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Still divided? Considering the future of Berlin-Marzahn¹

Zusammenfassung

Marzahn, eine Plattenbausiedlung im ehemaligen Ostberlin kann als eine gebaute Repräsentation sowohl von Staatsozialismus als auch von moderner Stadt betrachtet werden. Seit 1990 hat die Siedlung eine generelle Abwertung erfahren, die derzeit noch dadurch verstärkt wird, dass Marzahn mit dem Problem der Schrumpfung konfrontiert ist. Anhand von Interviews mit Hauptakteuren liefert der Beitrag die Grundlage für eine diskursive Konstruktion von ausgesprochen divergenten Ideen über die Zukunft von Marzahn.

1 Introduction

In this paper I consider the future of Marzahn, a district of some 60,000 apartments in East Berlin that was developed from the early 1970s to 1990. Marzahn is the largest housing estate in Central-East Europe built utilizing industrialized construction techniques and pre-fabricated concrete panels, a construction method that was used so extensively throughout socialist Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union that today 170 million people live in 70 million *Plattenbau* apartments; a built legacy of state socialism. Marzahn's layout derives from Modernist conceptions of the 'Functional City' – segregation of land use, clear hierarchy of circulation routes, elimination of corridor streets, all housing in apartment buildings set in abundant open space. In post-1990 unified Germany Marzahn faces a general cultural devaluation of socialist era panel estates and the material problem of 'shrinkage' – a shrinking population that results in high numbers of vacant dwellings.

¹ I would like to acknowledge the financial support of this research project provided by York University, the Canadian Centre for German and European Studies and the Canada-European Union Programme For Cooperation in Higher Education and Training: Consortium on Planning and Governance of Globalized Urban Environments. Thanks are also owed to Matthias Bernt, Jon Caulfield, Gene Desfor, Anne Haila and Roger Keil for comments on an earlier version of this article.

In considering Marzahn I am interested in a contemplation of the possible role its socialist and modernist legacies might play in non-socialist and post-modern times in determining its future. What are the processes of, and who are the actors involved in, the rebuilding of this Modern City after modernism? At a broader scale, I want to consider whether the multi-dimensional changes underway in Marzahn since German unification in 1990 should be understood solely in the context of the transformation from a state-socialist to a capitalist society, or whether they can also be considered “a little-examined expression of the process of globalization.” (BODNÁR 2001, 3)

This paper is based largely on a series of interviews conducted in Germany between 2002 and 2004. Interviews were undertaken (mostly in English – a few were conducted in German with the assistance of interpreters) with key actors in the planning, design, construction, rehabilitation and study of Marzahn. Interviewees included representatives of the fields of planning, architecture, art history, sociology and political science. Some were academics, some had private consulting firms, some worked at research institutes and others were civil servants. Some of the interviewees had spent most of their lives in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) while others had lived in West Germany. I have also interviewed past and current residents of Marzahn, the latter being representatives of tenant groups. Thus, the divergent views of Marzahn’s future that I present in this paper are discursively constructed.

Mine is an exogenous view of Marzahn. As a North American undertaking research in Germany I do not have first hand experience of living through the unification of the GDR and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), nor do I have the long time resident’s organic intellectual understanding of life in Berlin. On the other hand, I am convinced that my ‘outsider’ status bestows distinct advantages on my research in that the cultural divisions and debates that are embedded in Berliners, and which are central to a consideration of the future of Marzahn and other socialist era panel estates, do not frame my research in such a personal way.

2 Life in GDR-era Marzahn

The general impression given by all interviewees is that the majority of residents of pre-1990 Marzahn were quite happy to live there. One interviewee said that its residents “loved Marzahn” (H.-interview, 2002) and another, who had herself lived in Marzahn, said that in some respects it “was like a kind of paradise” (Ha.-interview, 2003). The initial residents went there by choice and, in so doing, realized a great improvement in the material standard of their housing. One interviewee, who moved to Marzahn in 1987,

remembered how luxurious it was to have unmetered hot water and electricity (P.-interview, 2004). Another couple, also resident in Marzahn since 1987, had been a family of four living in 1½ rooms and were delighted to have been allocated a larger apartment (Kn.-interview, 2004). Living in Marzahn was “a sign of modernity” and “a step forward” (K.-interview, 2002). While members of East Berlin’s alternative scene preferred to stay in the inner city, young families chose Marzahn (B. and E.-interview, 2002).

All interviewees agreed that there was no social segregation on the basis of class in Marzahn. Professors, auto mechanics, letter carriers and architects lived side by side in identical apartments. Some interviewees referred to an ‘elite’ of highly educated people who lived there. As well, to a certain extent housing allocation “favoured certain higher standing population groups” (RIETDORF et al. 2001, 19). Certain groups, such as young families with children, were given priority in housing allocation. Others receiving special attention for their “special housing needs” included party officials, athletes and leaders of key organizations (MARCUSE and SCHUMANN 1992, 118). In contrast to Marzahn, the population of social housing estates developed at the same time in West Berlin was in large part poor, not well-educated and marginalized. Throughout Central and Eastern Europe housing was heavily subsidized by the state in an amount equal to between 3 and 5% of Gross National Product (RIETDORF et al. 2001, 19). The rent on a typical newly built apartment in Marzahn in 1980 covered only 29% of operating costs and 16% of total costs (i.e. operating costs plus amortization of development and construction costs) (MARCUSE and SCHUMANN 1992, 92). As a result of those deep subsidies, on average, households in the GDR paid only 7% of gross monthly income in rent (REHBERG 1998, 110–111).

From today’s perspective one might ask if the original residents of Marzahn didn’t miss the urban qualities of the inner city neighbourhoods they left behind. In response to that question some of the interviewees made the point that in the GDR “bourgeois street life” (Ha.-interview, 2003) of people lounging in outdoor cafes or browsing through shops did not exist. One interviewee felt that in the GDR there had been “no real urbanity” of the sort that is based on heterogeneity and thus Marzahn was not significantly less urban, in that sense, than the inner city (H.-interview, 2002). For many, the lure of a new well-equipped dwelling simply outweighed other considerations.

Marzahn, while clearly conceived as being part of Berlin, was also meant to be a fully serviced town-within-a-town. Initial schematic drawings of Marzahn indicated a very big town centre that matched the scale of Alexanderplatz (Ha.-interview, 2003; HUBACHER 2000). The goal was to build more than a *Schlafstadt* or dormitory town (Ha.-interview, 2003). While Marzahn was part of Berlin it did, nevertheless, feel like one was “crossing

a border” when going from it to central Berlin or vice versa (Ha.-interview, 2003). Living there required a different kind of time management. It seemed difficult to find the time to meet friends who stayed in the old city, or to go to the cinema in the old city. “When you became a Marzahner something changed. You were obliged to find friends there” (Ha.-interview, 2003). In contrast, it appeared possible in an inner city neighbourhood like Prenzlauer Berg to live the day in a more chaotic and less-pre-planned way. People who remained in the old city said that Marzahn was *jwd* (*janz weit draussen*) (Ibid.) – the “back of beyond” (TERRELL et al. 1999, 453). To inner city East Berliners, you weren’t a ‘real Berliner’ if you didn’t experience Prenzlauer Berg or Friedrichshain on a daily basis (Ibid.). Yet, in fact, Marzahn is extremely well-connected by public transportation to central Berlin; the S-bahn journey to Alexanderplatz (which is about ten km. from the southern part of Marzahn) being only twenty minutes long. This feeling that Marzahn is remote from the centre, far out at the edge of the city, I have found is still prevalent among inner city Berliners.

3 Marzahn post-1990

With the union of East and West Germany in 1990 the situation of Marzahn was suddenly and dramatically changed. It found itself a part of a much larger city, and no longer part of a national capital city. Its tens of thousands of dwelling units were now part of a housing *market*; its workers part of a labour *market*. Land use and development became subject to a planning system imported *in toto* from the west. Western culture, including ideas about desirable built form and types of housing, was poised to confront the cultural and political ideas embodied in Marzahn’s buildings and its citizens.

Immediately following unification a discussion ensued regarding the future of the socialist era panel estates with some in the West calling for their demolition. Eventually the decision was taken in 1991, by the Berlin *Senat* and the Marzahn *Bezirk*, to “revitalize and urbanize” Marzahn (DROS-TE and KNORR-SIEDOW 2002, 3). Restoring Eastern housing was seen as a way of “recreating eastern society and integration into the western system” (Ibid., 13–14). It was an important “psycho-political decision” taken in an effort to help unite the two Berlins (Sch.-St.-interview, 2003). It acknowledged the surveys taken of sitting tenants in Marzahn which found that 80% were content living there (Ibid.). One interviewee contends that it was as absurd in 1990 to have imagined wiping out all of the *Platte* (which are home to about two thirds of East Berliners) as it was in the 1960s for planners to have contemplated eliminating the entire pre-Modern city (R.-interview, 2002).

The post-Modern turn taken in planning and architecture in Berlin in the 1990s has been of great consequence to Marzahn. This ‘turn’ can be traced to the International Building Exhibition of the 1980s in West Berlin (IBA Berlin 1984/87), “an event [that, to many, was] of epoch-making significance” (ZOHLEN 2000, 335), which precipitated “a critical return to the corridor street and the street-edge block development” (VON BEYME 2000, 247). IBA “became a milestone in the revision of Modernism” (VON BEYME 2000, 247). There were two components to it: *Neubau-IBA* and *IBA – Alt* (ZOHLEN 2000, 329). The *IBA – Alt* guidelines were published as the “12 principles for urban renewal” (Ibid., 335). Ultimately IBA (both old and new) “marked the renunciation of a strictly functionalist approach which divided the city into segments of everyday uses – transportation, housing, industry, offices, culture, etc. It was replaced by an integral, holistic approach which saw the city as both a patrimony of cultural history and as a challenge.” (Ibid.)

In spite of some criticism that “*IBA – Alt*’s conservationist approach vis-à-vis the nineteenth-century world revealed a certain nostalgia and a romanticizing view of history” (Ibid., 331, see also SIEVERTS 2003), its anti-Modern approach to the city, and to Berlin in particular, came to be the dominant view among architects and planners in West Berlin. The ‘Berliner Architektur’ codified in the subsequent *Planwerk Innenstadt* (stone-clad buildings with a cornice height of 21 metres form continuous streetwalls) was intended to support the ‘critical reconstruction’ of Berlin as idealized ‘European City’. The significance of *Planwerk Innenstadt* and of the ‘critical reconstructionists’ to Marzahn is that it clearly establishes as the dominant view in circles of power (political and opinion-making) and in general discourse of city-building the ‘superiority’ of the pre-modern city and its built form, and severely de-values modern planning and design. And there is no bigger example of modern planning and design in the Berlin region than Marzahn.

4 Marzahn today

As noted above, Marzahn’s early residents were diverse in terms of occupation, they included a well-educated elite, and were generally happy to live there. Today though it is possible to identify several very different subgroups within the overall population of Marzahn residents as well as a degree of discontent not evident prior to 1990 (the following description of Marzahn residents is based on H.-interview, 2002; K.-interview, 2002; R.-interview, 2002). The first of these subgroups is comprised of middle-aged, middle class people who have always enjoyed living in Marzahn, and who continue to do so. While they disliked the undemocratic nature of the GDR, at the same time they appreciated its idea of social equality. They believe

that a sense of social solidarity still exists in Marzahn which they feel they wouldn't find in West Berlin. They have never owned their own home and don't have a desire to acquire property. They would like to stay in Marzahn. A second subgroup is that of people who do want to leave. They have been unhappy living in Marzahn and have, for a long time, wanted to consume like Westerners. Their dream is to move to a suburban house. Third are those who have lost quality of life since unification. These are households where one or both parents are unemployed. They stay in Marzahn because they have no choice. A fourth group are the *Spätaussiedler* – ethnic Germans from Russia who claim the right of return as German citizens. A substantial number have moved to Marzahn (about 20,000 out of a total of 100,000 in Berlin and 2 million in all of Germany), especially Marzahn Nord (INURA meeting with Marzahn *Quartiersmanagement* staff, 2003). A very small fifth group are Vietnamese who came to the GDR as contract workers and stayed on after 1990. A sixth group are neo-Nazis. Their presence is noted by some observers as being what makes Marzahn, in their estimation, a dangerous place. On the other hand, several interviewees believe this aspect of Marzahn's reputation is exaggerated and note that other parts of Berlin also have gangs (eg. Turkish gangs in Kreuzberg).

While Marzahn today has a reputation among many West Berliners as a terrible place, it is not, in fact, as socially troubled a district as parts of West Berlin. Unlike the large housing complexes in West Berlin, Marzahn still houses a middle class. The most socially deprived districts in Berlin, where incomes are lowest and unemployment highest, are the traditional workers' districts of Neukölln, Wedding and parts of Kreuzberg in West Berlin (G.-interview, 2004). In the Marzahn-Hellersdorf *Bezirk* the unemployment rate of 19.7% is slightly higher than the August, 2004 rate for Berlin as a whole of 18.2% (www.statistik-berlin.de). On the basis of per capita income, the *Bezirk* does rank in the lower third of all Berlin *Bezirke* (www.berlin.de/ba-marzahn-hellersdorf/derbezirk/englisch_mh.html), though notably not lowest of all. In Marzahn incomes are higher and unemployment is lower than in many social housing estates in West Berlin. (It should be noted that within Marzahn, residents of Marzahn *Nord* and *West*, the last parts of Marzahn to be developed and comprised of 11,800 dwelling units or about one fifth of the total housing stock in Marzahn, do exhibit more social problems. The percentage of the population living on social assistance in Marzahn *Nord* and *West* is the highest of any area in Berlin.) It is ironic then that Marzahn overall has a reputation in the West as an ugly and dangerous place that is filled with marginalized people. This attitude, according to one interviewee, suggests that there is still a Wall of sorts between East and West (H.-interview, 2002). There has been an "ideological devaluation" of *die Platte* (B. and E.-interview, 2002; BODENSCHATZ 1991); a "cultural

turn” to believing that “you don’t live in a slab” (H.-interview, 2002). This cultural turn has fed the common perception among Westerners that Marzahn is the most terrible place in Berlin.

My research suggests that while some in East Berlin have accepted this cultural and ideological devaluation, many have not and they continue to believe that Marzahn is a good place to live. The tenants interviewed believe that Marzahn’s bad image is a creation of the media and extremely unfair. One interviewee noted that *Märkisches Viertel*, West Berlin’s largest social housing project, is “older and uglier” than Marzahn but has a lower vacancy rate because Marzahn suffers from the word *Plattenbau* (P.-interview, 2004). He believes that “[o]ne does not have to love Marzahn North, but one should at least consider it without prejudice.” (P.-interview, 2004) These contrasting perceptions of Marzahn lead, as described in detail below, to very different ideas about Marzahn’s future.

The crucial issue in Marzahn today is that of ‘shrinkage’, the phenomenon of population decline that results in a large number of vacant dwellings. It should be noted that shrinkage is affecting all housing estates in Berlin, both East and West, and all cities throughout the former GDR. In Berlin about 120,000 dwellings were vacant in 2003, or about 6% of the total housing stock (CREMER 2003, 2). It should also be noted that shrinkage in Berlin is not as severe as in those other cities and that the city’s population appears to have stabilized at 3.4 million after declining by about 100,000 during the 1990s (www.statistik-berlin.de). For example, Hoyerswerda’s population has shrunk by half since 1990 (Ha.-interview, 2003). In Marzahn about 10% of the flats were vacant in the summer of 2003 (W.-interview, 2003) though in some buildings in Marzahn *Nord* the vacancy rate reached 40%. (C.-interview, 2002) Overall, the population of Marzahn has declined from 159,000 in 1995 to 130,000 in 2002, or by 18%. In Marzahn *Nord* and *West* the population has dropped in the same period from 27,000 to 19,000 or by 29% (CREMER 2003, 4). Shrinkage then is not unique to Marzahn; indeed it is far less severe there than in other places in the GDR. The immediate problem presented by shrinkage in Marzahn is what to do with buildings that have a high percentage of vacant units. Other related problems include the consequent decline in enrolment at area schools, and declining custom at area shopping precincts.

Shrinkage in Marzahn is caused by a number of factors. The population of the GDR overall has fallen significantly since unification in 1990, partly due to a low birth rate and partly due to a migration of people to urban centres in the West where, they believe, there is a better prospect of finding work. One pair of interviewees noted that the labour agency in Hoyerswerda sends job-hunting young people by bus to the West or to other countries. They also noted that some people from Thuringia and Saxony in the East

work in Frankfurt am Main from Monday to Friday and come home on the weekend (Kn.-interview, 2004). Demographic projections suggest that East Germany's population could shrink by half by the year 2050 (www.shrinkingcities.com). In addition to the GDR-wide phenomenon of population decline, some residents of socialist era housing estates have chosen to move out, generally to a house in the suburbs. Kil notes that Berlin's population declined post-1990 as "those who had been city-dwellers moved to the periphery in their tens of thousands – away from the geranium balcony to the carport and front lawn" (KIL 2000, 374). In the case of Marzahn there has been an influx of *Spätaussiedler* but no other groups are choosing to move there from somewhere else. In Marzahn shrinkage is most apparent in Marzahn *Nord* and *West*. It is in these neighbourhoods that it will be addressed in one way or another.

The response of the Federal Government to the problem of shrinkage is the program called *Stadtumbau* (literally "City Rebuilding"; note: other translations of *Stadtumbau* include "recreating the city" (DROSTE and KNORR-SIEDOW 2002, 14), and "Urban Transformation" (Ibid., 147, fn.185); CREMER (2003) refers to it as "City Remodelling"; the Marzahn-Hellersdorf Bezirk website calls it "Urban Regeneration" (www.berlin.de/ba-marzahn-hellersdorf/derbezirk/englisch_mh.html). There are separate programs for former West and East Germany (*Stadtumbau West* and *Stadtumbau Ost*). The program is intended to address, in a comprehensive manner, problems faced in 240 neighbourhoods in German cities. More specifically, it is intended to fund the selective demolition of buildings in large housing estates, its assumption being that buildings cannot, and should not, be left vacant. The political questions to be answered, assuming that there will be demolition, are who decides which buildings are to be demolished and in what fashion (i.e. partial or total demolition), and how and where current tenants in those buildings are to be re-housed. Underlying these questions and their resolution is conflict between what might be considered, on one hand 'good planning' (following in the Berlin tradition of 'careful urban renewal' as described above, as well as the ongoing effort of the *Quartiersmanagement* to stabilize the community) and, on the other hand, the bottom line of the housing companies. The housing companies that own and manage the panel estates were assigned a portion of debt when they were created post-1990. That coupled with the high vacancy rate means that many are in a difficult financial situation. Demolition is intended primarily to ease the financial squeeze on the housing companies. (A.-interview, 2002)

To date the housing companies and local and state governments have been guilty of terrible public relations in talking to the residents of panel estates about plans for the future (D. and K.-S.-interview, 2003). In Mar-

zahn, residents first learned about the proposed demolitions when the Berlin newspaper *Die Morgenpost* published an article in June, 2002 which indicated that 2,000 units would be torn down (P.-interview, 2004). Tenants received letters from the housing company in September, 2002 telling them that they would have to vacate their apartments by December, 2003. There was no offer to be rehoused in another apartment (K.-interview, 2004). The housing company, *Wohnungsbaugesellschaft Marzahn*, then met with the dozen or so tenants who were members of a *Bewohnerbeirat* in Marzahn North to inform them of their demolition plans. The *Quartiersmanagement* staff issued a statement calling for public participation in the discussions about Marzahn North's future and arguing against total demolition of buildings in the centre of the neighbourhood (CREMER 2002). Eventually a public meeting was held in a local school in January, 2003 and about 350–400 residents attended. Present were representatives of the housing company, the Marzahn-Hellersdorf *Bezirk* and the Berlin *Senat*. Residents at the meeting were “angry and unhappy” (NEHOM meeting, 2003). The impression of residents was that the housing company didn't care what happened to people (Kn.-interview, 2004). Residents felt completely left out of the process (P.-interview, 2004). “Panic and angst” set in as they began to wonder where they would end up living (Ibid.). After the January, 2003 public meeting another tenants' group, the *Mieterinitiative*, was set up to focus specifically on *Stadtumbau Ost* and the question of demolitions. The Berlin Senator for Urban Development, Ingeborg Junge-Meyer, later characterized this process as one of “intensive public participation” (Junge-Meyer, email interview, 2004). Cornelia Cremer, of the *Quartiersmanagement* office, characterized the situation as “nervous but constructive” (CREMER 2003, 5). Nervous because residents did not know which buildings would be demolished or where they would end up living, but also constructive because residents became increasingly committed to participating in the *Stadtumbau* process. In February, 2003 the *Bewohnerbeirat* issued a statement of demands which included a commitment to keeping current residents in the neighbourhood, a tenant relocation process, maintenance of low-rent flats, resident participation in the *Stadtumbau* process, and the provision of information in Vietnamese and Russian.

In Marzahn *Nord* the buildings with the greatest number of vacant units were in the centre of the district. Initial thoughts were to demolish those buildings and create a park in their stead. Critics, however, believed that this would be a terrible blow to the district, in effect ripping out its heart. As well, they felt that Marzahn already had an abundance of open space. They suggested demolishing buildings next to undeveloped fields at the edge of the district, in effect moving the ‘edge’ inwards while leaving the core of the district intact. The problem with that proposal is that buildings at what is

currently the edge have been fully renovated and are fully occupied. (C.-interview, 2002) Another possibility would be to selectively demolish buildings so as to bring the edge condition much deeper into Marzahn; to bring ‘fingers’ of green ‘countryside’ into the centre of Marzahn. Being close to the countryside is what residents identify as one of the attractive features of Marzahn; thus selective demolition could greatly increase the number of buildings deemed to be, in this sense, attractive. (D. and K.-S.-interview, 2003) One *Stadtumbau Ost* proposal for Marzahn, and for other GDR-era housing estates, called for the partial demolition of the large blocks in order to create small low-rise buildings that contain large dwelling units (E.-interview, 2002). An advantage of this approach is that it could be used to create types of dwellings that weren’t built when Marzahn was originally developed – low-rise family housing and large dwelling units suitable for large families. This would address what is considered by some to be a hindrance to attracting new groups of residents to Marzahn, i.e. the limited range of dwelling type and size.

As of early summer, 2003 no decision had been made by Berlin as to how to proceed with demolitions in Marzahn. One interviewee believed that the inability to make a policy decision regarding the *Stadtumbau* proposals reflected the fact that Berlin has been in the midst of a “*Denkpause*” – literally a pause, or ‘timeout’ to think about its future (CREMER in: NEHOM mtg., 2003). After years of shrinking, its population has stabilized, however, it is impossible to predict whether or not this trend will continue. The European Community is expanding to include several Eastern European countries as members and some people think Berlin could see an influx of large numbers of people from those countries. They believe that while Berlin did not fulfill the 1990 dream of becoming a Global Metropole, it could still become a Central-East European Metropole. Others dismiss the likelihood of that happening contending that migrants from Central and Eastern Europe will head farther west than Berlin to cities like Hamburg, Munich and Frankfurt, or to other countries altogether. Another possibility is that Western firms will set up operations in countries to the east of East Germany. The uncertainty about the impact of exogenous events on Berlin’s future makes the formulation and implementation of policy extremely contentious. Later in the summer of 2003 a decision was finally reached regarding demolitions in Marzahn *Nord* and West (see below), and active demolition had begun in other parts of Marzahn. A panel from Marzahn’s very first pre-fab building, which was demolished that summer, was sent to the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* (ELTZEL 2003, 19).

5 Deciding the future of Marzahn

“No other place had come to represent the symbolic image of the competition between the systems [i.e. capitalism and socialism] in such an exclusive way as this dual structure: two half cities that were designed in every way to be the antithesis of each other, but which were inescapably fixated on each other. Two outposts, two bulwarks, two bargaining chips, two showcases ...” (KIL 2000, 373).

According to Kil, after being separated for forty years into West and East, the challenge facing Berlin is to find a way for it to be whole again. But the challenge of stitching together the two parts into a single city; of re-articulating formerly socialist East Berlin with capitalist West Berlin, is not the only one facing Berlin. The new united Berlin must also find its way in a globalizing world. Brenner notes that “[p]rofound divisions between East and West persist in Berlin, but they have been blurred in equally profound ways by the new patterns of socio-spatial polarization that have been unleashed during the course of the 1990s. Moreover ... over a decade after reunification, Berlin has not become the vibrant global city-region envisioned by many local boosterists, but a city confronted with a deepening social, economic and fiscal crisis.” (BRENNER 2002, 641)

Berlin must find its place within a neo-liberal capitalist world system of globalizing urban regions, and closer to home, within the economic system of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Commenting on the case of Germany, Brenner states that “[t]he differentiation of the national urban system of the FRG into a polarized hierarchy of internationally competitive, declining, stagnating and shrinking city-regions constitutes one of the central characteristics of the FRG’s post-fordist geography.” (BRENNER 1997, 289)

This is the post-fordist urban system that the ‘New Berlin’, i.e. the reunited West and East Berlin, finds itself part of post-1990. The reality facing Berlin today is that, in spite of having once again captured the prestigious title of national capital, it is not particularly important to the rest of the nation economically, let alone the rest of the world. Indeed, among German cities Berlin leads only in office cleaning firms and private security firms (KRÄTKE LECTURE, 2003). This is the context within which any contemplation of the future of Marzahn must be situated.

It is when considering Marzahn’s future that differences of opinion among my research interviewees are most clearly drawn. This is especially true when they expand their thinking beyond what, in their opinion, is Marzahn’s likely future to imagine its possible future. All indicated, at least to a certain extent, that they believe Marzahn’s future is open-ended. It is contingent on so many exogenous factors, perhaps the most important among them being whether or not Berlin will be successful at establishing an eco-

conomic niche as a “service Metropole” (KRÄTKE LECTURE, 2003). Connected to that is the unknown impact of the planned expansion of the EU and the possibility of a subsequent in-migration of a substantial number of people to Berlin from Eastern Europe; people who might choose to settle in Marzahn. One interviewee for example, sees hope for Berlin as a city of immigrants from the former socialist countries and Turkey (K.-interview, 2002). In so doing he looks to the East for salvation and not to the West.

Two interviewees imagined a potentially bleak future for the former GDR. One described how the global economy “has decided it doesn’t need the GDR” (K.-interview, 2002). In his opinion, “whole towns will disappear and go back to nature”. Ironically “within this disappearing country is our new metropole, Berlin. All around it the woods, and in the middle a shining phantasmagoria” (Ibid.). Within the ‘disappearing country’ and the ‘phantasmagoria’ he does see a possible future for Marzahn. The other interviewee with deeply pessimistic thoughts about the future of East Germany believes that many residents of the former GDR have given up expecting anything from the state. She predicts two possible outcomes of this feeling of resignation: a revolution of the extreme right wing, or an exodus of people that will leave entire regions of the GDR empty (Ha.-interview, 2003).

All interviewees agree that large scale demolition of vacant buildings would be an extremely undesirable course of action that would destabilize the community and contribute to Marzahn’s being further stigmatized as a dying place – a district with no future. On the other hand most believe that selective demolition will occur. Most interviewees believe that Marzahn may continue to decline somewhat socially and lose some more of its population as its better off residents continue to move out to suburban houses, but at the same time most don’t think it will become “a Bronx” (K.-interview, 2002). (Ironically Nike’s advertising campaign in the summer of 2000 was set in Marzahn and used it to create an impression of being in the Bronx – K.-interview, 2002). Some interviewees believe it is also possible that certain parts of Marzahn – Springfuhl, for example – will have no problems with vacant units due to the high quality of the renovated housing, good shopping facilities and proximity to the centre of Berlin, while the more remote sections of Marzahn *Nord* and *West* could continue to experience difficulties. One interviewee made the observation that while an excess of housing is a Berlin-wide problem it apparently is going to be ‘solved’ by way of demolitions in the panel estates. In his opinion far more demolitions should have occurred in *Gründerzeit* Berlin – more garden houses and side wings should have been pulled down to open up the interior of blocks. (K.-S.-interview, 2003) Had that occurred there would be fewer present day vacancies in the peripheral housing estates. However, given the high esteem

in which the pre-modern city in Berlin is held today, it is unlikely that any widespread demolitions will be undertaken in the old city.

The real divide in opinion among the interviewees is over the question of leaving vacant buildings standing. A minority argue in favour of leaving them. They want to wait to see if the EU expansion does bring an influx of new residents to Berlin, an influx that could be housed in Marzahn. They also argue that these buildings should be viewed as a public resource that was built with public funds. From that perspective they believe they should be held onto at all cost. To other interviewees, however, retaining boarded up vacant buildings is a non-starter. The cost of securing them would be prohibitive, but more important would be their standing as symbols of the failure and emptiness of Marzahn.

Those who favour keeping the vacant buildings argue in favour of allowing a kind of disorderly and 'wild' urbanism, something they acknowledge would be difficult to accept given what they describe as the German predilection for perfection (Ha.-interview, 2003; K.-interview, 2002). Why not, they argue, consider the vacant spaces in Berlin's buildings a luxury to be utilized, indeed to be enjoyed? (see KIL 2004) Why not suspend the normal rules around access to and use of space, they ask? Kil, for example, places faith in spontaneous, informal and organic enterprise which has already begun to re-use empty spaces in panel estates, sometimes breaking zoning rules in the process. "Where formerly washing used to dry, bananas, tea or insurance are now sold; in the unleaseable, oversized restaurant hall there now stands fitness equipment; what was originally a storeroom for building-repair men was then a passport studio and now a copy shop. And next to every new supermarket, and above all at every station forecourt, loiters the vanguard of all individual market initiative: the caravan of stands for bread, sausages, flowers, smoked eels and jogging tracksuits. This is where the service economy can be studied in its archetypal form – raw, unrestrained, unspoilt: the central European version of the bazaar, the survival economy of those "left over" by the laws of global modernization." (KIL 2000, 378)

In other words he is arguing for a break with both the socialist hyper-planning that created Marzahn in the first place, and the current regulatory bureaucratic planning that controls land use and housing there. And in looking to the East and to immigrants and their small-scale organic enterprises he also seems to be proposing a break with global corporate capitalism. In these ways Kil believes that Marzahn and other panel districts like it can become urban, the "essential essence" (KIL 2000, 376) of which he believes is "the chance to adapt, for free growth and expansion." (Ibid.) To Kil, Marzahn is a kind of frontier town; a place that offers the opportunity or an opening for something new. (K.-interview, 2002)

Kil's approach is similar in some respects to that of the Shrinking Cities project, an international and interdisciplinary exploration of the problem of shrinkage. This three year project (2002–2005) is being funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation and is using four cities as case studies of the problems of shrinkage – Detroit USA, Manchester/Liverpool U.K., Ivanovo Russia and Halle/Leipzig Germany. Just as Kil questions the ability of traditional planning to resolve the problems created by shrinkage, the organizers of the Shrinking Cities project are searching for new ways of imagining shrinking cities and their futures. (www.shrinkingcities.com)

An urban quality that Marzahn is missing is variety and flexibility in built form (and the variety and flexibility in the activities such built form supports). One possible way of achieving that missing dimension of 'urbanity' in the form of different building types would be via the private market in property development. Ironically, such a route would represent the antithesis of the centralized planning and development that originally produced Marzahn, and of the socialist ethic of equality in housing that undergirded its creation. But while Marzahn is now open to the market, the market currently has little interest in it and is certainly unable to 'solve' the problem of vacant dwelling units. If the market cannot help Marzahn either to create its missing qualities of urbanity or to deal with its problem of shrinkage, and if the bureaucratic response to shrinkage is simply to demolish the empty buildings and contribute, possibly, to the further stigmatization and destabilization of Marzahn, then perhaps the provocative idea of celebrating the "luxury of space" (KIL, personal communication, 2003) and of supporting a 'wild urbanism' is not so unreasonable. To most Westerners though, such ideas are absurd. Their proponents are dismissed as 'old Communists' and "embittered ideologues" (BRENNER 2002, 637) or as suffering from 'Ostalgie' – a nostalgia for the GDR (LINDEN et al. 2004).

Pickvance has described what he calls the "radical change model" which some have put forward as a way of understanding the change from state socialism to "what follows" (PICKVANCE 1996, 232). According to this model, "state socialism suffers a collapse as though all the blood disappeared from the veins of the old body. This then leads to the idea that an economic and institutional vacuum is created where the old body was, in which new structures can easily be built" (Ibid., 233).

If any legacies of the collapsed society remain they are perceived as being "entirely negative, since anything inherited from a system opposed to capitalism must be contradictory to a shift towards capitalism." (Ibid.) Clearly this is the case with the general Western perception of Marzahn as a legacy of the GDR, and with considerations of its future. But perhaps the West has filled the so-called 'vacuum' of Marzahn as much as it can or is willing to. Perhaps now is an opportune time for other actors to employ other methods

in an attempt to shape its future. Perhaps the cultural and social legacies of Marzahn's socialist and modernist early days are so strongly embodied in its residents that they will play a part in charting its future. And just as it took eighty years for people to learn to love Prenzlauer Berg, i.e. the formerly despised tenement city of *Gründerzeit* 'Stone Berlin', perhaps it will take eighty years to learn to love Marzahn (K.- interview, 2002).

6 Creative Destruction

By the summer of 2004 demolition work was underway in Marzahn North. But interviews with tenant representatives indicated that Marzahn residents had successfully inserted themselves into the decision-making process with what they deemed to be positive results. In Marzahn North pre-fab concrete panels could be seen swinging through the air on the end of construction cranes and stacked in piles on the ground. A row of small concrete boxes standing behind the construction fence turned out to be, on closer inspection, bathroom 'cubes' taken from dismantled apartments. Through what had been their doorways could be seen still-attached plumbing fixtures and the previous users' decorating ideas. Behind this scene were blocks of dwellings that were further along in the demolition process. What had been a standard eleven storey *Plattenbau* building had been converted to a low rise building with a roof line that stepped up and down, and a façade that stepped in and out. Top floor rooms opened onto large private terraces. A rental office down the street offered the first occupants of *Ahrensfelder Terrassen* choice of bathroom tiles and kitchen cabinets (the name given to these remodelled slab blocks is an attempt at being as un-Marzahnlike as possible – Ahrensfelde is the country village that abuts Marzahn to the north and which lies outside of Berlin in the State of Brandenburg). The rental agent on duty indicated that the first small group of remodelled apartments was renting well. Rent for a remodelled 90 sq. m. unit would be about 700€ inclusive; a bit less than 8 € per sq. m. When I suggested that the rents were perhaps somewhat expensive, the agent replied: "But these apartments are almost new!" Rental brochures stress the fact that the architects of *Ahrensfelder Terrassen* have responded to tenants' wish lists and incorporated roof decks, balconies and windows in kitchens and bathrooms.

In Marzahn Nord 1,670 units are being remodelled into the 409 rental units of *Ahrensfelder Terrassen* plus 38 units for sale. These will be in buildings ranging in height from three to six storeys. Thus there will be a net reduction of 1,223 dwellings. The tenants' initial position was that 500 rental units should be created, whereas the *Senat* wanted to retain only 300. A compromise figure of 447 units was finally agreed upon. The 38 owners-

hip units are being sold at prices ranging from 78,600 to 125,900 Euro (www.wbg-marzahn.de/projekte/stadtumbauost.php). In August, 2004 the first tenants moved into a remodelled apartment. Other neighbourhood projects to be funded by the *Stadtumbau* program include landscape improvements, the creation of bicycle lanes on Havenmann Strasse (the main street of the neighbourhood), and the refurbishment of the S-bahn station. Clearly neither of the extreme options for dealing with vacancies in Marzahn Nord – total demolition of vacant buildings and their replacement with a park / leave vacant buildings empty and boarded up – had been adopted. Neither had the option of bringing the ‘edge’ into the centre been pursued. Some demolition is underway which will result in a net loss of dwellings, but at the same time new kinds and qualities of space are being created.

Tenants view their involvement in the final decisions regarding demolitions as a political victory – they successfully reduced the net loss of dwellings and increased the number of remodelled units to be created. They don’t mind the small component of ownership housing that will be created. While none of the tenants interviewed believed that this round of demolitions would be the last in Marzahn, they think that in the future tenants will be more involved in the decision-making process. In addition to that achievement they also believe that they have set a precedent that new housing will be created at the same time that there are demolitions (P.-interview, 2004). As a tenant spokesperson, Torsten Preussing, stressed in an interview with a reporter from a Berlin newspaper, “*Es heißt schließlich nicht Stadtabriss Ost, sondern Stadtumbau Ost.*” (BERLINER ZEITUNG 2003, 2). The same tenant representative was very proud of the accomplishments of a small group of ordinary people in taking on the demolition plans of the housing company, yet at the same time he acknowledged how difficult it is to get people involved (P.-interview, 2004). Just as residents of West Berlin opposed slash and burn urban renewal in the 1970s, it appears that East Berliners are doing likewise thirty years later in response to slash and burn *Stadtumbau* proposals. They appear to have successfully forced their way into the debate over shrinkage and demolition resulting in at least a somewhat more ‘careful urban renewal’ approach in Marzahn. Their hope is that they have established a precedent for future *Stadtumbau* projects undertaken in other locations, and that they as a group can become increasingly involved in discussions affecting the future of Marzahn. To date, only a very small percentage of the total housing stock in Marzahn has been affected by demolition – thus it is too early to assess the Bezirk wide impact of tenant involvement in *Stadtumbau*.

7 Retail revival?

I have described above the apparent lack of interest of the property market in Marzahn. It was surprising, therefore, to find two substantial retail developments underway in the summer of 2004 at either end of Marzahner Promenade. The smaller of the two projects was under construction at the east end of the Promenade and comprises 4,700 sq. m. of floorspace. The larger project, which has been given the English language name “Eastgate”, is a 32,000 sq. m. shopping mall containing 150 shops and services and 1,400 parking spaces. It is being built on the site of the former GDR-era department store next to the S-bahn station. The project manager, ECE, is a Hamburg-based corporation that manages large shopping centres all over Germany (including the Potsdamer Platz Arkaden in Berlin and the Leipzig Hauptbahnhof centre). One tenant household interviewed saw this as a positive development and said that they definitely intend to shop there. They were unhappy though with the choice of an English language, rather than German, name.

These retail developments seem to confound the conventional wisdom that Marzahn is ‘over-stored’. The building of Eastgate, with what will no doubt be a standard array of chain stores, can also be seen as vote of confidence on the part of property capital and retail capital in the future of Marzahn. It also can be seen as part of a process of ‘normalizing’ Marzahn – of bringing to it a large scale retail complex very similar to others that have been built in other parts of Berlin since 1990. Perhaps this will contribute to a normalizing of Marzahn’s overall image as well. While these retail developments clearly indicate that property capital hasn’t lost all interest in Marzahn, it is important to note that these are commercial developments. The market’s interest in residential development in Marzahn remains extremely limited and my contention that the market cannot be looked to for solutions to Marzahn’s housing problems remains valid in my opinion.

8 Concluding Remarks

A useful concept in understanding the processes of change underway in Marzahn is that of ‘the city as a palimpsest’: “a manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed [; ...] something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form” (PEARSALL 1998, 1336). Marzahn is beginning to develop different layers and textures – physical, social, cultural, political – superimposed onto the original built form and way of life. Given Marzahn’s ‘creationist’ origins (built all at once over a relatively short period of time by a single creator, and meant to represent “total living” (K.- interview, 2002)) it has a particularly strong original layer or ‘manuscript’. But new ‘writing’ is being super-

imposed over the old: the 1990s renovations of the *Platte* which introduced some surface level variety and differentiation; the current demolition and/or remodelling of apartment blocks; the small-scale mixed use commercial retail residential complexes that were built in the 1990s throughout Marzahn which are quite varied in appearance and layout, and which generally try to create the spatial qualities of an urban street; the informal street markets at S-bahn stations; the small amount of market housing that has been built; the Eastgate project which will bring standard chain store shopping mall format retailing to Marzahn, the cultural diversity and cultural challenges brought by the *Spätaussiedler* to Marzahn; the growing political activism of tenants.

Just as the GDR era socialist city contained legacies of the pre-socialist era, so will the post-socialist city contain legacies of socialism. Similarly the modernist city contains the legacy of the pre-modern city, and the after-modern city contains the modern. It was foolish of slash and burn planners in the 1960s to think that they could erase the entire pre-modern city, and it was foolish to have thought, as some politicians did in Berlin in the early 1990s, that the entire city of socialism (i.e. the *Plattenbau*) could be erased (R.-interview, 2002). However, this is not simply about built legacies but also political, social and cultural legacies – of socialism and modernism. As Bodnár notes “[w]ise use of some elements of the legacy of state socialism ... can be a retaining force against the polarization and fragmentation of the city. ... How such elements can be extricated and used in a different (postsocialist) context is ... likely the most important political issue in east-central Europe today.” (BODNÁR 2001, 186)

The debate over the future of Marzahn reveals that Berlin is, in some regards, still divided. It makes clear that “West Berlin hasn’t completely taken over East Berlin.” (Ek.-interview, 2002) While many in the West devalue panel estates like Marzahn, many Easterners remain proud of the Modern city they built out of the rubble of WW2 (Ha.-interview, 2003). The debate over Marzahn’s possible future provides very clear evidence of starkly different socio-cultural conceptions and perceptions of what is a ‘good’ place to live. It unsettles many assumptions about objective and universal criteria of what constitutes ‘good’ city form.

Clearly Marzahn is changing; what remains unclear is what the process of change will be, and who the important actors in that process will be. The citizens of Marzahn are learning new political practices – taking on the state in the tradition of Western urban political movements in defence of “deeply grounded local traditions of how to use and produce space” (LEHRER 1999, 651), traditions rooted in the state socialist era. How successful they will be in the future is unpredictable.

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