BERLIN | NEW YORK
THE LEGACY OF MODERN ERA HOUSING
Strategies for the next 30 years of Neu-Hohenschönhausen, Berlin and beyond

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Columbia University,
Graduate School of Architecture,
Planning and Preservation
This report was prepared by students in the urban planning program at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation as part of a studio project in the spring of 2015. Invited by HOWOGE, one of Berlin’s six municipal housing associations, the studio lived and worked in Neu-Hohenschönhausen for one week to develop and discuss ideas for the next 30 years of this modern era housing development of more than 28,000 units.

Prior to traveling, the studio worked on comparative analysis of housing developments in Berlin and New York from the 1920s to the 1980s as well as tools for community research. This report is as much about the local particularities of Neu-Hohenschönhausen as it is an attempt to understand the opportunities and challenges that the inheritance of housing developments from this era present to planners today.

Thank you to the many contributors to this studio who helped us with lectures, comments, discussions and engagement, especially during our week-long stay in Berlin. Especially we are grateful to HOWOGE’S hospitality and generosity in welcoming the studio in Berlin in March 2015.

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Background

Modern Era Housing and Tower-in-the-Park

By the end of the 20th century, one of the most recognizable and widespread building typologies was “tower in the park” style housing. This was a result of trends in urbanism and architecture, enabled by the realities of the physical and political landscape. These estates were conceived of as lasting solutions to a variety of urban conditions. As 21st century planners, we are left with these housing projects and are responsible for their future, especially in public housing.

Some of the basic tenets of the ideology behind this type of housing were affordability, livability, and density. Each of these was addressed by the architecture and urban design, with the assumption that social and political concerns would be ironed out by these ideal built forms. How did 20th century housing projects live up to this ideology? Should we be holding housing projects to the standard of what they were designed to be, or what we need them to be in the present and future?

Tower-in-the-park housing is often criticized as an architectural or planning failure. Many public housing projects are subject to high poverty and crime rates, and other issues. However, not all towers in the park have the same issues. Within this building typology, there is a range of purpose, ownership, and accountability that over time demonstrate different trends in the successfulness for these estates.

On the 30th anniversary of the site, our client, HOWOGE, has asked us to help conceptualize the future of this neighborhood. The housing authority HOWOGE is responsible for the sustainability of this estate as it grows to serve a citywide need for more housing. In order to meet a city mandate for more housing units, and attract and maintain residents for these units, HOWOGE seeks a vision for the future of Neu-Hohenschönhausen – for the next 30 years.

Envisioning the future of a 20th century modern era housing estate is a highly relevant task in the 21st century. In central and eastern Europe, nearly one-half of the population lives in this type of estate. With examples across Germany and around the world, these aging estates are home to millions of people. Though they vary in size, style, ownership, and tenure, they often face similar kinds of challenges. These include: maintaining affordability, accommodating more people and new household configurations, upgrading buildings for use and resource efficiency, maintaining and redesigning public space, and strengthening social infrastructure.

Most of the existing estates will not be replaced in the foreseeable future, because of budget and resource concerns. Therefore, they will require upgrades and flexibility as they transition to fulfill their use in meeting the demands of their cities. Neu-Hohenschönhausen is no exception to this.

In this studio, we ask a number of questions. Do large-scale housing projects work? What is the process for understanding the challenges facing these building types, and determining what should be done to address them? How can we help our client, a housing authority in Berlin, with these questions about the Neu-Hohenschönhausen estate?
Before World War II, Berlin was a bustling, populous city with a high housing density. In the 1930s, Berlin was home to over 4 million people.

After the war, a lot of that housing stock was destroyed. Over the last century, much of the housing stock has been built back up, in the West and East in different styles. Between the end of the war and 1989, West Berlin was rebuilt and restored as an enclave, to house those who remained or went there to hold the Western outpost “island” in East Germany. East Berlin was built up as part of Communist policy - to house workers in the most efficient way. Over the last
25 years, reunified Berlin has grown exponentially and its scarred landscape is now once again the bustling capital of one of the most powerful countries in Europe and the world. Berlin is now facing a housing shortage, because the city is growing rapidly and there are not enough housing units for everyone.

The City of Berlin introduced the “Living in Berlin” Mandate, which lays out the strategy for increasing the overall housing stock in Berlin by 137,000 additional units of housing by 2025. The six public housing authorities are creating conditions to increase the number of public housing units from 277,000 to 300,000 in the coming decades.

Most of the people in Berlin live in rental housing - 86%. In Lichtenberg, the district that our site Neu-

Berlin’s Housing Stock from 2001-2014 (Source: Stadtentwicklung.berlin.de)
Hohenschönhausen is located in, over 90% of the people live in rental housing.

Lichtenberg is also one of the districts with the smallest average apartment space per person in Berlin. In a city with such a high percentage of renters - and so many of them in large public housing estates - many people’s lives depend on the liveability of these estates. In this studio, we look at some of the possibilities for what this site could be; what is the best case scenario for so many people?

Some of the actors who can play a role in determining the future of Neu-Hohenschönhausen include the government, which includes the City level (Berlin Senate) and the District of Lichtenberg, and our municipal public housing authority client HOWOGE.

Other actors include local institutions such as the Grüner Campus Machow, local businesses, residents, cultural institutions and community organisations.

Our vision for Neu-Hohenschönhausen is to ensure...
An Overhead View of Neu-Hohenschönhausen
(Source: www.fotos-aus-der-luft.de)
Site

Neu-Hohenschönhausen was built between 1985 and 1989, it is one of the last large-scale housing complexes built by the former German Democratic Republic.

The style of housing that it represents, which has come to be called “Tower in the Park”, originated in Europe in the interwar years, 1919 – 1935, but its origins go back to the Garden City movement at the turn of the 20th century. Over the next 80 years, the Garden City movement evolved into what we now think of as modern era housing. In Germany, a generation of architects, including Bruno Taut and Walter Gropius, pioneered a building typology derived from industrial design processes, one in which form followed function. Applied to large-scale housing estates, this design vocabulary - emphasizing clear, simplified forms and lots of glass and light - could not have been more different from the dense, dark and unsanitary conditions of the “rental barrack” tenements which it replaced.

Throughout the 20th century, this housing typology would become prominent in both Western and Eastern Europe. By the 1970s, the German Democratic Republic, in search of economies of scale and quick production methods, turned to a system of construction developed by the German Academy of Architecture and the Technical University of Dresden based on pre-fabricated concrete slabs called WBS 70 (Wohnungsbauserie 70). These slabs allowed for standardized, simple construction that is highly pre-fabricated off site and could be easily assembled to build massive, large-scale buildings.

Neu-Hohenschönhausen was built with WBS 70 and relied on a large number of vertically stacked housing complexes to house its residents, providing light and air by setting these tower blocks in a green space oriented around both the automobile and mass transit. Neu-Hohenschönhausen was primarily a residential district that included basic retail amenities, a medical center and many schools and day care facilities throughout the development. Residents were expected to travel to work by public transportation.

Groundbreaking for Neu-Hohenschönhausen commenced in 1985, and it is now approaching its 30th anniversary in September. It is a large complex, both by area (5.16 Km2) and by population. Designed for 128,000 people, when it was opened it housed 118,000, just less than 10% of the entire population of East Berlin. After reunification, its population declined and today it is home to approximately 54,000 people. The apartments remain mostly occupied, but the number of people per apartment has shrunk.
Drawing from Le Corbusier’s Ville Contemporaine
After the reunification of East and West Germany, ownership and management responsibility for the housing stock was redistributed to a number of private housing associations and HOWOGE, a state-owned housing association explicitly created to take over housing stock in Hohenschönhausen previously owned by the East German government.

The project has great transportation connectivity to the rest of Berlin, via an S-Bahn train (S75), which runs roughly north and south, and three tram lines (M4, M5 and M17) which run along a main avenue (Falkenberger Chaussee), roughly east and west.

The rent also continues to be very affordable, averaging €6/m², compared with €8/m² for Berlin as a whole. When originally completed, many of the housing units were allocated to teachers, doctors and professors, many of whom still live in their apartments. In addition Neu-Hohenschönhausen is beginning to draw a new generation of young families in search of affordable rents, easy commutes and a pleasant place in which to raise their families.

There are several advantages to living in Neu-Hohenschönhausen: the prevalence of open space, great connectivity to the rest of Berlin and affordable rents. Neu-Hohenschönhausen benefits from an abundance of green, open space nearby, as it is located on the periphery of the city adjoining farmlands and forests.

Envisioning the future of a 20th century modern era housing estate is a highly relevant task in the 21st century. In central and eastern Europe, nearly one-half of the population lives in this type of estate. With examples across Germany and around the world, these aging estates are home to millions of people. Though they vary in size, style, ownership, and tenure, they often face similar kinds of challenges. These include: maintaining affordability, accommodating more people and new household configurations, upgrading buildings for use and resource efficiency, maintaining and redesigning public space, and strengthening social infrastructure.

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Nonetheless, there are several challenges with the site: internal disconnection, an aging population, and higher than average rates of unemployment and receipt of government benefits.

The transportation infrastructure that connects Neu-Hohenschönhausen to the rest of Berlin also internally divides it. The S-Bahn runs at ground level, with only two pedestrian connections between East and West Neu-Hohenschönhausen: an underpass at Wartenberg Station and an overpass at Neu-Hohenschönhausen station. Similarly, the main avenue (Falkenberger Chaussee) is very wide, accommodates heavy traffic from two tram lines and several bus lines as well as private vehicles, and safe pedestrian crossing places are few and far between.

The S-Bahn line and the avenue with the tram lines divide Neu-Hohenschönhausen into four quadrants.

In addition, the demographic characteristics of the population reveal other challenges. As of 2010, 14% of the residents of Neu-Hohenschönhausen were 65 years of age or older. This is expected to grow to just over one-fifth by 2020 and it will be a challenge for HOWOGE to adapt the housing units to meet the physical and social needs of this aging population while also planning for the needs of residents who will come after them.

Furthermore, 15-43% of residents receive some form of “transfer benefits” (Transferbezug), as compared to 12.3% for Berlin as a whole. “Transfer benefits” refers to any kind of government assistance that a household receives (child support, housing or Hartz IV, a combination of social security and unemployment benefits given to households who have work but are under an income threshold).

Similarly, 9-15% of Neu-Hohenschönhausen residents, depending on quadrant, are unemployed, as compared to 8% for Berlin as a whole. Moreover, the younger population that is moving into the housing estate is not as well-educated as the population that is aging out of it. These are challenges to HOWOGE maintaining the social stability of the housing estate.

Urban development today faces the challenge of maintaining affordable housing. Flat construction is to be accelerated, while at the same time ensuring that the flats target broad sections of the population and correspond to the diversity of the metropolitan society.

Given the vacancy rate of less than 1%, Neu-Hohenschönhausen enjoys great demand among segments of the population looking for affordable housing.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
Transfer Benefits throughout Berlin (Source: Stadtentwicklung.berlin.de)

Unemployment throughout Berlin (Source: Stadtentwicklung.berlin.de)
Above and Below: Satellite views of Neu-Hohenschönhausen depicting Assets and Challenges
Client

Our client is HOWOGE, one of six municipal housing authorities in Berlin which manages the supply of affordable rental housing stock. HOWOGE operates rental apartments, primarily in the district of Berlin-Lichtenberg.

The parent company has three subsidiaries: HOWOGE Service GmbH (which provides residential support services for HOWOGE and other real estate companies, including a concierge, caretaker and neighborhood helper services, and security), HOWOGE heat GmbH (which supplies heat and hot water, monitors energy usage and is responsible for energy improvements by retrofitting and other means) and GRATO Immobilien Service GmbH (a real estate agency).

With its own housing stock of 57,000 apartments, HOWOGE is one of the ten largest landlords in Germany. It intends to grow its housing supply by another 6,000 units by 2018, by constructing 3,000 new apartments and purchasing another 3,000 and renovating them. HOWOGE also owns another 10,000 non-residential units. Seventy-six percent (76%) of its inventory consists of units in large housing estates like Neu-Hohenschönhausen.

HOWOGE prides itself on its commitment to sustainable population development (both in the sense of maintaining affordability and reducing its carbon footprint), innovative housing concepts and social commitment to its residents. Their motto is “Mehr als gewohnt” is a play on words meaning both “More than usual”, but also “More than Housing”.

Unlike New York’s public housing authority NYCHA, HOWOGE has a mandate to be financially self-sustaining, while at the same time offering affordable rents. It is the largest owner in Neu-Hohenschönhausen with approximately 22,000 units. As such it has tremendous influence and responsibility for the sustainability of the neighborhood beyond the provision of housing and is supportive of many community initiatives.

Research

An initial comparison of several large-scale housing developments in New York and Berlin built between the 1920s and 1980s revealed a series of similarities and common challenges (See Appendix A).

All were built to provide affordable housing and the majority of them still do. While all were built using some form of subsidy or public funds, ownership varies from public ownership to private individual ownership to cooperative ownership.

All are now challenged by an aging building stock that houses an aging population. Many of the buildings do not conform to current expectations of energy-efficiency, sustainable construction, and contemporary household compositions. Many struggle to adequately use and maintain the semi-public open spaces surrounding the buildings. Many also all seem to lack retail amenities and social infrastructure that supports an urban culture of encounter and exchange in public space. As you will see in the following research Neu-Hohenschönhausen, albeit the youngest of these case studies is no exception.
Methodology

Our studio group, from Columbia GSAPP, set out to examine challenges facing the site based on community input from Neu-Hohenschönhausen stakeholders. To do so, we used methods to engage with residents of Neu-Hohenschönhausen and to learn its challenges firsthand. In March we traveled to Neu-Hohenschönhausen in Berlin, Germany. We lived in apartments at the site and worked from an unused storefront along a main thoroughfare in “Ostseeviertel,” or the northwestern quadrant of the neighborhood. As urban planners, it was critical we develop an understanding of the site based on the experiences and expertise of residents and other stakeholders. Through our investigation we wanted to learn challenges and planning strategies from local experts. We wanted to facilitate a process of urban planning that included the residents. It was our objective, then, to develop a proposal based on both data we accessed remotely and with the input from Neu-Hohenschönhausen community members.

We used our week-long site visit to test some of the challenges we anticipated based on the information we had researched. We lived and worked in the neighborhood for a week developing daily routines and getting a personal impression of what it feels like to live in Neu-Hohenschönhausen. We learned that the estate was easily accessible by both the S-Bahn and the tram. On the other hand, the S-Bahn and the tram divided the estate into four disconnected quadrants. In addition, the Linden Center shopping mall served the majority of our retail needs. We used the Linden Center on a daily basis to buy a variety of items such as food, toiletries, and work supplies. In the evening, once the Linden Center closed, we relied on restaurants in the neighborhood. Through our search for stores outside of the Linden Center, we learned the neighborhood boasted a number of additional businesses, such as dentists offices, indoor sporting facilities, community organizations, and schools. We also learned the neighborhood was filled with open spaces, some of which, provided outdoor sporting facilities such as a skateboard park and others of which were not programmed such as in the case of the courtyards.

We also set up a work space provided by our client in a vacant storefront. We used the space for frequent programming including discussions with our client, residents and other experts. We engaged residents and other community members about Neu-Hohenschönhausen. Sometimes we did so informally, through conversations in front of the storefront. We created programming specifically designed for residents of the housing estate, held during more formal community workshops. Every day in our pop-up space we held a lecture or discussion related to Neu-Hohenschönhausen and modern era housing. Residents and the general public were invited to listen to designers, architects, urban planners, and professors discuss housing in New York and Berlin and ways to bring tower in the park style housing and its ideology into the 21st century. The week culminated in an open house in which we invited neighborhood residents, students, our guest lecturers, our client, and the public to participate in a planning workshop. During the main workshop, we used a series of activities to gather experiences, challenges, and strategies from local experts in order to help us design strategies for Neu-Hohenschönhausen over the next 30 years.

One of the activities we designed was the “flag model.” It was used to help us learn what residents liked, disliked, and desired in their neighborhood. Using styrofoam and construction paper, we built a model of the northwest quadrant of Neu-Hohenschönhausen. The construction paper on the tip of each flag corresponded to the categories “like,” “dislike,” and “want to improve.” Participants were then asked to write on the flag the object or condition they liked or wanted and place the flag in that location on the model. Through this activity, we learned some of the assets and challenges of the site according to residents. We also learned how they think of their existing outdoor space and how they use and navigate that space. After talking with participants and evaluating the flags, we found out that many residents liked having a lot of open green space, however, many of those residents wanted (at least some of) those spaces to have more programming: more benches, exercise equipment, playgrounds, fields dedicated specifically to sports, and places designed to hang out.
Representatives from Howoge, Community Leaders, and Residents of Neu-Hohenschönhausen attend a Community Planning Workshop during March 2015.

Left: Flags were used to identify areas Residents Liked, Disliked, and Desired in Neu-Hohenschönhausen. Below: Columbia Students engage Guests at the Community Workshop Open House.
The purpose of another activity, the “collage flip,” was to prompt participants to illustrate challenges and strategies facing Neu-Hohenschönhausen. We asked participants to split a piece of paper in half. On the left side of the paper they made a collage to illustrate a challenge facing Neu-Hohenschönhausen. On the right side of the paper, they made a collage to illustrate a response to the challenge. Then, on the bottom of the paper, the residents described both the challenge and the response to the challenge in one or two words to contextualize the illustrated response.

We learned that participants wanted more places to meet. Despite the myriad social and cultural amenities currently existing in Neu-Hohenschönhausen, participants expressed a desire for places to meet and socialize. Based on the collage responses, it was evident that the existing social and cultural offerings in Neu-Hohenschönhausen did not fully provide the experience desired by residents. The residents needed to be better connected to the existing amenities and the existing amenities needed to be better connected to each other. This feedback from residents on the lack of social connectivity of the site would help shape our proposed interventions to make these amenities more visible and exciting.

Above and Below: Residents participate in the Collage Activity during the Community Workshop March 2015
Framework

To envision the future of Neu-Hohenschönhausen we organized our strategies around three different scales of intervention that correspond to different actors that might play a role in implementing it. Thinking about the next 30 years for Neu-Hohenschönhausen allows for some ambitious and large long-term goals. But the next 30 years begin now. Therefore, in each of the three scales, we describe a process for implementation that proposes short-term pilot projects and a longer term vision for a full transformation of the neighborhood whereby the various stakeholders can learn from the pilot for the longer term process. We begin with the small-scale changes: The individual blocks and buildings. We propose to retrofit the existing buildings and adjacent open spaces through a collaborative process between HOWOGE and the residents addressing the environmental character and identity of Neu-Hohenschönhausen and improving the energy efficiency and layout of the existing building stock.

Then, we zoom out to the scale of the Ostseeviertel and propose increased visibility of the existing social and retail infrastructure. Here, the district of Lichtenberg should collaborate with the many existing community organizations and cultural facilities such as the Nachbarschaftshaus (neighborhood house) and the Anna Seger library. At this scale, we also identified sites for new infill development to diversify the existing housing stock and add opportunities for mixed-use buildings. The district of Lichtenberg and our client HOWOGE are the main actors to implement this proposal over time. Finally, we propose to use nature as an asset to bridge the divide between the four quadrants that make up Neu-Hohenschönhausen and propose a new centrally located park along the S-Bahn. Here we see the existing landscape, primarily under public ownership and the eco-school “Grüner Campus Malchow” as an asset to give character and identity to this unifying linear park.
2.1: SMALL-SCALE STRATEGIES

Improving Existing Residences and Courtyards

The first step to a sustainable community is maintaining and improving the existing spaces. For this, we suggest a plan that involves the retrofitting of the buildings and the reactivation and redesign of the interior courtyards.

In this section, the residents and our client HOWOGE will be the main actors, starting from retrofitting the buildings to be more sustainable and ecologically friendly, and then activate the underutilised courtyards. We propose that HOWOGE initiate a collaborative process together with the residents of one block as a pilot executed by our client. Through a series of workshops, HOWOGE can communicate its own needs and interests in upgrading while soliciting input from residents about how they would like to see their own block in the future. Then if this is successful, this strategy can be expanded to the whole community.

Retrofitting the Buildings

The city of Berlin is committed to improving energy efficiency and greening its energy mix. In 2010, Berlin had already met its initial target of a 25% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels. It now plans to reduce Future renovations to increase energy efficiency provide an opportunity to engage in a more comprehensive process of retrofitting existing buildings to address changing needs of inhabitants. This may include the alteration of floor plans to provide a greater variety of units, the renovation of ground floor lobbies to allow for barrier-free access to the building and to the semi-private courtyards as well as greater visibility and access to the many small businesses and doctor’s office that occupy ground floor units. As described above, the final design of this retrofitting process should be determined in a collaborative process between the residents of the block and the owner (in the case of our pilot, HOWOGE).

These aging estates are home to millions of people. Though they vary in size, style, ownership, and tenure, they often face similar kinds of challenges. These include: maintaining affordability, accommodating more people and new household configurations, upgrading buildings for use and resource efficiency, maintaining and redesigning public space, and strengthening social infrastructure.

Most of the existing estates will not be replaced in the foreseeable future, because of budget and resource concerns. Therefore, they will require upgrades and flexibility as they transition to fulfill their use in meeting the demands of their cities. Neu-Hohenschönhausen is no exception to this.
The above Courtyard could be used for a Pilot Retrofitting Program.

Future Renovations include modifying the Facades of the buildings. The below diagram shows how those Renovations could evolve by 2030. Future renovations to increase energy efficiency provide an opportunity to engage in a more comprehensive process of retrofitting.
The housing blocks on our site are made of the prefabricated WBS-70 units, and there are three different building typologies on the site; the point high-rise, the high-rise and the mid-rise. There is a huge scope for retrofitting and renovating them. The point high rises for example can be retrofitted to add more communal spaces on the ground floor for residents of the building, and the roof can be activated with gardens to promote more interaction among the residents.

Although all of the apartments owned by HOWOGE were renovated in the mid-90s (and some are currently slowly undergoing small scale renovations mainly to the facade) there is a potential for retrofitting of the apartments. Not only will it save energy but some relatively non-invasive redesigns will be helpful in reasserting Neu-Hohenschönhausen’s image for the next 30 years and provide more attractive and variable apartments.

Challenge:

Pictured are apartments currently for lease on our client’s website. The majority of apartments in Neu-Hohenschönhausen are 2-bedroom apartments, giving little flexibility to living arrangements and household size. Neither does this accommodate the growing number of single-person households in Berlin, nor does it accommodate larger families, let alone other forms of living arrangements such as inter-generational living or cluster apartments. In addition, each tenant can be consulted on the interior of their apartment to the extent feasible to determine if people would like different flooring, wallpaper, floor plan layout, etc. The retrofit of communal spaces such as lobbies, roof access, communal rooms or storage would require agreement by the tenants.
Case Study: Bois-Le-Prêtre - Paris (5 year Project):

The tower is part of a group of high-rise apartment buildings erected in the 1960s along the northern border of the Paris ring road. Renovations were done in the ‘80s strictly to make the buildings more energy efficient but another renovation was clearly necessary (as is true in Neu-Hohenschönhausen). The objective of the renovations was to disencumber and free up each apartment, giving more light and air, as well as more generous living space without modifying the existing structural organization.

The project enlarged the apartments through the creation of new flooring on the entire periphery of the tower. This made it possible to enlarge the living rooms, create winter gardens and continuous balconies around the building, and improve comfort natural light and the views in the units. Rooms could also be reconfigured with this new plan. In these retrofits, there was a reconfiguration of the ground floor. Entrances are now open and go from the front door to the garden. Also added were two spaces for the use of the tower’s inhabitants that were installed on either side of the lobby.

To ensure that residents could stay in their units, renovations were rapidly built. The construction was based on the principle of repetitive, prefabricated and light modules (as the original Neu-Hohenschönhausen buildings were). The project was accompanied by a rather long dialogue with inhabitants in the form of group discussion workshops on the general transformations of the building and individually with each family on the specific transformation of their apartments. It was obvious to the architects that most of the families did not want to move out. The tower’s inhabitants were therefore allowed to keep their units or exchange them within the building for larger or smaller ones. They remained in their homes during the construction work.

Case Study: Weingarten - Freiburg, Germany:

Another example comes from Freiburg, Germany. This is the first retrofitted passive solar housing project in the world. Passive solar heating is building design that uses natural principles of heating and cooling to regulate temperatures. Physical design of structures and materials are used whereas active solar heating involves mechanical or electrical equipment to regulate temperatures.
Strategy:

Even a relatively large-scale retrofitting (like the Bois-Le-Pretre example) should only take about 5 years from start to finish: from the initial studies and design mock-ups to getting community feedback to installing a model to implementing all the physical changes to the buildings. The retrofittings can and should be done in phases. This way HOWOGE has an opportunity to first design one prototype and test how residents respond to the space. HOWOGE should start by identifying one specific building as a pilot. The first thing that could be changed is the entrance. This would take a relatively short time and would let residents know that other changes are in store. It could also potentially add new community space where the residents can collectively decide what new additions and renovations they would like in their building. Of course, if residents do not want anything done to their entrances, HOWOGE should not change anything. All design improvements should be either initiated or approved by the community.

HOWOGE should use physical designs (as well as renderings) for the renovations as a starting place to see how residents would like their spaces to change. Engaging residents in the design process will not only allow them to identify strongly with the end result, they will also engage with each other, building community along the way. A welcome side effect of this “building by building” process is the opportunity for different outcomes that break up the monotony of similar buildings currently present in Neu-Hohenschönhausen.

The rest of the community would then see what they like from this example and work with this.

The future 30 years of Neu-Hohenschönhausen (and Berlin in general) will be different from the past 30. As times change, so do living requirements. Mixing old, young, single, and married people in the same space encourages a mixture of ideas, cultures, and world views. Units in Neu-Hohenschönhausen can and should be reconfigured to accommodate for younger families, students, and new retirees. These units can be reconfigured on a case by case basis. These new groups will be attracted to Neu-Hohenschönhausen because of its affordable rent, adaptability of spaces, and easy connection to the city.
“We don’t like to hang out inside these blocks because everybody can see you from their windows. It’s also pretty boring.” - A local high school student
Retrofitting the Courtyards

The site’s courtyards are semi-private spaces enclosed by many of the housing blocks. The primary users of these courtyards are the residents of the nearby blocks. They are typically owned and maintained by the housing association that owns the surrounding buildings, however in a few cases, these spaces are owned by the district of Lichtenberg. Some of the courtyards contain playgrounds, one contains a community garden, others are planted with easy-to-maintain green, some are fenced, some unfenced. A large amount of the space is left underutilized: large expanses of unattended grass, bushes and trees. Some are even littered with garbage, and are left otherwise empty.

As in the case of retrofitting the buildings, we recommend that HOWOGE initiate a collaborative process with residents to plan a more active and attractive programming and design for these spaces.

In proposing their own desired uses for their courtyards, it is hoped that residents of each housing block would be able to achieve the best use for their space, gain a sense of pride and community. Improvements could be funded through a combination of contributions from HOWOGE and the funds distribute through the “Bürgerjury”, which disburses small funds for activities in the neighborhood.

Part of our plan would be that the residents design their own courtyard and participate in the maintenance of it. This might serve as a tool to allow for more highly programmed and maintained areas, and give a sense of ownership and accountability to the residents. With responsibility on the side of tenants, it may also spur more interaction and collaboration. By voting for their own block’s usage, this will bring individuals together to negotiate. As this process is expanded from a pilot to other blocks, it can also contribute to creating different identities for these spaces from one block to another.

Maintenance Strategy

Funding for maintenance has been limited in the past, especially for spaces owned by the district of Lichtenberg, which are often full of litter. To address this, especially given proposed improvements that would increase the need for maintenance, we developed the idea of OSID (open space improvement district), an idea coined from the American planning concept of BID (business improvement district).

In order to make it work, we need to set up regulations. If a certain percentage (in BID case 60%-70%) of residents agree to apply for their unit block as OSID. Then it becomes mandate that residents within the block pay a small extra maintenance fee each month, and the money would be used to hire community members for the management and maintenance of the courtyards. As the majority of our residents belong to the middle and low income group, we would further offer the chance to do community work as alternative for paying, residents can contribute either a small sum or in kind labor to care for the open space in addition to the owner’s basic existing maintenance. And on the other hand, if it turns out that over certain percentage of the residents don’t want to make changes to the existing courtyards or raise living cost in Neu-Hohenschönhausen, we want to make sure that they could easily opt out with their veto rights, and the high-percentage requirement is set to make sure that people will not be pushed out by our open space improving, while being able to make the change, ensuring that we are maintaining affordability.

Case Study: Sunnyside Gardens

The courtyards of Sunnyside Gardens are maintained by their residents and have proven to be a successful model. Residents of Sunnyside Gardens decide the ownership and the use of their courtyards. These are either divided and fenced off (privately owned and maintained) or a courtyard owned and managed by a large group of residents. The coop-style gardens have chairs, big trees, and a manicured lawn for residents to enjoy a sunny afternoon. Both models work well.
Above and Below: Proposed Site for the Courtyard Pilot Program in Neu-Hohenschönhausen
Above and Below: Buildings and Public Spaces owned by HOWOGE.
Diversifying the Housing Stock and Social Infrastructure

At the scale of the Ostseeviertel, we identified the following opportunities:

- Opportunities for new residential construction, to meet the need for housing in Berlin and diversify the housing stock in Neu-Hohenschönhausen
- Opportunities for mixed-use development
- Opportunities to increase the visibility of existing social infrastructure and activate spaces

Infill

As discussed earlier, Berlin’s department of urban development has identified a need for 137,000 additional housing units by 2025. It expects its six state-owned housing associations to increase their own housing stock from 277,000 to 300,000 during this time period. Our client HOWOGE, one of the six state-owned housing associations would like to explore if and how some of these units can be built in Neu-Hohenschönhausen.

By 2030, after the Berlin population forecast, the demographics of the entire city will shift significantly. More precisely, the proportion of seniors (65 and older) will increase in the entire age structure and Neu-Hohenschönhausen will be no exception to this. This different demographical development gives an indication of a demand for more flexible and spatially attractive living spaces in the next 30 years. For our proposal, we mainly looked into the Northwest Quadrant of the site, the Ostseeviertel. Other than the mandate of meeting the housing needs by the Senate of Berlin, our diagnosis from living on-site for a week also resulted in arguments and questions about the housing and densification needs for the coming years in Neu-Hohenschönhausen, and we then looked into how these needs can be best addressed keeping in mind the bigger picture of a sustainable neighborhood.

The state has identified sites in the urban development plan to build on state-owned flats, but also on non-state owned flats. According to this plan our site Neu-Hohenschönhausen has been identified for urban redevelopment with funding applications.

We propose to a) build new units on sites primarily owned by HOWOGE and b) to introduce mixed use infill illustrated in the drawings opposite this page.
By diversifying the use of existing and new housing structures, we hope to give Neu-Hohenschönhausen a new character that would attract different kinds of households.

The sites for new infill development were primarily chosen to be on the land owned by HOWOGE as seen in the maps to complement the existing block structure. These include parking spaces, open spaces etc.

We propose incorporating new and flexible housing typologies for the next thirty years as demographics shift. Diverse lifestyles and requirements of a wide variety of residential quarters is addressed by adding new units to the site, reflected by the needs of the new incoming population. In terms of mixed use infill, we have identified two potential locations where mixed use could be initiated.

The first site marked in pink on the map opposite this page is located close to the big shopping mall, the Linden Center. This way this central node can be activated with more cafes, restaurants etc. and furthermore recreational uses can be added to it. Since there’s also a forecast in Berlin for more co-op apartments by 2020, our strategy for mixed use housing falls in line with a bigger picture of intergenerational living trend in Berlin. The underlying fact that in Berlin, average living space per inhabitant was 38m² in residential buildings and since 1995 it has increased by almost 10% which is much higher than in cities such as Munich, Hamburg, Stuttgart and Frankfurt despite the certainty that the proportion of relatively large single family houses in Berlin is comparatively low also strengthens our strategy of incorporating new flexible housing types in Neu-Hohenschönhausen. In all these large cities, the living space per capita since 2003 has only very slightly changed.

Our second site located on the northwestern part on the quadrant for mixed use infill is the shopping complex area around called Kaiser’s. We propose to build more housing over this site and reinforce the commercial zone with events, and activities that can foster interactions within the community.
Buildings and open spaces owned by HOWOGE proposed for new infill development
**Source data derived from onsite survey and Google maps**
social infrastructure\current

**Source data derived from onsite survey and Google maps**
Social and Cultural Connectivity

Also at the scale of the Ostseeviertel, we see an opportunity to enhance social experiences by strengthening existing neighborhood organizations, making creative use of the open spaces and strategically upgrading the built environment to increase the visibility of existing social and retail infrastructure. Here, the district of Lichtenberg should collaborate with the many existing community organizations and cultural facilities such as the Nachbarschaftshaus (neighborhood house) and the Anna Segher library as well as local businesses to develop short term interventions while preparing for larger capital investments.

To achieve this we envision two types of strategies: invisible and tangible ones.

The existing landscape of cultural and retail facilities is dispersed and in many cases not visible to members of the public. There are two main commercial areas in the Ostseeviertel: The Linden Center, a large indoor shopping mall serves as the “go-to” center for retail, entertainment, and restaurants. It has more than one hundred retail spaces on three floors and free parking above. The Anna Segher Bibliotek – directed by the District of Lichtenberg- is also located at the Linden Center, it’s entrance disguised and not very inviting. It is a major magnet for everyone in Neu-Hohenschönhausen serving every need from groceries, clothing, banking, pharmacies to restaurants and cafes. This was confirmed in several conversations with residents and through our own observations living in Neu-Hohenschönhausen. Located near several tram stops, it is an indoor facility with vast pedestrian areas surrounding it that are empty. Just to the north, retail spaces line the ground floor of a residential building, while there is a significant flow of pedestrian traffic, most spaces were vacant.

To the north of the Linden Center, approximately nine hundred meters away, a smaller node provides primarily grocery stores, a media shop, pharmacy, and café. This area is close to the local primary school and is serviced by the local tram. In addition individual businesses are distributed throughout the neighborhood, mainly bars, restaurants or bakeries of low quality.

The Nachbarschaftshaus (neighborhood house), a converted school building near the Wartenberg S-Bahn station provides space for with diverse activities, including dance classes, art classes, a café and multiple music schools. Other cultural amenities are scattered throughout Neu-Hohenschönhausen, also frequently in repurposed schools or residential buildings. Similar to the Linden Center, albeit at a much smaller scale, the variety of activities inside the building do not spill out. Instead the Wartenberg Platz (between the neighborhood house and the Berlin-Wartenberg S-bahn station) is usually empty and several adjacent retail spaces buildings are abandoned.

These observations were confirmed during various conversations with residents at our workshop and when walking the neighborhood. Few residents seemed aware of the wealth of cultural activities already existing in the area. We also frequently heard that there are no places to meet, to hang out, to relax or even to meet as a community.
This collage shows walkways, pedestrian paths, and open spaces surrounding the Linden Center.
“I would love to have a nice cafe in my neighborhood, so that I don’t have to go elsewhere to meet my friends for a coffee”
- Resident during a community open house
Increasing visibility of existing activities and venues

There is already an important amount of activities happening in the site. Therefore, to share the knowledge of what happens in the neighborhood and to strengthen the cultural networks implementing new and modern forms of technology and interventions in the open spaces is needed to enhance the identity of the community.

The District of Lichtenberg provides a touristic map where some sites of Neu-Hohenschönhausen are included. However, we believe this map needs an upgrade in sync with the new activities we envision in the next chapters.

The community groups also have some marketing strategies but they do not seem effective in getting the residents to convene for activities. During our presentation in Berlin, the president of a cultural group mentioned that some efforts to communicate the activities within the community were done but they also realized that the information was not reaching enough of the community.

Because our population is basically elderly and young adults with kids, and taking into consideration the important amount of young people we believe some of the following initiatives are proper to use:

- Unify channels of communication and create new ones.
- Build installations on the pedestrian flows where information can be displayed and changed conveniently. Installing physical signage, whether it be wayfinding or a sign announcing entries to the community website in the Linden Center.
- Strengthening the neighborhood communication networks. A neighborhood network can be organized by using the physical structure of the site. Each tower can have a community group in charge of the communications of those residents. All buildings surrounding a courtyard can communicate between each other and then network to the other tower community groups within the housing estate. Creating a useful network, could also be used for administration and maintenance of the open spaces.
- Integrating diverse demographics into the neighborhood communication networks. This is also possible if all demographics are addressed with all of the activities of the site.
Tangible Strategies

We see an opportunity to creatively use existing open spaces, vacant facilities or existing buildings to promote places to meet, and increase the visibility of cultural and social activities. This can be done in three phases:

Phase 1: Temporary Interventions

Short term actions are temporary interventions - either economic or cultural activities - in the open spaces surrounding existing concentrations of indoor activities - the Linden Center and the neighborhood house. They can be piloted this summer by the neighborhood groups in collaboration with the district of Lichtenberg. The following are some examples for potential interventions.
Outdoor Reading Room

Prerower Platz, currently a bare square-shaped area behind the Linden Center, could be used by the Anna Segher library to organize an outdoor reading room, bringing the library outside, taking advantage of nice weather and use the activity as a promotion of this important educational facility. In addition, the Youth Art School of Lichtenberg could organize artistic interventions or exhibits in the square. Existing examples of such outdoor reading rooms include Bryant Park in New York and the uni project, a mobile reading room that travels to different urban places to activate these spaces and encourage reading.

Retail corridors

The public space between the Linden Center and the housing blocks to the north lacks pedestrian flow and commercial activities. However, the public space is wide, open and in good condition. Either a local organization or some businesses located in the Linden Center could use beach chairs to occupy the area, similar to New York’s plaza program, where permanent improvements to pedestrian plazas are preceded with temporary installations. This would allow local business owners, and the district to implement change quickly, test receptivity while developing more longer-term improvements. A flea market can be located here to serve as bridge between the huge scale of the shopping mall and the scale of the housing blocks. This strategy could also be used for the pedestrian path along Zingster Strasse. (see map).
Wartenberg Platz

This is a public space that could be transformed into an important node for the community. Currently however, the square is surrounded by mostly vacant buildings and is not very inviting. The neighborhood house and the many groups housed within can play a role in strategically activating the square through temporary interventions such as music performances or a pop-up café. Different groups can test the waters to enliven the space, while lobbying for more investment into the physical space with the District of Lichtenberg. This could also be a space for an outdoor fitness classes anticipating the proposed park (see the following chapter).

Phase 2: Making use of Vacant Spaces

A medium-term action is to make use of the vacant infrastructure to accommodate new activities, local businesses or cultural groups. For example the ones located around the Linden Center or next to our studio’s boulevard. Some of the business that are scattered throughout the site could be concentrated in this place, bringing economic opportunities to local entrepreneurs. The main objective is to reorganize and condense this activities so they can get advantage of the existent pedestrian flow and the residents each one can attract. They community continuously demanded more spaces to meet, specifically cafes, restaurants and bars. This could be a perfect opportunity, space and environment to locate a gastro-corridor.
Phase 3: Design Competition

As a long-term strategy, we propose a design competition for the permanent upgrade of the described public spaces, to connect these spaces not only to the adjacent buildings but to Neu-Hohenschönhausen as a whole. The competition should allow for input from members of the community at the beginning of the process and throughout. A representative of the community could be a member of the jury but also participate in the conceptualization of the competition. In addition, teams could be required to partner with local organizations or resident groups.
Environmental Character and Identity

Neu-Hohenschönhausen is surrounded by nature. The Malchower See just to the north is a major destination for residents. To the north and east the edge of the neighborhood is the edge of the city, and throughout the residential blocks, the open spaces are green, at times even “wild” with several natural rainwater retention ponds between buildings. Nature is a great asset that can be utilized to define Neu-Hohenschönhausen’s character and build on existing strengths. At the scale of the entire neighborhood, we propose a natural landscape that will bridge the four separate quarters together and will give Neu-Hohenschönhausen a strong identity as an urban neighborhood in the landscape.

During several sessions with residents, we learned that the rail tracks and the Falkenberger Chaussee act as barriers between the four quarters. We also learned that youth want a centrally located park to meet and play sports, an activity they regularly go to center of Berlin for.

Existing green spaces around the Malchower See are a major attraction. The lake is surrounded by nature trails that many of the residents frequent especially during the warmer months when spring and summer festivals, picnics, and other outdoor events take place.

We propose to utilize nature and residents’ interest in nature as a unifying character for the neighborhood by proposing a large centrally located park that connects existing green spaces and bridges over the rail and under Falkenberger Chaussee to link the four quarters of Neu-Hohenschönhausen. Developing a large park will take time, local engagement, funding and commitment by the senate and the district of Lichtenberg. We believe that local organizations can play a role as pioneers to initiate this process.

Residents discuss a large park during an open house.
“Central” Park

As discussed earlier, the major roads and railways in Neu-Hohenschönhausen are very wide and lack a comfortable human scale. The S-Bahn divides the site. While there are plenty of open spaces, they are generally of low quality and lack a cohesive design language. We propose to combine the fragmentary natural landscape into a big park (pictured below) of about 206 hectares.

The park is intended to reflect a clear response to the natural setting and ecologies of the site, to harmoniously integrate human activities with ecological and cultural resources in a sustainable way, to promote appropriate amenities to activate the landscape and create social activities.

Above: This figure shows a first person view of the Malchower See. Below: Existing greenspace in Neu-Hohenschönhausen.
Case Study: Gleisdreieck Park

Similar to Neu-Hohenschönhausen, a railway line cuts through this area in a north-south direction separating the park. Gleisdreieck park was created with the basic essentials of landscape architecture in mind. Without any decoration, its simple and clean design uses fine details with pleasant materials and vegetation, which together create a strong successful space.

We developed four strategies for our proposed “Central” Park:

1) Programs and activities

The diverse programs make the park. We propose a park that contains playgrounds for children and educational facilities for the elderly, spaces for entertainment and outdoor activities. The park should be for everyone in the neighborhood and could activate the community, representing a contemporary, refreshing new lifestyle in Neu-Hohenschönhausen.

2) Spaces and greenways

Greenways will help to connect the different parts of the natural landscape, and allow for the circulation of pedestrians and bicycles. This will improve the sense of connectivity between the four quadrants as it allows access to the new park.

Currently, access to the existing landscape is poor with few formalized pedestrian pathways. Therefore, we add more entrances to increase the connectivity of the park. The greenways and pedestrian paths help to link different open spaces and landscape nodes. The three pedestrian crossing systems are intended to solve the problem of ensuring safe travel for people. They will serve as models in providing for the free flow of people.

3) Hills and terrain

Currently, the site is flat and undynamic. By adding more diversity through hills, valleys, sound barriers, and land-
scape corridors, the views and scenery of the site will be beautified.

4) Water and revetment

Waterfront experience is one of the key design issues of the park. We will redesign and reconstruct the existing soft and hard edges according to various functions, interaction experience with water and eco-oriented principles.

Case Study: ARC International Wildlife Crossings Infrastructure Design Competition.

Wildlife crossings are structures that allow animals to cross human-made barriers safely. They are applicable to Neu-Hohenschönhausen as pedestrian crossing systems.

Programs and activities

The park is a long-term project and can be build in phases. We see an opportunity to engage residents and local groups in the process of designing and developing the park. One of these local institution is the Grüner Campus Malchow.
Above: Nodes within the proposed park are illustrated in pink (representing playgrounds for children) and yellow (representing outdoor areas for the elderly). Below: Proposed entertainment venues (red) and proposed sites for cultural activities (blue) along the rail line (orange).
An illustration of proposed water revetment in Neu-Hohenschönhausen.
Above and Below: Renderings from the ARC International Wildlife Crossings Infrastructure Design Competition.
Above: Phases in which the proposed park could be developed Blue (Phase I), Purple (Phase II) and green (Phase III). Below: Renderings of the proposed park with areas designated for activities.
Eco School as Pioneer

Grüner Campus Malchow is a great asset in this process and a potential pioneer for the park. It is one of few places that brings students and parents from all over Berlin to the area on a daily basis because it is a well-known and unique school.

Grüner-Campus Malchow (Green-Campus Malchow) was founded in 1991 as an elementary school, later expanding into a high school with an emphasis on environmental studies. The school teaches kids between the ages of 6 and 15 the importance of environmental sustainability and provides numerous community workshops and other programming in addition to regular coursework. The school is located at the northwestern edge of Neu-Hohenschönhausen and uses approximately 27 acres of land consisting of forested area, a sports field, courtyard, live animal farm, and four campus buildings. It currently provides workshops for approximately 1200 children throughout the Neu-Hohenschönhausen community. Workshops include introductory courses in Environmental studies, farming and animal science, as well as craftsmanship and woodworking. Middle and high school students are given the opportunity to work on these farms and natural areas, maintaining animal areas, feeding schedules, and the general upkeep of the facility as part of an unpaid work-study program. (Gruner-Campus Malchow)

Development of the eco-school is extremely important and is in keeping with the developmental goals of the district of Lichtenberg. The school directly affects intergenerational growth by creating activities and centers for child development and parental education. The school is vital to migrants coming into the area because it will support young mothers and parents in child education as the population increases. Lastly, it assists in the environmental sustainability and development of greenery throughout the area, an idea consistent with the country.

Challenges

The eco-school is located on the periphery of Neu-Hohenschönhausen and is not well connected to the rest of the community. Every year their class size expands, as they have been growing from their foundation and will eventually continue with all grades through the end of high school.

Grüner-Campus Malchow (Source: www.sekundarschulen-berlin.de)
Above: Grüner-Campus Malchow is outlined in white.

Activities conducted by the eco-school
(Source: www.sekundarschulen-berlin.de)
Because of its growing size and user group, the school has interest in expanding its site and amenities to include extra space to create additional activities for the middle and high school classes.

Because of its educational nature, the school is uniquely poised to bring an air of innovation to new environmentally-friendly developments in the neighborhood.

Proposal

As part of our goals for a more sustainable community, the Gruner-Campus Malchow should actively engage in park activities that stimulate social interaction and promote community health. As a pioneer, the eco school could conduct interim programs that create trails or nature paths in the location of the future park that tie the communities together. Nature trails are used by a wide variety of people and are a great place for community interaction.

This strategy can be conducted as a joint educational venture with different schools in the community. For young children, one way to start this program would be to have small groups of children (two or three) partner up with a high school mentor in order to establish rapport and a strong community of learners. These groups could conduct activities with one another such as outdoor workshops and hikes prior to developing foot paths. After a determined time, the groups could then go on hikes within the future park area. During these hikes they would identify key features of the park and mark areas of interest.

Students, their parents and families should be invited to participate in the physical development of the area. Participants can then divide further into groups and focus on specific areas of each project based off of interest. Dividing into groups and creating priorities of work is time efficient and allows for a faster completed project. Upon completion of the path the schools would invite the community of Neu-Hohenschönhausen to the park and exhibit their work. Media would be invited as well to promote the community and provide exposure of the overall project.

The eco-school is a potential force multiplier for Neu-Ho-
henschönhausen and for the development of the environmental character of the neighborhood and the goal of a large unifying centrally located park.

Left and Below: Trails and Paths could be developed as a youth activity.
We hope that our multi-scale strategy will be prove useful as HOWOGE moves forward with its plans for the future of Neu-Hohenschönhausen. Vision, scope, and interconnectivity of the different types of the built, environmental, and social sustainability of the site should aid in making decisions in the short term that lead to a coherent plan in the long term. As the housing authority works with the other actors to make this community more than liveable, more than usual, “mehr als gewohnt,” – keeping a vision of the next 30 years and its possibilities for improvement may lead to a better community for current and future residents.

Researching and envisioning a future for a large modern housing estate like Neu-Hohenschönhausen is important for planners of large housing projects everywhere. Exploring the process for the improvement and sustainability of the site is an opportunity to transform existing buildings and landscapes into comprehensive models of successful high-density housing. With growing density needs around the world, these sites will play a key role in providing shelter and livelihood to millions of present and future residents.

We looked at a variety of strategies to make these kinds of places more attractive, liveable, dynamic, sustainable and, basically, be excellent places for people to live. Modern housing was designed with the ideology of an era – and in order to be brought into the 21st century, it must be infused with the ideology of our era.

We hope that our collaborative process – research-based and intuition-driven, top-down and bottom-up, tangible and intangible, small-scale and large-scale, short-term and long-term – can contribute to a growing body of work that new generations of urban planners can draw from to make the best decisions for the cities and sites they have inherited.
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New York and Berlin Case Studies

In order to contextualize the project at Neu-Hohenschönhausen, we wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the social, political, and architectural history of tower-in-the-park public housing, and get a sense of how these types of projects continue to function today. What was the ideology behind this type of project? How did the architecture and urban design of these estates achieve the goals of the project? Were they successful then, and are they successful in their current state? What trends do we see?

In order to do this, we began our research looking at nine case studies from New York and Berlin.

New York

Sunnyside Gardens

Public policy: Which specific housing-related policies facilitated this case study? For instance Housing Act of 1949 or the “Five-Year-Plans”, what exactly does that policy facilitate)

1901 – Tenement House Act created the “New Law Tenement”. This law essentially made it necessary to assemble more than one lot in order to build apartments in New York. By then, the idea of perimeter block design of apartments had become acceptable for both luxury and philanthropic housing, with occasional lot coverage approaching 50%.

1907 – Improvement Plan by the Public Improvement Commission appointed by Mayor Seth Low: calling for more open spaces and more attractive views, as well as the need for typing the metropolis together through the construction of bridges between the boroughs.

1913 - Heights of Buildings by Manhattan Borough President George McAneny: recommended height limitations for buildings based on their locations and provided for set-backs on tall buildings to allow light and air to reach the ground level.

1915-1919 – Clarence Stein volunteered to be Secretary of the Housing Committee of the New York State Reconstruction Commission appointed by Gov. Alfred E. Smith. Stein also served as Secretary of the City Planning Committee of the City Club.

1920 – New York State legislature provided real estate tax exemptions for housing projects begun before 1920 (later

1921 – Clarence Stein became the Chairman of the Committee on Community Planning of the American Institute of Architects.

1922 – Life Insurances companies were given permission to invest in housing projects.

1923 – Governor Smith appointed Stein to be Chairman of the New York State Commission of Housing and Regional Planning.

Design/Planning Ideology: How is this case study rooted in contemporary architecture and planning debates (for instances the Bauhaus movement, or CIAM)

Mr. Bing, chairman of the City Housing Corporation, dreamed with a Garden City. This urban planning philosophy was created by Ebenezer Howard in his book “To-morrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform”. His idealized city would house 32,000 people on 2,400ha. The garden city will be self-sufficient and when it reached full population, another garden city would be developed nearby. The concept of it was a city where industries will provide employment, one which will also have stores, making it self-contained. It will be surrounded by a ring of land reserved against building, which is to be used for gardens and general intensive agriculture. In this way it is hoped to keep the city from growing indefinitely.

Sunnyside was the first effort of this group to create a physical solution to the problems they found. They worked to create high quality residential design at a reduced cost, a goal they believed was achievable thorough planning, organization, and new financing mechanisms. Their objective was to increase the supply of homes for working people by creating new sources of low-cost capital combined with large-scale residential design and site-planning. They believed their ideas would create homes for everyone and hoped they would change the fundamental way cities were formed and grew. By creating it in the urban environment, planners took advantage of the municipal services available and the employment and cultural opportunities provided. RPAA planned to improve upon it at future developments, including Radburn in New Jersey and Chatham Village in Pittsburgh. The ideas demonstrated at these sites and later at the Greenbelt cities of the 1930s have had a major effect on planners and designers throughout the twentieth century, seen particularly in many features of the New Towns of the 1960s and 70s as well as in many ideas of the New Urbanists of today.
Lillian Wald & Jacob Riis Houses

Lillian Wald and Jacob Riis houses are part of the affordable housing developments by the largest public housing authority in North America, NYCHA. New York City Housing Authority or NYCHA was established in 1934 and it’s public housing represent 8.3% of the city’s rental apartments. NYCHA is home to about 5.2% of New York City’s population with more than 400,000 New Yorkers residing in its 334 housing developments. The Section 8 lease-housing program of NYCHA provides subsidized rental assistance to about 235,000 people. In Manhattan alone, there are about 103 developments with 59005 apartments.

In the year 1937, The US States Housing Act of 1937-created by the Wagner Steagal Act of 1934-allocated 800,000,000 dollars[1] in the form of federal loans to states to develop low-income housing and how these funds were going to be implemented was a matter of urban policies and planning.

‘After NYCHA’s creation, by 1938 it had 36,000 applications for 13,000 apartments. Tenants were selected according to a rigorous point system, requiring bank accounts, insurance and citizenship. Housing officials chose residents according to the race of the surrounding neighborhood. The policy continued until the civil rights movement forced NYCHA to establish an office to “assure a fully integrated tenant body in 1958.’

NYCHA’s Lillian Wald and Jacob Riis houses are located on the lower east side of Manhattan between Avenue D and the FDR Drive, from Houston to 10th Streets. Completed in 1949, Wald, Riis and Riis II houses are spread over an area of 16.46, 11.7 and 5.94 acres respectively and are presently home to about 9000 people.

Designed by architect Frederick Ackerman and Lafayette Goldstone, Wald houses were named after an American nurse Lillian Wald who was a strong supporter and advocate for human rights. These houses with a density of 250 people per acre have an average rent of $456 approximately and constitute of 1857 units including a variety of low, mid and high-rise apartments. The adjacent development of Riis and Riis II houses similarly, were named after Jacob Riis; a photographer and a journalist who documented the life of the people living in the tenements of New York. He was also the author of the famous ‘How the other half lives’. The Riis and Riis II developments have a density of 230 and 217 people per acre respectively and their average rent is approximately $468 and $452. Although homogene-

low, mid and high-rise apartments.

On tracing the design ideologies behind these housing developments, it could be argued that the housing prototypes by Le Corbusier’s ‘City of Tomorrow’, published a decade earlier in 1924 became instrumental tools for ‘slum clearance’ in New York. Also inspired by the CIAM principles, these LES superblocks are a good example of modernist architecture, employing Le Corbusier’s formula of the ‘tower-in-the-park’ with large built structures surrounded by abundant open spaces. The design of these superblocks however, is not as successful as it seems. With almost 82 percent inaccessible fenced-off interactions on the site, a sense of isolated and unapproachable urban experience is created. This isolation may also be a result of the neighborhood’s disconnect from the rest of the city in terms of transit and accessibility. A density comparison between these superblocks and a typical New York City block reveals that the superblocks have a higher percentage of open spaces than the latter with almost 80 percent devoted to green and other spaces for recreation and only 20 percent is built-up. The grid blocks however, cover about 56 percent as building surfaces and the remaining 44 percent is restricted to the movements along narrow spaces.

Despite these external design anomalies, these housing communities enjoy a variety of shared spaces for informal and formal interactions.

‘NYCHA’s own description from their website: ‘As New York City’s largest landlord, NYCHA is well-known for providing high-quality low-cost apartments. However, you might not know about the programs and services offered by NYCHA, which go far beyond housing to enrich the lives of residents and offer opportunities. NYCHA’s Community Centers and Senior Centers serve as a hub for most of our recreational, cultural and educational programs.’[3]

Apart from engaging in various community programs and services, NYCHA also provides education and employment programs for its youth residents.

Jacob Riis had himself documented some of the fabled tenement communities that had once stood at the site of the Wald and Riis houses, and this had later inspired the big housing movement. Since their inception, however, these huge and extremely valuable housing estates are in a state of gradual deterioration resulting from prolonged lack of repair and maintenance services across the housing authority. From rising health concerns to taking as long as seven years to address elevator problems.

APPENDIX
Co-Op City

Designed by Herman J. Jessor, who build more than 40,000 units of cooperative housing in NYC. along with Abraham kazan, a driving force of the cooperative housing movement in the United States. And at that time it is very popular for unions to fund the coop housing projects, there were ones dating back to 1927. But this is the largest in the world.

It is well designed; we have large inner public green space in the center for all the residents, lined up with a high school, so teenagers within the neighborhood could walk to school through or around the park, it would be really safe and enjoyable. And in almost closed up areas, lower level of neighborhood, there are still lots of semi-private green space, for the residents of just 3 or 4 blocks. Mitchell Lama housing program ---- The program’s purpose was the development and building of affordable housing, co-operatively owned, for middle, low -income residents. Under this program, government acquired property through eminent domain by claiming that the location is blighted and take it then give it to developers for further development. Developers could have a tax break from 6 to 8 % every year, until a 100% reimburse.

Influenced by Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius Ville contemporaine pour trois million d’habitants

New form of concentrated tower, to densify in the air while freeing the ground space for the public and green space, park, so the ventilation, sunlight problems could be solved in a lot of cases. Apply the tower in the park and la ville radieuse ideal from le corbusier, very famous community living, sharing public and semi-public space together. commercial spaces, cooperative supermarkets, nursery schools parking garages, three shopping centers, six schools, day care centers, power plant, firehouse, more than offices, religion space, sports facilities like basketball courts within the community.

1961 Zoning Resolution, which we still use today, emphasized public space and encouraged developers to incorporate plazas into their projects

City within a city function well, but too much on the corner of the city, kind of get out dated and seem as dangerous bad reputation as the years went on, partly for their “housing project-like” appearance and more accurately due to their closed-off locations that led to vandalism and crime

Ownership and finance

Sponsored and built by the United Housing Foundation union

Supported by a mortgage loan from New York State’s Housing Finance Agency (HFA)

$152 million from New York Community Bank

Owned by cooperators:

The corporation is membership-based, with membership granted by way of a share purchase in the cooperative

The shareholder can live in or sell the housing unit,

But it is a limited equity this is a rule about price when selling the share, to make sure the house is affordable, very low sell price but upcoming rent every month.

people elect representatives to select on who could live there and who could not. Revenues from rents by residents and run some business to make money for housing cost, usually take loan to build.

Problems:

Limited access to the city:

city bus Bx 23,26,28,30 MTA bus Q50 connect co-op city with subway services and there is no direct link to subway system this could be a big problem for job opportunities and access to other parts of the city

Transit access is poor. Yet, by most accounts, residents — the majority of whom own cars — are not pushing for greater transit access or connectivity.

But there were shopping area and parks integrated into the plan.

APPENDIX
Roosevelt Island

Roosevelt Island is a narrow island in the East River of New York City that lies between the island of Manhattan to its west and the borough of Queens to its east. It is about 2 miles (3.2 km) long, with a maximum width of 800 feet (240 m), and a total area of 147 acres (0.59 km²).

The island’s isolated location in addition to its open-air environment was considered an ideal place to conceal the city’s sick, infirmed and criminal populations. In 1968, as New York slid toward bankruptcy, the island became a prime target for revitalization efforts when Mayor John Lindsay appointed a committee to plan new uses for the neglected and abandoned island.

Roosevelt Island has a population of 11,551. The total number of households is 4,710 with 2.06 people per household on average. The median age of the current population is 39.37.

In both its physical situation and its governance, Roosevelt Island stands as an “island apart” within New York City. Roosevelt Island is owned by the city, but was leased to the state of New York’s Urban Development Corporation for 99 years in 1969. Therefore, all of its residential and commercial development sit upon City-owned land but is controlled by the State.

The New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC) was established to help renew New York State’s cities and towns and to encourage the orderly growth of urban areas. Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC) was established as a subsidiary corporation of the UDC in 1984.

The master plan for Roosevelt Island was designed by the well-known architects John Burgee and Philip Johnson. The master plan called for a community of 20,000 low-and-moderate-income people in two separate, automobile-free island towns – Northtown and Southtown – with twenty-five acres of parkland, a four-mile waterfront promenade and a 2,000-car garage called Motorgate. Construction began in 1971, but was beset by staff problems and budget overruns. By 1975, the first wave of new residents began moving onto the island.

Financial difficulties caused an extended delay in realizing Southtown, the second phase of the original development plan. Construction on Southtown did not begin until 2002. In between, there have been other additions to Roosevelt Island not laid out in the original development plan.

Many buildings exit the Mitchell-Lama program because the owners are entitled to do so after 20 years (with mortgage payoff). Another reason for conversion to market-rate status is the growing operating costs as buildings become middle-aged, especially with major system repairs (elevators, roof, facade, plumbing, etc.). If borne by rent-paying tenants, these increased costs are likely to threaten affordability. Changing to a market-rate tenancy provides stronger cash flow.

APPENDIX
Roosevelt Island (Source: www.rooseveltislanderblogspot.com)
Berlin

Hufeisensiedlung

Built during the Weimar Republic in 1925, the Hufeisensiedlung ("horseshoe estate") was one of the first modernist housing estates ever built in Neukölln, Berlin. This thirty-seven hectare estate consists of over six hundred flats within the horseshoe estate itself, and an additional six hundred and seventy-five row houses built on the periphery. Apartment size ranges from one to four bedroom style apartments with a modest average rent of roughly 6.5 euro per square meter.

The horseshoe estate was built by the German Non-profit homestead, savings, and construction corporation (GEHAG), a housing co-op founded in April 1924 by Martin Wagner. This housing typology was critical during the housing shortage that existed in in Germany. Following WWI, various co-op housing societies and associations, public housing associations and trades unions housing groups were formed to build economical housing in Berlin. This housing scheme was successful making rent affordable for the working class.

Bruno Taut in association with Martin Wagner designed the Hufeisensiedlung between 1925 and 1930. Strong influences derived from Ebenezer Howards Garden City Movement and the Bauhaus movement during the Weimar republic. The estate is built under the legacy of Neues Bauen, meaning “new way of building”. The idea of Neues Bauen encompassed a mix of social classes and encouraged the formation of communities on the green periphery of the city. These communities were to be built in an enclosed spatial framework that could build interpersonal relationships within the community. This kind of Urban development was thought to produce “socially able” persons suited to the progressive development of the future republic. Neues Bauen avoided architecture schemes that promoted individualism, class defined (bourgeois) housing areas, and privacy.

Taut designed the functional and rather simple architecture. Apartments are low rise and easily accessible for most tenants. The estate was also one of the first to be built using prefabricated slab housing as well as cranes which promoted efficiency and production of housing. Lattice windows, brick veneers to the corners of the building, the contrast of smooth and Rauputzflächen are important characteristics of Hufeisensiedlung. A special highlight is the coloring. The long front of Fritz Reuter-Allee is painted in “Berlin Red” (oxblood) and is therefore popularly known as “Red Front”. Salient end staircases divide the facade. The entrances are painted in bright blue. These color schemes are a trademark of the settlement.

The Hufeisensiedlung maintained linear ownership until 2009 when GEHAG merged with the German bank Deutsche Wohnen AG. The merger allowed many apartments to become vacant due to property becoming privatized. Despite this challenge, rent for public housing remains affordable and the building is maintained to high and historical standards.

The Hufeisensiedlung is a UNESCO World heritage site developed under the strict tenets of modernism. The architectural style of the Berlin Modernism Housing Estates is characterized by open housing concepts for the garden and city. Its architecture stands in stark contrast to the closed, densely built residential block from the urban planning of the 19th century. It stands entirely against classical design (pitched roofs, high urban density, privacy, and individualism) and the apartments possessed bathrooms, kitchens, and sun balconies which were uncommon compared to classical design. Additionally, the spacious recreation areas and playgrounds set new standards of living. Lastly, and most importantly the estate offers housing for the broadest chunks of the population at the most affordable rate.

APPENDIX
Hufeisensiedlung (Source:www.fotos-aus-der-luft.de)
Hansaviertel

Tucked into the northwest corner of Berlin’s Tiergarten Park, between the Tiergarten and the route of the elevated railway, the Hansaviertel is an oasis of green in the city’s bustling core. The tallest buildings are six isolated 16 story tower blocks, five of which hug the inner curve of an elevated rail line connecting the western and eastern parts of the city. The other structures, four and eight-story slabs, then clusters of one-story single family homes (bungalows), descend in scale southward into the park, eventually disappearing amongst the oaks and chestnuts. In all, 36 buildings, including two churches, a kindergarten, a shopping center and a library, are distributed across the Hansaviertel’s 18 hectares, or 44 acres. The district is mostly a residential area and the share of commercial space is low.

For three months during the summer and autumn of 1957, West Berlin was the host of an international housing exhibition called Interbau 57, whose focus was the reconstruction of a bombed out central district of town known as the Hansaviertel.

History and Context

The Hansaviertel was named after its Hamburg-based financial backers (the Hanseatic League) and the district was laid out in the late 19th century. It had treelined streets, stone townhouses, and a well-heeled population of several thousand people, many of them Jewish. The “Hansa district” was a comfortable middle-class residential areas of Berlin, founded in 1874, between the Spree River and the northwest quarter of the Tiergarten. The name “Hansaquarter” what chosen: because this particular area was developed by a company, the majority of which was owned by entrepreneurs from Hamburg, BuergerVer-einHansaviertelBerlin.

It was a comfortable, middle class, posh residential area of medium density, in strong contrast to the surrounding working class neighborhood, Moabit, north of the River Spree. The destruction of the area began in 1933 with the accession of the Nazis and, between 19303 and 1943 there was a social redistribution of housing owned by Jews in the Hansa District, who had comprised about 10% of the population. One such Jewish house, at Cuxhaven 14, is preserved.

The original Hansa neighborhood was much bigger, stretching north and west of the elevated train line to the banks of the Spree river. About 90 percent of the houses destroyed in World War II air raids. During the war, nine in ten buildings were destroyed. During the bombings of 22 and 23 November 1943, more than 75% of the district was destroyed. When the area was rebuilt as part of the Interbau, the decision was made to build to the south and east of the elevated train line. Since that time, the name “Hansa quarter” has become a synonym for the southern part of the area. After the war, bombed and burned houses were demolished were, leaving only about 40 houses of the old neighborhood, of which 30 remain today, north and west of the elevated railway.

Immediately after the war, it was not clear which ruling political system, capitalism or socialism, would prevail. The Hansaviertel was created as a reaction to the massive housing project of Communist East Berlin, the “workers palaces” along the Stalinallee, now KarlMarxAllee in and near the Friedrichshain neighborhood of East Berlin. The Hansaviertel residences at Interbau were hailed as a model of progressive living, a “City of Tomorrow.

The area, planned in 1953 and built between 1955 and 1960, is considered a model of modern city planning and of the classical modern or postmodernism of the time. An urban planning competition was held in 1953, and the Allies and the Federal Republic sponsored a building exhibition. In 1953 an international competition was arranged, Interbau 57, part of a nationwide series of architectural exhibitions.

Fifty-three architects (a third from outside Germany) agreed to design buildings, including Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Alvar Aalto, Oscar Niemeyer, and Arne Jacobsen. Private capital was scarce, and almost all buildings erected were with public subsidies. Of the structures erected at the inception, only the seven bungalows on small plots were originally sold to their residents, the remainder being rented as apartments. In postwar Berlin, there was a dire need for housing. The modern buildings of the Hansa quarter with bathrooms, hot water, garbage disposals and central heating were sought after residential properties. The rent was well above the average for the city. Nevertheless, there were long queues of housing applicants.

In 1995 the entire Hansaviertel came under landmark protection and it was in the 1990’s that the apartments converted into a cooperative type ownership and began to be sold to the residents.

Some Quotes from Early Residents

One now elderly resident moved into one of the bungalows with her late husband in 1958. Their parents provided them with the money needed to buy the home. They were “awarded the contract” for the last property available. Another bungalow, designed by Sep Ruf, was purchased in 1957 by Peter Schaefer’s parents, who bought the first bun-
galow to be sold at the Interbau, and now he lives in the house himself. Schaefer, who is 71 and a retired radio-oncologist, said “My father could have bought an old villa in Dahlem” for the same amount of money, “but he was convinced the future was being built here,” Schaefer said. There are many like Schaefer still living in the Hansaviertel who visited the Interbau exhibition in 1957. Christine Kliche, 75, a retired postal worker, is one. “The atmosphere was like a Volksfest,” or carnival, she said. “I found the new buildings most attractive, but I never dreamed I would live in one. At the time I had very little money and was single; families had priority.”

Quotes from More Recent residents

“There are no such things as typical Hansaviertlers,” says Dieter Kosslick, 59, the director of the Berlin Film Festival, “except maybe the first ones.” Kosslick, a native of the Black Forest area of Germany, moved into a bungalow in 2003 on a tip from a colleague. Cornelia Vossen, a media consultant, and Henrik Adler, a theater festival manager, recently bought an apartment in the Aalto building. Its rooms are arranged in a cluster around a central living space with huge windows opening onto a deepset balcony and the park beyond. As with many homes in the Hansaviertel, plenty of glass dissolves the boundary between indoors and out. A new generation of design conscious professionals (architects, artists, curators, club owners) is moving in. There are few vacancies, despite the fact that Berlin enjoys a surplus of restored and affordable pre-World War II housing, and the Hansaviertel cannot compete in terms of raw space.

Hansaviertel in Summary:

Inhabitants (2008): 5,828, approximately 30% of whom are foreigners

Architects


Landscape Architects

The parks and open spaces of the Hansa quarter were created between 1956 and the early 1960s. The landscape architects were: Hermann Mattern, René Pechère, Ernst Cramer, Otto Valentien, Herta Hammersbacher, Edvard Jacobson, Gustav Lütge, Pietro Porcinai, Wilhelm Hübottter and Christian Theodor Sorensen.
Stalinallee

Stalinallee, was constructed beginning in 1952. At the time, Joseph Stalin was the head of the Soviet Union. His rule has been characterized as totalitarian, brutal and as committed to the political ideologies of socialism and communism. Stalin has also been described as a fervent opposed to capitalism. Stalin’s opposition to the west included refusal of Western aid in order to help rebuild east Berlin. Instead, during Stalin’s rule, Soviet controlled east Berlin was rebuilt according to a series of five year plans used by both the Soviet government and the East German government for the purposes of rebuilding the economy and land. The plans were designed to transform the Soviet Union from a “peasant society to an industrial superpower” (Stalin).

The “workers palaces,” or the housing built along Stalinallee were considered grand. The housing brought luxury to socialist workers. In keeping with Sixteen Principles of Urban Design, the boulevard was designed to emphasize community, Soviet unity and allegiance to soviet politics (Pikulski). In the adjacent neighborhoods the plazas were designed for political demonstrations and parades. Political and administrative buildings were at the center of urban spaces as opposed skyscrapers and markers of industry. Residential quarters of neighborhoods were connected by community amenities such as schools and gardens. All of the necessary cultural and commercial necessities were located within the neighborhood. Following his death in 1953, however, a period termed “de-stalinization” altered the direction of architecture and planning in Soviet controlled east Berlin. Critics quickly renamed the boulevard and designed buildings with a modernist approach. Buildings were constructed using a prefabrication method giving way to less ornament, and faster and cheaper construction methods. When Germany reunified in 1991, some state owned property was sold to private parties.

Today, similar to the original planning, many buildings along the boulevard are still residential with commercial space at the street level. The districts surrounding Stalinallee, or as it currently called, Karl Marx Allee, range in character and types of residents. In blocks with the older tenement-style housing the diversity of residents is visible, however, such blocks also contain conditions such a lack of central heating and therefore many students live in this housing. The mixed use, mixed rent, and resident aspects, also serve as a point of attraction to potential residents. Similar to many urban communities around the world, especially New York City, the challenge ahead is how to ensure current residents can maintain residency, while potential residents continue to influx their neighborhoods.
Gropiusstadt

In 1958, the government of West Germany was in a position to fund the construction of housing projects for those Germans who were residents of West Berlin. This was part of a broader effort to encourage Germans from the West to live in the political island of Berlin, located within the boundaries of communist East Germany. Berlin had lost a large percentage of its housing after the war, and there was land to build on throughout the city.

The planning department of the city of West Berlin commissioned a design for a piece of land in the southeast of the city (south-center of the city as a whole) in the district of Neukölln. It was originally named Britz-Buckow-Rudow (BBR) for the neighborhoods it intersected at the edge of the city, near the state of Brandenburg. It had been largely agricultural before its purchase for use as housing. Because of the distance from the city center, the plan was to include the extension of the U7 subway line. The area was to be designed by the architect Walter Gropius and his office The Architects Collective (TAC).

Famous for founding the Bauhaus school, Gropius by this time had also done a lot of work in housing architecture, and his participation in the project was considered noteworthy. The idea of building a housing estate at the time incorporated the ideas of “Licht, Luft, und Sonne” (Light, Air, and Sun).

The original design was for 14,500 units in buildings not exceeding 14 stories. It included buildings with circular footprints and large green spaces, designed to allow for neighborhoods within each part of the housing complex. With the construction of the Berlin wall in 1961, they were forced to change the plans to adapt to the new space limitations. In addition to the physical limitation of the wall, compromises to the plan had to be made to adapt to the will of the housing authorities and the government.

After this series of changes, the estate was then designed for 19,000 units in buildings up to 30 stories. (This high rises were not the will of Gropius himself, whose ideas did not necessarily align with those who favored the tower-in-the-park concept.) The new plan maintained some elements of the original, such as the curvature of the buildings (reminiscent of the famous Hufeisensiedlung complex built thirty years prior) and other elements of the building and landscape design. Fifty thousand inhabitants were expected for the complex. It broke ground in 1962, with then-mayor Willy Brandt laying the foundation stone. It took 13 years to complete the project. Before it was finished, in 1969, Gropius died, the BBR complex was renamed Gropiusstadt in his honor.

From the outset, this housing complex was funded and gov- erned by two of the Berlin housing agencies: DEGEWO and GEHAG. Most of the complex belonged to GEHAG, and only a portion to DEGEWO, which continues to be the case today. It is a large area, of 657 acres, much of it open and green space. The cost of 1.74 billion marks came to the housing agencies from federal subsidies for urban development. Completed in 1975, the inhabitants of the project were often West Berliners who had come to the city to take advantage of the subsidies provided for Westerners to inhabit the walled-in city. In the 70s and 80s, Gropiusstadt became infamous as an area of social unrest due to perceptions of declined living conditions and social status of its residents. This reputation was most famously depicted in the book and film Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo, by Christiane F., whose work describes the drug culture and difficulties of growing up in Gropiusstadt, a peripheral housing complex.

The unsuccessful social circumstances may or may not be partially attributed to the lagging social infrastructure (schools, etc. that had yet to reach Gropiusstadt) or the negative aspects of the large open spaces (security issues, lack of maintenance leading to uncomfortable public spaces, etc.) The architecture itself is also sometimes cited as a reason for the social unrest. To address some of this, the first big renovation project was done by DEGEWO in 1986 to improve the property. This was followed soon after by the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. The wall’s destruction and the reunification of Germany meant changes in every corner of Berlin, and Gropiusstadt was no exception. Throughout the 90s and 2000s, numerous projects such as energy renovations, federal funds, and the allocation of a district management team (Quartiersmanagement), meant that the neighborhood improved drastically.

At the 50-year anniversary of the site, in 2012, Gropiusstadt was still combatting its reputation. However, it is an area that is not particularly subject to crime (especially relative to the rest of Neukölln) and of average rates of unemployment for the city. However, it does have an above average share of welfare recipients. The number of immigrants, while statistically higher than the average for Berlin, are nowhere near the percentages in the more highly immigrant neighborhoods.

The direction that the housing authorities DEGEWO and GEHAG aspire to for the area is one of filling it with young families. Brochures from these housing authorities promote Gropiusstadt as an area where multiple generations live together peacefully and with many nearby amenities. Chief among these is the Gropius Passagen, a highly successful shopping complex. This mall is successful, but lead to the demise of the remaining small businesses that had existed in the originally designed
commercial spaces.

With better management, landscapes that have filled in with more greenery in the last decades, and 35,000 inhabitants in an area built for 50,000, Gropiusstadt is an overall satisfactory place to live. Easy access to the city (via U7 line) allows the inhabitants to not be dependent on the local amenities, but have access to the rest of the city with relative ease. It is an interesting case of a tower-in-the-park complex achieving more social cohesion after decades of neglect, and may be examined as an example for other similar sites. While it is still not the modernist-architecture envy that was perhaps originally conceived of for these estates, it is at this juncture a suitable living space for moderate-income residents of the city.

Gropiusstadt (Source: Anna Nemitzweg Giaras)