New Towns in the German Democratic Republic: The "Neubaugebiete" of Rostock

Marilyn Rueschemeyer, Rhode Island School of Design
New Towns in the German Democratic Republic

The Neubaugebiete of Rostock

Marilyn Rueschemeyer

The new towns of Rostock are a result of planned social policy in the GDR in the 1960s which emphasized rapid and inexpensive housing construction. Based on empirical research in the new towns as well as an analysis of the East German sociological and architectural literature, this essay describes developments in housing that have taken place in the past twenty-five years—as well as some of the social responses of the inhabitants to their new living environment.

Rostock is a two-and-a-half hour ride north from Berlin toward the Baltic Sea (see Map 1). Over seven hundred years old, it has traditionally been a provincial city in the underdeveloped agricultural area of Mecklenburg. Shipbuilding and fishing play an important role in its economy. The University of Rostock, presently the Wilhelm Pieck University, was founded in 1419 and is one of the oldest universities in Northern Europe.

Before the outbreak of World War II, the population of Rostock was 120,000; in 1945, there were fewer than 90,000 inhabitants. Over half of the inner city was destroyed. During the last forty years, the population has more than doubled, reaching about 250,000, with an annual increase of 5,000 new residents. Sixty percent of the population now lives in the new residential areas begun in 1962 between old Rostock and Warnemunde, a popular seaside resort on the Baltic Sea. With the completion of the expanded international harbor and the building of a new chemical industry at the outskirts of the city, a further increase in population is expected. Of course, the construction industry has also developed enormously.

The first years after the war were characterized by a partial rebuilding of the
Map 1. Cities in The German Democratic Republic.

main streets and important cultural monuments and buildings in the destroyed inner city. Then the residential areas of Reutershagen I and II (1953–60) and the Südstadt (1960–65) were built. New residential developments continued to be put up until they now represent 60 percent of all living quarters. The housing, which
was erected in the primarily agricultural villages of Lütten Klein, Evershagen, Lichtenhagen, Schmarl, and Gross Klein (see Figure 1), was built on land considered generally poor—flat, unwooded, and wet, as well as windy. A sixth new community, Dierkow, currently is being built on the east bank of the river. In 1966, the first inhabitants moved into Lütten Klein, the oldest of the new residential developments discussed in this essay.

The settlements lie on both sides of the main traffic route, primarily in the northwest of the city, along the Unterwarnow. They are linked to each other by means of recreational zones, walks, and parks. The western boundaries of the new living quarters contain small, private gardens and fruit orchards, which also serve as some protection from the wind. On the east side of the main traffic route, both north and south, are large industrial complexes, as well as areas reserved for "nicht-stÖrende Arbeitsstätten"—low-disturbance workplaces. New residential areas are being developed there as well. The houses are standardized constructions, built with prefabricated elements. The settlements were to be planned as quickly and as cheaply as possible to accommodate Rostock’s increasing population. There are still 20,000 people without proper apartments, and the inner city’s living quarters have yet to be modernized. After the renovation of the university center, the city planners expect to turn their attention to the many rundown houses in the city.

This essay, then, will address a number of issues revolving around the new settlements of Rostock. It will focus on the interplay between public policy and the experience of everyday life. The first section is a brief description of the goals and realities of urban development in the German Democratic Republic, of which Rostock is one manifestation; indeed it is considered one of the more successful examples of urban development in the GDR. The second section discusses new town design in Rostock and some of the learning processes in city planning. The third section deals with the reactions of the residents to their new living quarters, the social relations that have developed, as well as the role of political organizations and other institutions. Although the emphasis is on Rostock, the essay includes some comparisons to other new residential quarters, such as Marzahn, a huge new residential area around Berlin.

Reconstruction and urbanization in the GDR

The German Democratic Republic is the most industrialized of all the countries of Eastern Europe. Since it was highly industrialized as well as urbanized from its beginnings, it has not experienced change with the same degree of intensity and rapidity as has characterized other countries in the process of industrialization and urbanization. Already in 1975, about 70 percent of the population lived in urban communities and approximately 80 percent lived in urban regions, 1 while in the other countries of Eastern Europe, less than 60 percent of the population was urbanized. 2 However, the proportion of people living in really large cities is
lower than in Poland, Hungary, or the USSR. Only one-quarter of the population of about 17 million lives in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants, while a little more than half lives in communities of 20,000 or less. The remaining quarter is in middle-size cities of 20,000 to 100,000 inhabitants. (See Table 1.)

The GDR, like other socialist countries, has tried to develop those areas that were industrially backward and has created a number of new industrial centers in the northern and eastern regions of the country while at the same time encouraging the expansion of already existing industries. General principles of development were first formulated at the Eighth Party Congress in 1971 where economic targets were set for the regions. In Rostock, as mentioned above, the port was enlarged, a shipyard expanded, and the fishing industry further developed. With the exception of Rostock, all cities with populations over 100,000 are south of Berlin. The small and medium-size towns in which people live are typically associated with huge industrial agglomerations. It has been estimated that a third of all employed people travel to work outside the town in which they live. Over 40 percent of the population lives in these industrial agglomerations with centers in Berlin, Leipzig-Halle, Karl-Marx Stadt-Zwickau, Dresden, and Magdeburg. Sixty percent of the total economic output is produced in only 15 percent of the territory of the GDR.3 Concentrated investment in the major cities remained a part of GDR settlement policy since the 1950s. Between 1964 and 1975, 80 percent of the growth of cities with over 20,000 inhabitants was attributed to migration from small towns and communities. It is noteworthy that the strongest growth has taken place in towns with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants, continuing the pattern of urban decentralization in small urban centers.

In the territory that is now the GDR, more than half of the housing units in the inner cities were destroyed during World War II; 620,000 housing units were completely destroyed and another 200,000 were partially damaged.4 As devastating as this was, in the immediate postwar period the availability of housing was greater than in West Germany where there was even heavier damage and higher rates of immigration.5 Because of the GDR’s economic policy goals as well as the reparations demanded by the Soviet Union, construction activity was concentrated primarily in the industrial sector. Although the reconstruction of the damaged houses began immediately, there were few funds allocated for new housing or for modernizing the existing housing stock. As late as 1981, only 35 percent of the housing units were built after 1945; 46 percent of all housing was built before 1919, while 19 percent was constructed between 1919 and 1945. In those buildings constructed before 1918, only 5 percent of living quarters have central heating and only 25 percent have an indoor toilet and bath.6 By 1981, only a third of the living quarters had central heating while approximately two-thirds were equipped with a bath or shower and an indoor toilet.7

Rent is very low in the GDR, ranging from 3 to 10 percent of annual income, and even lower for those who are unable to afford these rates. Since over half of the old houses are in private hands, the low rents discourage extensive repair,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hauptstadt Berlin</td>
<td>1,185,533</td>
<td>Wilhelm-Pieck-Stadt</td>
<td>34,726</td>
<td>Ludwigsfelde</td>
<td>20,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leipzig</td>
<td>558,994</td>
<td>Güben</td>
<td>34,624</td>
<td>Auernach/Seebruck</td>
<td>20,837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dresden</td>
<td>522,532</td>
<td>Weißwasser</td>
<td>34,303</td>
<td>Haldensleben</td>
<td>20,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl-Marx-Stadt</td>
<td>318,917</td>
<td>Aschersleben</td>
<td>34,141</td>
<td>Markkleeberg</td>
<td>20,095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magdeburg</td>
<td>289,075</td>
<td>Saalefel/Saale</td>
<td>33,604</td>
<td>Werda</td>
<td>19,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rostock</td>
<td>241,146</td>
<td>Sangerhausen</td>
<td>32,913</td>
<td>Mittweida</td>
<td>19,491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halle/Saale</td>
<td>236,139</td>
<td>Naumburg/Saale</td>
<td>31,913</td>
<td>Oschatz</td>
<td>19,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erfurt</td>
<td>214,281</td>
<td>Rudolstadt</td>
<td>31,896</td>
<td>Hainewald</td>
<td>19,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potsdam</td>
<td>137,522</td>
<td>Rathenow</td>
<td>31,796</td>
<td>Wurzen</td>
<td>19,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gera</td>
<td>129,891</td>
<td>Senftenberg</td>
<td>31,053</td>
<td>Bernau b. Berlin</td>
<td>19,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwerin</td>
<td>124,935</td>
<td>Wittenberge</td>
<td>29,916</td>
<td>Grossenhain</td>
<td>19,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottbus</td>
<td>120,723</td>
<td>Arnstadt</td>
<td>29,697</td>
<td>Königsberg</td>
<td>18,951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwickau</td>
<td>120,486</td>
<td>Glauchau</td>
<td>29,470</td>
<td>Wusterhausen</td>
<td>18,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jena</td>
<td>106,555</td>
<td>Ilmenau</td>
<td>29,167</td>
<td>Zehst</td>
<td>18,763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dessau</td>
<td>103,738</td>
<td>Quedlinburg</td>
<td>28,911</td>
<td>Blankenburg/Harz</td>
<td>18,683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandenburg/Havel</td>
<td>95,133</td>
<td>Apolda</td>
<td>28,827</td>
<td>Löbau</td>
<td>18,410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halle-Neustadt</td>
<td>91,510</td>
<td>Sonneberg</td>
<td>28,793</td>
<td>Kempen</td>
<td>18,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankfurt/Oder</td>
<td>84,072</td>
<td>Aue</td>
<td>28,696</td>
<td>Rößneck</td>
<td>17,943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neubrandenburg</td>
<td>82,450</td>
<td>Coswig</td>
<td>28,121</td>
<td>Hohenstein-Wehren</td>
<td>17,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Görlitz</td>
<td>80,216</td>
<td>Burg b. Magdeburg</td>
<td>27,866</td>
<td>Ribnitz-Damgarten</td>
<td>17,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plauen</td>
<td>78,797</td>
<td>Oranienburg</td>
<td>27,346</td>
<td>Grimma</td>
<td>17,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stralsund</td>
<td>75,335</td>
<td>Delitzsch</td>
<td>27,334</td>
<td>Schmalkalden</td>
<td>17,372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoyerswerda</td>
<td>70,698</td>
<td>Eisleben</td>
<td>27,249</td>
<td>Oschersleben/Bode</td>
<td>17,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weimar</td>
<td>64,007</td>
<td>Henningsdorf</td>
<td>27,194</td>
<td>Denmin</td>
<td>17,151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greifswald</td>
<td>62,991</td>
<td>b. Berlin</td>
<td>27,149</td>
<td>Stollberg/Erzgeb</td>
<td>17,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wismar</td>
<td>57,874</td>
<td>Stassfurt</td>
<td>27,129</td>
<td>Stollberg/Erzgeb</td>
<td>17,081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Latitude</td>
<td>Longitude</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gotha</td>
<td>57,662</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altenburg</td>
<td>54,999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wittenberg</td>
<td>54,306</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eberswalde-Finow</td>
<td>53,473</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwed/Orde</td>
<td>51,881</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suhl</td>
<td>51,731</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freiberg</td>
<td>51,290</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riesa</td>
<td>51,285</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisenach</td>
<td>50,895</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bautzen</td>
<td>50,502</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisenhüttenstadt</td>
<td>49,491</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merseburg/Saal</td>
<td>49,219</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirna</td>
<td>48,253</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordhausen</td>
<td>47,203</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halberstadt</td>
<td>47,115</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stendal</td>
<td>45,792</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freital</td>
<td>45,199</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schönebeck/Elbe</td>
<td>44,876</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeitz</td>
<td>43,716</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mühlhausen</td>
<td>43,656</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfen</td>
<td>41,229</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernburg/Saal</td>
<td>41,006</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zittau</td>
<td>40,554</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weissenfels</td>
<td>39,044</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gustrow</td>
<td>38,931</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meissen</td>
<td>38,710</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greiz</td>
<td>36,226</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wernigerode</td>
<td>36,166</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fürstenwalde/Spree</td>
<td>35,240</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radebeul</td>
<td>34,928</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kothen/Anhalt</td>
<td>34,728</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

although it is possible to obtain low-interest credit loans, on which the landlord pays only .5 percent interest. But repair also is a problem because necessary parts and materials are very difficult to obtain. As late as 1971, per capita living space (79 feet) was one-fourth less than in the Federal Republic and the lowest among the European communist states.8

Construction began in the 1950s with the elimination of the worst destroyed houses and the rebuilding of those that were salvageable. The state began to rebuild its most important institutions and cultural monuments; Stattesoper Berlin and Zwinger Dresden were started at that time. Also begun during this period were the building of the industrial towns as well as the repair of major streets in the old cities. Traditional elements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were used quite extensively in the renovation. In addition, a few new housing projects were completed in Berlin and in other important centers. During the sixties, the use of prefabricated materials increased. The housing projects that were built were generally considered monotonous and inadequate.

Throughout the GDR, there were serious complaints about the condition of the housing. The low birth rate was in part attributed to the poor living conditions. Furthermore, the regime was unable to sufficiently increase the mobility of its workforce because it was difficult to attract workers to an industrially developing area where the housing was poor. Many skilled workers refused to take on better jobs in exchange for poorer housing. The political leadership widely recognized that the condition of housing had a significance that reached far beyond living areas and working spaces to also affect identification with the country as well as with the political system. The location of housing and the living conditions in the area were considered important for motivating workers as well as for promoting a positive atmosphere in the work collective itself. Peter Voigt, head of the Sociology section at the Wilhelm Pieck University emphasizes this comprehensive aspect of territorial planning: “Whereas social planning within the place of work is aimed at increasing productivity at work, territorial social planning embraces the way of life of the collective as a whole.”9

Under the Honecker administration, expenditures for housing doubled, and systematic goals and plans were established for the improvement of housing conditions in the GDR. The overall goal was to provide decent housing for all citizens by 1990 and to eliminate housing as a social problem in the GDR. The long-term housing program adopted by the Eighth Congress of the SED (Socialist Unity Party—Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands) in 1971 is considered the basis of its social policy. It is seen as fundamental to the further development of the material and spiritual-cultural life of the citizens and intimately connected with the development of all aspects of the quality of life. The objectives specified at the Eighth Party Congress with respect to housing were:

— to provide all families with an apartment
— to improve housing conditions, notably those of workers, cooperative farmers,
and large families, and to assist young couples in the procurement of housing—
to gradually eliminate the historically based social and regional differences in
housing conditions
—to provide neighborhoods with the necessary cultural and social facilities so
that more leisure time will be available for recreation and education.\textsuperscript{10}

Much attention has been given to the technical and economical aspects of these
goals. At the Ninth Party Congress in 1976, housing received the highest social
priority. Plans were made to build or modernize 2.8 to 3 million apartments
between 1976 and 1990. From 1971 through 1982, 1,794,300 living units were created. Of these, 1,207,100 were newly built; the remaining units were created
through renovation and modernization. It was anticipated that by 1980, 40 per-
cent of the population would live in buildings that were newly constructed or
renovated, and by 1990, 10 out of approximately 17 million GDR citizens would
have their housing conditions improved.\textsuperscript{11} These goals laid out at the Congress
were long prepared for; the construction industry had already been greatly ex-
panded. Until 1980, building constituted 17 percent of the total investment of the
GDR.

Because of the desperate need for housing, the GDR has tried to construct apart-
ments as quickly and as cheaply as possible. Already in 1960, 49 percent of apart-
ments were industrially constructed with prefabricated parts. By 1974, the per-
centage of industrial housing rose to 84 percent and then to its present level of 96
percent, which compares with only 8 percent in the Federal Republic. The GDR
now produces its own prefabricated parts, and the time required to build an apart-
ment has been enormously reduced. In the 1950s, workers took 2,000 hours to
complete an average housing unit; now the average has been lowered to 600 hours.

At the same time, architects, engineers, and planners have introduced many
other considerations that go far beyond giving each family a warm and comfort-
able apartment. Since 1966, with the reorganization of the Bauakademie der
DDR (Academy for Housing and City Planning), aesthetic principles were taken
more seriously into consideration, at first with attention to the centers of impor-
tant cities and, after the death of Ulbricht, to the new residential quarters. Despite
economic constraints, architects are concerned with many of the same issues as
Western architects, and they want to construct good architectural forms while
developing a particular style that is expressive of East German society and of
local traditions. One interesting reaction from at least some GDR architects has
been the rejection of the postmodern architecture that has characterized much of
the new building in the West as well as in the GDR. While cherishing the past and
advocating the preservation of old buildings, architects also express concern
about simply turning back to historical elements instead of creating something
new.\textsuperscript{12}

Thousands of scientists, technicians, architects, and planners are involved in
planning and construction. Aesthetic as well as social goals are discussed and
planned for, but economic considerations remain paramount. The architectural plans as well as the social arrangements of the new living quarters are compromised by the need for economic budgeting. From the point of view of the sociologists, construction can never become an end in itself but always has to be oriented to the living of the people and progress in the development of a "socialist way of life." The planners and architects are asked to establish the preconditions for a successful family life, for the equal participation of the women in society, for the education and socialization of the young, and for the care of the elderly and disabled.

New residential areas are designed with public or communal facilities and services. The building program typically includes plans for homes for the aged, clinics, markets, restaurants, pubs, and buildings for culture and recreation, libraries, youth clubs, sports facilities, and necessary services. However, new towns vary enormously in the realization of these plans, and in how the residents in the new living areas perceive the adequacy of public facilities and services. One Rostock architect indicated that for every 1,000 residents, the average goals are 108 school places, 76 kindergarten places (for children under 6), and 58 places in the nurseries (for children under 3). These figures necessarily vary from area to area. Sixty percent of the cost of an apartment is used for its construction, 18 percent for the public facilities, and 22 percent for traffic and other technical expenses.

Housing in the GDR is either built and administered by the state, by cooperatives (Genossenschaften), or it is privately owned. In the new developments of Rostock, the state owns 60 percent of the housing and the Genossenschaften 30–40 percent. Cooperative apartments receive state credit and subsidies by production enterprises but the members are expected to pay a large sum for the common stock, 1,500 marks for a room. The deposit goes into the stock and is at the cooperative's disposal. Some of the costs are paid for by actual participation in the construction of the housing by the future residents, and it is not infrequent for friends, colleagues, or students to lend a hand. While these time demands and the additional expense may be considered a disadvantage, members of the Genossenschaften are fairly certain of being able to move into their apartment in two to three years, and exert more control over such things as repairs than residents in state-owned housing. Workers can apply for low-interest loans for the required amount from their production enterprises; afterward, the rents are somewhat lower than in the state-owned apartments.

Private housing in the new residential quarters is primarily for families with many children, although workers responsible for construction as well as families with access to West German marks may also acquire their own small houses. The percentage of private, newly built houses is low compared to other East European countries: GDR—12 percent; Romania—20 percent; Poland—30 percent; Hungary—70 percent. Possibilities for obtaining credit provisions (3.25 percent for loans) and material allocations for the private construction of new housing have
Increased. However, state expenditures for housing have also grown, and at present the state sector is responsible for about two-thirds of all new housing reconstruction and renovation.

Urban planning has a complex structure. The Socialist Unity Party (SED) has developed general principles and guidelines for territorial and city planning in its programs of the Eighth and Ninth Party Congresses of 1971 and 1976 and it also maintains, at each level of organization, officials and committees concerned with housing and urban development. Operative planning and implementation, however, are in the jurisdiction of the state. Here we find a differentiation by time horizon (from five-year plans to long-term perspectives of up to thirty years), by economic branch (construction industry, transportation), and by territorial level (from city through district to the whole republic).

The longest-term plans, working with periods from fifteen to thirty years, concern general urban development, location of industry, supply of the area, and changes in transportation as they relate to perspectives on economic development. Long-term plans covering ten to fifteen years deal with shifts in industrial distribution and the broad articulation of demand and supply in different aspects of urban development. The plan to deal with the deficit in housing by 1990 belongs in this category. Finally there are the five-year plans that take the form of enacted law and which quite concretely determine what is to be produced in different areas and by whom.

The State Planning Commission is the central organ of the Council of Ministers for developing these plans. It cooperates, with respect to urban planning, with the relevant ministries of Construction and of Transportation. All three of these national bodies have also offices at the district and city levels. Thus, at the city level the Bureau for City Planning, the City Construction Office, and the Department of Energy, Transportation, and Mass Transit have to cooperate with each other. These lower-level offices are of considerable importance. Jiří Musil writes of the GDR:

The long-range strategy for settlement development . . . differs somewhat in character . . . from the Czechoslovak, Polish, and Hungarian strategies. The concept for settlement developments is not drafted as a national physical plan but rather in the form of general principles and guidelines.15

Planning is increasingly based on research. The Institute of Geography and Geocology at the Academy of Sciences does basic research, while the Research Station for Territorial Planning (Forschungsleitstelle für Territorialplanung), which is attached to the State Planning Commission, concerns itself with more applied research directly relevant for planning. The Institute for City Planning (Städtebau) and the Bauakademie der DDR contribute to the development of plan guidelines which the national organs give to the districts and cities. At the city level local research projects or specially commissioned studies by such institutes
as the Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen in Weimar have some impact on
detail planning. The operational planning is accomplished jointly by the construc-
tion firm (Wohnungsbaukombinat) and the Bureau for City Planning, which
employs architects, engineers, and other specialists.

There are several alternative routes to take in order to obtain an apartment.
Individuals may advertise in the newspapers, offering to exchange apartments
with someone in another part of the city or with a family living in a different city
altogether, or simply stating the need for an apartment. There are centers (Wohn-
ungscommissionen) for apartment changes with lists of people who are moving
out of their apartments and lists with requests from people needing housing. Most
people are able to arrange for a new apartment at their place of work.

The actual provision of housing falls mainly into the competence of regional
local councils which lay down the criteria by which apartments are allocated,
according to the aforementioned principles established by the Eighth Party Con-
gress (priorities include newly married couples, families with several children,
workers needed in a particular enterprise). The Wohnungsamt decides which
enterprises are allocated apartments and these apartments are then distributed by
the trade union (Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung BGL). The union leadership dis-
tributes old as well as new housing, which is administered by the Volkseigene
Kommunale Wohnungsverwaltung. The cooperative apartments are distributed by
the Arbeiterwohnungsbauenossenschaften (AWG). Part of the payment involves
participating in construction. Residents claim that they received their housing
quicker and that the quality was somewhat better.

Despite the enormous number of new apartments, there remain many prob-
lems. Even if we exclude the condition of the older housing in the inner city,
which is just beginning to be addressed, the location of the apartment is not
always where it is most needed and the size of the apartment may be too small for
its inhabitants. Nearly half of the apartments are one- and two-room flats, a flat
containing a living room, bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom.

There are some characteristics of the population that present particular prob-
lems. As of 1981, 18.9 percent of population of the GDR (16,739) was under 15;
63 percent was of working age, and 18 percent were pensioners. The GDR has a
high population of retired people compared to other developed countries. About
10 percent of the elderly continue to work for at least part of the work week.
Nearly half of them live alone. Furthermore, due to the high divorce rate (about
one in every three marriages ends in divorce) there is a high percentage of one-
parent families. Altogether, 3 million people—23.1 percent of the adult popula-
tion over the age of 18—live on their own in the GDR.17

The construction of the new towns of Rostock

Primarily because of the development of new industries, the population has been
increasing at the rate of about 5,000 inhabitants a year. About 17 percent of the
population has lived in Rostock less than 15 years. If we look at the recent new towns of Schmarl and Lichtenhagen, 20 percent of the population has been in Rostock for 6 years or less. Many of those who come are between 18 and 40; they migrate from other areas of the GDR, frequently from cities in the south or from the countryside. In 1972, 41.6 percent of the population of Rostock was 25 or under (compared to 37 percent in the GDR); in the settlement of Lütten Klein, it was 48.9 percent. In the years from 1971–1981 Rostock ranked first in the growth of housing: Rostock—16.8 percent; Frankfurt/O.—12.1 percent; Berlin—11.8 percent; Erfurt—11.7 percent; Gera—11.1 percent; Schwerin—11.1 percent.18

The new towns in Rostock were designed as more than mere aggregates of apartments. There were careful plans regarding access to the main traffic routes, the kind and number of public institutions necessary (schools, clinics, etc.), retail
and service shops, and spaces for recreation of all sorts. In the first phases of construction, only the most essential features were realized. Nevertheless, given the scarcity of apartments, many people were only too happy to finally have a private and comfortable place in which to live. Later, technological advances and a greater understanding of the needs of the population resulted in considerable modifications of the new towns.

As previously stated, the use of industrial material and parts and the necessary concentration of living functions resulted in similarity and monotony. Multistory blocks are prevalent in all the settlements. High-rise buildings are used to identify centers, underline green areas, and represent an orientation to the train stations. Architectural variation seeks to give a distinctive character to the different town developments. While Lütten-Klein is characterized by typical block projects, in Evershagen a somewhat freer design application was used through the construction of segmental projects, completed in sequence, allowing new possibilities for adjusting the building plans (see Figures 2 and 3). The newer settlement designs included a kitchen with an outside view, a partial separation of toilet and bath, an eating place in the kitchen, and a wind-protected balcony inset (loggia). Evershagen represents a more court-forming, meandering-like design. Lichtenhagen
Figure 4. The Town of Lichtenhagen.

(Figure 4) constitutes a large space with a closed rambling structure with cars parked outside. Schmarl (Figure 5) closes itself to the outside and to the characteristic winds through large-scale rounded blocks. There are also attempts to relate the new towns to the nonurban environment—provision of easy access to the harbor, fruit orchards, or to a nearby village or restaurant in a more traditional style. Lütten Klein and Evershagen, for instance, share a little restaurant, Fischerdorf. The hope is to avoid having the residents completely enveloped by an environment of cement. Still, the overwhelming impression is not one of an intimate, warm living quarter; even with only 28,500 residents in Evershagen or 17,568 in Schmarl, it takes quite a while to walk away from the buildings themselves. Of course, compared to Marzahn, one of the satellite cities outside of Berlin, with a population of 150,000, the housing developments in Rostock appear less formidable. The little village near the Marzahn development is completely dwarfed by the huge residential complex.

Aside from the differences in the architectural form of the new towns, each Neubaugebiet usually includes some special public institution which is shared by one or more towns—such as a large gymnasium, swimming pool, a polytechnical school, a home for the aged, or a medical clinic. The shopping complexes also vary in kind as well as adequacy. Each new residential area that is built is...
purposefully arranged differently, and the social services that are introduced as well as the changes in spatial arrangement stem at least in part from the difficulties encountered in older settlements. For example, parents in many of the older high-rise apartments were neither able to see their children in the little playgrounds nor call to them from their apartments. Consequently, the newer residential areas were built with a larger number of smaller (though still five- and six-storied) apartment houses. Furthermore, since children were frequently unable to find their way back to their apartment because the houses were so similar, within the settlements themselves the entrances had to be painted with different colors.21 In the newer settlements, increasing differences in the design of the facades were introduced (Figure 6). The smaller apartment houses were to facilitate neighborly relationships. Schmarl has several little park areas, some with concrete ping pong tables, a response to the need for intimacy and for activities for young people. The more rounded buildings were intended to create a more communal and intimate atmosphere as well. It was anticipated that the provision of land adjacent to the residential areas for small family gardens and tiny bungalows would
increase the satisfaction of many residents with their new living quarters.

More debate greeted the reaction of the Kombinat to changing demographic conditions in the GDR. With an increase in divorce, more 1½ room apartments
were planned, for example, in Dierkow an increase from 18 percent to 28 percent. (Another reason for this increase may be the crude incentive system by which the building firm receives premiums for the number of apartments constructed, independent of apartment size.) Sociologists strongly advocated anticipating the use of a stable mix of apartments with a changing population, just as public institutions can be used differently during the history of a residential area. After a few years there may be less need for schoolrooms and they then could be converted to club spaces or eventually for use by an increasing older population. Sociologists advocated providing space from the beginning for a mixture of age groups and family sizes as well as functions.

Sociologists and city planners both in Rostock and in the Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen in Weimar have been involved in a number of studies of Rostock's new living quarters. Using information from the research done in the GDR together with my own interviews has made it possible to gain some understanding of the reactions of the residents to the new residential areas as well as of the social relationships and supports that have developed over the years.

An unofficial estimate is that a quarter of the population of Rostock's new residential areas would like to live elsewhere. Part of the dissatisfaction stems from the small size of apartments and the inadequate number of rooms; indeed those who are crowded plan to move out of their apartments as soon as they are able. At present, five out of eight households with more than three people live in two- and three-room apartments. Many of the young couples with children dream of a one-family house of their own. Still others who are uncomfortable in their new surroundings are unused to an urban life-style; having migrated from the countryside, they experience difficulty adjusting to a more anonymous and built-up environment. While the inhabitants of the new living areas acknowledge the housing shortage and appreciate the innovations and responses of the architects and city planners (for example, the differences in the form and facade of Schmarl or the Lichtenhagen Brink, a gardened mall, as a center of activity), nevertheless they complain that despite their increased comfort and despite the innovations, the environment of the residential quarters is monotonous. They are further away from the center of the city than they had anticipated, and within the new towns there are neither enough cultural activities nor sports' opportunities for their families. There are few cafes and little restaurants to make their town warm, inviting, and an interesting place to be. Of course, despite a tendency for a predominance of younger couples and single parents with children in each new settlement, the inhabitants of the new towns are at different life stages and social levels so that their dissatisfactions and complaints vary. The higher the occupational qualification of the inhabitant, for example, the greater the expectations are for the quality of life in the residences.

Approximately a third of the population of the new towns travels 45 minutes or more to work, longer than originally anticipated. Even for the 38 percent of the residents who arrive at work in 30 minutes or less, the ride is typically on
overcrowded streetcars that are difficult to negotiate during work hours, and that along with trains come too infrequently (although the situation has improved in the past two years). Although 50 percent of the residents of the new towns own cars, not everyone is able to drive to work; husbands and wives may have completely different schedules.

Women, especially, may decide to take work that is below their level of qualification in order to remain closer to their apartment and to the nurseries or kindergartens of their children. At present, about a third of the residents travel to the inner city for work and 18 percent work in the residential area itself. As the local services increase in number, it is expected that even more will seek employment within the residential area. Ironically, when a study of Lütten Klein and Evershagen was done in 1974, there were women trained to work in the services, in tailoring for example, who were not doing so and were even unemployed. One reason was that much of the work was defined traditionally as women’s work, neither well respected nor well paid.24 Thirty-five percent of the women interviewed in that study were working at jobs that did not correspond to their training. University-trained women, more than others, were willing to travel longer to do work that was appropriate to their qualifications.25

The dispersion of many specialized shops all over the city forces men and women to do considerable traveling to buy what they need for their wardrobe or their home. Despite complaints over the years from the residents of Evershagen, for example, and the empty space already allocated for small shops at a central crossing, the shops are not being constructed. Where they are introduced as part of a newly built town, the residents express more satisfaction with their housing arrangements. At the same time, food shopping for everyday needs is easier in the residential areas than in many parts of the inner city because of the number of markets in the towns, and most of the people do their shopping there in the afternoon, after work. Especially coveted items, fresh fruits for example, may not be found in the local market and so it is not unusual for someone to be seen traveling with an enormous bunch of bananas to distribute to friends and colleagues. Within recent years, there has been an expansion of nurseries and private gardens to meet the demands of residents for fruit and flowers.

The construction of the new towns was to involve more than giving GDR citizens an apartment and necessary services; ideally, the social relations in the new settlements and the active involvement of the residents should lead to a socialist way of life. In the new towns around Rostock, less attention has been devoted to these aspects of the community than to its physical construction. Such national organizations as the Democratic Women’s League (Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschland) and the People’s Solidarity Movement (Volkssolidarität) maintain some activities in the new residential areas, but the degree of involvement and influence varies from town to town and especially within any particular area with age and social level. The Democratic Women’s League plans some role in advising local councils and planners on the needs of women and may
act as a pressure group under certain conditions, relocating a playground, for example, or having the hours of local shops arranged so that women on shift work have access to them. Most recently, a new ramp in Evershagen was constructed so that parents can more easily get their baby carriages to the train. Volunteers of Volkssolidarität visit the elderly regularly, delivering meals and doing small errands; many of the active workers are themselves retired.

Families in the new towns as well as in the inner city’s apartment houses are organized into Hausgemeinschaften (house organizations) and send representatives to the leadership board of the residential area. The ideal house organization comprises no more than twelve families and contains a mixture of apartment sizes to encourage mutual help among people of different ages. The functions of the organization are to ensure that order and cleanliness prevail, to care for repairs, and to organize social activities. The success of these Hausgemeinschaften varies enormously; when people are from very different social backgrounds, when they do not adhere to the apartment houses’ standards of cleanliness and orderliness, when there is a lack of leadership due to families being involved in shift work or sea travel, or when the Gemeinschaft is not well defined, the residents may come together primarily to decide on necessary repairs or to take care of any emergency that may arise in the apartment house. The Hausgemeinschaft receives money from the city administration for repairs. When responses to complaints from the residents take a long time to be resolved, when money for repairs is not forthcoming, when equipment parts are nearly impossible to acquire, people become discouraged, less active in the Hausgemeinschaft, and less willing to respond to campaigns to clean up, make repairs, or care for the grounds. At the same time, at least in the new towns I observed, the hallways were undamaged, and at least in moderately good condition. Once a year at least the Oberbürgermeister (mayor) or city deputies come and a “town meeting” is held which many of the residents attend. The city administration also has a permanent office in each Neubaugebiet.

From the observations of the sociologists involved in the study of city life, it became clear that there was more individual activity and mutual support than indicated by the statistics of the Hausgemeinschaft leadership or the district committees of the National Front (Wohnbezirkausschusse). People in the apartment buildings establish standards and norms for behavior and security, as well as for the common care of the house. Among the residents, researchers found a great deal of informal mutual support and neighborliness, which was not defined as close friendship except for a minority of residents. In a study of Marzahn, the large residential town built on the outskirts of Berlin, sociologists observed an interesting change in social patterns which also seems to apply to Rostock. Generally, as in the United States, workers spend their free time primarily with relatives, and to a lesser extent with friends; among professionals, this tendency is reversed. Third on the list of both groups were colleagues at work, and last were neighbors in the house. After some time in the Neubaugebiet, more and more people turned to their neighbors, who were then ranked third on their list,
followed by work colleagues. The explanation given was that it was complicated to travel to meet people after a long day’s work. Some neighborliness develops very quickly. Residents were asked if they had neighbors they would trust with their keys. Of those who lived in Marzahn less than three years, 90 percent of the respondents had at least one other family they would trust with their keys; 50 percent of those interviewed felt comfortable enough with five or six families to give them their keys.

With time, the inhabitants of the new towns are generally more satisfied with their residences. It takes a while to develop a community; many of the residents in Rostock’s new towns have only lived in the city for a few years. Friendships in Lütten Klein, one of the older settlements, are stronger than in other towns. At the same time, in the newer settlements, more often both parents are at work and the children are educated in nurseries and kindergartens. There is little that people share to bring them together beyond the minimal participation needed to keep the housing in good repair and an occasional common celebration. Where several work colleagues live in a house together, there is more the residents can share, though they are not necessarily intensely involved with each other after work. Generally, the researchers believe that the kind of participation that exists in successful work collectives is in its infancy in the residences and that people are not involved in a way that is comparable with their involvement in the workplace.

Niederländer suggests that the reason people are not involved in their residential communities has less to do with their desire to retreat from the outside world than with the lack of opportunities to engage in social activities. In a research project on the new towns in the GDR, workers indicated that little free time after work is spent in the residential area itself (outside of the private apartment), and that during the weekend the communities are deserted, with the exception of very few of the new towns. Warnemünde, the seaside resort, is an easy ride, even with public transportation. Workers and employees at different levels and in different cities in the GDR indicated the following preferred activities: television—73 percent; work in house and garden—56 percent; sports, hiking, walking—52 percent; reading—47 percent; meeting friends and acquaintances—44 percent. Fewer respondents expressed interest in hobbies, going to the theater, concerts or films, and artistic activity. Most of the preferred activities reflect a strong desire for privacy.

In a study of different areas of Rostock, residents interviewed in the new towns were asked where they typically spent their time after work: 62 percent were in their apartments, 8 percent remained in the residential area itself, and 30 percent left the residential area altogether. During the weekend, 11 percent were in their apartments, 7 percent remained in the residential area itself, and 82 percent left the residential area altogether. Several of my respondents indicated that there was little need to become involved in the towns, that they could easily drive to the city to see friends, that they had activities with colleagues at work or afterward, and that they looked forward to the privacy of their own homes. Nearly three-
quarters of the residents between 25 and 55 want a garden of their own. Though in 1983 only a quarter of the families had their own garden (either on land adjacent to the town or some distance away), a standing joke in the GDR is that there are more dachas than mushrooms. These include little, very simple country houses as well as one-room structures in the garden itself. Studies indicate that a garden considerably increases the satisfaction of the residents and relieves in part the yearning for a private house. It is interesting to observe that people prefer their own private gardens, and in one study of Rostock’s new towns the residents were not enthusiastic about sharing a garden with other tenants directly adjacent to the apartment house. There were several reasons for their response; two primary ones were the desire to leave the residential area and the wish to have private time, unobserved by others.

Even those who look forward to the privacy of the apartment and garden would like to increase the possibilities for more family activities in the residential area. Activities are primarily geared to families with young children, and the organization of the few that exist may be poor. In Schmarl, for example, the cinema program begins between seven and eight, a very difficult time for parents with young children. At the same time, there are an impressive number of playgrounds for little children, and in Schmarl, the concrete ping pong tables are used by the older ones as well.

The lack of opportunities is especially problematic for the elderly, most of whom do not own cars and are not able to travel on crowded streetcars. During the weekends, they tend to remain in the residential area, though they too express the wish to leave to visit friends, etc. One elderly man complained that they were promised a cinema for their residential community for years but that he still had to travel “to visit the mistress in order to see a film.” The problems of loneliness are acute for many of the elderly. They would like to live within walking distance of their children, but it seems that a number of tiny apartments interspersed with larger ones that were reserved for them have been given to families. Although there are a few homes for the retired and elderly in the residential areas, both a better age mix and an increased variety of housing were recommended by planners. One architect maintained that it was impossible to take for granted one housing preference for the elderly—some prefer quiet living spaces, while others find it important to be near a train station; some very much enjoy living near young children while others prefer to be surrounded by people their own age.

Single parents with children, and these tend to be mostly women, also have difficulties with social isolation in the new towns. In the GDR as a whole, a third of the births are to unmarried mothers. Since the divorce rate is also high, families headed by women are further increased in number. Such women have special social supports; indeed when there is housing available, their needs have priority. At the same time, if they work far away from their residential community, it is not easy to return quickly if they have to, and it is difficult to leave the children at night and travel into the city. Parents do support each other with baby-
sitting and other forms of help, but many expressed a desire for more clubs and cafes in the residential quarters, more activities, and more possibilities for meeting other adults.

Perhaps the group that is considered the greatest problem, and the least catered to in the new towns, are young people under 25 who have not yet embarked on a life of their own, either personally or professionally. In a GDR film, “The Island of Swans,” a fourteen-year-old from the countryside living in one of the new residential areas on the outskirts of Berlin had great difficulty adjusting to his new environment. The youngsters in the town left a note on their community bulletin board announcing that they have had enough of cement! The film was strongly criticized by the Party and the Free German Youth newsletter, though even the Party itself at times has leveled accusations at the quality of the projects.

Everyone seems to agree that the young people need much more to do in the new towns, more clubs and cafes, increased sports facilities, perhaps working spaces where they can increase their skills while repairing bicycles, record players, etc. Sometimes, they are paid to work on the grounds or on the care of the apartment house but their activities for the most part are in their apartments or outside their residences, away from the town. They like to go dancing or hang out in places where they can talk; they enjoy the movies and beer drinking; they like to be with their friends. While over 80 percent of the retired people in the new towns preferred their free-time activities to take place in their residence, almost 50 percent of the young preferred these activities outside the community.32

Only 10 percent of the young workers in a study done in Rostock indicated that the Free German Youth leadership concerned itself with the leisure time of the youngsters in the town and only 4.9 percent indicated that the National Front was concerned; only 6.8 percent believed the enterprise showed concern. More than half of the youngsters did not conceive of the possibility of spending time in their residences in an interesting and stimulating way.33 Researchers in Berlin found tensions among some of the families because property, destroyed supposedly by youths, took so long to repair that the condition of the housing deteriorated. People were reluctant to criticize each other because they were uncertain of who was actually at fault. Young people are seen as not having the same attitudes as their parents; they are not as orderly and they typically are not interested in the lectures and activities at their school or youth organization. Since young people represent, at least during a certain stage of the history of a new town, a large percentage of the population, the lack of activities and the response of the youngsters is seen as a severe problem.

Conclusion

It is difficult at this time to evaluate the success or failure of the new towns of the GDR. They were a response to complaints about the lack of housing and about the miserable conditions of the existing housing stock. Typically, each succeeding
town contains some elements that are a response to previous difficulties and in turn, with time, reveal new issues that have to be addressed.

Needs vary according to age, stage of life, occupation, etc., and with limited resources and differences over where these resources should be channeled, it is difficult to meet all these demands. In a comparative study of the older parts of cities and new residential quarters, people living in the older quarters were still found to complain about the condition of the housing while leisure time activities, the distance to work, and difficult access to the shops and other public institutions of the inner city were complaints from those living in the new residential quarters.34 GDR research on Rostock's residential areas and my own work confirmed these differences. Overall satisfaction with the new residential quarters of Rostock is greater than in some of the other new developments in the GDR. In part, this is due to the access to the sea and somewhat more innovative construction.

City officials, architects, construction firms, and different resident groups view the towns from varying perspectives. However, since over 60 percent of Rostock's population lives in the new residential quarters, many of the officials, architects, and planners live there themselves. Administrators consider maintaining a relatively contented population as crucial not only for the relations in the community itself, but for continuity in the process of production.

The varying reactions to the new towns are not simply determined by the architecture of the settlements. Rather, the architecture and the overall design are one important element in the lives of the inhabitants whose world is equally shaped by the settlement's relation to the city, workplace, and essential services—and the ease of transportation to these, by the structure of political life and its concomitant political culture, by work organization and work satisfaction (or lack thereof), and by the ability to realize family and personal goals. The role the settlements play in this broader social constellation provides a critical dimension for our understanding of the quality of life in the GDR.

Notes

The author is very grateful to the Joint Committee on Eastern Europe of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council, financed in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Ford Foundation, which supported her with a research grant during the preparation of part of this study, as well as to the sociologists at the Wilhelm Pieck University, Rostock, for their help with this project. She also wants to thank Duncan Smith, director of the exchange program between Brown University and the University of Rostock, for his continuing support and encouragement of her work. Dietrich Rueschemeyer's comments on this chapter are very much appreciated.


4. Jutta Gysi and Wulfram Speigner, "Changes in the Life Patterns of Families in the
German Democratic Republic,’’ (Academy of Sciences of the GDR in Institute of Sociology and Social Policy, Berlin [East], 1983), 41.
8. Scharf, 112.
10. Gysi and Speigner, 41.
15. Musil, 105.
16. Gysi and Speigner, 93.
18. Ibid., 41.
20. Bauen im Ostseebezirk (Rat des Bezirkes Rostock, Bezirksbauamt, 1982), Band 7, 14.
23. Ibid., 36.
27. Kahl and Riedel, 150.
29. Helmut Hanke, Freizeit in der DDR (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1979), 75.
30. Staufenbiel, 38.
31. Ibid., 137.
32. Ibid., 39.


References


Rueschemeyer, Marilyn and Bradley Scharf. "`Labor Unions in the German Democratic Republic.'" In Trade Unions in Communist States, ed. Alex Pravda and Blair Ruble.