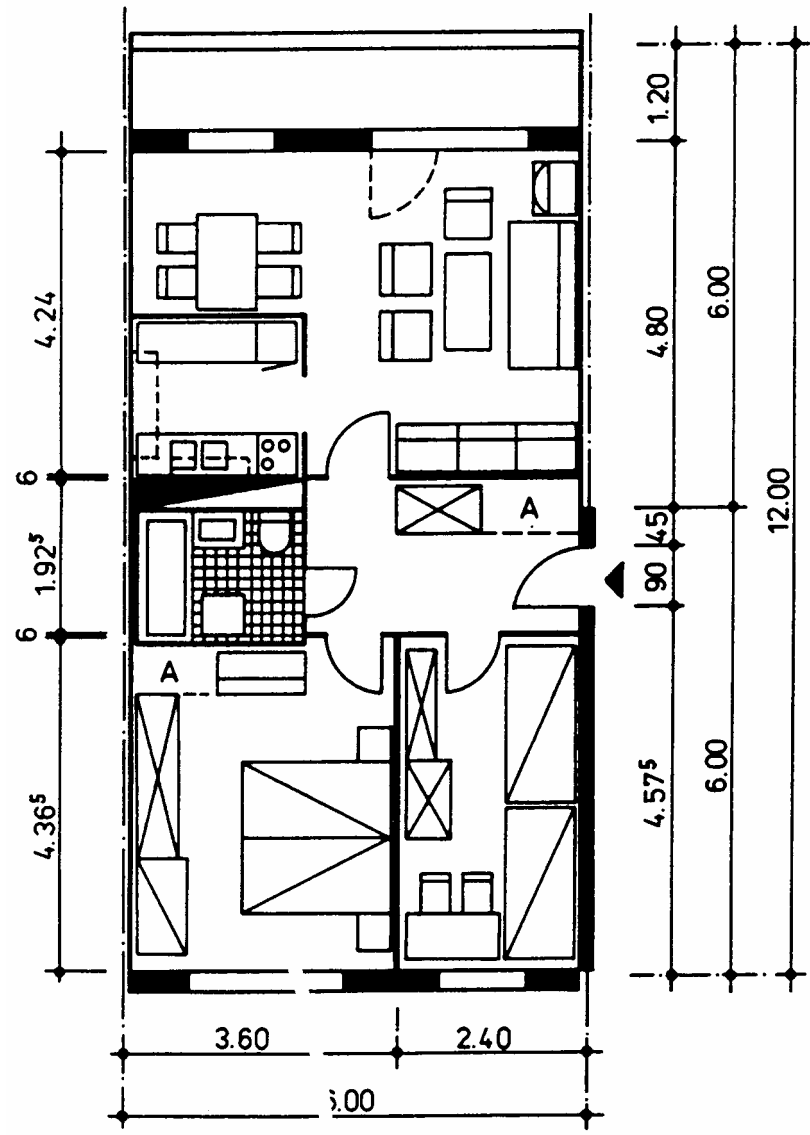


- Großwohnsiedlungen mit 2.500 oder mehr Wohnungen
- Großwohnsiedlungen mit 1.000 bis 2.500 Wohnungen

© BfLR Bonn 1996
Quelle: Dokumentation der
Bundesforschungsanstalt für
Landeskunde und Raumordnung
Stand: 31. Dezember 1995

Fig. 8

Typical ground plan of a WBS 70 - 3-room-apartment with kitchen without window



Source: BMBau 1993: 12

Fig. 9

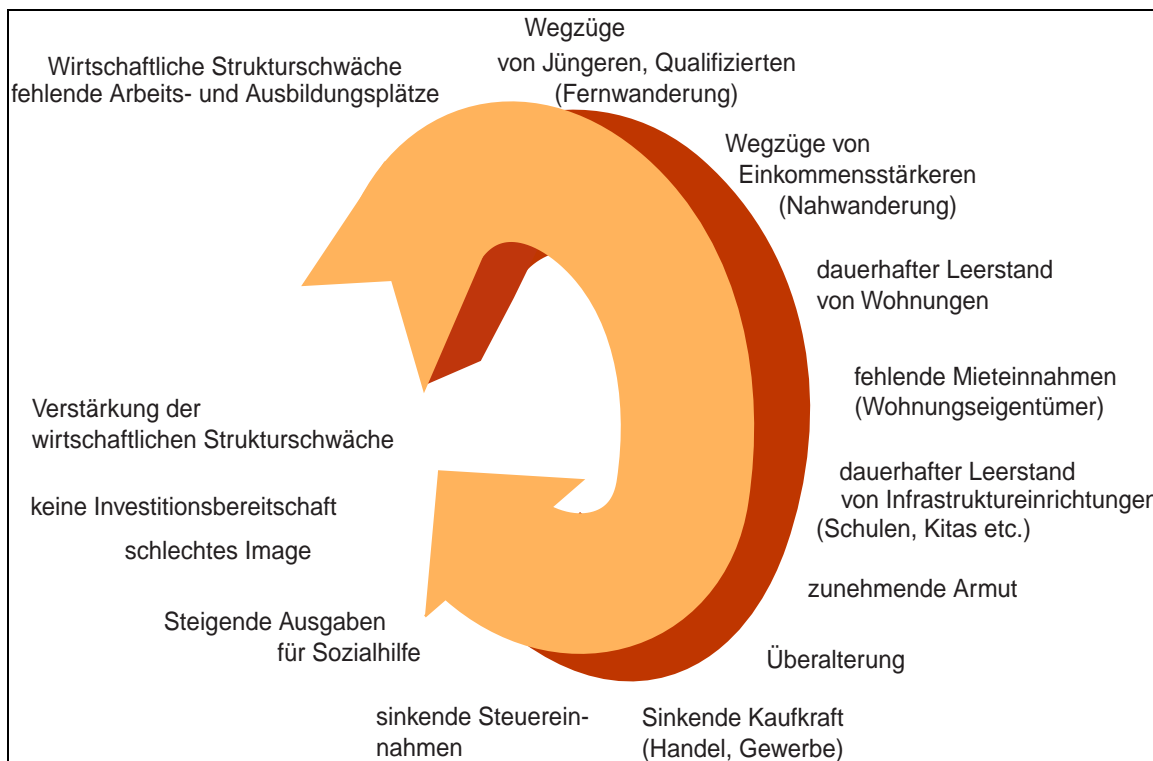
Experimental building in large panel construction of 1953 in Berlin-Johannisthal (above: entry; below: backside)



Photos: Ulrich Müller, 1994

Fig. 10

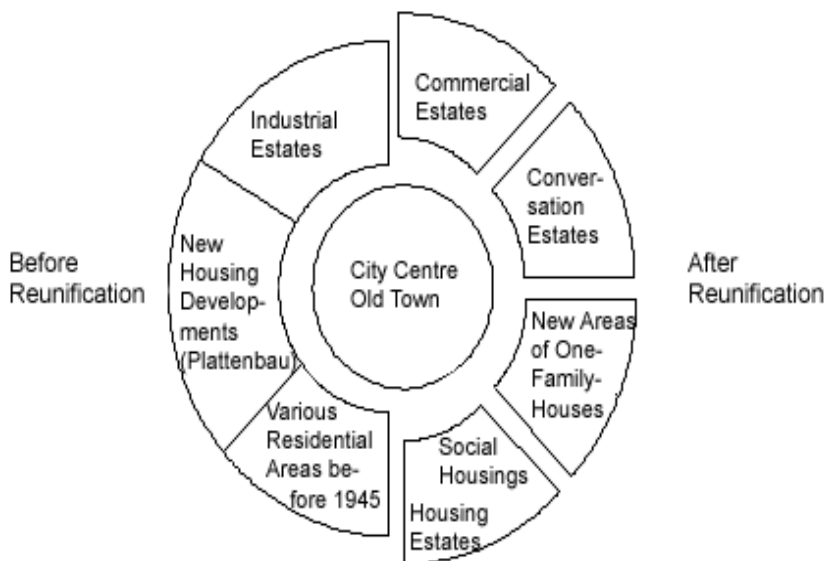
Threatened downward spiral in shrinking cities



Source: Beer, Ingeborg; Urbane Projekte Schmitz Potsdam 2001: Obere Talsandterasse in Schwedt/Oder, Integriertes Entwicklungs- und Handlungskonzept im Rahmen des Förderprogramms "Soziale Stadt". Gutachten im Auftrag der Stadt Schwedt/Oder 2001, S. 25.

Fig. 11

Structural model of a city in East Germany



Source: own outline

Fig. 12	Overview of the amount of low-demand housing stock in East Germany
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The amount of the number of empty flats is different. A best overview was given for 2000 in the report of the commission „Wohnungswirtschaftlicher Strukturwandel in den neuen Bundesländern“ (changing of housing structure by changes of economic structure in the new states):

- in East Germany about 13 % of the housing stock is of low demand or hard to rent
- only half of this stock is on the housing market, the other half is not available on the housing market

The main issues are like follow:

1. The problem of empty flats is first one of the inner cities pre war housing stock, e.g. 1/3 of all until 1918 built flats are empty.
2. The emptiness of flats built in the GDR-time was in 1998 with app. 8% still moderate. But until now this housing stock is the most increasing empty stock today.
3. The large housing developments are characterized by a regional concentration of empty flats (partly more than 50%).

Fig. 13	Development of empty flats of housing societies in the state Brandenburg
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Source: MSWV 2003