CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of International Studies

Department of German and Austrian Studies

Dissertation Thesis

2024   **Jakob Marcks**

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of International Studies

Department of German and Austrian Studies

Jakob Marcks

Urban Development in the Global Cold War

East Germany in UN-HABITAT, 1976-1989

Dissertation Thesis

Prague 2024

Author: **Jakob Marcks, M.A.**

Supervisor: **PhDr. Václav Šmidrkal, Ph.D.**

Consultant: **PhDr. Jan Koura, Ph.D.**

Year of the defence: 2024

References

MARCKS, Jakob. *Urban Development in the Global Cold War – East Germany in UN-HABITAT, 1976-1989.* Praha, 2024. 142 pages. Dissertation thesis (Ph.D.). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of International Studies. Department of German and Austrian Studies. Supervisor PhDr. Václav Šmidrkal, Ph.D.

Abstract

A common theme in the history of development is how the Eastern Bloc and the West competed for influence and power in the postcolonial world through all kinds of modernization projects, including factories, machinery, and infrastructure, and how the leaders of newly independent nation-states manoeuvred through this competition for their own benefit. What remains under-researched, though, is urbanism as a specific dimension of this development competition.

A case in point is the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) strategy of building relations with governments and urban development professionals from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, using the United Nations Programme UN-HABITAT as a platform. This case offers a unique new angle that goes beyond individual projects, people, and places, taking a broader and long-term institutional perspective on the global ambitions of a socialist state in the field of urbanism.

I argue that urbanism comes with specific features (e.g., economic characteristics and the fact that urbanism embodies ways of organizing society) which made it different from other development undertakings and turned urbanism into an important tool for socialist governments in the global development competition.

Abstrakt

Soupeření východního bloku a Západu o vliv a moc v postkoloniálním světě prostřednictvím nejrůznějších modernizačních projektů, včetně továren, technologií a infrastruktury, stejně jako manévrování vůdců nově nezávislých národních států s cílem získání vlastních výhod patří mezi běžná témata dějin rozvojové spolupráce.

Nedostatečně probádaný však zůstává urbanismus jako specifické pole tohoto soupeření v oblasti rozvoje.

Příkladem může být strategie Německé demokratické republiky (NDR), která budovala vztahy s vládami a odborníky na rozvoj měst z Afriky, Asie, Latinské Ameriky a Blízkého východu, přičemž jako platformu využívala program Organizace spojených národů UN HABITAT. Tento případ nabízí jedinečnou novou perspektivu, která jde nad rámec jednotlivých projektů, lidí či míst, a sleduje širší a dlouhodobý institucionální pohled na globální ambice socialistického státu v oblasti urbanismu.

V této práci tvrdím, že urbanismus přišel se specifickými prvky (např. hospodářskými vlastnostmi nebo ztělesněním různých způsobů organizace společnosti), které jej odlišily od jiných rozvojových projektů, a učinily tak z urbanismu důležitý nástroj socialistických vlád v globální rozvojové soutěži.

Keywords

Global Cold War, Development, Urban Planning, German Democratic Republic (GDR)

Klíčová slova

Globální studená válka, rozvoj, urbanismus, Německá demokratická republika (NDR)

Length of the work:

274.503 characters

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 02 July 2024   Jakob Marcks

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to have had Václav Šmidrkal at my side as my supervisor. Having started this journey with me five years ago, he has always remained supportive, even as I adjusted the direction of my research again and again. I would like to thank my consultant, Jan Koura, who adopted me into the Cold War Research Group at Charles University's Faculty of Arts, where I found my second academic home and community.

I would like to express my gratitude to the archivists in Berlin, Dessau, Erkner, Fort Hare, Koblenz, New York City, and Prague, who guided me with patience and expertise through their archives and resources. I dedicate this dissertation to my partner, Max, whose endless understanding, patience, and love have seen me through the easy times and the hard times.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Throughout the Global Cold War, both the socialist camp and the West used development to support their political, economic, and security interests in the postcolonial world order. Both promoted development projects in newly independent nation-states in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America to secure their interests in these countries – which likewise tried to manoeuvre through this competition for their own benefit. This development competition also had an urban dimension. Socialist and Western states alike developed urban master plans and were involved in building, planning, and exchange activities in and with these countries.

Scholars researching such urban issues usually focus their research on individual people or specific projects. Recently, Łukasz Stanek introduced a new place-based approach – i.e., exploring how urbanization in specific postcolonial places was created through the interplay of people, knowledge, and resources, competing and cooperating within and across the Cold War divide.[1] At the same time, there has been little to no systematic research into the institutional dynamics of the states that competed for urban development in postcolonial states. Why did socialist states use *urban* development in the Global Cold War development competition? What were the underlying strategies? How did they pursue their aims in practice? What changes and continuities can be observed?

To allow for a broader analysis that goes beyond the common approach of building research around people, projects, or places, my dissertation focuses on how the German Democratic Republic (GDR), as a socialist state, engaged with potential partners and competitors through a specific United Nations Programme for urban development (UN-HABITAT). As overpopulation and homelessness escalated in many so-called developing countries throughout the 1970s, HABITAT was founded as a response to this crisis, beginning with a major international conference in 1976. Since then, HABITAT has been an intermediary for construction and urban development projects,

---

[1] Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020).

and it has also organized training sessions on development policies and similar topics, targeted first and foremost at professionals from less developed world regions.

Unlike project-based approaches, this framework allows studying a relatively long period (1976–1989). Moreover, unlike place-based approaches, it allows going beyond tangible building and planning sites, instead unveiling a broad spectrum of tools deployed by state socialist actors in this competition, including educational and propaganda activities, as well as the significant groundwork conducted within the GDR's institutions that set the foundation for all these activities.

With this broad approach, which is based on research from eight archives in Europe, Africa, and North America, my research adds a new perspective to the history of development in the Global Cold War. I show that urbanism was a tool that socialist states actively used in the development competition, because urbanism has specific characteristics that make it different from "regular" development projects, such as factories and machinery. On the one hand, urbanism had pragmatic advantages (no need for material resources and less dependency on technological competitiveness), which gained importance when socialist economies declined. On the other hand, it allowed for the promoting of socialist ideas of the city on a global scale, and thereby socialist ideas of society – ideas that underwent notable changes in the period in question.

1. Research Scenario

In recent years, the History of Development has received increased attention from Cold War scholars, moving the discourse away from Western-centric perspectives towards multipolar perspectives. Development is now understood as an essential instrument in the Cold War competition for power, a competition in which all sides – East, West, and South – were agents that tried to deploy this instrument for their respective economic, ideological, or geopolitical benefit. Typically, development projects centred on infrastructure, factories, or weapons, to give but a few examples. The "First" and "Second" World used such technological projects as vehicles to pursue their interests in the "Third" World, which itself often tried to pit the former two against each other.

An important but under-researched aspect of the development competition is urbanism. During the Cold War, architects and urban planners from both the East and the West worked on urban master plans, housing programmes, and institution-building in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. In the past two decades, such urban topics have been studied by several scholars, who have usually worked on case studies about individual projects – e.g., how Polish urban planners developed a new Master Plan for Baghdad in the 1970s,[2] or how East Germany engaged in housing projects in Zanzibar.[3] Most of these works were written by European scholars, and their starting point is usually one person or one specific project. In 2020, Łukasz Stanek set a precedent with his book *Architecture in Global Socialism*, in which he goes beyond such individualized perspectives. Rather, his starting points are places – e.g., the Ghanaian capital of Accra between 1957 and 1966 – and he examines how these places came into being, based on global flows of knowledge, people, and material. In this way, Stanek shows how the Global Cold War[4] development competition resulted in urbanization in Ghana, Nigeria,

---

[2] Łukasz Stanek, "Miastoprojekt Goes Abroad: The Transfer of Architectural Labour from Socialist Poland to Iraq (1958-1989)", *The Journal of Architecture* 22, no. 4 (2017): 768–811.

[3] Ludger Wimmelbücker, "Architecture and City Planning Projects of the German Democratic Republic in Zanzibar", *The Journal of Architecture* 17, no. 3 (2012): 407–32.

[4] I am using the term "Global Cold War" when applicable. The "Global" in the Cold War was first introduced by Odd Arne Westad in 2005 and relates to the idea of overcoming a bipolar understanding of the competition between Moscow and Washington as two superpowers with their respective proxies. The term "Global Cold War" expands the scope to encompass the broader global dynamics of the era. It emphasizes that the conflict was not limited to these two powers alone but emphasizes the agency of smaller actors within and outside both the blocs. The term "Global Cold War" helps to highlight the interconnectedness of various regional conflicts and the significance of local struggles; it underscores

Iraq, and elsewhere. Stanek's novel place-based approach represents, for the first time, a (somewhat) systematic research into the "recipient's" or results side. What remains missing is the counterpart to Stanek's approach, i.e., systematic research into the "donor's" side.[5] Beyond individual projects or persons, there is no systematic research into the methods, practices, and strategies of socialist institutions that participated in the global competition for urban development. My focus on a programme like HABITAT allows for a broader analysis of the institutional dimension than studying individual projects, people, or places. Through examining the GDR's HABITAT membership, I will explore why the GDR used *urban* development in the Global Cold War development competition, the extent to which this approach was strategic, how they pursued their aims in practice, and how this changed or remained continuous throughout the studied period.

My main argument is that urbanism emerged as an essential tool for socialist states amidst the global competition for development. Throughout the period in question (1976–1989), urbanism, as a tool of development politics, was subject to changing geopolitical and economic contexts (such as the decline of socialist economies in the 1980s) and changing perceptions within the professional community regarding what makes good urbanism. Despite these changes, urbanism remained an important political and economic instrument, as it had specific features that made it distinct from other development forms.

In the scholarly discourse, it is widely acknowledged that development was in many cases not a benevolent act, but rather served to bring postcolonial nation-states on a path towards either the socialist camp or the capitalist Western states, using unpolitical matters like technology as a vehicle (as Sara Lorenzini writes, technology was not neutral anymore, "*machinery and dams were products of a culture, and the choice of technology implied a choice of social organization, labor relations, and structures of*

---

the global dimensions of the Cold War and its impact on diverse nations and regions around the world. See Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[5] Due to the limitations of this first chapter, I used the terms "recipient" and "donor", yet I acknowledge that, in fact, these relations were more complex than donor-recipient relations, as the recent discourse on co-production shows – see for example Jakob Marcks, "Self-Help Architecture in the Global Cold War: East German Panel Technology for the ANC, 1982–1992", *Comparativ - Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 33, no. 3 (2023): 421–39.

production: it was a political choice.").[6] Urbanism had the advantage that it did not require any "vehicles" to convey visions of organizing society. There are genuine differences between the (ideal) socialist city and the capitalist city, as they are the spatial outcome, or even catalyst, of the socialist or capitalist organization of society. In this sense, especially in the early years of HABITAT, GDR urbanists used HABITAT to promote what Kimberly Zarecor calls "infrastructural thinking with a socialist scaffold."[7] In the 1980s, the socialist modern city faced mounting criticism from the population and the professional community alike for its scale and monotony. Whereas modernist ideals were formulated by urbanists educated during the interwar period and by their students, a new generation of urbanists now began to question these ideals, calling for less extensive, diversified, and smaller-scale interventions. This shift was also mirrored in HABITAT, where the GDR now shifted its focus towards, for example, how to revitalize neighbourhoods, departing from its previous emphasis on planning large-scale housing projects. As the ideals of socialist modernity diminished, the economic specificities of urbanism gained relevance. Typical activities included, for example, developing Master Plans or other forms of land-use plans, consulting the setup of urban planning authorities in new nation-states, or providing self-help housing solutions for rural populations. Such measures did not require material investments or resources, while still generating hard currency income. Moreover, despite the rise of computer-aided technologies, such activities remained relatively independent from technological competitiveness – unlike the "regular" development projects of socialist states, for which the lack of competitiveness became an insurmountable problem in late socialism.

I have chosen the GDR's membership in UN-HABITAT for several reasons. As outlined above, I aim to examine the institutional dimension of urban development cooperation from the perspective of the socialist camp. HABITAT's long existence and broad field of activities make it an ideal case, as it transcends individual projects, people, and institutions, which meant that the state apparatus had to mobilize and coordinate various actors, including the Academy of Building (Bauakademie), the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and others. Furthermore, the case of HABITAT allows us to observe changes and continuities in the strategies and

---

[6] See also chapter 2.2, Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 68.

[7] I will explain this concept in more detail in chapter 3.2.

approaches of its Member States over time. Moreover, as an organization, HABITAT was acknowledged by the socialist camp, the West, and the Group of 77 alike, serving as the largest international organization promoting urban development in the region that nowadays is often referred to as the Global South. Accordingly, it became a platform that mirrored the development competition of the Global Cold War. Eventually, this long-term institutional perspective enables the exploration of significant groundwork on the political and institutional level, such as capacity-building efforts aimed at establishing the necessary foundations to implement all of these projects (which is a finding that can hardly be uncovered through mere project- or place-based approaches).

Of the various socialist states, I have chosen the GDR because they played a leading role within the socialist camp and coordinated the involvement of their "socialist brother states." Moreover, archival materials pertaining to the GDR are more readily available and accessible compared to other states. At the same time, I acknowledge that the GDR had specific characteristics that did not apply to other socialist states, which must be taken into account when drawing broader conclusions for the socialist camp. The two most common specificities compared to other socialist states likely include the GDR's international isolation until the 1970s and the fact that the authorities promoted socialist ideology more strictly than other, more pragmatic states. The first issue – international isolation – is partially mitigated by the fact that HABITAT was founded only in 1976. The second issue – the prevalence of ideology – influenced the GDR's relationship with HABITAT and was likely one of the reasons why the GDR was interested in HABITAT.[8] Ultimately, studying HABITAT allows us to compare and cross-check the GDR's involvement with other socialist states (as far as archival materials allow), offering another way to mitigate the disadvantages of looking at one single state.

1.1 State of the Art

Engerman (2017) stands among the pioneering authors who have contributed to our understanding of the history of development. He delineates a framework wherein development acts as an instrument to perpetuate colonial rule.[9] Initially, Engerman and

---

[8] As I will show throughout this dissertation, the GDR used HABITAT to promote textbook-like ideas of the socialist city on a global scale. Moreover, HABITAT as an organization often took positions critical of capitalism, and it was not dominated by the West, which became even more relevant in the 1980s with the rise of US-dominated international organizations.

[9] David Engerman, "Development Politics and the Cold War", *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 1 (2017): 1–19.

other early (Western) scholars of development history described development as a geopolitical invention of the West. In recent years, however, this discourse has become more multifaceted. Burton et. al (2021) argue that development was an instrument that emerged from imbalances between centres and their peripheries, which was limited to neither the Cold War nor Western colonialism. As they show, the Soviet Union used development to modernize its own peripheries in the 1930s – and later, during the Cold War, socialist leaders used such previous European and Central Asian experiences when promoting the socialist development model in newly decolonized nation-states.[10] Moreover, Lorenzini (2019) and Kott (2021) show how development turned into an important instrument for both the socialist and capitalist camps during the Global Cold War. They highlight how socialist states used the development competition to gain leverage within the Eastern Bloc and how the governments of newly independent nation-states manoeuvred through Eastern and Western development initiatives).[11] Kott also points to the United Nations as a platform for this competition. Both Kott and Lorenzini trace how this competition evolved from the postwar years through the high years of development in the 1960s and 1970s up to the decline of the socialist development model in the 1980s – the "lost decade", as Artemy Kalinovsky calls it.[12] The current discourse around the history of development is described in more detail in chapters 2.1 to 2.4.

An integral aspect of development is urbanism, wherein urbanists from socialist countries contributed their ideas to urban development projects in postcolonial nation-states and engaged in professional debates in international forums like UN-HABITAT. These contributions often reflected a specific socialist understanding of urbanism, which is why I also engage with literature on this topic. In her essay "What makes the socialist city so socialist?", Zarecor (2018) explains how infrastructural thinking – which existed in the East and the West – was catalyzed through the socialist political system and, vice-versa, turned into an instrument to shape society.[13] Bernhardt (2005)

---

[10] Eric Burton, James Mark, and Steffi Marung, "Development", in *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization*, ed. James Mark and Paul Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 75–114.
[11] Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*; Sandrine Kott, *Organiser le monde: Une autre histoire de la guerre froide* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2021).
[12] Artemy Kalinovsky, "Sorting Out the Recent Historiography of Development Assistance: Consolidation and New Directions in the Field", *Journal of Contemporary History* 56, no. 1 (2021): 227–39.
[13] Kimberly Zarecor, "What Was so Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe", *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 1 (2018): 95–117.

shows how such modernist, infrastructural visions of the socialist city unfolded in East Germany, and how they changed over time – from the first generations of socialist New Towns that were formed around steelworks, influenced by interwar discourses, to a second generation often linked to the chemical industry (such as Halle-Neustadt, dubbed "the city of chemical workers", which the East German delegation to HABITAT praised repeatedly as a good practice throughout the 1970s), up to the crisis of socialist infrastructural and large-scale urbanism in the 1980s.[14] As for the crisis of socialist modernist urbanism, Petr Roubal's research provides insights into the shifts occurring in the 1970s and 1980s, and how changing urbanistic ideals were negotiated within the professional community. While Roubal takes on the Czechoslovak perspective, some of his conclusions are also applicable to the GDR and the socialist camp as a whole.[15]

These debates all influenced the collaboration and exchange between urbanists from socialist states and their counterparts in newly independent postcolonial nation-states. Ward (2010) stands among the first scholars to explore the urban dimension of development history. He traces the role of Eastern and Western architects and urbanists in the context of decolonization, highlighting how local and international influences shaped the urban development frameworks of these countries. Ward also emphasizes the role of international organizations as intermediaries for urban development projects, occasionally involving highly reputable architects such as Constantinos Doxiadis and Adolf Ciborowski.[16] Building on Ward's work, the past two decades have witnessed a growing body of literature on architecture and urban planning cooperation between the socialist bloc and newly independent nation-states – including the early works of Stanek and others, many of which were published in a themed issue of the *Journal of Architecture* in 2012 ("The 'Second World's' architecture and planning in the 'Third World"). Stanek's recent work (2021) further advances the place-based approach mentioned earlier. Much like the development phenomena described by Lorenzini, Kott, Burton, and others, Stanek's work mirrors similar themes. For instance, he elucidates how Soviet urbanists were "thinking African and Asian cities through Tashkent and

---

[14] Christoph Bernhardt, "Planning Urbanization and Urban Growth in the Socialist Period - the Case of East German New Towns, 1945-1989", *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 1 (2005): 104–19.

[15] Petr Roubal, "Krize urbanistické moderny v socialismu. Případ plánování Prahy od šedesátých do osmdesátých let 20. století", *Soudobé Dějiny* 24, no. 3 (2017): 335–60.

[16] Stephen V. Ward, "Transnational Planners in a Postcolonial World", in *Crossing Borders: International Exchange and Planning Practices*, ed. Patsy Healey and Robert Upton (New York: Routledge, 2010), 47–72.

Samarkand", or how Hungarian architects created "constructed affinities" between their own rural and underdeveloped history and the situation of their counterparts in Africa.[17]

East Germany's participation in this development competition was significantly influenced by the impact of the Hallstein Doctrine, which resulted in a lack of international recognition until the early 1970s. Accordingly, the GDR primarily relied on soft means of collaboration, such as cultural diplomacy. Beyond the socialist camp, the GDR sought collaborations with liberation movements like the African National Congress (ANC) – a form of collaboration that turned into a "hallmark of GDR foreign policy",[18] as Ulrich van der Heyden put it. These patterns of collaboration persisted even after the isolation was overcome. Scholars have researched the GDR's activities from various angles. For instance, Max Trecker examines East–South cooperation from an economic perspective, arguing that the economic downturn during late socialism was significantly fuelled by the debt crisis in Latin America and Africa.[19] Young Sun Hong (2015) shows how the two Germanies competed in humanitarian aid,[20] Sahrendt (2009) focuses on cultural diplomacy,[21] and Burton (2021) on development work(ers),[22] to give but a few examples. As far as the urban dimension of development is concerned, three types of studies exist. Firstly, there are studies about specific projects, such as the GDR's reconstruction of Hamhung (North Korea, 1950–1953)[23] and Vinh (Vietnam, 1970s),[24] as well as numerous smaller projects, particularly in Africa. Secondly, in recent years, studies about individual architects and their lives and work in, for example,

---

[17] see chapter 3.1

[18] Ulrich van der Heyden and Anja Schade, "GDR Solidarity with the ANC of South Africa", in *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War "East"*, ed. Lena Dallywater, Chris Saunders, and Helder Adegar Fonseca (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 79.

[19] Max Trecker, *Red Money for the Global South. East-South Economic Relations in the Cold War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).

[20] Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[21] Christian Sahrendt, *Kunst als Botschafter einer künstlichen Nation* (Wiesbaden: Steiner-Verlag, 2009).

[22] Eric Burton, *In Diensten des Afrikanischen Sozialismus - Tansania und die globale Entwicklungsarbeit der beiden deutschen Staaten, 1961–1990* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2021).

[23] Dong Sam Sin, "Die Planung des Wiederaufbaus der Städte Hamhung und Hungnam in Nordkorea durch die DAG-Städtebaubrigade der DDR von 1955 - 1962 - Eine städtebaugeschichtliche Abhandlung aus der Sicht eines Zeitzeugen" (Dissertation, Hamburg, HafenCity University, 2017); Young-Sun Hong, "Through a Glass Darkly: East German Assistance to North Korea and Alternative Narratives of the Cold War", in *Comrades of Color - East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 43–72.

[24] Christina Schwenkel, *Building Socialism - The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

Ethiopia or Nigeria have emerged.[25] Thirdly, Andreas Butter's contributions, albeit brief, provide an overview of the GDR's involvement in architecture and urban planning projects abroad from 1949 to 1989, highlighting continuities and changes.[26]

To date, there remains a notable gap in significant and systematic research into the institutional dynamics, whether regarding the GDR or the socialist camp as such – i.e. why and how authorities and professional institutions from the urban and architectural field engaged in and with the growing number of postcolonial nation-states. A notable exception is Juliane Richter's as-yet-unpublished dissertation about the Institute for Tropical Building,[27] which, alongside Bauakademie, was perhaps the most important institution that backed the GDR's urban planning and architecture ambitions in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

1.2 Methodology, Sources, Terminology

The most essential sources for this dissertation are drawn from eight archives across Europe, America, and Africa. Key archives in Germany include the Scientific Collections at the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space in Erkner. The Leibniz Institute was established in 1992 as one of the institutional successors of the GDR's Bauakademie; it emerged from the Bauakademie's former Institute for Town Planning and Architecture (Institut für Städtebau und Architektur, ISA). ISA was in charge of the GDR's practical cooperation with HABITAT starting in 1984. Today, the Scientific Collections hold many of ISA's files and the personal estates of many GDR architects, including Gottfried Wagner, who headed the East German HABITAT delegation from 1984 to 1989. Files of Bauakademie's other institutes are located mainly at the German Federal Archive in Berlin. The archive furthermore holds relevant personal files, such as the estate of Gerhard Kosel, who headed the GDR's HABITAT delegation from 1977 to 1984. Materials of the Ministry of Construction, which was in

---

[25] Monika Motylińska and Phuong Phan, "'Not the Usual Way?' On the Involvement of an East German Couple with the Planning of the Ethiopian Capital", *Architecture beyond Europe*, no. 16 (2019); Anne-Katrin Fenk, Rachel Lee, and Monika Motylińska, "Unlikely Collaborations? Planning Experts from Both Sides of the Iron Curtain and the Making of Abuja", *Comparativ - Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 30, no. 1 (2020): 38–59.

[26] Andreas Butter, "Solidarität in Stein und Stahl? Der Architekturexport der DDR als Hebel einer 'antikolonialistischen' Außenpolitik", in *Koloniale Spuren in den Archiven der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft*, ed. Heinz Peter Brogiato and Matthias Röschner (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2020), 128–43; Andreas Butter, "Showcase and Window to the World: East German Architecture Abroad 1949-1990", *Planning Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (2018): 249–69.

[27] Institut für Tropenbau an der Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen Weimar (HAB Weimar)

charge of the political-ideological oversight of East Germany's cooperation with HABITAT, are also located at the Federal Archive in Berlin. Regarding foreign politics, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also played a role in ensuring that East German activities and positions towards HABITAT aligned with the GDR's broader UN policies. The Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin holds the Ministry of Foreign Affairs files. To understand the German-German context of the topic, I consulted files from the West German Ministry of Construction (Federal Archive in Koblenz) and the West German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office in Berlin). Further archives include the Stasi Records Archive and the archive at Bauhaus Dessau, as the Bauhaus was involved in certain activities in HABITAT.

To provide contextualization and understand how other socialist states cooperated with HABITAT and other UN programmes and agencies in architecture and urban planning, I consulted the Czech National Archive. In South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) archive in Fort Hare provided essential insights. One of the most visible HABITAT-intermediated projects of the GDR was a joint construction and self-help project carried out by the ANC and Bauakademie in Tanzania at the Dakawa Development Centre. The ANC archive proved beneficial in verifying certain information from East German archives and complementing East German reports and the personal perspectives of East German experts and officials with the views of their African counterparts. I also consulted the Archive of the United Nations in New York City in the United States. Unfortunately, all files of the HABITAT administration are stored at the headquarters of HABITAT in Nairobi (Kenya) and are not publicly accessible. Nevertheless, the UN Archives in New York proved useful regarding communication between HABITAT, the UN Secretary-General, and certain other UN bodies. Although accessing the HABITAT archive directly is not feasible, the UN Archives, combined with the insights from European and African archives, provides a workaround for this limitation, which is not ideal but is currently the only possible approach.

The archival materials I consulted consist, to a significant extent, of internal reports from various institutions involved with HABITAT – often sent by East Germans abroad to their superiors in Berlin. This includes, for example, memos from the GDR embassy staff or East German urban planners and other experts staying abroad on HABITAT

missions. Likewise, the GDR's delegation to HABITAT frequently sent reports to East Berlin during the annual sessions of UNCHS. In his recent book on German development work in Tanzania, Eric Burton thoroughly explains how to interpret the internal reports of seconded personnel in development projects. For historians, it is crucial to understand that there is "*a whole complex of social practices, imbued with power, which accompanies the production and reception of reports and must be taken into account in the reconstruction of history.*"[28] The reports used for my dissertation not only originate from seconded personnel, but many of them involve authors and recipients in different countries and on different power levels. Therefore, most of Burton's observations apply to these reports as well. Such reports are often rich in information but simultaneously challenging to interpret. Their context of origin is an important factor. The authors of such reports are not neutral persons, nor are their reports neutral summaries of events on the ground. Rather, such reports depict unequal power relations between the author and the recipient, and the authors often pursue an agenda with their reports, even if sometimes only a subconscious one. Consequently, such reports often paint a distorted picture: in some cases, they even aim to change the understanding of reality at the ministries they are subordinated to, thereby trying to adjust the demands of the ministries towards them, for their benefit. Burton describes such reports as "*the instrument of rule dictated from above (but nevertheless manipulated from below), in which the boundaries of what could be said were narrowly drawn, and structurally justified blanks could be found.*"[29] Furthermore, Burton notes that "*most reports are cautiously optimistic in tone, describe general progress, and – for the sake of credibility – also contain concessions that smaller but surmountable problems still await a solution. Causes of problems are usually outsourced to external factors, and personal failure is admitted just as rarely as a lack of perspective for one's own efforts.*"[30] The authors of such reports were usually aware of the expectations of their recipients and adjusted their contents accordingly.[31]

---

[28] Author's translation from the German original: "ein ganzer Komplex sozialer, machtdurchtränkter Praktiken, die mit der Produktion und Rezeption von Berichten einhergehen und in der Rekonstruktion der Geschichte beachtet werden müssen" (Burton, *In Diensten des Afrikanischen Sozialismus - Tansania und die globale Entwicklungsarbeit der beiden deutschen Staaten, 1961–1990*, 29.)

[29] Authors's translation from the German original: "[der Bericht als] das von oben diktierte (aber nichtsdestoweniger von unten manipulierte) Herrschaftsinstrument, in dem die Grenzen des Sagbaren eng gezogen waren und sich strukturell begründete Leerstellen finden lassen" (Ibid., 27.)

[30] Author's translation from the German original: "Die meisten Berichte sind im Grundton vorsichtig optimistisch, schildern allgemeine Fortschritte und enthalten – der Glaubwürdigkeit halber – auch

Alf Lüdtke's reflections on language in the context of the GDR are equally relevant. Lüdtke builds on a study by Mary Fullbrook, who examined certain SED reports drafted by lower levels and passed through various levels to the leadership. Her observations are also applicable to reports from GDR personnel abroad. Fullbrook noted a growing "formulaicness" in these reports beginning in the 1960s and even more so in the 1970s, leading them to become increasingly meaningless. The reports contained more and more platitudes and "party and official prose",[32] as Lüdtke calls it. Lüdtke also examines the contrast between factuality and fictionalization in such reports. For many authors, fictional elements in their reports were often important to create or maintain room for manoeuvre. Using the SED example, Lüdtke shows that in many cases, both the authors and the addressees were often aware of the fiction and saw through it.[33] Matthias Judt has also studied the language in GDR archive materials, noting an increasing ideologization over the years – for example, the claim to embody "progress". This was also reflected in the way reports were written. While filtering out actual statements from this phrase-like writing is difficult, it is precisely the change in phrases over time that holds some significance for historians.[34]

In working with such reports, my strategy is to maintain a continuous awareness of their lack of neutrality and the potential subtexts and implicit meanings. Another helpful strategy was to juxtapose East German reports with resources from other authors and other archives. For instance, I also studied West German archival materials about the Vancouver conference and the annual UNCHS sessions because they provide a second perspective and also document Bonn's observations of the other German state's activities. The same applies to the ANC Archive in Fort Hare, South Africa, regarding the joint HABITAT project of the ANC and the GDR in Dakawa, Tanzania. In this case, internal ANC documents described their cooperation practices in detail and openness, while omitting the socialist "prose" that often dominated East German reports about the

Zugeständnisse, dass kleinere, aber überwindbare Probleme noch ihrer Lösung harren. Ursachen für Probleme werden üblicherweise in externe Faktoren ausgelagert und persönliches Scheitern genauso selten eingestanden wie eine Perspektivlosigkeit des eigenen Einsatzes" (Ibid., 28.)

[31] Ibid., 24–31.

[32] Author's translation from the original German term "Partei- und Amtsprosa"

[33] Alf Lüdtke, "Sprache und Herrschaft in der DDR. Einleitende Überlegungen", in *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte*, ed. Alf Lüdtke and Peter Becker (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1997), 24–26.

[34] Matthias Judt,"'Nur für den Dienstgebrauch' - Arbeiten mit Texten einer deutschen Diktatur", in *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte*, ed. Alf Lüdtke and Peter Becker (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1997), 35ff.

project. Additionally, personal insights help overcome the limited informative value of official reports, though only to a very limited extent, as the leading figures of the East German HABITAT delegation have either passed away or cannot be located. However, the personal estates of both Gerhard Kosel and Gottfried Wagner, the two long-time heads of the GDR's HABITAT delegation, are available in the archives in Erkner and Berlin. Kosel's documents are rich in information, as they include his diaries, and Wagner's estate was particularly helpful for one of the GDR's HABITAT projects, a seminar series, because it contains handwritten notes from the seminar participants.

Regarding terminology, several terms require reflection. In the past, terms such as "Third World" or "developing countries" were widely used to categorize countries other than North America, Western Europe, and the Eastern Bloc. In recent years, the term "Global South" has increasingly been used. All of these terms pose the problem of impacting the analytical language used by researchers to describe the past. The most obvious example is the term "Third World", which was introduced by contemporaries in the context of decolonization to describe the new global situation. At the same time, it was criticized by scholars from regions devalued as the Second and Third World. As Young-Sun Hong puts it, the construction of the Third World as "the 'other' of Western modernity" was meant to justify the continued subordination of this region; the three-world paradigm was an attempt by the West to "rescue and rearticulate their conception of the imperial, colonial world order and their place in it in relation to the socialist camp", thereby including the Eastern Bloc into the picture while simultaneously denying its legitimacy by downgrading it to the Second World.[35] Generally speaking, terms like Third World are not geographic descriptions but rather reflect worldviews.[36] The term "developing countries" is likewise problematic, as it is often used as a catch-all phrase for a diverse range of nations with varying levels of economic, social, and political development. Like the term Third World, it arguably does not reflect a geographic delineation but a specific worldview that originates from the idea of development stages in which there are developed imperial centres and underdeveloped regions following the same development patterns, though delayed in time – a logic that

[35] Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, 14–16.
[36] Anna Calori et al., "Alternative Globalization? Spaces of Economic Interaction between the 'Socialist Camp' and the 'Global South'", in *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War*, ed. Anna Calori et al. (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 4.

first emerged with the British Mandate system.[37] The term "Global South" was introduced as an alternative to the First-Second-Third World terminology, aiming to acknowledge the power dynamics and historical imbalances between developed and less-developed nations. However, it can reinforce a binary division between the North (developed) and the South (less developed). Critics claim that the term "Global South" tends to homogenize a diverse group of countries and regions with distinct histories, cultures, and challenges. It is often associated with notions of dependency, poverty, and underdevelopment. This can inadvertently reinforce a narrative that portrays these countries as passive recipients of aid or assistance rather than recognizing their agency.[38] In this dissertation, I try to avoid these terms when possible and instead adopt more context-specific and neutral language when referring to countries or regions. This includes using country names, regional descriptors (e.g., Southeast Asia), self-descriptions (e.g., the Group of 77), or terms that reflect the specific characteristics being discussed, thereby avoiding generalizations or (subconscious) assumptions linked to the given nation or region.

Other terms that require clarification revolve around the urban question. The sources I am working with use terms such as "urbanism", "urban development", "urban planning", "architecture", "territorial planning", and related words. Definitions of these terms vary across geographical contexts and are sometimes translated differently in other languages. In UN-HABITAT publications, no distinct definition can be found. However, when reading and interpreting current PR texts of HABITAT, they implicitly convey the following meanings: (1) Urban Design is focused on particular projects; it is about the functionality and aesthetics of delineated smaller entities – such as the design of streets, housing complexes, or parks. Some scholars connect it to placemaking, that is, to the design of (public) spaces, and accordingly, they define urban design as "the making of places for people".[39] In this dissertation, I do not use this term, as I do not speak about the making of places in the sense of this definition. (2) Compared to Urban Design, Urban Planning looks at the city on a broader scale. It is the discipline that combines technical, social, and economic aspects to coordinate land use and

---

[37] see also chapter 2.1

[38] see for example Alfred Lopez, "Introduction: The (Post) Global South", *Global South* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1–11.

[39] Matthew Carmona, *Public Places Urban Spaces - The Dimensions of Urban Design* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

infrastructure in urban areas. For Arch Daily, "*as a discipline and as a method of action, urban planning deals with the processes of production, structuring, and appropriation of urban space. In this sense, its main objective is to point out what measures should be taken to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants, including matters such as transport, security, access opportunities, and even interaction with the natural environment.*"[40] (3) Urban development – following the implicit meaning conveyed through HABITAT publications – is rather the description of a state or a result. The HABITAT website reads, for example, that they support governments "*to improve policies, plans, and designs for more compact, socially inclusive, and better integrated and connected cities that foster sustainable urban development.*"[41] In this sense, urban planning is the "method of action" (improving policies, plans, and designs), and urban development is the result. (4) The term "urbanism" has no unified meaning, and its meaning varies in different languages and countries. In my definition, it encompasses both methods of action and result.

Finally, I am aware that there are different tendencies in academic writing regarding using the first and third person in different countries, languages, and disciplines. However, writing an English-language dissertation at a Czech University about a German topic, mixing Cold War and Development History with urbanism, I decided to opt for the perspective that best serves the clarity and readability of my work. Therefore, I sometimes use the first person in this dissertation, but only in passages where my own original reflections are concerned. This includes, for example, explaining my methodological approaches, my interpretations, or instructions for the reader. This allows me to present my ideas, arguments, and reflections more directly and helps me reduce (reader-unfriendly and often imprecise) passive voice.

1.3 Structure

This dissertation is divided into three sections: "Development", "The Global Urban Question", and "Practice". In "Development" (second chapter), I will briefly revisit the history of development as a concept and how it was used in different periods by different actors. This also includes the United Nations, which turned into a platform

---

[40] "What Is Urban Planning?", Arch Daily, Camilla Ghisleni, https://www.archdaily.com/984049/what-is-urban-planning (accessed 13 November 2023).
[41] "Urban Planning and Design", UN HABITAT, https://unhabitat.org/2-urban-planning-and-design, (accessed 13 November 2023).

(though not without agency) for development projects and discourse, starting with the reconstruction of Europe after World War II, followed by the growing dominance of postcolonial nation-states in the UN in the 1960s and 1970s, and up to the organization's weakening in the 1980s. This weakening was part of a broader crisis of the development idea during this decade, which some scholars describe as a "lost decade". Eventually, I will position East Germany in the global development competition, considering both its specificities and commonalities compared to other Eastern Bloc countries.

In "The Global Urban Question" (chapter 3), I create a bridge from the development questions discussed in the previous chapter to urbanism. I will examine, in particular, how urbanism was a sub-form of development and how UN-HABITAT was founded to promote urban development. Here, I will show, amongst other things, how the Secretary-General of HABITAT attempted to redefine the UN's development concept and in how far this new concept overlapped with the GDR's vision of (urban) development. Moreover, I will show how the GDR engaged with HABITAT, starting even a few years before the programme's official foundation in 1977. Accordingly, I will explore East German strategies and objectives related to the new organization and how these have changed over time.

In "Practice" (chapter 4), I will move from the political and theoretical aspects of development to the practical-professional level of the GDR's relationship with UN-HABITAT. This chapter is divided into five practical cases – practical events, projects, or other activities of GDR actors related to HABITAT that shaped their relationship. These cases include, firstly, HABITAT's 1976 Vancouver conference, which preceded HABITAT's foundation, and where the GDR participated with a high-level delegation and promoted its visions of urban development. Secondly, from the 1980s, Bauakademie undertook strategic and coordinated efforts to improve their prospects for urban planning and architecture projects on foreign markets, which were directly linked to UN-HABITAT. Thirdly, HABITAT acted as an intermediary and provided financial assistance for a construction project between the GDR and the African National Congress (ANC) in a refugee camp in Dakawa, Tanzania, where the GDR introduced a prefab housing construction system from 1986 onwards. Fourthly, the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH, 1987) focused mainly on promotional aspects and questions of legitimacy. Fifthly, from 1987 to 1989, East Germany's Bauakademie

organized a HABITAT seminar series in Berlin and Dessau, aimed at sharing their urban development expertise with participants representing various urban and regional planning authorities from Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world.

Taken together, these cases presented in chapter 4 illustrate how priorities changed over time, mirroring a generational shift in the East German HABITAT delegation and a concurrent evolution in professional discourse among urbanists. The earlier cases, such as the Vancouver conference, clearly highlight how HABITAT was seen as a platform to promote the ideals of modernist socialist urbanism. By contrast, the later cases, such as the seminar series, demonstrate how the GDR adapted its focus towards more pragmatic and economic ambitions. These cases also reveal the failures and difficulties encountered, such as the inability to translate their own urban development expertise to the conditions of other world regions, and how the state invested significant resources into overcoming these issues to prepare East German urbanists for assignments abroad.

2. Development

The main aim of this chapter is to discuss the idea of development and its role in the Global Cold War. This will provide a framework for the next chapter (chapter 3), where I will examine the specific urban dimension of development and its rise in the 1970s and 1980s, a situation that led to the foundation of HABITAT and heightened East German interest in the topic. I will, therefore, explore different definitions of development and discuss how the idea of development shaped the Global Cold War, with a special eye on the relation between newly decolonized nation-states and the Eastern Bloc, as well as the role of the United Nations therein. This also includes positioning the GDR within these dynamics.

2.1 What is Development?

In trying to find a definition for development, Corinna Unger (2018) begins her introduction to postwar development with an illustrative account involving the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. In 2016, the foundation launched a project to send 100,000 chickens to so-called developing countries, aiming to allow people in these countries, especially women, to build an income and become economically independent. One of the foundation's target countries was Bolivia. However, the Bolivian government fiercely refused the foundation's plans, seeing it as a "Trojan Horse" to bring American-style capitalism into the country, based on the wrong assumption that Bolivia was a predominantly rural (backward) economy. This case is particularly interesting because it reproduces patterns common to the development discourse since its beginning around a century ago. Development arises from power imbalances between the centre and periphery, between the developed and less-developed. It comes either disguised as a fix for these imbalances or as a perpetuation, depending on the perspective. While usually portrayed by the centres as aid, development has also been a means of exerting foreign control over marginalized countries or regions – though sometimes the latter has managed to turn development into a tool to challenge foreign influence by playing imperial powers against each other (an aspect that the chicken case omits).[42] For David Engerman, development has three prerequisites: a conceptual apparatus, state capacity,

---

[42] Corinna Unger, *International Development - a Postwar History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 2f.

and political commitments, which, taken together, became instruments to secure colonial rule.[43] Most scholarship on the history of development tends to be Western-centric, often attributing its origins to the Western world, which deployed development as a tool to spread capitalism as an answer to poverty and backwardness in less-developed regions of the world. This scholarship dates the beginning of development to the interwar period, describing it as an American invention solidified after World War II by leaders like President Truman, turning development into an essential tool in the Cold War power struggle. In such accounts, Western attempts also extended to the UN, which they turned into an intermediary for advancing their ideas of development on a global scale. Recent scholarship, however, moves away from this Western focus, exploring how actors in the "Second" and the "Third" World developed their own genuine development models and exercised agency within international organizations like the UN, which itself developed a sense of agency. As development studies extend beyond the Western perspective and become increasingly multifaceted, creating a common definition of "development" becomes increasingly difficult, especially considering its transformations over different periods throughout history.

Some scholars trace the origins of development back to civilizing missions like the British Mandate system. For instance, Sara Lorenzini points to the British mission of civilizing other parts of the world and creating the idea of different development stages.[44] Recently, scholars have emphasized development concepts and discourses that emerged from the Soviet Union and Central-Eastern Europe in the 1920s, which were echoed internationally. Dominated by surrounding empires, Central-Eastern Europe's nation-states were founded only after the First World War, following the empires' collapse. Characterized by rurality and economic lag, the region was at that point viewed as a periphery in need of outside development: "*in a parlous state, the region would come to be compared with a wider economically backward, rural, and unstable world that extended into Africa and Asia.*"[45] At the same time, leaders in both the Soviet Union and Central-Eastern Europe began creating their own development concepts. These concepts often emphasized disparities between the urban and the rural. Central-Eastern European economists, for instance, developed concepts and theories that pointed to the inequality in trade relations between the centre and periphery and

---

[43] Engerman, "Development Politics and the Cold War", 3.
[44] Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, 11ff.
[45] Burton, Mark, and Marung, "Development", 79.

likewise promoted these ideas beyond the region. Equally important are Soviet development attempts in Central Asia. Here, the Soviet Union mobilized significant resources to industrialize its peripheries, e.g., for better cotton production. The Soviet Union framed these efforts as solidarity between the centre and periphery, which leaders in Moscow and loyal counterparts in Central Asia promoted as an alternative to capitalist centre-periphery relations, where they saw the peripheries as being reduced to the *hinterland*, to being suppliers of raw materials, while profits were channelled to the centres.[46] For Soviets in the 1930s, development was not just a technical question but was interlinked with a social transformation, fighting what was perceived as backward traditions and instead promoting the reorganization of labour, social space, and settlements. This approach was not confined to national discourses but echoed internationally and was actively promoted by the Soviet Union as a path to industrialize the peripheries – which became even more appealing during the Great Depression, when many Western nations suffered. Not only Western sympathizers but also leaders from other world regions, such as India's Jawaharlal Nehru, viewed the Soviet Union as a positive example. When Nehru visited Moscow, he voiced his admiration for Soviet economic development, seeing "glimpses of a new civilization in the Soviet model".[47] The modernization of the Soviet peripheries and the Central-Eastern European experience of backwardness and being turned into the hinterland of empires are essential to understanding how this world region dealt with development in a global context after the Second World War. Interestingly, this historic experience became an important motif for socialist leaders in the Global Cold War, presenting the socialist development model as a tried-and-tested concept for new nation-states to escape poverty and backwardness.[48]

2.2 The Rise of Development in the Global Cold War

In the immediate years after the Second World War, Central-Eastern Europe remained marginalized. The UN and the US perceived it as a region with little development that

---

[46] Burton, Mark, and Marung, "Development".

[47] Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, 14f.

[48] Socialist leaders often used their countries' own historic experience to promote economic and social models (see e.g. Burton, Mark, and Marung, "Development", 89.). The same observation also extends to urbanism, where "constructed affinities" became an important instrument for socialist architects and urbanists to convince their counterparts from the Global South of the relevance of their expertise (Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*, 100ff.)

primarily stayed rural and agricultural. In the second half of the 1940s, there were significant efforts by the United Nations to improve the situation. Initially, aid and reconstruction were organized through UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), which was established to fund the rebuilding of Central-Eastern Europe. While UNRRA's governance was formally international, it was effectively dominated by the Americans and the British. UNRRA's activities ended in 1946, when the organization was dissolved amidst growing anti-communism in the US and accusations that UNRRA's activities in countries like Poland were fostering communism. Upon the dissolution of UNRRA, its tasks were handed over to other UN programmes and agencies, yet this marked an essential shift: right after the War, East and West were brought together in the United Nations by the ambition of providing immediate relief, by the revival of personal ties from the interwar period, and by a shared belief in creating a post-fascist world order. However, until the end of the decade, international organizations like the UN were turning into an instrument in the Cold War power struggle.[49] This power struggle was more complex than just a rivalry between Moscow and Washington, though, as the foundation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in 1947 shows, a pan-European organization that brought East and West together and was used by some socialist countries as a counterweight to Soviet economic domination.[50] While UNRRA existed only for a short time, its history is worth being told. Firstly, it exemplifies how interests and power relations in international relations can change rapidly. Secondly, UNRRA's dissolution marked the transformation of Central-Eastern Europe from a region that was the target of development from the outside into a region that (slowly) began to initiate development projects in other parts of the world, as I will show in the following.

Soviet activities beyond Europe had begun already under Stalin, despite his concept of "socialism in one country". However, these activities remained minor compared to what followed under Nikita Khrushchev, who was regarded as "the most Third Worldist Politbureau member".[51] Similarly, smaller Eastern Bloc countries ventured into Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America starting in the 1950s (with East Germany mainly developing relations with liberation movements, as they remained

---

49 Kott, *Organiser le monde: Une autre histoire de la guerre froide*, 20ff.
50 Daniel Stinsky, *International Cooperation in Cold War Europe: The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1947-64* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).
51 Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, 42.

internationally isolated in the context of West Germany's Hallstein doctrine until the early 1970s). It was in this period that development became a "full-fledged weapon in the Cold War arsenal":

> *Until then, talking about development meant singling out problems and suggesting solutions. Development plans extolled the virtues of modernity and modernity was conceived in the singular: there were several ways to solve the same problem, and experts had differentiated approaches, but they did not diverge drastically. With the entry of the Soviet Union as a potential donor rather than a distant model, development turned competitive. Models were now pitted against one another in a competition about effectiveness and symbolic strength.*[52]

Ideologically, the concept of underdevelopment held a prominent place in socialist global development narratives, referencing their own European experience from the era of the empires. In this understanding, underdevelopment resulted from colonialism, and despite decolonization, the West perpetuated these unequal power relations. The socialist development model – based on a planned economy, rapid industrialization, and nationalization – would be an efficient countermeasure to escape marginalization, as their own example has shown. In development projects, this was reflected in the way socialist countries described their assistance as being based on solidarity and equal relations, while consciously avoiding the term "aid", as it implied inequality.[53] As Lorenzini puts it, "*More than touting its role as a socialist vanguard, the Soviet Union promoted itself as a modern and pacific state, advanced in the sciences and arts. The ultimate victory of communism over capitalism would be achieved through the demonstration that the socialist mode of production possessed decisive advantages over the capitalist mode.*"[54]

At the same time, intellectuals from Central-Eastern Europe – especially those who could build on international networks from before the War – drew comparisons between their own experience and the situation of their counterparts as "victims" of a Western-dominated economic system that enriched the centres while exploiting the peripheries. This argument gained even more traction with the advancing decolonization when

---

[52] Ibid., 68.
[53] Ibid., 38–45.
[54] Ibid., 46.

leaders from newly independent nation-states, such as Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) or Ahmed Sékou Touré (Guinea), reached out to Eastern Europe to tap into their resources and seek inspiration from their development models, e.g., in the field of agriculture. While Cold War historiography often highlights how the Eastern Bloc penetrated so-called developing countries, the initial exchange often started the other way around. In many cases, leaders from newly decolonized nation-states like those mentioned above sought new connections with the Eastern Bloc, while the latter remained initially wary (though bilateral cooperation with governments in Africa and other world regions was later also used by various bloc members as a tool to counterbalance Moscow's influence).[55] Thus, leaders from decolonized countries tried to explain to their counterparts from the Eastern Bloc how their development models were allegedly infused with socialist elements, which was not necessarily a sign of actually believing in European concepts of communism but rather showed the agency of these actors.[56]

The GDR's specific role and strategy from the postwar period to the 1970s, when the East German state began gaining international recognition, warrants closer examination. During its early years, the GDR, confronted by a lack of international recognition, sought alternative cooperation partners. This included states that recognized the GDR, and otherwise mostly liberation movements.[57] The GDR's specific situation not only influenced their choice of partners but also led to alternative means of collaboration (such as cultural diplomacy). Therefore, medical and humanitarian development became a cornerstone of East German ambitions in Africa and Asia after the War. Although the GDR achieved sovereignty in 1955, it was limited by West Germany's Hallstein doctrine, which meant that they could not join the United Nations, forcing the GDR to rely on non-diplomatic instruments in their international relations. During this period, East German development projects were often focused on prestigious initiatives that revolved around solidarity, while economic concerns played a lesser role. A case in point was the reconstruction of Hamhung in North Korea in the 1950s, an enormous project that fits into the humanitarian aid category as much as it was about urban development. Hamhung is a typical – and probably the most prominent – example of this period; the aim was to reconstruct the entire city for which the GDR spent up to 1 per cent of its GDP per year. Hamhung held high symbolic value for the East German

---

[55] Kott, *Organiser Le Monde - Une Autre Histoire de la Guerre Froide*, 42.
[56] Burton, Mark, and Marung, "Development".
[57] van der Heyden and Schade, "GDR Solidarity with the ANC of South Africa", 79.

government, as it was their first significant project abroad. By reconstructing an entire city, the government attempted to create a showcase that shined across the world and showed the technological achievements of the GDR as a young socialist state that had just emerged from the destruction of the War. Another typical feature of this period is that these projects were less focused on economic gains than later ones and involved and mobilized the East German population to a significant extent.[58]

Furthermore, educational programmes were an essential dimension of East Germany's development cooperation. As Marcia C. Schenck puts it, "*Cold warriors battled for the hearts and minds of young people with scholarships and teachers, thereby founding transnational networks of knowledge creation and exchange outside epistemological ties to former colonizers.*"[59] Educational programmes included sending teachers abroad (as was the case in Dakawa and Mazimbu in Tanzania, where the GDR was involved in a UN-HABITAT project – see chapter 4.3), as well as receiving pupils from Mozambique and other countries and various age groups for education in East Germany.[60] Another crucial group was higher education students who came to East Germany to study. While many students sought to adapt to the East German educational environment, a case study of Angolan students shows that many perceived the situation as difficult when confronted with rules that limited them in their personal lives,[61] and many experienced racism.[62]

With rising decolonization, the UN's focus moved from reconstruction in Central-Eastern Europe to the newly emerging nation-states. In the two decades between 1945 and 1965, UN membership grew from 51 to 117, as many former colonies gained independence and joined the organization. As a result, power relations in the UN changed from a Western-dominated organization to one where the Group of 77 – a

---

[58] As Young-Sun Hong shows, workers from the pharmaceutical industry even initiated grassroots efforts to collect donations and work overtime to produce medicine for Hamhung. This mobilization was not initially sanctioned by the socialist party – which eventually decided to "adopt" this movement. See Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World and the Global Humanitarian Regime*, 22–71.

[59] Marcia C. Schenck, "Negotiating the German Democratic Republic: Angolan Student Migration during the Cold War, 1976-90", *Africa* 89, no. S1 (2019): S144–66.

[60] Tanja R. Müller, *Legacies of Socialist Solidarity: East Germany in Mozambique* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2014).

[61] Schenck, "Negotiating the German Democratic Republic: Angolan Student Migration during the Cold War, 1976-90".

[62] Sara Pugach, "African Students and the Politics of Race and Gender in the German Democratic Republic, 1957-1990", in *Comrades of Color - East Germany in the Cold War World*, ed. Quinn Slobodian (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 131–56.

group of 77 non-aligned Member States from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, founded in 1964 during a session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) – had more votes than the West or the Eastern Bloc. As Eva-Maria Muschik (2022) argues, the UN and its promotion of development were decisive in this process. The UN was confronted with reconciling the contradictory aims of self-determination and national sovereignty, as emphasized in the UN Charter's principle of self-determination and championed by the growing number of new nation-states, and the ambitions of the "old" powers, who had founded the UN to sustain their global power ambitions. Development became the tool the UN used to reconcile these opposing positions. The UN provided development assistance in nation-states undergoing decolonization, serving as an intermediary and filter between contractors from the Eastern Bloc and the West on the one side and governments of new nation-states on the other side. This mediation enabled the foundation of nation-states in former colonies and helped the UN expand its membership base. At the same time, involving Western contractors meant that they could build upon previous colonial development projects, while the UN, as a "filter", limited foreign influence and left decisions on national policies to the recipient governments. Thus, the UN used development to moderate the decolonization process by reconciling two contradictory political aims.[63]

This UN approach to development came with what some scholars describe as the "technification" of problems, meaning that the UN treated development projects as technical matters that could be solved by deploying presumably neutral experts and expertise, applicable everywhere and under any conditions, while avoiding systemic questions. Mehos and Moon (2011) frame this phenomenon through the idea of portability and portable knowledge.[64] As the UN emphasized universality and strived for a unified development concept, there were too many competing interests between the different Cold War power blocs to allow for this ambition to materialize. In Lorenzini's words, "*the development galaxy was better described as a patchwork of regional plans with global ambitions than as a coherent system. Although cooperation – among allies and international organizations, between North and South, and among*

---

[63] Eva-Maria Muschik, *Building States - The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2022).

[64] Donna Mehos and Suzanne Moon, "The Uses of Portability: Circulating Experts in the Technopolitics of Cold War and Decolonization", in *Entangled Geographies - Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*, ed. Gabrielle Hecht (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 43–74.

countries of what is now called the Global South – was fundamental to how aid was understood, this harmonious vision did not reflect reality."[65]

Development projects of the socialist camp in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America were not limited to the United Nations. In fact, the biggest share of projects remained bilateral – and they remained ambiguous. Formally, the Eastern Bloc presented its projects as anti-colonial solidarity. This approach materialized – though for a short time only – in solidarity-based loans, i.e., government loans from socialist countries to so-called developing countries that did not follow market conditions. Some of these countries requested field experts free of charge, as well as loans that had to be repaid only once an economic convergence between East and South had been reached. On a structural level, some socialist states initially supported UNCTAD, which advanced the interests of the Group of 77 in world trade.[66] During these years, socialist development assistance mainly consisted of turnkey factories, which included the actual construction and the initial running of the new plants and were financed through government loans. Turnkey plants were one aspect of broader technology transfer efforts, which included vocational training, patent exchange, joint research projects, and education and other measures that were formalized through government agreements.[67] As some authors argue, the socialist globalization project was even more emancipating than the Western one, as it allowed for new alliances *between* the peripheries or semi-peripheries – that is, between smaller states in the socialist camp and so-called developing countries, rather than perpetuating the traditional relations between a centre (i.e., Moscow or Washington) and its peripheries.[68] However, by the 1960s, it became increasingly evident that the promise of anti-imperial solidarity was not free from national interests, and more and more cracks became visible in the alliance between the socialist camp and new nation-states like Ghana and Guinea. UNCTAD, for example, was attractive for the socialist camp not only because of its focus on so-called developing countries but also because it allowed trade links with the West. At its first session in 1964, Moscow, Budapest, Warsaw, and Sofia expressed concerns that UNCTAD was overly focused on the needs of the Group of 77. Later, some socialist

---

[65] Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, 6.
[66] Burton, Mark, and Marung, "Development", 96ff.
[67] In the case of East Germany this often included so-called WTZ agreements ("Wissenschaftlich-Technische Zusammenarbeit); see Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, 83.
[68] Johanna Bockmann, "Socialist Globalization against Capitalist Neocolonialism: The Economic Ideas behind the New International Economic Order", *Humanity* 6, no. 1 (2015): 109–28.

states even tried to join GATT (General Agreement on Trades and Tariffs), viewed by many as a "club of rich capitalist countries",[69] in reaction to which UNCTAD was founded as a counter model. From the late 1960s, solidarity-based loans were increasingly questioned by the Eastern Bloc. Eventually, economic nationalism remained a driving force in the Eastern Bloc and was reinforced by the bloc's economic weakening.[70] In this context, Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere complained that "'*the rich socialist nations' were 'now beginning to use their wealth for capitalist purposes, that is, for the acquisition of power and prestige' rather than tackling issues of development and poverty.*"[71] In socialist solidarity projects, the delineation between aid and trade remained diffuse. COMECON's Permanent Commission for Technical Assistance, which should have coordinated the development projects of the Eastern Bloc (but never succeeded at introducing a genuinely coordinated approach), is a prime example that shows how trade and profits dominated relations that have been officially labelled as solidarity. The Commission's documents focus exclusively on technical aspects and questions of infrastructure and trade, while the term "solidarity" is entirely absent.[72]

The 1970s brought a significant push for the GDR's development projects, as the East German state could now move beyond its focus on liberation movements, socialist states, and cultural diplomacy. During this decade, East Germany participated, for example, in several infrastructure and industrial projects in Africa and other global regions. In Angola, for instance, East German development projects were primarily aimed at the construction sector. There, East German experts contributed to the construction of buildings, roads, and other essential infrastructure. Unlike in earlier decades, in which motifs of solidarity played a prominent role, business interests now gained importance for the East German state. Once the GDR joined the United Nations and became recognized by more and more states, new opportunities for development projects arose. At the same time, the détente between the Eastern Bloc and the West led to an increasing orientation towards the West, while it was also a period of

---

[69] Burton, Mark, and Marung, "Development", 96.
[70] Ibid., 96–98.
[71] Julius Nyerere, quoted in Burton, Mark, and Marung, 97.
[72] Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History*, 83.

unprecedented cooperation within COMECON, where ever more complex economic and political relations had been achieved.[73]

At the same time, the 1970s were a period in which the newly decolonized nation-states had sustained their position in the United Nations. This group of countries became yet more self-assertive and began pushing for an alternative global economic system. This materialized in initiatives like the New International Economic Order (NIEO), which some of the so-called developing countries established to call for fair global trade patterns and dismantle the economic dependencies between North and South that had persisted since the colonial age. These new positions further changed the relationship with the socialist camp, which was no longer considered a natural partner in the anti-colonial struggle. This change was partly caused by the shifting priorities of the socialist camp described in previous paragraphs. While publicly, they still ascribed notions of solidarity to their exchange with less developed countries, in practice, cooperation increasingly resembled the capitalist approach. However, this break was not initiated solely by their partners from the South, as many economists from the socialist camp denounced NIEO as unreasonable.[74]

While NIEO was not an official strategy of the United Nations, various UN organizations – including HABITAT – became places where NIEO was discussed, advanced through some of the so-called developing countries, looked at with a certain wariness by the Eastern Bloc, and rejected by the West. Partially in response to this situation, the US and other Western states actively tried to weaken the United Nations from the turn to the 1980s. From 1977 to 1980, the United States left the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNESCO from 1984 to 2002, and in 1982, the US significantly cut its contributions to the WHO, to name but a few examples. These steps had financial implications for the United Nations, and they were accompanied by accusations such as "disrespect for Western values" in the case of UNESCO and too-close proximity to Communism. In parallel to the weakening of the United Nations, the US strengthened Western-backed organizations such as the IMF and World Bank.[75]

---

[73] Max Trecker, "The 'Grapes of Cooperation'? Bulgarian and East German Plans to Build a Syrian Cement Industry from Scratch", in *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War*, ed. Anna Calori et al. (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 56.
[74] Burton, Mark, and Marung, "Development", 100ff.
[75] Kott, *Organiser le monde: Une autre histoire de la guerre froide*, 180.

2.3 The Fall of Development during Late Socialism

These changing power balances in international organizations also impacted the debt crisis of the 1980s: when Mexico could no longer service its debt in 1982, and other countries found themselves in similarly difficult situations, the IMF and the World Bank stepped in to rescue these states financially, but under the condition of economic restructuring – that is, privatization and liberalization.[76] Therefore, one could argue that the debt crisis helped expand Western economic models (respectively perpetuating dependencies between the economic centre and its peripheries). For the socialist camp, the debt crisis had the opposite impact. As Trecker argues, the debt crisis of many African and other governments contributed to the fall of the socialist economies as, through trade with these countries, they could no longer generate hard currencies, which were needed to purchase advanced technology from the West to remain competitive in manufacturing.[77]

Increasingly, Western-backed international organizations targeted not only so-called developing countries but also the socialist camp. Romania joined the IMF in 1972 and Hungary in 1982 in the hope of easier access to loans, in a trade-off for liberalizing their economies. Generally speaking, this period came with economic deregulation in socialist countries and a decline of radical criticism towards capitalism. At the same time, claims for social justice lost ground in the socialist camp, and instead, they increasingly focused on human rights.[78] Globally, the socialist development model became more and more unattractive. Only a few African countries were left that followed some sort of – and not necessarily the European way of – socialism, and the promises of a better life did not materialize. Dependency on loans from Western banks, on the one hand, and the growing disintegration of the socialist camp, on the other hand, diminished development cooperation between East and South.[79] Despite the ongoing disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, the unattractiveness of the socialist development model, and the increasing IMF and World Bank dependency, especially of countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, cooperation between East and South continued, though on a small level. In 1987, around 5,000 economic projects between these

---

[76] Ibid., 180.

[77] Trecker, *Red Money for the Global South. East-South Economic Relations in the Cold War*.

[78] Kott, *Organiser le monde: Une autre histoire de la guerre froide*, 181–83.

[79] Ibid., 186–91.

countries and COMECON were counted. The projects increasingly had a multilateral setup, meaning that several socialist states were involved, yet these relations amounted only to 1 per cent of world trade.[80] Kott summarizes this situation as a period of fatigue – that is, an economic fatigue that materialized in the tremendous debts of several countries, coupled with an ideological fatigue that materialized in the dissolution of socialist ideals on a global level.[81] Several authors describe the final years as a re-orientation of the Eastern Bloc towards the West: For Burton, Mark, and Marung (2022), this period is about re-peripheralization:

> *By the end of the 1970s, ideas of development that had been nurtured within postwar UN institutions played an ever less important role in shaping the global economy. [...] Western states led the construction of a new global economic architecture to enable the easier withdrawal of capital from the clusters of ideologically unsympathetic colonial states. [...] Eastern European bilateral funding and development was outdated.*[82]

In this sense, it was the indebtedness of the Eastern Bloc that put an end to solidarity-based relationships, tied socialist states closer to the West again, and resituated Central-Eastern Europe into "complex, interdependent globalization".[83] Similarly, Kott speaks of the gradual recolonization of Central-Eastern European economies by Western governments, banks, and international organizations. For access to technology and hard currencies, exporting raw materials to the West – a pattern reminiscent of the early years of the development discourse in Europe – now became more promising than cooperation with governments in Africa, Asia, or Latin America.[84]

This lost decade also had a profound impact on East Germany. During the 1980s, the GDR's situation was further aggravated, as it faced significant economic challenges characterized by inefficiencies, resource shortages, and a declining economy. The country struggled with outdated industrial infrastructure, low productivity, and a lack of technological innovation. Additionally, East Germany had substantial external debt, which further strained its economy.

---

[80] Ibid., 191–95.
[81] Ibid., 211.
[82] Burton, Mark, and Marung, "Development", 106.
[83] Ibid., 109.
[84] Kott, *Organiser le monde: Une autre histoire de la guerre froide*, 188–92.

In the early 1980s, West Germany helped the GDR out of its debt crisis, and the GDR indeed managed to reduce its liabilities in the West – though at the expense of economic substance, because social programmes remained untouched. With Poland's bankruptcy in 1981 and Romania no longer serving its creditors, confidence in the Eastern Bloc collapsed among Western creditors. In the first half of 1982 alone, Western creditors withdrew 40 per cent of their short-term deposits from the GDR. As the government in Bonn feared the consequences of a political crisis similar to the Polish one, they eventually provided guarantees for loans from West German banks in 1983 and 1984. However, as reforms did not accompany the loans, they were stabilizing in the short-term yet destabilizing in the long-term. As far as exports were concerned, the GDR's strategy was now increasingly to generate hard currencies ("liquidity takes precedence over profitability"). The share of informal exports (so-called KoKo[85] exports, which were not included in the official economic plan) grew tremendously.[86]

This strategy was also mirrored in urban planning and construction, where Bauakademie's number of "real" projects abroad declined to almost zero. In contrast, the number of so-called "domestic exports" grew significantly. The category of "domestic exports" mainly comprised the construction of church buildings financed by West German churches (see also chapter 3.1).

At the same time, as Steiner (2004) argues, the government in East Berlin could not rely economically on the Soviet Union to the same extent as before, especially since Moscow was rather concerned with itself – that is, with changing leadership and its own economic situation. At home, the usual barter between government and population (prosperity in exchange for political quiescence) was increasingly ineffective for many citizens. This overall situation, together with the – still – inflexible and centralized way of steering the economy inhibited innovation and economic growth. Ultimately, the GDR's productivity lagged significantly behind West Germany's, at two-thirds of the latter's productivity (compared to a one-third gap at the beginning of the 1950s). Three

---

[85] "KoKo" was the abbreviation for "Kommerzielle Koordinierung" (the Commercial Coordination Department), which was established in 1966 and was responsible for generating foreign currency outside the state plan, primarily by importing embargoed goods and engaging in various financial and trade activities. Under the leadership of Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski, KoKo contributed significantly to mitigating East Germany's trade deficits and fulfilling its immediate credit needs, operating with limited oversight from state control authorities.
[86] André Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan - Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004), 197–203.

goals increasingly competed with each other: reducing debts while at the same time servicing debts and maintaining living standards. To cope with this situation, the government further limited investments – with one important exception, which was the housing programme, a programme that was the pride of East German housing and social policy and was actively promoted through HABITAT and other forums. However, this general limitation of investments furthered the downward economic spiral and reduced East German innovation capacity.[87] As Steiner summarizes, *"The inability of the socialist economic system to produce structural as well as technical-innovative change inherent in the system formed the decisive cause of the GDR's economic weakness in its last decade. The system was unable to react and adapt to the new framework conditions – globally changing prices for important resources and the international spread of a post-Fordist production regime based on flexible technologies. [...] In fact, external economic developments aggravated the problems, but they were not their root cause."*[88]

Steiner's short remark on external economic developments requires further reflection. While Steiner spends only limited thoughts on the impact of East Germany's economic collaboration with its partners in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, Trecker provides a more complex assessment. He argues that the liquidity crisis of countries in Africa and Latin America in the 1980s was directly related to the weakening of the Eastern Bloc. With rising financial liquidity problems of many of the Eastern Bloc's partners, the GDR and other socialist states lost some of their most important customers, which directly impacted their solvency. This was even more problematic as hard currency incomes from trading with these countries were necessary to buy technology and equipment from the West.[89]

2.4 Summary

As demonstrated in this chapter, the history of development can be understood as a result of centre-periphery interdependencies. Central-Eastern Europe, long

---

[87] Ibid., 203–10.
[88] Author's own translation, "Die Unfähigkeit des sozialistischen Wirtschaftssystems, strukturellen sowie technisch-innovatorischen Wandel systemimmanent hervorzubringen, bildete die entscheidende Ursache für die wirtschaftliche Schwäche der DDR in ihrem letzten Jahrzehnt. Das System war nicht in der Lage, auf die neuen Rahmenbedingungen – weltweit veränderte Preise für wichtige Ressourcen und internationale Verbreitung eines postfordistischen Produktionsregimes auf Basis flexibler Technologien – zu reagieren und sich ihnen anzupassen. [...] Tatsächlich verschärften die außenwirtschaftlichen Entwicklungen die Probleme, sie waren aber nicht deren eigentliche Ursache." (Steiner, 226.)
[89] Trecker, *Red Money for the Global South. East-South Economic Relations in the Cold War*, 170.

marginalized, developed into a political and economic centre during the communist period, only to be re-peripheralized again during late socialism (in fact, things become even more complex when acknowledging the complexity within this bloc – that is, changing centre-periphery relationships between the Soviet Union and the Central-Eastern European states). According to Burton, Mark, and Marung, this very experience of liberating oneself from the periphery became an important reference point for the socialist states in Central-Eastern Europe when pursuing development attempts in newly independent nation-states.[90]

During the 1950s and 1960s, many socialist states promoted the socialist development model to the governments of nation-states undergoing decolonization, catalyzing the East-West competition during the Global Cold War. While the United States understood development as a tool to contain communism, for the Eastern Bloc, it became a tool to spread its own economic and social model. At the same time, the governments of of newly independent nation-states were directly asking the Eastern Bloc for assistance – yet the Eastern Bloc remained initially wary of such overtures. During this period, the United Nations became an important intermediary for development projects. It played a crucial role in the foundation of new nation-states: through its development projects, the UN provided the "old powers" with room for continued presence in their former colonies, while simultaneously serving its new members and increasing its membership base.

The GDR started late and under specific conditions in this Global Cold War development competition. While the Soviet Union and other socialist states were already in the middle of what was described as the "heyday of development", the government in East Berlin had to focus on cultural diplomacy due to the lack of international recognition. This specific approach focused on supporting liberation movements and soon became a "hallmark of GDR foreign policy". The country's new international recognition in 1973 changed their situation, yet it also coincided with the economical weakening of the Eastern Bloc, which hampered their attempts to participate in the global development competition. At the same time, the growing self-assertiveness of their potential partners in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle

---

[90] Burton, Mark, and Marung, "Development".

East, followed by financial liquidity problems of the same countries in the 1980s, worsened the situation for the Eastern Bloc.

3. The Global Urban Question

In the following, I will translate the development topic examined in the previous chapter to urban development, placing particular emphasis on the global crisis of the city in the 1970s, how this crisis led to the foundation of UN-HABITAT, and how HABITAT tried to redefine the concept of development from an urban perspective. I will moreover show how the GDR collaborated with HABITAT, what their strategies and practices were, and how they changed during the period in question. I will outline that there was indeed a fundamental shift, coinciding with, firstly, a generational shift in the leadership of the East German HABITAT team; secondly, changing professional discourses on what makes a good city; and thirdly, changing economic circumstances.

3.1 Urbanism and the Development Competition

Stephen Ward was among the first scholars to explore the circulation of urban planning knowledge between the "Global North" and "Global South" while going beyond the common Western-centric perspective and acknowledging the role of socialist architects and planners. Under colonialism, urban planning in the colonies was based largely on Western blueprints. France, for instance, applied its "National Programme of Urban Planning" first in Morocco and later to most other colonies. Similarly, planning in countries like Nigeria or Trinidad was directly based on British legislation. As Ward argues, colonial elites saw colonies as test-beds for urban planning projects, risking only limited political opposition (unlike at home). At the same time, urban and regional planning could facilitate the exploitation of colonial resources and should have prevented economic disruptions caused by, for example, diseases. After independence, most (though not all) colonial representatives in urban planning administrations were exchanged, yet as Ward argues, their practices and policies kept existing. In some cases, private architecture and urban planning offices with previous experience from the colonial era filled the newly emerging gaps.[91]

This situation opened up new international exchange opportunities beyond Western colonial powers. One notable development was the formation of the United Nations Housing, Town and Country Planning Section (HTCP), an entity that may be considered a predecessor of UN-HABITAT. On the one hand, HTCP emerged from the initiative of

---

[91] Ward, "Transnational Planners in a Postcolonial World", 49–51.

Western architects. At the 1946 Hastings Conference of the International Union of Architects (UIA), the foundation of HTCP was proposed by the American housing advocate and urban planning lecturer Catherine Bauer Wurster, along with the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) Secretary Jaqueline Tyrwhitt. On the other hand, Ernest Weissmann, a Yugoslav, served as the HTCP's first Director General. In the immediate postwar time, Weissmann's Yugoslav background helped to minimize suspicion in both East and West. Weissmann, Walter Gropius, and other CIAM members attended the group's first postwar meetings in New York. He was interested in finding individuals with experience in housing finance, law, and planning coordination for UN positions. Accordingly, architects and planners like Otto Königsberger (who was later involved with HABITAT) or the housing activist Charles Abrams became leading figures.[92] While existing research highlighted the role of Western architects in postwar UN urban planning projects (and while they indeed dominated), architects from the Eastern Bloc were involved as well – yet received only minor scholarly attention. A case in point is the Polish Adolf Ciborowski, who served as the chief director of the UN programme to rebuild the city of Skopje from 1964 to 1976 and later became an advisor to UN-HABITAT.[93]

Finally, decolonization also led to new cooperation between urban planners and architects from the Eastern Bloc and the former colonies. Ward mentions several examples, such as Polish architects whom the Iraqi government contracted for the 1973 Baghdad Master Plan or the Hungarian Karol Polónyi, who worked for the Ghana Construction Company from 1963 to 1969.[94] Likewise, there were East German projects. Among the housing and urban planning projects with the highest visibility (in temporal order)[95] were the reconstruction of Hamhung (North Korea),[96] a housing

---

[92] Muhammad Ijlal Muzaffar, "The Periphery within: Modern Architecture and the Making of the Third World" (Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007), 25; Ward, "Transnational Planners in a Postcolonial World", 60.

[93] Maja Babić, "The Yugoslav Skopje: Building the Brutalist City, 1970-1990", in *Urban Planning During Socialism - Views from the Periphery*, ed. Jasna Mariotti and Kadri Leetmaa (London: Routledge, 2024), 70.

[94] Ward, "Transnational Planners in a Postcolonial World", 52–60.

[95] I am presenting projects that either received coverage in the GDR architecture journal *Architektur der DDR* (from 1952–1974 *Deutsche Architektur*) or are covered by existing research.

[96] Hong, "Through a Glass Darkly: East German Assistance to North Korea and Alternative Narratives of the Cold War".

project in Zanzibar (Tanzania),[97] the reconstruction of Vinh (Vietnam),[98] the construction of Abuja (Nigeria),[99] and a HABITAT-sponsored self-help prefab panel housing project in Dakawa (Tanzania).[100]

While much research on these themes has traditionally adopted a Western-centric position, recent years have seen a wave of scholarship on urban development cooperation between actors from the Eastern Bloc and their counterparts from the so-called Global South. Stanek's *Architecture in Global Socialism* provides a thorough overview of the topic. Stanek makes three essential observations relevant to the link between the global development competition and the urban question: (1) he argues that the 1950s and 1960s were characterized by the ambition to translate the socialist urban development model to Africa and other world regions; (2) he explains how urban planners from the Eastern Bloc invoked motifs of peripherality, colonialism, and underdevelopment when working abroad; and (3) he reflects on the impact of late socialist economic conditions on urban development cooperation.

Firstly, from the mid-1950s, the Eastern Bloc increasingly saw newly independent nation-states in Africa and other parts of the world as a test-bed for implementing the socialist development model. In particular, the USSR used their development efforts in Central Asia and the Caucasus as a "good practice" that could be transferred to Africa and Asia; they were "thinking African and Asian cities through Tashkent and Samarkand", as Stanek puts it. An illustrative example is how the Soviet planner Anatolii Rimsha translated the Soviet mikrorayon to the Afghan and Ghanaian context. While mikrorayons were first transferred to Uzbekistan, mixed with mahallas (a traditional type of local community), Rimsha later published the book *Town Planning in Hot Climates*, where he showed how to adjust the mikrorayon concept to Kabul and Accra.[101] Another example of Stanek is a blueprint for the construction of two housing districts in Accra and Tema, which he describes as the most sophisticated translation of the socialist development path into architectural and urban design in Ghana. However,

[97] Wimmelbücker, "Architecture and City Planning Projects of the German Democratic Republic in Zanzibar".

[98] Schwenkel, *Building Socialism - The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam*.

[99] Fenk, Lee, and Motylińska, "Unlikely Collaborations? Planning Experts from Both Sides of the Iron Curtain and the Making of Abuja".

[100] Marcks, "Self-Help Architecture in the Global Cold War: East German Panel Technology for the ANC, 1982–1992".

[101] Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*, 48.

these designs were never executed. Instead of embracing socialist modernity, most architects from socialist countries with the Ghanaian authority in charge of the project considered themselves to be part of a global modern architectural culture.[102]

Secondly, using the example of Lagos (Nigeria), Stanek highlights how urbanists from the Eastern Bloc used shared, constructed identities to convince their counterparts in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Among these motifs were colonialism, underdevelopment, and peripherality. Stanek refers to the Hungarian architect Karol Polónyi, who worked in Africa for a more extended period. Polónyi's reflections on peripherality respond to the development concept of Burton, Mark, and Marung (see also chapter 2.1), which understands development as the outcome of power imbalances between centres and peripheries. In this context, Polónyi links Hungary's rurality to what he experienced in West Africa. Polónyi maintained that his work in rural Hungary, "parts of which were 'still not very far from […] a developing country,' had prepared him for West Africa."[103] Instead of importing specific tools from Eastern European regional planning to West Africa, Polónyi applied his experience from Hungary to comprehensively reconsider the role of urban planning in underdeveloped conditions. Polónyi, moreover, linked the colonial experiences in Ghana and Nigeria to Hungary's situation between the Prussian, Habsburg, and Ottoman Empires. Polónyi's argument had some inconsistencies, and in Africa, his claims of a shared history of peripherality and being colonized were perceived by some actors differently from what Polónyi had expected. In Nigeria, Polónyi's counterparts said to him: "*You are Hungarians. You never had colonies. You don't have any tropical experience. Do you consider yourselves competent to prepare a master plan for a city in West Africa?*"[104]

Thirdly, another aspect of Stanek's work that helps link development and urbanism in the Global Cold War relates to the period of late socialism. In this period, knowledge flows often reversed. Urban planners and architects from socialist countries now had the chance to work with the latest technologies, especially in the Gulf region, North Africa, and the Middle East, and then brought these experiences and new skills back home – and could build upon them also after the end of the Cold War. Overall, the opportunity

---

[102] Ibid., 64.

[103] Charles Polónyi, *An Architect-Planner on the Peripheries: Case Studies from the Less Developed World* (Budapest: P&C, 1992), 12., quoted in Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*, 102.

[104] Polónyi, *An Architect-Planner on the Peripheries: Case Studies from the Less Developed World*, 82.

to work in these countries during late socialism played a crucial role in advancing the careers of numerous architects from the Eastern Bloc. Architects from across the socialist camp greatly benefited from their exposure to state-of-the-art technologies, including CAD software, advanced construction techniques, and innovative materials.[105] What started as "thinking African and Asian cities through Tashkent and Samarkand" (see above) had now evolved into urban planners that returned and "thought Warsaw through Damascus, Prague through Kuwait City, and Sofia through Abu Dhabi."[106]

3.2 A New Development Concept for a Global Urban Crisis

In 1978, in the journal *HABITAT International*, a British economist wrote about "the most radical and explosive change taking place in an already sufficiently radical and explosive century", namely "urbanization at breakneck speed",[107] now a topic of focus for the UN. In fact, the UN discussed urban topics from the afterwar period. The foundation of HTCP in 1946 can be seen as the first acknowledgement of the global challenge of rapid urbanization. Soon after the foundation of HTCP, the UN launched a mission on "Tropical Housing". In the early 1950s, the mission travelled to various Asian countries and reported on the crowded, insanitary living conditions. In 1964, they published a "Manual for Self-Help Housing", which refers to the 1952 mission report, claiming that "the situation appears to be alarmingly similar today."[108] In the following years, they pointed at urban development issues regularly, yet with limited resources and without strong institutional backing.

This changed with the worsening of the situation in the 1970s. In his statement for the 1976 HABITAT Vancouver Conference, United Nations Secretary-General Dr Kurt Waldheim described a grim housing situation of the world's poor: at least one-third of the urban population in so-called developing countries lived in slums and squatter settlements, a significant share of the people in these countries had no water within 100 metres of their homes, while more than 50 per cent had no electricity. These challenges not only concerned less developed countries; they were broad and complex, with Waldheim claiming:

---

[105] Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*, 298.
[106] Ibid., 299.
[107] Barbara Ward, "Priorities for the New UN Centre for Human Settlements", *HABITAT International* 3, no. 3/4 (1978): 415–19.
[108] Muzaffar, "The Periphery within: Modern Architecture and the Making of the Third World", 43–46.

Neither rural settlements – where the majority of people still live – nor the towns and cities, are satisfying the needs and aspirations of their inhabitants. Their evolution in this century has been all too often exclusively guided by market demand – itself affected by great inequalities of income – rather than by deliberate policies to meet elementary human needs.

Waldheim continues, stating:

The symptoms of an increasingly serious situation in human settlements are evident in virtually all countries. There are differences in the kinds of problems and in their severity, but hardly any country has escaped the consequences of the inadequacy of past policies and programmes. The most noxious of these symptoms are only too conspicuous: poverty and unemployment, rural stagnation, and the mass exodus from the countryside into the cities, ever-spreading urban slums and squatter settlements, the worldwide and growing shortage of housing, the inability of governments to provide basic services of water and sanitation, the menace of air, water, and land pollution, and the crisis in municipal finances in the face of augmenting burdens.[109]

While the GDR objected that these challenges were "evident in virtually all countries" (as a socialist state that had – in their eyes – neither a housing shortage nor poverty and unemployment and had stopped the exodus from the countryside to the cities by introducing rural planning), Waldheim's general problem description seems valid. Other international organizations attested to a global urban crisis as well, such as the World Bank.[110] The World Bank proposed new approaches, such as an increased focus on rural development to lift pressure from cities. While their problem analysis was mainly similar to that of the United Nations, their proposed responses partially differed. Even though the World Bank highlighted the need for regulation, they also promoted a more market-oriented approach than HABITAT.

In a 1976 paper titled "The Need for a New Development Model", Enrique Peñalosa, the Secretary-General of the Vancouver conference (and a pivotal figure in the

---

[109] Ruedas to UNCHS, 14. August 1984, United Nations Archives (UNA), New York City, S-1051-0005-13.
[110] World Bank, *Sector Working Paper Urbanization* (Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1972), http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/981091468765865507/Urbanization (accessed 01 October 2022).

institutionalization of the conference in the years before and after), made a strong point when claiming that the common approach to development had failed:

> *National leaders and world public opinion must be made to recognize that the systems and methods now in use – the "development model" of the past decades – are not working. For a long time, the reasons for this failure were thought to stem from a lack of finances, or political commitment, or expertise. Now it is increasingly understood that none of these go to the heart of the problem. The base cause is conceptual and structural.*[111]

With the "development model of the past decades", Peñalosa means the idea of development stages that were previously outlined in chapter 2.1 – that is, an understanding of development as linear progress, in which the peripheries would follow the example of the centres through well-defined development stages. Moreover, he criticizes the focus on gross national products and other financial indicators. According to Peñalosa, the assumption of a causal link between a country's GNP and the quality of life of the masses does not work (anymore). Accordingly, improving indicators does not mean that the living conditions of the majority improve:

> *No matter what the ratio is of savings and investment or increases in the gross national product, we are faced each year with greater evidence of hunger, poverty, unemployment, and what are rightfully called "subhuman" conditions of life. The focus of these conditions, or where the failure of development is most evident, is in human settlements – in the decay of rural villages, in the overnight shelters along highways, and in the slums and squatter settlements of the great cities.*[112]

Against this background, Peñalosa called for a more comprehensive approach to development centred around human settlements. Territorial planning, as he called the new approach, should overcome sectoral approaches, where priority is "given to the most quantitatively productive forces available, but without regard to other considerations – social, environmental, or the need for more regional balance."[113] Territorial development, instead, bridges the different sectors by using human

---

[111] Enrique Peñalosa, "The Need for a New Development Model", *Finance and Development* 13, no. 1 (1976): 6–7.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

settlements as the overarching framework. In Peñalosa's words, territorial planning is "development within a spatial dimension", and he linked these considerations directly to the ongoing discussions about the New International Economic Order:

> *It would be ridiculous to suggest that territorial planning and a human settlement development strategy will solve all the economic problems of the Third World. Of course, the first need is to establish a more just economic relationship on a global basis. However, I believe that a new international order must be complemented by a new development model.*[114]

While Peñalosa's elaborations highlight the city and human settlements as the core reference point for a new integrated development model, HABITAT was not the only organization that reflected on development during this period. Notably, Peñalosa published his thoughts in a special issue of *Finance & Development*, a journal issued jointly by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The World Bank itself, while not going as far as HABITAT, acknowledged the need for a more comprehensive development concept.

Acknowledging the significance of urbanization challenges, the World Bank claimed in a 1972 report that it recognized the importance of discussing and proposing policies to tackle urbanization problems. This shift led to "urbanization" becoming one of the World Bank sectors – a cross-cutting issue among other sectors previously strictly delineated according to industries. The World Bank noted that the growth of informal settlements and slums, coupled with a lack of urban services, has fostered their understanding that "development" encompasses more than just economic expansion. The report stated that the measures implemented thus far have largely failed to address these challenges effectively or generate more efficient urban growth patterns. While the World Bank previously focused on individual, isolated projects, they now increasingly placed their development projects within a wider context, stressing the need to assess their (urban) development projects with a more comprehensive evaluation of their impact on the individual sector and the overall economy.[115] While broadening its development concept and acknowledging the cross-cutting nature of urban development, the World Bank – unlike Peñalosa – maintained its focus on economic growth, measured through indicators such as GDP.

---

[114] Ibid.

[115] World Bank, *Sector Working Paper Urbanization*.

Interestingly, Peñalosa's concept of territorial planning, which takes human settlements as a framework to organize and plan development, overlaps with socialist visions of urban development. Zarecor's definition of the socialist scaffold ("a comprehensive system of interconnected components that functioned in relation to one another")[116] sees the city as a node within the planned economy. As much as the national economy was planned, the city had to be planned at all levels. In this understanding, the national economy was a complex system of interdependent sectors; their connection was the city. Accordingly, urban development was not just about the city as such; it was an intervention into the fabric of the national economy. This brings to mind Peñalosa's ideas of "development within a spatial dimension". HABITAT's new definition of development positioned the city as an all-encompassing reference point that could overcome hitherto sectoral approaches. It used human settlements as an overarching framework integrating various previously isolated dimensions, such as infrastructure development and industrial development.

3.3 The Founding of UN-HABITAT

HABITAT's foundation must be seen in the context of the new develpoment discourse introduced in the previous chapter. Before HABITAT, the Committee for Housing, Building, and Planning at ECOSOC was the primary United Nations unit responsible for urban development activities at the headquarters level. Regional economic commissions also engaged in similar work within their respective regions. Additionally, specialized UN agencies like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) were involved in urban development topics. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took charge of programming and financing most technical assistance and pre-investment projects conducted by the United Nations. The scope of projects related to urban development varied, ranging from comprehensive urban and regional planning conducted by expert teams lasting several years to the appointment of individual advisors in housing finance for shorter durations. Historically, the United Nations has allocated relatively limited staff resources and technical assistance funds to urban development. However, compared to

---

[116] Zarecor, "What Was so Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe".

previous decades, there was a growing commitment in this area, even though the overall amount remained small.[117]

While the visible kick-off for HABITAT was the 1976 Vancouver Conference – which I describe in detail in chapter 4.1 – the question of how to strengthen and institutionalize urban development issues within the United Nations started two years earlier, as soon as the conference planning took off, with diverging positions within and across the different Cold War camps and the UN. On 16 December 1974, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 3327 (XXIX) on the establishment of the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlement Foundation (UNHHSF). The new foundation was the first step towards the institutionalization of HABITAT, though it remained rather weak. Financially, it was built upon a one-time payment of USD 4 million from the United Nations and otherwise relied on voluntary contributions. At its foundation, UNHHSF's primary purpose was to assist with national human settlement programmes.[118] The socialist states remained sceptical towards UNHHSF and rejected all calls for financial contributions.[119] For the UN Secretary-General, UNHHSF was only a first step. While there were diverging positions among different UN bodies, Peñalosa aimed to establish HABITAT as a separate institution with its own secretariat to coordinate international cooperation in human settlements. Before the conference, Peñalosa and his team prepared three alternatives for institutionalizing HABITAT and toured many participating countries to promote his ideas. All of his proposals met with scepticism in the conference's preparatory committee, where the majority of countries voted against his plans. Instead, they called for Peñalosa to provide an assessment of all international organizations and agencies that already worked on human settlement issues and to elaborate on how these organizations – such as UNEP's department on human settlement or the UN Housing Center – could cover the activities of HABITAT. Despite these setbacks, Peñalosa and his team kept pushing to establish a new institution.[120]

In mid-1975, having already visited Moscow, Stockholm, and Warsaw, Peñalosa continued his tour to Bonn, where he likewise tried to promote his plans to

---

[117] World Bank, *Sector Working Paper Urbanization*, 101ff.

[118] UN General Assembly, Resolution A/RES/29/3327 Establishment of the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation, 16 December 1974.

[119] HABITAT-Konferenz und Folgemaßnahmen, 1976 (n.d.), Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PA AA), Berlin, M 82/1297-92.

[120] Reddies an Herbst, 29 September 1975, Bundesarchiv (BArch), Koblenz, B134/12784.

institutionalize HABITAT. He met with negative reactions here as well, though. Bonn communicated a "wait and see" approach to Peñalosa and refused to make any commitments regarding institutionalization before the actual conference. Like many of the other participating countries, Bonn instead preferred to work on human settlement issues within UNEP or other existing institutions and wanted to wait for the expected upcoming structural reform of the United Nations. Moreover, West Germany rejected Peñalosa's requests for voluntary contributions to HABITAT. The West German delegation was well aware that Peñalosa was trying to seize a window of opportunity that they were trying to keep shut. In a handwritten note, one of the West German officers remarked, "If not now, then it won't happen within the next ten years."[121] Like Bonn, East Berlin was against establishing a new institution.[122] The common position shared by the socialist camp was that ECOSOC's existing Committee on Housing, Building, and Planning should take up additional responsibilities to support international cooperation in the field, but without founding (let alone financing) a new institution.[123] As Peñalosa later summarized, both the US and the Soviet Union attempted to avoid the foundation of HABITAT as a new institution "at all costs", followed by the other countries from their power blocs and primarily based on the unwillingness to make financial commitments.[124]

Five days before the conference's opening, discussions escalated in the work group regarding the preparation of the conference. The head of Kenya's delegation accused Peñalosa of breaking agreements and overstepping his competencies. While the committee voted against establishing a new UN institution at previous meetings, Peñalosa prepared a proposal for the conference that foresaw the establishment of HABITAT as a new body within the UN. Interestingly, there was no clear, unified position among the so-called developing countries about the question of institutionalization. Kenya was against establishing a new institution, and the delegations of Tanzania and Egypt supported it. Other states, such as Mexico, sided

---

[121] Studienbesuch von Herrn Peñalosa in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 01 October 1975, BArch, Koblenz, B134/12784.

[122] HABITAT-Konferenz und Folgemaßnahmen, 1976 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1297-92.

[123] Niederschrift über die Konsultation von Vertretern sozialistischer Staaten in Moskau, 18 May 1976, BArch, Berlin, N2504/278.

[124] Enrique Peñalosa, "Birth Pangs of the New UN Agency for Human Settlements", *HABITAT International* 3, no. 3/4 (1978): 203–4.

with the Secretary-General.[125] During the conference itself, this situation reoccurred when the participants from the Group of 77 could not agree on several issues. This included whether the new HABITAT organization should be subordinated to ECOSOC (the Economic and Social Council) or UNEP (the United Nations Environment Programme), and whether its headquarters should be located at the existing UN premises in New York or Vienna or whether it should be in Kenya, Gabon, or Mexico. As the East German delegation later remarked, the representatives of Kenya did not even have a unified position within their own delegation regarding these issues.[126]

In addition to the opposition from Washington and Moscow and the unclear position of the Group of 77, Peñalosa also faced opposition within the United Nations itself. Peñalosa's first idea of merging all current UN Agencies related to Human Settlements and placing them under one administration faced resistance from those who preferred to maintain the existing system. Since there were many proponents of keeping things unchanged within the UN, it was deemed more practical to create an entirely new entity instead of trying to consolidate the existing agencies. The plan for the new entity then met with intense competition between ECOSOC and UNEP, both of which tried to gain control of HABITAT. UNEP was determined to have any new HABITAT agency or centre under its direction and to control from its headquarters in Nairobi. They even rejected a proposal to establish a decentralized unit connected to UNEP, potentially located elsewhere. Peñalosa complained that UN Secretary-General Waldheim "felt it inappropriate that he should 'take sides'. The consequence was that all involved felt encouraged to intensify their own politicking."[127]

Due to diverging positions within the Group of 77, the Vancouver conference ultimately recommended that the 31st UN General Assembly establish HABITAT as a new secretariat, headed by an Under-Secretary of the UN, while also handing over all unresolved questions to the General Assembly. The Vancouver participants neither decided on the seat of the headquarters nor whether it should be subordinated to ECOSOC or UNEP. Ultimately, the 31st UN General Assembly, unsuccessful at resolving these questions about the institutional setup, postponed the decision to the 32nd General Assembly, calling a committee in ECOSC to prepare new, concrete

---

[125] HABITAT-Konferenz 1976 - Ausführliche Berichte über Teilaspekte der Konferenz, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/283.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Peñalosa, "Birth Pangs of the New UN Agency for Human Settlements".

recommendations for institutionalization.[128] Finally, in December 1977, at the 32nd General Assembly, Resolution A/RES/32/162 was adopted by 101 votes, with zero countervotes and 13 abstentions. The latter included the socialist states, which remained hostile towards establishing a new institution, as well as Belgium, France, Italy, and China. The resolution decided that ECOSOC's Committee on Housing, Building, and Planning should be transformed into a Commission on Human Settlements (UNCHS), which should be elected for a three-year term. The composition of the Commission mirrored the power balance between North and South in the United Nations at this point: sixteen seats for African states, ten seats for Latin American states, thirteen for Asian states, six for the socialist camp, and thirteen for the West. The resolution decided on establishing a "small and effective secretariat". The primary function of the secretariat was to facilitate the work of UNCHS and to administer UNHHSF. It was intended to act as a central hub for human settlement initiatives and to facilitate the coordination of activities across the United Nations system. Its tasks included practically executing human settlement projects, establishing a database of potential consultants and advisers for these projects, and organizing HABITAT's public relations. The activities of the secretariat, UNHHSF, and other departments were centralized in the new HABITAT Centre (see the organigram in Figure 1). The resolution overall calls for increased international cooperation in the field of human settlements. It called for collaboration and technical assistance in "policy formulation, management, and institutional improvement" and "education and training and applied research relating to human settlements" for "developing countries". Moreover, the resolution highlighted the importance of "projects in self-help and cooperative housing, integrated rural development, water, and transportation".[129]

As to the headquarters, the resolution decided on Nairobi, Kenya, to allow for synergies with UNEP, which is located in the same city[130] – much to the chagrin of the GDR, which strictly opposed Nairobi based on previous diplomatic quarrels between the Kenyan and East German governments. The Polish delegation supported their negative position towards Nairobi, and it even suggested preventing the choice of the

[128] HABITAT-Konferenz und Folgemaßnahmen, 1976 (n.d.), Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amts (PA AA), Berlin, M 82/1297-92.
[129] UN General Assembly, Resolution A/RES/32/162, Institutional Arrangements for International Cooperation in the Field of Human Settlements, 19 December 1977.
[130] Ibid.

headquarters through tactical manoeuvres. However, this plan was not approved by the Soviets (as Gerhard Kosel, an important figure in the East German HABITAT team, put it, "the Soviet comrades explicitly noted this as an informative suggestion, without endorsing the proposal").[131] It took an additional six months to select a director for the newly formed secretariat. During this time, the organizations involved in the consolidation lacked a clear direction and reporting channel. As a result, the inaugural meeting of the new HABITAT Commission for Human Settlements had to be conducted without a director in place.[132] Only in 1978 was the Indian Arcot Ramachandran appointed executive director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements and as administrator of UNHHSF, remaining in office until 1993.

In its first phase, the new Commission met with several obstacles. According to Mr Sokolov, the Head of the Soviet delegation to the HABITAT Commission, the first meeting was ill-prepared and uncoordinated, mainly due to the inability of the United Nations to establish the intended work structures. For the secretariat, which should have facilitated the Commission's work, none of the UN's three candidates could take the position, be it for personal reasons or a lack of qualifications. In the absence of leadership, employees from the three existing UN institutions and departments that should have formed the core staff of the new secretariat refrained from relocating to Nairobi.[133] By 1970, the new secretariat was foreseen for 163 full-time positions, and the socialist delegations aimed to establish at least some of their professionals in these positions, a plan that never yielded the intended results.[134]

---

[131] "Die sowjetischen Genossen nahmen dies ausdrücklich als informative Anregung zur Kenntnis, ohne den Vorschlag zu unterstützen" – Niederschrift über die Konsultation von Vertretern sozialistischer Staaten, 18 May 1976, BArch, Berlin, N2504/278.

[132] Peñalosa, "Birth Pangs of the New UN Agency for Human Settlements".

[133] Information über ein Gespräch mit dem Leiter der Delegation der UdSSR in der Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen der UNO, Gen. J.N. Sokolov, 07 June 1978, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.

[134] Bericht über die Teilnahme einer Delegation der DDR an der 2. Tagung der Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen der UNO in Nairobi, 15 May 1979, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.
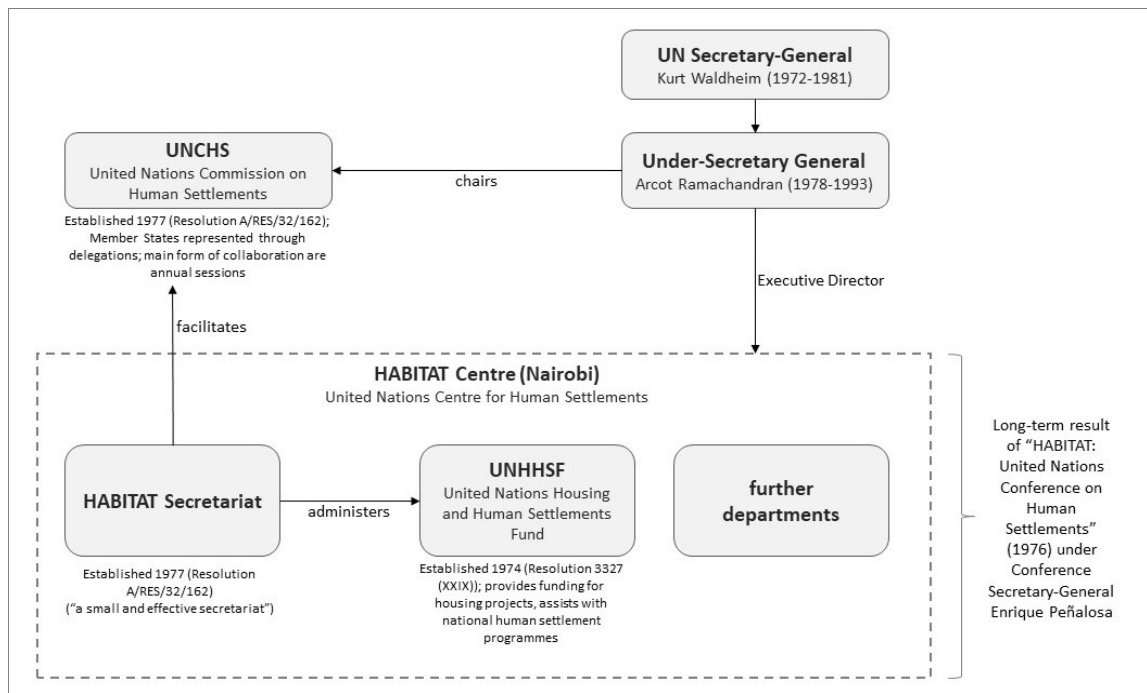
Figure 1: HABITAT Organigram as of 1980. Source: author's own illustration

Throughout the entire period studied in this dissertation, HABITAT struggled with a strained, even minimal, budget in some years.[135] By 1976, UNHHSF, the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation, established two years before the Vancouver conference, was practically "bankrupt", as Mr Sokolov put it. After the first, extraordinary payment from the UN budget to the Foundation, it was planned that UNHHSF should work through voluntary contributions from the Member States. By 1976, the UN's initial payment was used up, and voluntary contributions from selected Western states, intended for development projects, had also been used up. According to Mr. Sokolov, this money was used for salaries and business travel rather than for its intended purposes. In 1976, UNHHSF tried to leverage another $50 million USD in voluntary contributions and another payment from the regular UN budget.[136] At the second UNCHS session in 1979 in Nairobi, the executive director declared that for the next two years, they were planning with expenditures amounting to USD 23.2 million, which were covered by USD 6.8 million from the UN budget and USD 2.6 million in voluntary contributions – leaving a gap of USD 13.8 million for which the executive director was calling for further voluntary contributions. The socialist states consistently rejected any payments, as they did most of the time, while there were mixed signals

---

[135] Ruedas to UNCHS, 14 August 1984, UNA, New York City, S-1051-0005-13.
[136] Information über ein Gespräch mit dem Leiter der Delegation der UdSSR in der Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen der UNO, Gen. J.N. Sokolov, 07 June 1978, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.

from the West. France and the United States refused to contribute, whereas West Germany announced that Bonn would "lend an open ear to the executive director" regarding contributions (though in practice, it took Bonn almost another decade to commit to contributions).[137]

3.4 GDR in HABITAT: The Early Years

East Germany became a member of the United Nations in 1973 but had already joined some of its specialized agencies in the 1950s. For the GDR, these agencies, such as UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization), became a platform to develop ties with governments beyond the Eastern Bloc. Though technically not a specialized agency, HABITAT served a similar function. The East German delegation attended HABITAT meetings from the beginning, starting with the 1976 "HABITAT I" Vancouver conference, which preceded the programme's official foundation in 1978. Initially, East Germany's contributions were mostly limited to the annual HABITAT sessions, with only a few uncoordinated attempts to seek further engagement. In the early years, the socialist states used HABITAT mainly as a platform to spread their urban planning visions towards a global audience. At the first HABITAT conference in Vancouver, for example, the contributions of some socialist states highlighted the benefits of urban planning approaches in planned economies, where instruments like *prognostics* could facilitate planning. They emphasized the importance of socialist land-use policies and the supremacy of state investments to supply sufficient and high-quality housing, emphasizing that their approaches could also be useful for other global regions.[138] The socialist states coordinated their work with HABITAT through regular meetings of their delegations, at which they prepared common standpoints for the annual sessions of HABITAT.[139] Most of the annual sessions were held in the capital cities of so-called developing countries, such as Mexico City (1980), Manila (1981), and Nairobi (1982). Yet, after HABITAT's Helsinki session in 1983, the Hungarian

---

[137] Bericht über die Teilnahme einer Delegation der DDR an der 2. Tagung der Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen der UNO in Nairobi, 15 May 1979, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.
[138] A good starting point into the self-representation of socialist states is the library of videos that various delegations brough to the 1976 Vancouver conference, made available by the University of British Columbia through YouTube (HABITAT Conferences Digital Archive, https://www.youtube.com/@habitatconferencesdigitala857 (accessed 27 September 2022))
[139] Bericht über die Beratung von Delegationen sozialistischer Länder zu Fragen der Teilnahme an der Tätigkeit der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS) (…) in Rackeve (UVR), 12 October 1983, BArch, Berlin, N2504/287.

delegation tried to bring one of the next sessions to Budapest. Furthermore, Gerhard Kosel, who led the East German delegation from 1977 to 1984, at least considered proposing East Germany for a future session.[140] Discussions at the annual sessions often revolved around geopolitical questions related directly or indirectly to housing and settlements. Resolutions were negotiated, for example, regarding Israeli settlements in Palestine or the (shelter) situation of Namibian refugees displaced by South Africa's apartheid regime, but also on joint activities such as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH, 1987), to name but three examples. Recurring themes the East German delegation brought forward were their housing programme and policy (which they presented as a good practice for so-called developing countries) and the linkage between housing and global disarmament. A case in point is the 1987 annual session in Nairobi, where Kenya's president, in the opening speech, claimed that "if there is no peace in the world, there is no way to solve the problem of shelter".[141] The East German delegation gratefully referred to this quote, as it exemplified one of their repeated positions at the UNCHS sessions. In their logic, disarmament would free up financial resources, which should be used to tackle global housing problems.[142] Several socialist states, including the GDR, framed this position under the slogan "No Peace, No Shelter" and presented their proposal for a fund for "Disarmament for Development" at the 42nd session of the UN General Assembly.[143]

During these years – from the beginning until 1984 – the HABITAT delegation was led by Gerhard Kosel, a renowned architect who had previously served as President of Bauakademie and had a leading position in the design and construction of East Berlin's TV tower. Kosel, born in 1909, was a member of the communist party KPD from 1931, and after finishing his studies in Berlin and Munich under Bruno Taut and Hans Poelzig, he went to the Soviet Union in 1932 to work as an architect in Magnitogorsk. While Germany was under Nazi rule, Kosel lost his German citizenship, became a target of the Gestapo, and remained in the Soviet Union for more than a decade, where he also married his wife. In 1954, Kosel eventually returned to the GDR and soon

---

[140] Tagebuch Gerhard Kosel 11.5.1981 bis 12.4.1982, BArch, Berlin, N2504/163.

[141] ECOSOC Reguläre Tagung 1987, Erklärung des Vertreters der DDR zu TOP 11, 1987 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1298-92.

[142] ECOSOC Reguläre Tagung ECOSOC 1986, TOP 13: Internationale Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Menschlichen Siedlungen, 1986 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1298-92.

[143] Joint Statement by the Representatives of the Hungarian People's Republic on Behalf of the Delegations of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, (…), 12 October 1987, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1298-92.

became State Secretary in the Ministry of Construction.[144] During these years, Kosel focused especially on advancing industrialized and standardized building methods, one of the cornerstones of the GDR's reconstruction efforts in the postwar years.[145] Kosel was later described as "one of the intellectual fathers of industrialized construction in the GDR".[146]

Figure 2: Gerhard Kosel (left) at the 1976 Vancouver conference. Source: Barch, Berlin, N2504/293

Gerhard Kosel's career in the GDR took a sudden turn in 1965 following a dispute with Günter Mittag, who was in charge of construction matters at the Socialist Party's Central Committee at this point. Kosel had to quit his position as President of Bauakademie and lost his position in the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party, and the overall responsibility for the construction of the Berlin TV tower was taken away from him. Nevertheless, Kosel continued in architecture and construction politics, though with less prestigious assignments, and served as one of several deputies of the Minister of Construction until 1974. When the architecture journal *Architektur*

---

[144] His official position was "Staatssekretär im Ministerium für Aufbau", note that the "Ministerium für Aufbau" was renamed into "Ministerium für Bauwesen" in 1958 – see also: Glückwunschschreiben an Gerhard Kosel, 1959 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DY55/1686.

[145] Die Hauptaufgaben des Bauwesens in der DDR, 1960 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DY30/86422.

[146] Author's own translation from the German original: "einer der geistigen Väter des industriellen Bauens in der DDR", see: Architektur der DDR Editorial Team, "Prof. Dr. Gerhard Kosel zum 80. Geburtstag", *Architektur der DDR* 38, no. 2 (1989): 51.

der DDR published a piece on the occasion of his 80 birthday in 1989, they praised his achievements in the USSR as well as his commitments during the 1950s in Berlin and his role as President of Bauakademie, only to jump straight to his work for HABITAT in the late 1970s, as if there were no major developments in his life and career in between, omitting also his contribution to the Berlin TV tower. [147]

Only in 1977 was Kosel assigned to HABITAT, and even though he was the head of the East German delegation, he worked in relative isolation, without a larger team subordinated to him.[148] From his diaries, it is clear that Kosel did not have reservations against socialism as such (rather the opposite, as he frequently referred to Friedrich Engels's reflections on housing in speeches, publications, and diary notes,[149] and on a practical level he called for increased nationalization of the construction industry in the postwar years),[150] but at the same time, Kosel was indeed concerned about the system and its ways of working. As his diaries show, he was aware of the system's negative impact on architecture and urban planning, such as over-centralization and interference from the Socialist Unity Party (SED).[151]

The available archival materials did not reveal why exactly Kosel was appointed Head of the HABITAT delegation. However, the conditions of his appointment led to the assumption that the ministries in charge did not tie significant ambition to the GDR's HABITAT membership in the early years. When Kosel's assignment in the Ministry of Construction ended in 1974, he was left without a concrete perspective for a new

---

[147] Ibid.; Protokoll Nr. 16/74 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK, 13 February 1974, BArch, Berlin, DY30/62551.

[148] Tagebuch G. Kosel 27.6.1983 bis 13.2.1984, BArch, Berlin, N2504/163.

[149] Anmerkung G. Kosel, n.d., BArch, Berlin, N2504/282; Tagebuch G. Kosel 1979, BArch, Berlin, N2504/162.

[150] Vortrag des ersten Stellvertreters des Ministers für Bauwesen, Staatssekretär Gerhard Kosel, 20 June 1958, BArch, Berlin, DA1/557, Bd. 35.

[151] In September 1992, Gerhard Kosel added a comment to his 1955-1984 diaries (author's own translation): "The value of the diaries collected from 1955 to 1984 lies in the fact that they reveal the management of a large branch of the GDR economy over a long period of time. An analysis of the material will show: (a) overload with problems, partly subordinate issues, (b) over-centralization, (c) no work with fundamental issues – especially laws – general regulations, architecture. The leaders and employees made a real effort. The state leaders were the whipping boys of the Politbüro, the nation" (original: "Der Wert der Tagebücher gesammelt von 1955 bis 1984 besteht darin, daß sie die Leitung eines großen Wirtschaftszweiges der DDR über einen langen Zeitraum erkennen lassen. Eine Analyse des Materials wird aufzeigen: (a) Überlastung mit Problemen, zum Teil untergeordneten Fragen, (b) Überzentralisierung, (c) keine Arbeit mit Grundsatzfragen - bes. Gesetzen - allgemeinen Regelungen, Architektur. Die Leiter und Mitarbeiter haben sich redliche Mühe gegeben. Die staatlichen Leiter waren Prügelknaben des Politbüros, der Nation.") – Tagebuch G. Kosel 27.6.1983 bis 13.2.1984, BArch, Berlin, N2504/163.

position in the Ministry.[152] Only three years later, Kosel was appointed as head of the HABITAT delegation. At this point, he was already 68 years old, and while he was far from being "persona non grata", he was unsuitable for the "first row" after the dispute with Mittag, which made him lose his position as President of the Bauakademie. In February 1979, the minister of construction even offered to replace Kosel, as he felt that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would have fundamental objections to his person. While the minister's fears were likely based on a misunderstanding, and while Kosel remained in his function for another five years, the minister's approach can be interpreted as another piece of evidence for Kosel's comparatively weak position in these years.[153]

Regarding the economic exploitation of HABITAT, the various East German authorities involved did not follow a clear strategy during Kosel's era. On the one hand, the minister of construction called the delegation to create new business opportunities through the conference. On the other hand, this call to action was not underlined by any concrete plans or efforts. Karl Schmiechen, the head of East Germany's Vancouver delegation, used his speech in the general plenary in Vancouver to point at the openness of the East German construction industry for international clients, though his statement remained general and indirect (see chapter 4.1). After the conference, they drafted an action plan, yet it was limited to internal, mostly organizational matters.[154] Four years later, in 1980, the Ministry of Construction introduced a new strategy for the GDR's cooperation with HABITAT. Next to broader political goals, such as strengthening collaboration with the Eastern Bloc, pursuing disarmament, and promoting so-called anti-imperial solidarity, the strategy also included rather practical goals. This included pushing for participation in the operational activities of HABITAT in newly independent nation-states, as well as calling for knowledge sourcing. Through a systematic analysis of the activities of other countries in HABITAT and the materials they provide, the GDR delegation should source scientific and technological knowledge that East German institutions could adopt.[155]

---

[152] Protokoll Nr. 16/74 der Sitzung des Sekretariats des ZK, 13 February 1974, BArch, Berlin, DY30/62551.
[153] Gen. Prof. Kohl zur Information für Rücksprache bei Gen. Junker, betrifft Tagung der UN-Kommission Menschliche Siedlungen, 20 February 1979, Scientific Collections of the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS), Erkner, A2_2_127.
[154] Ergänzung des Planes der Maßnahmen zur Auswertung von HABITAT - Konferenz der UNO über Menschliche Siedlungen, 15 July 1976, BArch, Berlin, N2504/280.
[155] Konzeption für die Mitarbeit der DDR in der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS), 17 January 1980, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.

The 1980 strategy further called for using HABITAT to generate new business, emphasizing the need "to initiate, consolidate, and further develop bilateral relations in the field of construction with partner countries".[156] This approach is particularly interesting as it juxtaposes the East German public framing of their contributions to HABITAT with more practical ambitions that they did not mention publicly, centred around their own benefits. The strategy describes several activities that should strengthen the GDR's economic exploitation of HABITAT. This includes using HABITAT forums and HABITAT publications to promote the capabilities of the East German construction industry, to establish East German professionals in HABITAT's expert pool for field activities, to launch seminars, conferences, and study trips for urban planning professionals from the group of newly independent nation-states, and to offer education programmes for the same group.[157]

However, in the following years, no meaningful economic activity of the GDR in HABITAT can be observed. After the 1982 UNCHS session in Nairobi, Kosel pointed to the Commission's recommendation to build three transcontinental highways in Africa and remarked that this could be a starting point for initiating foreign trade.[158] However, this, as well as other, similar remarks were usually not followed by concrete activities. Moreover, it seems that interest in working with HABITAT has declined. According to the UNCHS statutes, membership in the commission was always valid for two years. Thereafter, the Member States had to renew their membership. When the GDR's membership was about to end in 1985, the Ministry of Construction proposed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs not to renew their membership and to participate with the observer status henceforth.[159] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed their proposal, though leaving a door open by pointing to the "interests of the group of socialist states", which might require them to decide differently.[160] It is not entirely clear what changed the minds of both ministries, but in February 1986, the East German membership in UNCHS was renewed for the 1986–1987 term.[161] The reasons for their continued interest in HABITAT are speculative: it could have been due to Soviet pressure, the

---

[156] Author's own translation, Ibid.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Auftreten des Leiters der Delegation der DDR im Plenum der 5. Tagung der UNCHS, 03 May 1982, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.
[159] Haak an Florin, 09 April 1985, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2314-88.
[160] Florin an Haak, 26 April 1985, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2314-88.
[161] Florin an Haak, 27 February 1986, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2314-88.

deteriorating economic situation forcing them to intensify their efforts to benefit from HABITAT economically, or other reasons.

3.5 GDR in HABITAT: From Modernism to Pragmatism

These developments also coincided with the transition from Gerhard Kosel (who was trained in the interwar years under modern architects like Bruno Taut) to Gottfried Wagner (who had a rather pragmatic approach and was very experienced with projects in postcolonial contexts). During these years, the GDR slowly started to exploit the economic opportunities offered by HABITAT more systematically, gained its first economically relevant contracts, and eventually even considered changing its position towards voluntary contributions. This new approach was formalized in the annual economic plans[162] and reflected in Wagner, who became Kosel's successor in 1984. In the same year, responsibility for HABITAT was transferred from the Ministry of Construction to Bauakademie (which was subordinate to the Ministry). The Institute for Town Planning and Architecture (Institut für Städtebau und Architektur, ISA) was now in charge. ISA has had a small workgroup for international projects since 1982 ("Arbeitsgruppe Export") and was relatively experienced internationally compared to other institutes in the Academy.[163] The change from Kosel to Wagner marked a significant shift towards economic considerations. Wagner has now united the positions of head of the export workgroup at ISA and head of the HABITAT delegation. Moreover, Wagner had know-how from building and planning projects in Abyan (Ivory Coast), Abuja (Nigeria), and other countries. According to archival sources, Wagner was much more straightforward than his predecessor in demanding increased authority and competence for his position as head of the delegation. He furthermore called for clear responsibilities of the different involved institutions, he requested establishing a considerably sized HABITAT team under his supervision and even pushed the Ministry to give him a diplomatic passport.[164]

Under Gottfried Wagner, the UNCHS sessions were increasingly used to exchange business contacts and search for new potential contracts. At the tenth UNCHS session in

---

[162] Vorlage zur Verteidigung des Ergebnisses Nr. 350 Leitung der DDR-Delegation in der UNCHS sowie der Zusammenarbeit der DDR mit HABITAT, 10 November 1987, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_30_16.

[163] Wagner and Schulze were involved, for example, in the housing projects in Yemen, Wagner and Wurbs had a leading role in the project in Tete (Mozambique). See also: Geschäftsbericht 1981 Institut für Städtebau Und Architektur, 1982 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/21246.

[164] Schwerpunkte für das Gespräch zur HABITAT-Arbeit am 16.9.1986, 1986 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, A2_2_90.

Nairobi (Kenya, 1987), for example, Wagner sought a personal talk with the executive director of the HABITAT Centre to conclude the contracts for both the upcoming HABITAT seminar and the Dakawa project. They also discussed the GDR's potential involvement in the development of roofing materials from local materials, a plan that most likely never materialized.[165] Likewise, at the 1988 UNCHS session in New Delhi (India), the GDR delegation presented a film called *A House of Mudbrick*, ultimately aiming to valorize Bauakademie's *Initativforschung* on how mudbrick, as a traditional local building material, could be upgraded into a modern construction material based on the GDR's expertise with standardization and rationalization (cf. chapter 4.2).[166]

In light of domestic and global economic challenges, HABITAT, with its financing opportunities for building and development projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, promised an attractive back door to potential new customers – that is, governments lacking the liquidity to buy the services of Bauakademie or other GDR companies directly. HABITAT promised fewer acquisition efforts than bilateral building and planning projects and safe payments in convertible currencies.[167] However, Bauakademie's efforts to realize tangible building projects through HABITAT were often hampered by the unwillingness of the Ministry of Construction and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to pay voluntary contributions to the HABITAT budget.[168] Financially, HABITAT relied heavily on voluntary donations from its members. Specialized agencies like UNIDO are autonomous membership organizations; they are funded through mandatory or assessed contributions of their members. HABITAT, however, is not a specialized agency; it relies on another funding system. In the 1980s, HABITAT received minor funding directly from the UN, but it always had to encourage its members to contribute voluntarily. Most socialist states rejected any contributions to HABITAT. In East Germany, discussions about a potential contribution started only in the late 1980s. Voluntary contributions would have significantly increased the chances of becoming a contractor for HABITAT's building and planning projects. The Soviet Union also refrained from contributing for most of the time, as did most other socialist

---

[165] Bericht über die Teilnahme der Delegation der DDR an der 10. Tagung der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS), May 1987, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2315-88.
[166] Report of the Commission on Human Settlements on the Work of Its Eleventh Session, 10 June 1988, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1299-92.
[167] Fachlicher Bericht über die Konsultationen mit einem Vertreter der Vereinten Nationen, 29 November 1985, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_88.
[168] Voluntary contributions were usually the requirement to be eligible for contracts (unlike with UNIDO, ILO, and other specialized agencies, where the contributions were mandatory or assessed).

states.[169] The argument brought forward publicly by the East German government was that poverty and housing problems in newly independent countries were consequences of colonialism. According to their logic, the colonial project was a Western project, meaning the West had to bear the primary financial responsibility in programmes like HABITAT. Another argument that was less publicized was the GDR's lack of financial resources. Kosel and his Soviet counterpart were sceptical that the UN, with every new body founded, would call for new, additional contributions. Moreover, due to the dire financial situation of HABITAT, Kosel claimed that some of the voluntary contributions were used to pay HABITAT's Nairobi staff rather than being channelled into projects and fieldwork.[170] Interestingly, the GDR indeed paid voluntary contributions to UNDP, an organization that was also mostly active in so-called developing countries. This calls into question the framing that "we don't contribute because we are not responsible for making up the damages caused by colonialism" and suggests that financial constraints played a more important role in explaining why the GDR rejected voluntary contributions.[171]

At the same time, in the wake of the Vancouver conference, a Bulgarian delegate warned that Western governments would likely call for increased financial contributions (which they did not ultimately do). These funds would eventually benefit the Western construction industry through attractive business contracts worldwide. The risk he saw was that the delegates from so-called developing countries would side with their counterparts from the West in the call for higher contributions.[172]

At the 9th UNCHS session in Istanbul (1986), Hungary and Poland were the first to commit to voluntary contributions to the UNHHSF, thereby making themselves eligible for HABITAT contracts regarding construction and planning projects. One year later, at the 10th UNCHS session in Nairobi (1987), the USSR followed suit.[173] The Soviets developed a new approach by taking non-convertible funds paid to the regular UN

---

169 Reguläre Tagung ECOSOC 1986, TOP 13: Internationale Zusammenarbeit auf dem Gebiet der menschlichen Siedlungen, 1986 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1298-92.
170 Bericht über eine Besprechung mit dem Stellvertreter des Leiters der Delegation der UdSSR in der UNO-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen, Genossen Prof. Chrustalow am 26.09.1979 in Moskau, 01 October 1979, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_127.
171 Konzeption für die Mitarbeit der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik im Entwicklungsprogramm der Vereinten Nationen (UNDP), n.d., IRS, Erkner, A2_2_127.
172 Niederschrift über die Konsultation von Vertretern sozialistischer Staaten in Moskau, 18 May 1976, BArch, Berlin, N2504/278.
173 Bericht über die Teilnahme der Delegation der DDR an der 10. Tagung der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS), 1987 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2315-88.

budget or to UNDP and transferring them towards HABITAT to finance projects. This approach circumvented formal procedures and was technically difficult to implement, as the UN's regular budget is assessed, while HABITAT contributions are voluntary. However, this strategy allowed the USSR to implement several joint projects with HABITAT, including a training centre for HABITAT in Dar es Salaam. The GDR delegation considered adopting the same approach to HABITAT contributions, but it was ultimately never implemented.[174]

Discussions about voluntary contributions continued throughout the late 1980s among the involved ministries. At the 1988 UNCHS session, the GDR delegation still rejected any monetary donations to HABITAT, while at the same time highlighting their contributions to the Dakawa project (see chapter 4.3) and the seminar series (see chapter 4.5), which they aimed to prolong.[175] At the same time, due to growing pressure from the HABITAT secretariat and awareness that the GDR's longtime position of neglecting financial contributions impeded their chances to secure HABITAT contracts, Wagner managed to at least initiate discussions about potential GDR contributions. In preparation for the 1989 Cartagena (Columbia) session, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade received the order to clarify in how far the GDR could make voluntary financial contributions to HABITAT.[176] Shortly before the conference, there was still no final decision on the matter.[177] The GDR ultimately did not confirm any contributions at the conference. This might have been due to unforeseen changes in the delegation's composition; for political reasons that cannot be fully established based on the available archival resources, Gottfried Wagner, who had already received his official accreditation for the session in Cartagena, and who pushed the topic of voluntary contributions, was removed from his position three days before the conference.[178]

---

[174] Paulig an Dietze, 30 June 1988, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1301-92.
[175] Direktive für die Teilnahme der DDR-Delegation an der 11. Tagung der Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (…) in New Delhi (Indien), 23 March 1983, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1299-92.
[176] Maßnahmeplan Nr. 88 zur Sicherung der weiteren Mitarbeit der DDR in der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS), 18 March 1988, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1299-92.
[177] "Während der 12. UNCHS-Tagung sind die teilnehmenden Länder aufgefordert, in einer speziellen Veranstaltung ihre freiwilligen Spenden für den HABITAT-Fonds bekanntzugeben. Die DDR-Delegation äußert sich auf dieser Veranstaltung nicht, sofern bis dahin nicht andere Festlegungen getroffen werden", see: Direktive für die Teilnahme der DDR-Delegation an der 12. Tagung der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (…) in Cartagena de Indias (Kolumbien, Entwurf), 1989 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M82/1300-92.
[178] Schlegel an Okali, 19 April 1989, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1300-92.

The diverging approaches within the socialist bloc regarding voluntary contributions to HABITAT are interesting, as Poland and Hungary were socialist countries with a comparatively high architectural presence in Africa and the Middle East,[179] which leads to the assumption that they were – possibly – more pragmatic and business-oriented than the GDR. Consequently, HABITAT remained financially weak, a situation that was further aggravated by cuts to the UN budget.[180]

Despite refraining from voluntary contributions, compared to the other socialist states, the GDR took a leading role and engaged more than others, taking over a coordinating function within the Eastern Bloc, at least on a technical-professional level. This started in Vancouver, where the East German delegation was appointed speaker of the group of socialist states and continued throughout the annual HABITAT sessions, where the GDR usually acted as the speaker of the group of socialist states.[181] The importance of HABITAT in the East German context is also supported by the amount of publicity that HABITAT saw in East Germany compared to other socialist states. The leading East German architectural magazine, *Architektur der DDR*, featured HABITAT repeatedly between 1976 and 1989. By contrast, the Czechoslovak magazines *Architektura ČSSR* and *Československý Architekt* referred to HABITAT only in relation to the 1976 Vancouver conference and never again thereafter. East Germany's leading role within the socialist camp may partially also be explained with pragmatism: as the GDR joined the United Nations relatively late, most other specialized agencies and UN bodies were already "occupied" by other socialist states. In UNDP, for example, states like Czechoslovakia were already relatively active with large urban planning projects, leading international consortia that included Eastern and Western institutions alike.[182] In ECE's Building Committee, the GDR had already been involved for years, cooperating with West Germany on a technical level (see below). Preparations for HABITAT began

---

[179] There is no quantitative study about the architectural engagement of different Eastern bloc countries in so-called developing countries, yet prior literature suggests that Hungarian and Polish architects both have a relatively long tradition in these countries (see e.g., Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*.)

[180] Ruedas to UNCHS, 14 August 1984, UNA, New York City, S-1051-0005-13.

[181] Bericht über die Teilnahme der Delegation der DDR an der 10. Tagung der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS), 1987 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2315-88.

[182] Czechoslovakia's TERPLAN, for example, submitted offers to UNDP jointly with British and American consultancies and Soviet institutions alike; jointly implemented projects included e.g. the Master Plans for Karachi (Pakistan) or Colombo (Sri Lanka); see: Master Plan of the Metropolitan Area of Colombo: Offer for Project SRL/71/528, 1973 (n.d.), National Archive of the Czech Republic (NA ČR), Praha, Fond 1454, Unprocessed, Box 327; Oldřich Tichý, "Generální plán metropolitní oblasti Karáčí", *Ročenka Terplan 1973*, 1973.

in the mid-1970s, coinciding with the GDR's first years in the United Nations. As other socialist states did not have an advantage over the GDR (as in UNDP, for example), the GDR sought to fill this vacuum. Furthermore, while UNDP and ECE were both oriented towards professional exchange and the implementation of concrete projects, HABITAT also served as a political forum. The GDR highlighted their understanding of HABITAT as a place where the global housing question should be discussed from a systemic and political perspective.[183] For the GDR, HABITAT's political dimension aligned with their comparatively pronounced ideological positioning in international relations (see chapters 2.2, 2.3).

After the first session of the HABITAT Commission, the head of the Soviet delegation, Mr Sokolov, suggested coordinating the contributions of the socialist states through COMECON's Permanent Commission for Construction.[184] While the formal role of the commission throughout the following years is not entirely clear, it played no significant role in practice. The socialist states limited their cooperation to annual meetings to prepare for the upcoming session of the HABITAT Commission. In 1985, the HABITAT secretariat in Nairobi suggested establishing a liaison office to cooperate with COMECON and HABITAT.[185] The GDR had no unified position towards this initiative. The Ministry of Construction, on the one hand, opposed the idea. Most of the socialist states were represented in HABITAT anyway and would coordinate their activities internally already. Such a liaison office would only have added value if it supported the generation of new HABITAT construction projects for the COMECON members.[186] On the other hand, the economic department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported the idea of a liaison office.[187]

Eventually, all socialist states pursued their agendas in relative isolation, exchanging and coordinating their activities mainly through the annual meetings to prepare for the upcoming UNCHS session. During these meetings, they discussed common standpoints on session resolutions and practical matters. At the session in Manila (1981), for

---

[183] Bericht über die Beratung von Delegationen sozialistischer Länder zu Fragen der Teilnahme an der Tätigkeit der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS) (…) in Rackeve (UVR), 12 October 1983, BArch, Berlin, N2504/287.

[184] Information über ein Gespräch mit dem Leiter der Delegation der UdSSR in der Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen der UNO, Gen. J.N.Sokolov, 07 June 1978, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.

[185] Johal an Sytschev, 09 August 1984, PA AA, Berlin, M82/2314-88.

[186] Paulig an Borch, 15 January 1985, PA AA, Berlin, M 83/231488.

[187] Dietze an Arbeitsgruppe RGW, 06 February 1985, PA AA, M82/2314-88.

example, the socialist delegates discussed whether they should invite the HABITAT secretariat to organize one of their annual sessions in a socialist country (Gerhard Kosel indeed reflected on East Germany as a potential conference venue, yet it is unclear whether this idea made it up to the ministerial level).[188] While the different socialist delegations recognized the need to cooperate more closely and develop a joint strategic approach to the HABITAT sessions,[189] they did not develop a joint concept of their cooperation with HABITAT in the following years.[190]

Figure 3: Gerhard Kosel (at the very right) and the new Executive Director of HABITAT, Arcot Ramachandran (at the very left) at the UNCHS session in Manila, 1981. Source: Barch, Berlin, N2504/293

Next to the GDR, the USSR was likely the most active socialist state in HABITAT. In the late 1980s, the Soviet Union started paying voluntary contributions (300,000 roubles) and implemented a growing number of projects with HABITAT. In a Memorandum of Understanding, they agreed to improve their information exchange, create publications, and conduct several training programmes. This included a seminar in 1989 in Tashkent on "Research and Design of Earthquake Resistant Structures for

---

[188] Tagebuch G. Kosel 11.5.1981 bis 12.4.1982, BArch, Berlin, N2504/163.

[189] Auftreten des Leiters der Delegation der DDR im Plenum der 5. Tagung der UNCHS, 03 May 1982, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.

[190] Einschätzung der Tätigkeit der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS) und der Mitarbeit der DDR in dieser Kommission, 09 February 1983, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.

Residential and Community Buildings in Developing Countries"; a symposium planned for 1990 in Suzdal, Vladimir region, on "Small and Medium Towns of the Third World"; and another training workshop scheduled for 1991 on "Preservation and Rehabilitation of Historical Districts and Towns". In addition to providing training and education, these events were explicitly intended to "provide an opportunity for possible future UNCHS/USSR cooperation" with the participants' countries. Additionally, the USSR and HABITAT agreed on fellowships in Soviet institutions and to cooperate on extending the Ardhi Institute in Dar es Salaam (nowadays Ardhi University, which specializes in the education of architects) regarding the planning of new facilities and the development of curricula.[191]

Cooperation between the Eastern Bloc and Western states in HABITAT remained relatively weak, and – at least publicly – their relationship was dominated by conflicts. Interestingly, the situation differed in the Construction Committee of ECE, where East Germany actively sought cooperation with West Germany and other Western states. While in HABITAT, the East German delegation objected to West German attempts to turn it into a professional forum for technical, non-political exchange; they sought this very form of exchange in ECE's Construction Committee.[192] In HABITAT, on the other hand, the relationship between the two Germanies was dominated by systemic rivalry. Based on different approaches to housing in capitalism and socialism, there was little cooperation between the two Germanies in HABITAT. Conflicts often arose related to seemingly minor issues.

When Gerhard Kosel, regarding the 1981 UNCHS session in Manila, noted in his diary "exceptionality, no confrontations",[193] he was indeed describing an exceptional situation. Usually, the first UNCHS sessions were relatively confrontational from the perspective of the GDR and the Eastern Bloc. One year later, in Nairobi, the GDR delegation experienced difficulties with their visa and entry to Kenya. While the East German delegation was able to solve these problems relatively quickly, the Soviet delegation, which faced a similar problem, could not participate in the first part of the conference and threatened to not acknowledge any of HABITAT's resolutions, to ask

---

[191] Memorandum of Understanding, 1988 (n.d.), BArch, Koblenz, B134/40718.

[192] Arno Gräf, "Die Zusammenarbeit zwischen sozialistischen und kapitalistischen Staaten auf dem Gebiet des Bauwesens" (Dissertation, Berlin, Akademie für Staats- und Rechtswissenschaft der DDR, 1980).

[193] Author's translation from the German original "Besonderheit, keine Konfrontationen" (Tagebuch G. Kosel 11.5.1981 bis 12.4.1982, BArch, Berlin, N2504/163.)

for their financial contributions for the organization of the meeting back, and even to question whether Nairobi was an adequate place for the headquarters of HABITAT. Eventually, the Kenyan government allowed the Soviet delegation to enter, and the conference proceeded as planned.[194]

The two following sessions (Helsinki 1983, Libreville 1984) were dominated by confrontation with West Germany. Especially at the 7th UNCHS session in Libreville in 1984, a conflict between East Berlin and Bonn overshadowed both delegations' work, sparked by nothing more than a footnote in a West German report presented at the conference. The footnote reads, "Berlin (West) is integrated into the legal, administrative and economic system of the Federal Republic of Germany and is represented at the United Nations and in its specialized agencies by the Federal Republic of Germany."[195] For the East German delegation, this terminology was part of a more extensive attempt by West Germany to sabotage the four-power agreement.[196] The conflict about this terminology soon heated up, especially since Bonn used a similarly contested formulation the previous year at the session in Helsinki. In Finland in 1983, the wording was about the Federal Republic of Germany "including West Berlin", a sentence for which the delegation later apologized.[197] The Soviet Union and Bulgaria publicly supported the GDR delegation. Johannes von Vacano the West German ambassador to Nairobi and permanent representative to HABITAT, exchanged informally with the Soviets and the Bulgarians and learned that both were expecting an answer from the West but were not interested in escalating the conflict. Still, however, they were preparing a resolution as a precautionary measure and had already started securing votes from the Member States.[198] On the other hand, Bonn held close contact with the Americans during the incident and agreed to most of their steps with them.[199]

---

[194] Auftreten des Leiters der Delegation der DDR im Plenum der 5. Tagung der UNCHS, 03 May 1982, PA AA, M 82/2346-86.

[195] Study Preliminary Remarks, 1984 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, BAV 126-LIBR/15171.

[196] A 1980 GDR dissertation identified a pattern in Bonn's attempts to counteract the agreement through international organizations. Among the most common West German approaches were allegedly appointing residents of West Berlin to their UN delegations without identifying them as West Berlin citizens in official documents, as well as creating precedents for the acceptance of federal governmental institutions located "illegally" in West Berlin. (Gräf, "Die Zusammenarbeit zwischen sozialistischen und kapitalistischen Staaten auf dem Gebiet des Bauwesens".)

[197] Fernschreiben AA Libreville an AA Bonn PA AA, 07 May 1984, PA AA, Berlin, BAV 126-LIBR/15171.

[198] Fernschreiben AA Libreville an AA Bonn PA AA, 03 May 1984, PA AA, Berlin, BAV 126-LIBR/15171.

[199] Author's own translation from the German original "Bei dem Berlin-'Zwischenfall' wirkten die alliierten Delegationen gutwillig, aber etwas hilflos" (Anmerkungen zum Ablauf der Konferenz, 15 May 1984, PA AA, Berlin, BAV 126-LIBR/15171)

While the GDR delegation accused their FRG counterparts of a wilful escalation, the latter regretted this incident and understood that diplomatically it was potentially harmful. In the words of the West German ambassador to Gabon, Günter Koenig, such incidents were utterly useless ("*überflüssig wie ein Kropf*"). Some Western delegations, such as the Scandinavians, showed little understanding of their mistake, and in general, the ambassador saw the risk that such incidents would overshadow their thematic contributions and weaken their position.[200] Indeed, the American Embassy in Bonn noted that "the language used in the footnote on page one of the booklet has not been approved by any of the Allies, and we have registered our unhappiness about it with the Foreign Office."[201] Eventually, both sides came to an agreement, including a new terminology for the footnote in question. The American Embassy in Bonn commented that for the Soviet delegates, especially Mr Sokolov, the incident was more of a compulsory exercise. The Americans perceived them as cooperative throughout the whole issue, pointing also to the moment when the US delegate presented their standpoint in the forum. When suddenly his microphone failed, Sokolov helped out and moved his microphone over, accompanied by the laughter of many delegates.[202]

Still, in the eyes of the FRG delegation, the political dimension of the UNCHS sessions increasingly escalated. In 1984, at the seventh session in Libreville, Gabon, the West German ambassador to Gabon concluded that – as a principle for the future – their delegation must always include at least one official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This should facilitate "political" resolutions and other texts that, in their eyes, had little to do with the actual topics of HABITAT, such as Apartheid.[203] Likewise, the Eastern Bloc's reaction towards this period of conflict at HABITAT was to strengthen their delegations with foreign policy experts. The GDR was a forerunner in this context, as their delegation always included a Ministry of Foreign Affairs representative. By contrast, the delegations of some of the other socialist countries were composed only of urban planning, construction, and architecture professionals. Therefore, the head of the Hungarian delegation proposed in 1983 that all socialist delegations should involve their

---

[200] Ibid.

[201] Fernschreiben Amerikanische Botschaft Bonn an AA Bonn, 03 May 1984, PA AA, Berlin, BAV 126-LIBR/15171.

[202] Fernschreiben AA Libreville an AA Bonn, 10 May 1984, PA AA, Berlin, BAV 126-LIBR/15171.

[203] Anmerkungen zum Ablauf der Konferenz, 15 May 1984, PA AA, Berlin, BAV 126-LIBR/15171.

Ministries of Foreign Affairs to be better prepared for the "repeated political provocations of the USA and other NATO countries".[204]

Under both Kosel and Wagner, their practical approach towards so-called developing countries at the UNCHS sessions was rather pragmatic. In domestic propaganda, the relation was described as a competition between two systems, socialist and capitalist, fighting about who had the better blueprint for so-called developing countries. As Gerhard Kosel put it in a magazine article for the professional public:

> *When discussing the topic of land and building land at the Helsinki Commission meeting (1983), the representatives of some capitalist countries tried to offer the promotion and development of private initiative as the only promising recipe for the effective use of building land and called for the systematic repression of state influence in this area. The representatives of the socialist countries presented their experience in the planned provision of building land for residential, productive, and social purposes, excluding any form of land speculation. (...) Based on their own insights – strengthened by the experiences of the socialist countries – the developing countries are increasingly realizing that the influence and control of the state on land and housing policy is a decisive prerequisite for success in solving one of the most complicated social problems of the developing countries.[205]*

In practice, however, little interaction between socialist delegations and delegations from Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East is documented. During the Vancouver conference, the Eastern Bloc still tried to position itself as a better alternative to the West in a West–South conflict. However, over time, the attitude of the

---

[204] Bericht über die Beratung von Delegationen sozialistischer Länder zu Fragen der Teilnahme an der Tätigkeit der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS) (…) in Rackeve (UVR), 12 October 1983, BArch, Berlin, N2504/287.

[205] Author's translation from the German original "Bei der Beratung des Themas 'Boden und Bauland' auf der Tagung der Kommission in Helsinki (1983) versuchten die Vertreter einiger kapitalistischer Staaten, die Förderung und Entwicklung der Privatinitative als einziges Erfolg versprechendes Rezept für die effektive Nutzung des Baulandes zu offerieren, und forderten die systematische Zurückdrängung des staatlichen Einflusses auf diesem Gebiet. Die Vertreter der sozialistischen Ländern legten ihre Erfahrungen bei der planmäßigen Bereitstellung von Bauland für Wohn-, Produktions- und gesellschaftliche Zwecke dar, bei der jegliche Form von Bodenspekulations ausgeschlossen ist. (…) Von eigenen Einsichten – bestärkt durch die Erfahrungen der sozialistischen Länder – ausgehend, setzt sich bei den Entwicklungsländern zunehmend die Erkenntnis durch, daß die Einflußnahme und Kontrolle des Staates auf die Boden- und Wohnungspolitik eine entscheidende Voraussetzung für die Erfolge bei der Lösung eines der kompliziertesten sozialen Probleme der Entwicklungsländer (…) ist" (Gerhard Kosel, "1987 Internationales Jahr - Wohnung für die Obdachlosen", *Architektur der DDR* 33, no. 1 (1984): 4–6.)

majority of the so-called developing countries towards the Eastern Bloc shifted, seeing them as a part of the developed North, without differentiating between the socialist and capitalist camp. As of 1983, Gerhard Kosel reported that these countries had "*on the one hand, the tendency to exaggerate the positive results, e.g. the rehabilitation of slums [...], with the aim of increasing the authority of the respective governments, on the other hand, the tendency of pessimism as justification for far-reaching demands for financial and material support. [...] Noteworthy are the efforts of some developing countries to mobilize their own resources, e.g., in the development of building materials production.*"[206]

Some scholars have identified epistemic communities in international organizations and specialized agencies – that is, groups of professionals from across the Cold War divide that work towards a common goal based on shared beliefs in, for example, development.[207] The HABITAT administration in Nairobi consisted of professionals from all regions of the world. However, for HABITAT, the available sources are insufficient to confirm or reject such phenomena. As previously mentioned, the HABITAT archive in Nairobi is not accessible to the public, and the materials in other archives do not allow for detailed research into the inner workings of the HABITAT administration. The GDR, like other socialist states, repeatedly tried to install East German citizens in the HABITAT administration, yet there is no evidence of East German representation. This problem was not limited to HABITAT but extended to all UN bodies. Firstly, the lack of representation was caused by shortcomings such as a lack of staff with suitable profiles or language skills. A United Nations analysis of the GDR's roster candidates delineates the candidates into eleven different occupational fields (e.g., "civil engineering and architecture, including physical planning" or "public administration experts", etc.); for all eleven occupational fields, the data sheet indicates that "more candidates are required", and the overall evaluation is that "the current

---

[206] Author's translation from the German original "Einerseits der Tendenz zur Übertreibung der positiven Ergebnisse, z.B. der Sanierung von Slums (…), mit dem Ziel der Erhöhung der Autorität der entsprechenden Regierungen, andererseits der Tendenz der Schwarzmalerei als Begründung für weitgehende Forderungen nach finanzieller und materieller Unterstützung. (…) Bemerkenswert sind die Bemühungen einiger Entwicklungsländer zur Mobilisierung eigener Ressourcen, z.B. bei der Entwicklung der Baumaterialienproduktion", see: Einschätzung der Tätigkeit der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS) und der Mitarbeit der DDR in dieser Kommission, 09 February 1983, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.

[207] Michel Christian, Sandrine Kott, and Ondřej Matějka, "International Organizations in the Cold War: The Circulation of Experts Beyond the East-West Divide", *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Studia Territorialia* 17, no. 1 (2017): 35–60.

number of roster candidates is too small. More important, however, than the total number of candidates is the occupational mix of the candidates, which should correspond to actual recruitment requirements."[208] Secondly, budget cuts further reinforced the problem in the 1980s. Positions in the administration were often not renewed, and if they were renewed, then it was only with temporary contracts, while Western citizens occupied most permanent positions.[209] In contrast to the GDR, West Germany successfully placed at least one citizen in the HABITAT administration, and records show that this person facilitated the communication between the HABITAT administration and the West German delegation in a building project.[210]

An observation that applies to both periods, the years under Kosel and Wagner alike, is that the socialist states always remained relatively passive at the UNCHS sessions, having their statements prepared but being inflexible with ad-hoc reactions during plenary discussions. This began with the Vancouver conference, where the Group of 77 prepared an alternative draft declaration on the spot, while the socialist delegations limited themselves to trying to introduce their prepared and approved text modules into the declaration. This approach continued throughout the UNCHS sessions. At an internal gathering of the socialist delegations at the 10th UNCHS session in Nairobi (1987), the Hungarian delegate made a critical remark that – interestingly – even made it into the internal conference report of the deputy minister of construction. The Hungarian delegate remarked that all socialist delegations are "*without exception completely inadequately prepared to speak on all agenda items and to have a determining influence on spontaneous discussions, leaving the field here largely to the non-socialist delegations. Despite isolated activities, they still limit their HABITAT work too superficially to the issuing of fundamental declarations and leave the continuous political, conceptual, and operational-practical effectiveness to the HABITAT centre and the non-socialist forces actively cooperating with it on an ongoing basis.*"[211] The delegate continued that this lack of influence leads to HABITAT

---

[208] Roster Candidates by Nationality - German Demcocratic Republic, 17 November 1976, BArch, Koblenz, B136/18200.

[209] Information zum Einsatz von DDR-Bürgern in Sekretariaten der UNO und deren Spezialorganisationen - Schlussfolgerungen für das weitere Vorgehen, 26 February 1987, PA AA, Berlin, M82/6088-93.

[210] Kurzprotokoll der gemeinsamen Arbeitsgruppe des Ausschusses für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau und des Ausschusses für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, 09 November 1988, BArch, Koblenz, B134/40718.

[211] Author's translation from the German original "ohne Außnahme völlig ungenügend darauf vorbereitet, zu allen Tagesordnungspunkten zu sprechen und spontane Diskussionen bestimmend zu

commercial strategies and practices favouring the non-socialist states, practices that cannot be corrected by solely appearing at UNCHS meetings with "fundamental statements."[212]

Insufficient capacities, including the mastering of the English language, further reinforced this inflexibility. Materials for UNCHS sessions were sometimes provided only in English and on short notice, as in Nairobi 1982, meaning that the GDR delegation could not prepare accordingly.[213] The delegation furthermore pointed out that they often lacked sufficient, easily understandable English-language information materials that could facilitate reaching out to potential clients.[214]

3.6 Summary

From the mid-1970s, the world witnessed a global urban crisis marked by overpopulation, rapid urbanization, and weak capacities to steer urban development, especially in so-called developing countries. This crisis resulted in homelessness and poor living conditions. The United Nations responded by redefining its development concept, now focusing on human settlements and the city as a comprehensive framework for development. This new development approach was interlinked with the foundation of UN-HABITAT as a new UN body focused on housing and urban development, an institution that newly bundled responsibilities previously scattered across different UN institutions. The foundation of HABITAT was backed by the Eastern Bloc (following initial scepticism) and the growing group of newly independent nation-states, against the votes of most Western states. For the Eastern Bloc, HABITAT's positions offered several connections to their own policies, such as HABITAT's focus on the quality of life for the masses while criticizing that urban development is too often subject to market forces.

---

beeinflussen und überlassen hier das Feld weitgehend den nichtsozialistischen Delegationen. Sie beschränken ihre HABITAT-Arbeit trotz vereinzelter Aktivitäten noch zu vordergründig auf die Abgabe grundsätzlicher Erklärungen und überlassen die kontinuierliche politische, konzeptionelle und operativ-praktische Wirksamkeit dem HABITAT-Zentrum und den ständig aktiv mit ihm kooperierenden nichtsozialistischen Kräften", see: Bericht über die Teilnahme der Delegation der DDR an der 10. Tagung der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS), May 1987, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2315-88.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Auftreten des Leiters der Delegation der DDR Im Plenum der 5. Tagung der UNCHS, 03 May 1982, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.
[214] Einschätzung der Tätigkeit der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS) und der Mitarbeit der DDR in dieser Kommission, 09 February 1983, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.

Moreover, there was a striking overlap between the socialist understanding of urban development and HABITAT's new development concept, which mirrored Peñalosa's ideas of "development within a spatial dimension." HABITAT's new definition of development positioned the city as an all-encompassing reference point that could overcome hitherto sectoral approaches. It used human settlements as an overarching framework integrating various, previously isolated dimensions, such as infrastructure development and industrial development.

Regarding the GDR's membership in HABITAT, the first years under the leadership of Gerhard Kosel were neither focused nor substantiated by the commitment of the Ministries of Construction and Foreign Affairs. In general, the GDR's relationship with HABITAT was characterized by a certain ambiguity. Kosel – a man who was socialized in the Weimar period, became a member of the KPD and survived the Nazi years in the Soviet Union – fell into political disgrace in 1965. Making him Head of the HABITAT delegation 12 years later, at age 68, speaks about the value that the ministries assigned to HABITAT in these early years. Under Kosel, the delegation focused on broad political questions, while the economic exploitation of HABITAT was not prioritized. At the same time, the GDR took a coordinating function within the Eastern Bloc from the beginning, which was partially due to the fact that HABITAT, unlike UNDP or other organizations, was not yet "occupied" by other socialist states and fit well with the GDR's foreign policy positioning.

In 1984, the leadership for HABITAT was transferred from Gerhard Kosel to Gottfried Wagner and from the Ministry of Construction to Bauakademie. Wagner had previous experience from urban development projects in Nigeria and Yemen, amongst others, and he had a surprisingly clear vision of the abilities (and constraints) of the GDR's urban planning sector on foreign markets. Under Wagner, Bauakademie increasingly managed to monetize its HABITAT membership, e.g., through seminars or building projects. At the same time, like most other socialist states, the GDR continued to refuse to pay voluntary contributions to HABITAT, which limited their chances of benefitting from HABITAT projects, e.g., by sending professionals abroad or by being contracted with HABITAT-financed housing or urban development projects.

The biographies of Kosel and Wagner are an essential background to understanding the 1984 shift. They had different professional backgrounds (Kosel was an architect; Wagner an urban planner), they had different approaches regarding how to cope with

the state-socialist context: Kosel wanted to deliver by making use of and improving the system, whereas Wagner sought small fixes that helped him deliver tangible results despite the system's inertia in the 1980s. Also, they belonged to different generations: Kosel, born in 1909, was educated in the interwar era, promoted industrialized construction for the reconstruction of East Germany, and authored the iconographic Berlin TV tower, which the regime saw as a symbol of the development capacities of socialism. Furthermore, his involvement in development cooperation was rooted in a period in which solidarity and legitimacy still dominated. Wagner, born in 1928, worked at the crossroads of urban and regional planning and he was involved in various urban planning projects as a practitioner in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Nigeria or Mozambiqe) before becoming Head of the HABITAT delegation.

4. Practice

In the previous chapter, I traced the global conditions that led to HABITAT's foundation, its history, and the GDR's position therein. What the previous chapters left open is the practical-professional level. HABITAT strives for "a better urban future" – as today's slogan claims – through training, policy advice, and the support of building and planning projects. But how did these projects and activities work in practice? East Germany's relationship with HABITAT was dominated by several events and activities that shaped their cooperation. These cases include (i) the 1976 Vancouver conference; (ii) capacity-building activities for East German urban planners and architects; aimed at improving the GDR's chances on foreign markets, including HABITAT; (iii) a building project in Tanzania; (iv) the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless; and (v) a seminar series co-organized by HABITAT and Bauakademie.

4.1 The Vancouver Conference (1976)

On 31 May 1976, Dr Kurt Waldheim, Secretary-General of the United Nations, opened the 12-day HABITAT Conference in Vancouver. The conference's formal title was "Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements."[215] In total, 170 delegations participated, representing mostly governments but also liberation movements such as the ANC, international organizations like the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and observers. On average, the delegations at the conference had nine members (ranging from one to 61 members in the individual countries), the majority were headed by ministers or state secretaries. The conference's general rapporteur was the Polish architect Adolf Ciborowski, and it was formally led by Enrique Peñalosa as Secretary-General. Among the 33 vice presidents was Karl Schmiechen, State-Secretary for Construction of the GDR and head of the East German delegation.[216] In 18 plenary sessions, more than 140 delegations presented their positions on how to solve housing problems from a global perspective. Moreover, different work groups were established to devise the Vancouver Declaration, a universal document describing key housing and urban development principles that should guide

---

[215] Exhibition Catalogue HABITAT United Nations Conference on Human Settlements BArch, 1976 (n.d.), Barch, Berlin, N2504/283.
[216] HABITAT-Konferenz 1976 - Ausführliche Berichte über Teilaspekte der Konferenz, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/283.

governments worldwide. Derived from these global, general principles, the conference aimed to elaborate on specific national recommendations for the participating countries and to develop recommendations for further international cooperation in housing and human settlements.[217]

The conference in Vancouver was not just a professional gathering; the organizers also promoted it to the public and turned the event into a big public event – ranging from an official side event organized by NGOs to live-streaming on a public TV channel. Moreover, the city of Vancouver hosted the HABITAT festival for the general public with many cultural events. There were HABITAT billboards all over the city, and the government coined a special "HABITAT Dollar" and designed a postage stamp. As one of the GDR delegates observed, tourist shops even sold HABITAT souvenirs.[218]

The GDR joined the preparations for the 1976 conference in 1974, two years before its official opening. From the beginning, Gerhard Kosel was the key person in East Germany's HABITAT activities, acting as an "adviser to the Minister for Construction." Formally appointed as leader of the HABITAT work group in the Ministry of Construction in 1974, he represented the GDR in the conference's preparatory committee and chaired meetings of the different representatives from the Eastern Bloc, such as a preparatory meeting in Moscow in December 1974. Kosel was surrounded by further staff from the Ministry of Construction, as well as Bauakademie and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The GDR was charged by the socialist states with a coordinating function. Their role – as agreed during one of the preparatory meetings of the socialist states – was to ensure the coherent and unified appearance of the socialist camp in Vancouver. [219]

In preparation for Vancouver, the Minister for Construction, Wolfgang Junker, defined three practical goals for the GDR's delegation: firstly, to develop their connections to the so-called developing countries and strengthen the GDR's authority; secondly, to gather new knowledge, in particular regarding foreign construction technologies; and thirdly, to create new commercial projects. In this context, the presentation of movies, such as their Halle-Neustadt showcase (see below), shold used to demonstrate their capacities. The Minister further requested that "the materials to be prepared for

---

[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.

HABITAT must combine a clear political message, high quality, and scientificity with propagandistic broad impact."[220]

4.1.1 The Vancouver Declaration

On the first week of the conference, three committees prepared the Declaration and other documents, building upon negotiations that started long before the Conference. The work groups presented their results in the plenary during the second conference week. GDR delegates participated in all three committees. The most important committee, with the most controversial debates, was the one focused on preparing the *Declaration of the Vancouver Symposium* – commonly known as the *Vancouver Declaration* – which was the primary document resulting from this first HABITAT conference. The GDR was represented in this committee by Gerhard Kosel and a colleague. This committee was mainly dominated by the confrontation between the different power blocs (in the eyes of the East German delegation, this was mostly a confrontation between West and South, whereas many delegates from, for example, Africa, highlighted North–South conflicts without distinguishing between the socialist and the communist camp).[221]

While a draft version of the Vancouver Declaration had already been prepared in the lead-up to the Conference, a smaller work group in which all global regions were represented, tried to fine-tune this pre-existing document. Around the same time, the Group of 77 introduced a complete counterproposal to the draft version that the other delegates were trying to improve and finalize. The work group eventually decided to use the proposal of the Group of 77 as a basis instead of the original one, yet several passages remained critical, and no agreement could be reached. Kosel, with his coordinating function for the Eastern Bloc, negotiated with the Group of 77 using the Cuban delegation as their contact node. The counter-proposal of the Group of 77 mirrored the NIEO, much to the chagrin of the US and other Western delegations. Critical issues were mostly related to known conflicts between the three power blocs, for example, whether the NIEO should be explicitly mentioned in the Declaration, the

---

[220] Author's translation from the German original "Die für HABITAT vorzubereitenden Materialien müssen ein klare politische Aussage, hohe Qualität und wissenschaftlichkeit mit propagandistischer Breitenwirkung verbinden", see: Grundkonzeption über die Vorbereitung der Teilnahme der DDR an HABITAT - Konferenz der UNO über menschliche Siedlungen, 16 April 1975, BArch, Berlin, N2504/278.
[221]

extent to which the question of disarmament should be included (as a way to free up resources for housing), as well as different passages related to occupied territories. Eventually, the committee was unable to prepare a commonly agreed declaration and instead passed their unfinished draft – with many passages marked as "controversial" – to the Conference plenum.[222]

In the end, the final and agreed version of the Declaration was based mainly on proposals of the Group of 77 and was adopted with 89 votes, primarily delegations of the G77 and the Eastern Bloc. In total, 15 delegations, among them the US, France, and West Germany, voted against the Declaration. Ten delegations abstained, including Austria, Spain, Japan, Portugal, and Sweden. For the Western delegates, the general tenor of the Declaration and sections that condemn Israel's settlement politics were decisive factors in their negative votes.[223]

The Declaration mirrors the general power balance context at the United Nations during this period. A West German delegate at the UN General Assembly reported in 1975 to Bonn about the increasing power of the so-called developing countries and how the Eastern Bloc allied with these states:

> *The Eastern Bloc has often successfully tried to portray the disputes between the industrialized countries and the developing countries as a pure South–West conflict. It uses this representation for its own purposes and for propaganda successes, especially in the field of disarmament. Despite this, however, the Eastern Bloc did not make a significant appearance at the 30th General Assembly. Its refusal to perform in the economic sphere was noted by the developing countries, but they rarely drew the appropriate negative conclusions from it. The power potential of the East is too great for this, and the chances of success in enforcing claims against it are too small. In some discussions with representatives of individual developing countries, however, it becomes clear that doubts are growing as to whether the East is the reliable friend it would like to be taken for [...] The role of the GDR has so far remained colourless in comparison. It is true that the representatives of the GDR have gained [...] self-confidence and agility in New York and have become active above all in the field of decolonization, such as in connection with the International Women's Year.*

---

[222] Ibid.
[223] HABITAT-Konferenz und Folgemaßnahmen, 1976 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1297-92.

But the GDR is too faithful a vassal of the Soviet Union to have been able to gain its own profile here. It does not attack us directly on its own. Efforts to emphasize contrast to us, however, were unmistakable.[224]

While the GDR delegation deemed the Vancouver Declaration progressive in general and praised how, together with the growing group of newly independent nation states, they managed to defend the original character of the draft delegation against attempts of the West,[225] they criticized it at the same time for being inaccurate. For them, the Declaration did not fully reflect the situation in socialist cities. Most of the East German criticism was geared towards HABITAT's key statement of a "general world crisis"[226] in the field of housing – which would imply that housing is in crisis everywhere, including in the socialist world. Since the GDR officially ended homelessness and internationally promoted its housing programme and the underlying socialist principles as a good practice, they heavily countered this key statement of HABITAT, emphasizing that there were no housing problems in the socialist world.

Likewise, in its opening statement, the Declaration claims, for instance, that "*in both the developed and the developing world there are ghettos of poverty and abandonment in a ring of middle-class suburbs; wealthy enclaves encircled with shanty towns; abandonment and deprivation in the countryside; the relegation of migrant workers to a new subservient class.*"[227] The GDR delegation deemed statements like these as imprecise because, in their eyes, urban social segregation was a problem of the Western

---

[224] Author's translation from the German original "Der Ostblock hat oft erfolgreich versucht, die Auseinandersetzungen zwischen den Industriestaaten und den Entwicklungsländern als reinen Süd-West-Konflikt darzustellen. Er nutzt diese Darstellung für seine eigenen Zwecke und für Propagandaerfolge besonders im Abrüstungsbereich. Trotzdem ist aber der Ostblock auf der 30. Generalversammlng nicht wesentlich in Erscheinung getreten. Seine Leistungsverweigerung im wirtschaftlichen Bereich wird hierbei von den Entwicklungsländern zwar zur Kenntnis genommen, aber selten daraus die entsprechenden negativen Folgerungen gezogen. Hierzu sind das Machtpotential des Ostens zu groß und die Erfolgsaussichten dagegen Ansprüche durchzusetzen zu gering. Bei manchen Gesprächen mit Vertretern von einzelnen Entwicklungsländern wird aber deutlich, daß die Zweifel daran zunehmen, ob der Osten der verlässliche Freund ist, für den er gehalten werden möchte (…) Die Rolle der DDR ist demgegenüber bisher farblos geblieben. Die Vertreter der DDR haben in New York zwar an Selbstsicherheit und Gewandheit gewonnen und wurden vor allem im Entkolonialisierungsbereich wie im Zusammenhang mit dem internationalen Frauenjahr aktiv. Die DDR ist aber ein zu getreuer Vasall der Sowjetunion, als daß sie hier eigenes Profil hätte gewinnen können. Sie greift uns nicht von sich aus unmittelbar an. Die Bemühungen, einen Kontrast zu uns zu unterstreichen waren jedoch unverkennbar." (Fernschreiben AA Ständige Vertretung bei den Vereinten Nationen an AA Bonn, 12 December 1975, BArch, Koblenz, B136/18200)
[225] HABITAT-Konferenz und Folgemaßnahmen, 1976 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1297-92.
[226] "allgemeine Weltkrise" ()
[227] UN HABITAT, "Declaration of the Vancouver Symposium", *HABITAT International* 1, no. 2 (1976): 133-141.

world. When occurring in newly independent nation-states, they understood it as a consequence of Western colonialism. In this context, Gerhard Kosel, the head of the GDR's HABITAT delegation from 1977 to 1984, pointed at homelessness in Chicago and Detroit and at the "*pronounced and awful discrepancies to be seen and felt between the distress and poverty prevailing in the slums and the pomp and glamour of the urban districts accommodating bank houses, luxury hotels, and the villas of the rich.*" While Western cities would mirror "class antagonisms", socialist cities, he claimed, were organized according to detailed plans that balance public and individual interests and prevent excessive growth of large towns and cities in favour of the systematic development of medium-sized towns and agricultural centres.[228] Furthermore, the GDR delegation criticized that while the declaration points, for example, to the need to curtail market forces in the housing sector, it does not mention the profound differences between socialism and capitalism, which they understood as key reasons for the housing problems in the West and in the decolonized countries.[229]

Despite these perceived inaccuracies and shortcomings, the East German delegation supported the Vancouver Declaration for its progressive statements. A case in point is the declaration's call for strong public authorities, especially in terms of land-use policies. The Declaration argues that the regulation of land use should be a public responsibility and that private ownership of land should not allow individuals to profit solely from community needs ("*Any 'unearned increment' created by changes in land use or by the growth, work and needs of settlements must return to the community which created the value in the first place.*")[230] The Declaration continues that "developing countries" must secure control of urban land use and values to provide basic security of tenure and essential municipal services for their citizens and to end social segregation

---

[228] Shelter for the Homeless - On the Global Situation in the Field of Human Settlements, 28 November 1983, PA AA, Berlin, M 83/2314-88.

[229] In an internal report, Gerhard Kosel further elaborated: "The declaration does not contain any clear statements on the actual sociopolitical causes of the shortcomings in the area of human settlements or on the necessity of fundamental sociopolitical changes to overcome the shortcomings. It represents a compromise between an optimal solution and what can be achieved under the given conditions by the socialist states in the preparation and realization of the conference." (Author's translation from the German original "Die Deklaration enthält keine eindeutigen Aussagen über die eigentlichen gesellschaftspolitischen Ursachen der Mißstände auf dem Gebiete der menschlichen Siedlungen sowie über die Notwendigkeit grundlegender gesellschaftspolitischer Veränderungen zur Überwindung der Mißstände. Sie stellt einen Kompromiß zwischen einer optimalen Lösung und dem unter den gegebenen Bedingungen von den sozialistischen Staaten bei der Vorbereitung und Durchführung der Konferenz Erreichbaren dar." (HABITAT-Konferenz und Folgemaßnahmen, 1976 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1297-92); see also: Thesen zur HABITAT-Konferenz, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/280.

[230] UN HABITAT,

based on income and privilege. The Declaration argues that public authorities must provide services, such as public transport, water and sanitation, health centres, and schools. As such infrastructure is expensive, the Declaration warns that if cities lose control over land use and land value, it becomes nearly impossible to finance the essential infrastructure. Positions like these overlap with the GDR's land-use principles, which they also promoted through HABITAT.[231]

4.1.2 Promoting the Socialist City in Vancouver

The main speech of State Secretary Schmiechen's in the plenary revolved around Halle-Neustadt, the city of chemical workers ("Stadt der Chemiearbeiter"), which he presented as a showcase of socialist urban planning – a new city intended for 110,000 inhabitants that represents the second generation of postwar socialist New Towns. Schmiechen concluded his speech by highlighting the GDR's experience with international cooperation, ranging from the reconstruction of the city of Vinh (Vietnam) to the education of foreign urban professionals in the GDR – statements that might be interpreted as an (albeit hidden) invitation for international collaboration with GDR architects and urbanists.[232]

In Vancouver, the GDR showed three audiovisual presentations: a slide-sound series about the GDR's housing programme, a film titled *Planned Landscape*, and another film called *Halle-Neustadt: City of Chemical Workers*.[233] *Halle-Neustadt* received the most attention, as a short version of the film was shown directly in the plenum, embedded into the speech of Minister Schmiechen. Halle-Neustadt was a city district located in the city of Halle, Germany. The idea behind Halle-Neustadt was to create a socialist urban planning experiment during the German Democratic Republic (GDR) era. The full 24-minute film presents it as a model socialist city, built from scratch in the 1960s to accommodate a rapidly growing population. High-rise apartment blocks, green spaces, and communal facilities like schools, kindergartens, and cultural centres characterized the city's architecture and layout. As a socialist New Town, Halle-Neustadt followed many of the ideals of socialist urban development in the context of a planned economy.

---

[231] Ibid.
[232] Plenumsbeitrag der DDR, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/280.
[233] Original German titles: "Dia-Ton-Serie 'Das Wohnungsbauprogramm der DDR'", Film "Geplante Landschaft", Film "Halle-Neustadt – Stadt der Chemiearbeiter"

Halle-Neustadt was a prime example of a socialist New Town of the second generation. For Soviet authorities, socialist cities like Halle-Neustadt were "*supposed to support the 'manifestation and materialization of the socialist way of life' in its function and its structure and satisfy the cultural, material, and aesthetic needs of the entire population as comprehensively as possible.*"[234] In practice, this idea translated into a hierarchical way of city planning, based on the assumption that the functioning of the city can be planned throughout all levels; rather than organic and partially uncontrollable processes of growth, urban planners believed that with centralized planning and instruments like prognostics, they could accurately organize the inner workings of the city and its embedding into the national economy. Across the Eastern Bloc, infrastructural thinking materialized in socialist New Towns. Prominent examples from the postwar years include Nova Huta (Poland), Dimitrovgrad (Bulgaria), and Eisenhüttenstadt (founded as Stalinstadt, East Germany). The initial plans for New Towns usually followed the Fordist town planning tradition, separating the residential zone from the large industrial plants, such as the steelworks in Eisenhüttenstadt and Nowa Huta. These cities were followed by a second generation of New Towns in the 1960s and 1970s, many of them "chemical towns" such as Halle-Neustadt – as presented by the East German delegation in Vancouver.[235]

From a broader perspective, Zarecor argues that the widespread goal for socialist cities such as Halle-Neustadt was to function as interconnected tools for both economic production and social change in the physical realm. Unlike capitalist cities, they served a political purpose within the economic system, being viewed as essential nodes of the planned economy. She develops two interdependent analytical frameworks: infrastructural thinking and the socialist scaffold. Infrastructural thinking refers to modernist urban planning approaches that understand the urban infrastructure as a determining factor; infrastructural thinking is "decision-making propelled by the requirements and scale of urban infrastructure"[236] – and as such, it is not per se a socialist concept, but infrastructural thinkers included Western architects such as Le Corbusier or Kenzo Tange. Their projects, however, were never as extensive as those in

[234] Barabara Engel, "The Concept of the Socialist City", City Space Transformation 19, no. 1 (2022): 669.
[235] Bernhardt, "Planning Urbanization and Urban Growth in the Socialist Period - the Case of East German New Towns, 1945-1989", 108–11; Peer Pasternack, *50 Jahre Streitfall Halle-Neustadt. Idee und Experiment. Lebensort und Provokation.* (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2014).
[236] Zarecor, "What Was so Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe", 99.

the state socialist countries. This is because they did not have the same level of legal and spatial control, and their urban visions were not part of a larger state project for transforming society as a whole, using the city as a key component. Infrastructural thinking requires a means of implementation, which, in the context of state socialism, Zarecor refers to as the "socialist scaffold." In her words, all socialist cities were modernist cities, but not all modernist cities were socialist cities – because not all had the socialist scaffold that enabled infrastructural thinking on a large scale.[237]

The socialist scaffold was a comprehensive system of interconnected components that functioned in relation to one another. This included various forms of transportation links serving factories; social, cultural, and educational institutions; housing; and other functions. The strength of this scaffold was its ability to anticipate and accommodate new developments as needed, taking a proactive, rather than reactive, approach. Unlike in the capitalist world, where cities and urbanization functioned through the spatial accumulation of profits, the socialist city followed different patterns. Transportation networks, for example, were designed to move people between their homes and workplaces, often from one periphery to another, rather than the (capitalist) pattern of moving people from the outskirts to the city centre. The transportation planning had to align with the master planning and cater to the needs of major industries. The design at the neighbourhood level was intended to be pedestrian-friendly, allowing residents to walk a short distance to access all necessary functions, whether stores, schools, or transportation hubs. This idealistic vision was based on the assumption that the infrastructure would be ready and adequate to serve the planned number of residents in a district and that each location would have equal access to goods, services, and transportation – which, in practice, did not work out in all cases.[238]

Halle-Neustadt played a vital role in the GDR's attempt to promote socialist urban planning in Vancouver and beyond. Accordingly, they also invited Enrique Peñalosa, Secretary-General of the Vancouver conference, to Halle-Neustadt when he visited the GDR in 1974. Reportedly, Peñalosa said, "*Elsewhere, too, new cities are being built with modern technologies, but one thing is quite different here than here in America; there are no neighbourhoods of the privileged and poor in Halle-Neustadt. It is because*

[237] Ibid., 99.
[238] Ibid., 99f.

of these problems of rich and poor that the best projects fail here."[239] When Kosel quoted Peñalosa, he paternalistically added: "*Mr Peñalosa had correctly recognized something very essential in Halle-Neustadt.*"[240]

Another common motif that multiple socialist delegates in Vancouver invoked was rural development. The new socialist village complemented the socialist New Town; both were essential for the political system and the national economy. As Vítězslav Sommer et al. show, using the example of Czechoslovakia, the vision was to create a stronger connection between the city and the countryside, with the city leading and the village following. Planners envisioned a shift in the lifestyle of peasants, with a new class of cooperative farmers emerging. The goal was to raise their material and cultural levels and enhance the amenities and environment of villages. Efforts were made to improve the standard of living, introduce modern infrastructure, and increase access to services such as healthcare, culture, and education. Next to technological progress, spatial planning played an important role. The strategy was to connect more remote areas with central municipalities through roads and public transport networks. The plan included separating residential zones from production zones, moving agricultural production outside villages, and renovating existing buildings to accommodate modern living standards.[241]

For the GDR in Vancouver, this topic was not at the centre of their attention, yet with the slide show "Planned Landscape", they highlighted the importance of rural development. Similarly, the Soviet delegation promoted its rural planning approaches. Gennady Fomin, for example, praised the advantages of the Soviet settlement policy, such as creating urban-like living conditions in rural areas, rural industrialization, and the development of satellite towns following the mikrorayon concept. Likewise, the Czechoslovak delegate praised his country's progres in rural planning.[242]

---

[239] Author's translation from the German original: "Auch anderswo werden neue Städte mit modernen Technologien erbaut, eines aber ist hier ganz anders als bei uns in Amerika; es gibt in Halle-Neustadt keine Viertel von Privilegierten und Viertel von Armen. An diesen Problemen reich und arm scheitern bei uns die besten Projekte." (Gerhard Kosel, "HABITAT-Konferenz der UNO über menschliche Siedlungen", *Architektur der DDR* 23, no. 5 (1977): 281–88)

[240] Author's translation from the German original "Herr Peñalosa hatte in Halle-Neustadt etwas sehr wesentliches richtig erkannt" (Ibid.)

[241] Vítězslav Sommer, Matěj Spurný and Jaromír Mrňka, *Řídit socialismus jako firmu: Technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956—1989* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2019), 132ff.

[242] HABITAT-Konferenz 1976 - Ausführliche Berichte über Teilaspekte der Konferenz, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/283.

4.1.3 A Political or a Professional Conference?

In addition to promoting urban development visions, the GDR aimed to showcase the East German political system. On the one hand, West Germany and other Western delegates accused the socialist camp of "politicizing" the conference – an allegation that occurred repeatedly and throughout later HABITAT conferences and events.[243] And indeed, the GDR delegation emphasized that this was "a political conference." They continued: "And we have understood this to mean that these experiences should not primarily apply to technical problems – such as the solution of urban transport or water supply – as important as they certainly are for human settlements."[244] In this sense, the GDR accused the West of trying to "technify" the conference:

> *Representatives of capitalist industrialized countries tried [...] to turn HABITAT into a purely technical conference and to put it on as a big commercial show of construction technologies and construction machinery, with the aim of putting the capitalist industrialized countries in a good light, doing business, and at the same time diverting attention from sociopolitical problems.*[245]

Gerhard Kosel, who, in his personal notebooks, repeatedly reflected on housing through the eyes of Engels[246] and Lenin,[247] argued at one point:

> *Wasn't the task of the delegation of the GDR too "political" for a conference whose main aim was to exchange experiences of governments on existing, practical solutions [to] problems of human settlements? Would it not perhaps have made more sense to aim primarily at the consultation and solution of specific technical questions of settlement planning of urban and housing construction? The general answer to this question was already given by*

---

[243] Ibid.

[244] Author's translation from the German original: "Und wir haben das so verstanden, daß diese Erfahrungen nicht vorranging technischen Problemen - wie etwa der Lösung des städtischen Transportes oder der Wasserversorgung - gelten sollen, so wichtig sie sicher aus sind für die menschlichen Siedlungen" (Gericke an Peñalosa, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/280)

[245] Author's translation from the German original: "Vertreter kapitalistischer Industrieländer versuchten (…) HABITAT zu einer reinen Fachkonferenz zu machen und als eine große kommerzielle Schau von Bautechnologien und Baumaschinen aufzuziehen, mit dem Ziel, die kapitalistischen Industrieländer in ein gutes Licht zu setzen, Geschäfte zu machen und gleichzeitig von den sozialpolitischen Problemen abzulenken." (HABITAT-Konferenz 1976 - Ausführliche Berichte über Teilaspekte der Konferenz, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/283)

[246] Tagebuch G. Kosel 1976, BArch, Berlin, N2504/162.

[247] Gerhard Kosel, "Versuch einer Darstellung der leninschen Idee der Entwicklung in architektonisch geprägter Form", *Architektur der DDR* 7, no. 35 (1989): 30–33.

Friedrich Engels. He wrote in 1872: "As long as the capitalist mode of production exists, it is folly to try to solve the housing question or any other social question concerning the fate of the workers individually."[248]

In the eyes of the GDR delegation, this overarching political-ideological approach to the conference was also backed by the UN. In this context, Kosel argued concerning the accompanying HABITAT exhibition, quoting the HABITAT Secretariat that "*despite a century of industrialization and progress, more people today are ill-fed and ill-housed than ever before, and the goal of progressively higher living standards is receding*", which he links to the segregating impact that capitalism has on housing and settlements. What Kosel does not mention is that the source he is quoting is actually much more differentiated. It contextualizes the above statement and highlights positive developments as well, including positive developments in capitalist contexts.[249]

Overall, the GDR's public appearance seems partially paternalistic, refusing to acknowledge any domestic problems in the field of housing and settlements. In a letter to an international addressee that cannot be fully identified based on the available archival materials (possibly intended for the chair of one of the work groups from the conference's preparatory committee), the GDR delegation repeated that the global housing problems identified by HABITAT do not concern the socialist world. With a patronizing subtext, they added that *"certainly there are gaps in information here and many things may not be known to you."*[250] They then explained the advantages of socialist societies. Interestingly, while their public appearance seems rather paternalistic and countered the alleged "technification" of the conference, one of their strategic interests in the conference was to extend their knowledge and gather insights into new, foreign technologies (see also chapter 3.4).

---

[248] Author's translation from the German original: "War die Aufgabenstellung der Delegation der DDR nicht zu 'politisch' für eine Konferenz, deren Hauptziel darin bestand, Erfahrungen der Regierungen über vorhandene, praktische Lösungen von Problemen der menschlichen Siedlungen auszutauschen? Wäre es vielleicht nicht sinnvoller gewesen, in erster Linie die Beratung und Lösung spezieller Fachfragen der Siedlungsplanung des Städte- und Wohnungsbaus anzustreben? Die generelle Antwort auf diese Frage hat schon Friedrich Engels gegeben. Er schrieb 1872: 'Solange die kapitalistische Produktionsweise besteht, ist es Torheit, dieWohnungsfrage oder irgend eine andere, das Geschick der Arbeiter betreffende, gesellschaftliche Frage einzeln lösen zu wollen'" (Anmerkung G. Kosel, n.d., BArch, Berlin, N2504/282.

[249] Exhibition Catalogue HABITAT United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/283.

[250] Author's translation from the German original: "Sicher gibt es hier Informationslücken und vieles mag Ihnen nicht bekannt sein" (Gericke an Peñalosa, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/280)

While the FRG and other Western countries called for a technological-professional approach to the Conference (i.e., a conference about technologies and instruments that could solve housing challenges), the East German delegation insisted on the political character of the gathering. One of their delegates, who identified himself as Comrade Scholz, remarked positively that when the Israeli delegate entered the stage, two-thirds of the participants left the room and remained absent when the Chilean representative – a military dictatorship from 1973 to 1990 – spoke. The link between these incidents and the housing question remained abstract. In Karl Schmiechen's words, "*One cannot talk about human settlements and simultaneously pursue a policy, as Israel has been doing for years in disregard of UN decisions towards the Arab countries.*"[251] Generally, (geo)political questions remained dominant during the Conference, which might be because most countries were headed by ministers, state secretaries, or ambassadors, while practitioners like Gerhard Kosel remained in the second row. Throughout the 12 sessions of the general debate alone, 12 delegates made use of their right to reply to speeches. Of these 12 interventions, five were dedicated to the Arab-Israeli conflict, four to the Western Sahara conflict, and two to the Cyprus conflict.[252]

Another political topic raised by the socialist delegations in Vancouver was disarmament. At the conference, the GDR delegation sided with Gennady Fomin, Head of the USSR State Committee for Construction and Architecture, who emphasized questions of disarmament. Aligned with the Soviet standpoint at the UN General Assembly, Fomin argued that reduced investments into arms would free up resources that should be invested into housing and urban development, thereby solving the challenges arising from overpopulation and homelessness – a position that the GDR delegation henceforth repeatedly emphasized, in various HABITAT forums and throughout the entire duration of its membership.[253]

While the GDR delegation mostly sided with their counterparts from the G77, in an internal report, they remarked critically that in the plenum, many speakers from these countries implicitly spoke about both East and West as "rich countries." This lack of differentiation mirrors the changing relations between the East and the South in the mid-

---

[251] Author's translation from the German original: "Man kann nicht über menschliche Siedlungen sprechen und gleichzeitig eine Politik betreiben, wie es Israel unter Mißachtung von UNO-Beschlüssen gegenüber den arabischen Ländern seit Jahren tut" (HABITAT-Konferenz 1976 - Ausführliche Berichte Über Teilaspekte der Konferenz, 1976 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, N2504/283)
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.

1970s, when more and more so-called developing countries no longer considered the Eastern Bloc to be "a natural partner in the anti-colonial struggle" (see chapter 2.2). Much to the chagrin of the GDR, several speakers used the term "rich nations" in Vancouver, not acknowledging the difference between capitalism and socialism – between capitalist exploitation on the one hand and what the GDR saw as an approach of solidarity and equal relations on the other.[254]

4.2 *"We have to learn to act as a company"* (1980s)

In chapter 2.3, I showed how East German exports suffered from the lack of innovation capacities and from a changing global economic environment, especially regarding the liquidity of potential customers in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. These problems also translated into architecture and urban planning, even though the latter still had the advantage of requiring few material resources and being less dependent on technological competitiveness. With a focus on Bauakademie, I will show in how the economic situation hampered East German activities in foreign markets. At the same time, this period also brought strategic attempts to increase innovation capacity, for example, through institutional reform and new training and capacity-building forms, which were interdependent with Bauakademie's activities in HABITAT.

From the early 1980s, fuelled by the country's dire need for hard currencies, Bauakademie began to organize its export activities more strategically than before. On the one hand, the Academy intensified its market research in the 1980s and undertook efforts to formalize the learning process that came with each international project, including using HABITAT as a new source of knowledge. Bauakademie increasingly tried to exploit international organizations – not only HABITAT, but also the Building Commission at ECE (Economic Commission for Europe) – to gain knowledge relevant to potential exports. At the same time, Bauakademie invested in so-called *Initiativforschung*, fundamental research into new technologies with presumably high export potential – aiming to leverage the results of this research through HABITAT. Despite these efforts, the financial results remained poor and were inhibited by structural problems and the inability to adjust to new business practices.

---

[254] Ibid.

These reform initiative responded to multiple structural challenges. In 1981, Gottfried Wagner – head of the export work group at Bauakademie's Institute for Town Planning and Architecture and later head of the GDR's HABITAT delegation – called for a more proactive approach towards potential customers in, for example, Africa, stating, "we cannot wait until project contracts find us but have to seek the market." [255] Wagner rightfully highlighted an important and persistent shortcoming of East Germany's urban planning, architecture, and construction industries. To understand the persistence of these problems, a comparison between Wagner's 1981 comments and a 1969 Bauakademie report on the export relations of East German architecture, urban planning, and construction industries provides valuable insights. Already in 1969, Bauakademie warned that the development of export relationships was too passive, arguing that incoming inquiries were checked for their feasibility on a case-by-case basis, while there was no systematic and forward-looking export activity. Accordingly, Bauakademie called for more active export management – a goal that, with the above 1981 Gottfried Wagner quote in mind, apparently did not materialize in the meantime. In the same context, Wagner insisted that Bauakademie would have to forge effective cooperation with the GDR's foreign trade representatives around the globe and improve its marketing work. Twelve years before, Bauakademie's analysis came to very similar results, calling for more efficient cooperation with the foreign trade representatives and also with GDR-based foreign trade organizations (FTO's) such as Limex or intercoop, which had a monopoly on foreign trade relations. And while in 1981 Wagner was sceptical of exports based on intergovernmental agreements, which were East Germany's most common practice at this point, Bauakademie's economic department came to very similar conclusions in 1969, highlighting the importance of tenders: projects assigned to contractors based on open calls in a competitive process.[256]

For Bauakademie, adjusting to new business practices was arduous. Still, in 1981, seemingly minor issues like the need for English-language business cards were raised,

---

[255] Wagner speaks on behalf of the Academy's Institut für Städtebau und Architektur (ISA). The German original of the quote is as follows: "Wir können nicht warten, bis uns die Aufträge ins Haus gebracht werden, sondern müssen den Markt aufsuchen" (Einige Bemerkungen zum Export von Planungsleistungen, 1981 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 4)
[256] Ibid.; Grundlagen für die Planung, Leitung und Durchführung der Außenwirtschaft im Bauwesen der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1969 (n.d.), DH1/25380, Box 1/2.

illustrating a certain unpreparedness.[257] Another example is business travel. For Tete-Matundo and other projects, business trips had to be cancelled because employees did not receive the approval to travel abroad on time (or at all).[258] A comment by Gottfried Wagner is very illustrative in this context. In his words, despite being a state institution, the Academy "must learn to perform and appear as a company."[259] This would be especially important for tenders, which are more lucrative than the intergovernmental agreements preferred by socialist states. The Academy's competitors have several advantages, Wagner continued. For example, they are "real" companies that don't have to learn how to act like ones. This includes, per Wagner, how they usually bribe their clients with 10 per cent of the contract value.[260]

Cumbersome organizational structures further impeded new potential projects abroad. In Nigeria, for example, the Academy explored the possibility of further contracts, following up on their contributions to the development of Abuja. A key obstacle for any follow-up projects was that only mixed companies (i.e., companies with Nigerian partners) that are registered and pay taxes in Nigeria are eligible for contracts, according to Nigerian law. For Western competitors with branch offices worldwide and long-standing business relations, it was easily feasible to meet such criteria, while the GDR had no such companies. East German authorities were aware of these challenges, and Wagner discussed them directly with the East German ambassador and the trade representative in Nigeria. In the end, though, they did not establish such a company.[261] The usual socialist approach – having FTOs as intermediaries between foreign clients and domestic institutions – was perceived as an obstacle by the Academy. While acknowledging the role of FTOs, Wagner preferred direct negotiations with (potential)

---

[257] Exportkonzeption des ISA, Entwurf, January 1982, IRS Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 4.

[258] Auswertung der Exportaufgabe Planung und Projektierung der Stadt Tete in der Volksrepublik Moçambique, 1982 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, A2_3_560.

[259] "Die BA muss lernen als 'Firma' aufzutreten" (Einige Bemerkungen zum Export von Planungsleistungen, 1981 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 4)

[260] German original: "Unsere Trümpfe müssen daher besonders (und zwar in dieser Reihenfolge) in auffallend (1) günstigen Preisen, (2) kurzen Terminen, (3) hoher Qualität liegen. Und da die Konkurrenten ebenfalls in kürzesten Fristen mit hoher Qualität produzieren, werden wir uns zumindest am Anfang gelegentlich mit niedrigeren als den erreichbaren Gewinnen begngen müssen, um erst einmal ins Geschäft zu kommen" (Ibid.)

[261] Wagner an Schmidt, 23 December 1981, IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 4; Fenk, Lee, and Motylińska, "Unlikely Collaborations? Planning Experts from Both Sides of the Iron Curtain and the Making of Abuja".

clients abroad whenever possible.[262] Bauakademie cooperated with nine different FTOs, with Limex being the most important one. From the Academy's perspective, problems with FTOs included slow reactions to client requests[263] and poor cooperation between Limex and institutions like the Bauakademie.[264] De-facto projects abroad were primarily acquired and realized by the Academy itself.[265] For the development planning for Tete-Matundo, for example, the Academy complained that Limex's tasks were limited to contractual negotiations and sending the developed plans to Mozambique. Both went slowly and led to delays of several months, according to an internal evaluation report.[266]

Concerning Bauakademie's own export activity, the rising pressure to generate hard currency income led to institutional reform in the early 1980s. In 1981, a new institute within Bauakademie was introduced, with the main aim of strengthening the Academy's export activities: the so-called *Muster- und Experimentalprojekt* (MEP),[267] and at the same time, 10 per cent of Bauakademie's staff resources were now formally assigned to export-related tasks.[268] As one of several institutes in the Academy, each with its own thematic specialization, MEP had 129 employees at the time of its foundation.[269] The rationale behind the new institute was to combine the responsibility for developing new exportable building technologies and planning services with experimental research to respond more flexibly to the demands of international clients.[270] In mid-1982, the role of MEP was further strengthened, as it was assigned a coordinating function for all exports of the Academy.[271] MEP was now – at least in theory – the central contact node between the Academy and the FTO's, for tangible building projects, mostly Limex); MEP was expected to deliver its own export projects while also coordinating the

---

[262] Exportkonzeption des ISA, January 1982, IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 4.

[263] Geschäftsbericht 1981 der Bauakademie der DDR, 1982 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/20718.

[264] Einschätzung der Arbeit des AHB Limex im Jahre 1987, 26 February 1988, BArch, Berlin, DH1/3315

[265] Konzept zur Übernahme der Außenhandelsfunktion durch die Bauakademie, 1990 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH1/34348, Box 2/2.

[266] Auswertung der Exportaufgabe Planung und Projektierung der Stadt Tete in der Volksrepublik Moçambique, 1982 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, A2_3_560.

[267] This was next to selected domestic tasks. See Geschäftsbericht 1981 der Bauakademie der DDR, 1982 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/20718.

[268] Spezifische Orientierungen für den Planlauf und die Plandurchführung 1983 für das Muster- und Experimentalprojekt, 1982 (n.d.), DH2/10804, Box 1/3.

[269] Vorlage zur Kaderentwicklung Muster- Und Experimentalprojekt, 02 November 1984, BArch, Berlin, DH2/20668.

[270] Textentwurf für die Neufassung der Informationsbroschüre der BA/DDR Teil Muster- und Experimentalprojekt, n.d., BArch, Berlin, DH2/11262, Box 5/6.

[271] Festlegungsvorschläge, 24 May 1982, BArch, Berlin, DH2/20666.

international projects of the other institutes in the Academy – and its success was measured mainly by the fulfilment of Bauakademie's hard currency plans.[272] In practice, the new delineation of responsibilities was not always functional. While MEP was assigned a central coordinating role for all exports, Gottfried Wagner, in his function as head of the export work group at Bauakademie's Institute for Town Planning and Architecture, partially contested this role and requested greater autonomy for their projects abroad; they also had their own marketing brochures for clients abroad and were acting relatively independently.[273] Conflicts also arose between MEP and ISA around the quality and costs of ISA's preparation of export offers; similar challenges also occurred with other institutes within Bauakademie.[274]

A recurring theme in MEP's analyses was the lack of knowledge about the situation in the countries of potential clients – including socioeconomic, sociocultural, demographic, legal, and administrative conditions, but also insufficient expertise with climate conditions, available building materials, and the local construction industry.[275] This lack of knowledge and experience was a major obstacle to drafting competitive offers and winning new contracts, especially when competing with Western architecture firms. The knowledge gap furthermore directly and adversely influenced the GDR's work in HABITAT, as the Ministry of Construction confirmed. Their thematic inputs at UNCHS have to be "*made on a case-by-case basis because of the lack of systematic research activity in the global problems of human settlements at Bauakademie and the universities. The lack of systematic research activity, including the systematic collection and evaluation of the GDR's experience in building abroad, has its effect on the training of young cadres, who are given insufficient knowledge about the world situation in the field of human settlements and building abroad.*"[276]

---

[272] Vorlage zur Kaderentwicklung Muster- und Experimentalprojekt, 02 November 1984, BArch, Berlin, DH2/20668.

[273] The Institute for Town Planning and Architecture, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 5; Exportkonzeption des ISA, Entwurf, January 1982, IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 4.

[274] Technisches Angebot zur Unterstützung einer heimischen Baustoffindustrie, 23 May 1984, BArch, Berlin, DH2/11262, Box 6/6.

[275] Staatsplanaufgabe Massenwohnungsbau in Nationalstaaten, 30 March 1984, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10900.

[276] Author's translation from the German original: "Die Stellungnahme zur Beratung von Fragen der menschlichen Siedlungen in der UNCHS erfolgt von Fall zu Fall wegen des Fehlens einer systmatischen Forschungstätigkeit auf dem Gebiet der globalen Probleme der menschlichen Siedlungen an der Bauakademie und den Hochschulen des Bauwesens. Das Fehlen einer systematischen

In this context, Andreas Butter elaborates on the learning curve of East German architects. As they could not build on colonial networks and expertise (unlike many of their Western competitors), working in newly independent nation-states was a learning process. This included technical learnings (e.g., how to adjust building technologies to different climatic conditions or make use of local raw materials) and cultural ones, often resulting in clashing expectations between them and their counterparts.[277] The reason for this learning curve, Butter argues, was the lack of colonial networks and expertise. The same problem translated to HABITAT as well, and the Ministry of Construction concluded:

> *In assessing the working methods and the situation in the UNCHS and in the Habitat Center, it must be taken into account in particular that many leading cadres of the building industry in the developing countries are traditionally tied to the building industry of the former colonial powers, above all through their professional training, that the building regulations, building methods, building technologies of many developing countries correspond to those of the former colonial powers, and that this is a great advantage of the capitalist states. In addition, many top officials and engineers of the developing countries were educated in the capitalist countries, they use the language of the former colonial powers and moreover, these languages are the main working languages in the organs of the UN, including the UNCHS.[278]*

Forschungstätigkeit einschließlich der systematisch Sammlung und Auswertung der Erfahrungen der DDR beim Bauem im Ausland hat seine Auswirkung auf die Ausbildung von Nachwuchskadern, denen nur unzureichende Kenntnisse über die Weltsituation auf dem Gebiete der menschlichen Siedlungen und dem Bauen im Ausland vermittelt werden" (Einschätzung der Tätigkeit der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS) und der Mitarbeit der DDR in dieser Kommission, 09 February 1983, BArch, Berlin, M 82/2346-86)

[277] Andreas Butter, "Solidarität in Stein und Stahl? Der Architekturexport der DDR als Hebel einer 'antikolonialistischen' Außenpolitik", in *Koloniale Spuren in den Archiven der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft* (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2020), 128–43.

[278] Author's translation from the German original: "Bei der Einschätzung der Arbeitsweise und der Situation in der UNCHS und im Habitat-Zentrum ist besonders zu berücksichtigen, daß viele Leitkader des Bauwesens der Entwicklungsländer traditionsgemäß vor allem über ihre Berufsausbildung an die Bauwirtschaft der früheren Kolonialmächte gebunden sind, daß die Bauvorschriften, Baumethoden, Bautechnologien vieler Entwicklungsländer denen der früheren Kolonialmächte entsprechen und darin ein großer Vorteil der kapitalistischen Staaten besteht. Dazu kommt, daß viele Spitzenfunktionäre und Ingenieure der Entwicklungsländer in den kapitalistischen Ländern ausgebildet wurden, die Sprache der früheren Kolonialherren verwenden und diese Sprachen zudem die wichtigsten Arbeitssprachen in den Organen der UNO, u.a. der UNCHS sind." (Einschätzung der Tätigkeit der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS) und der Mitarbeit der DDR in dieser Kommission, 09 February 1983, BArch, Berlin, M 82/2346-86)

To counter these various challenges, MEP launched a dedicated capacity-building programme aimed at providing the Academy with the thematic and methodological know-how to penetrate markets in Africa and other parts of the world ("*Grundlagen der Exportprojektierung*"). Equipped with roughly 300,000 to 500,000 marks per year, the new programme operated until 1987.[279] One of the programme's strains was the development of country studies. These relatively comprehensive documents of hundreds of pages responded to the knowledge gap introduced above.[280] Initially intended for Egypt, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania,[281] studies were eventually delivered only for Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, and Nigeria.[282] At the same time, MEP also developed various guidelines for the Academy's employees within the framework of this capacity-building programme. In bi-monthly themed newsletters ("*Hinweise zur Exportprojektierung*"), they provided information about specific topics deemed relevant for those working on export projects – for example, how to design buildings capable of withstanding tropical storms[283] or how to ensure that buildings are earthquake-proof[284] – usually including construction rules and references to further literature and regulations. Next to directly construction-related topics, the newsletter also addressed administrative matters, such as the relatively complex contracting process for projects abroad.[285] At the

---

[279] For the programme's annual budgets and annual priorities see: Aufgabenstellung zum F/E-Thema Grundlagen der Exportprojektierung, 18 December 1984, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10901, Box 2/2; Kurzbericht über die Erfüllung der F/E-Aufgabe Grundlagen der Exportprojektierung im Jahre 1985, 30 November 1985, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10901, Box 2/2; Kurzbericht über die Erfüllung der F/E-Aufgabe Grundlagen der Exportprojektierung im Jahre 1986, 30 November 1986, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10901, Box 1/2; Kurzbericht über die Erfüllung der F/E-Aufgabe Grundlagen der Exportprojektierung Im Jahre 1987, 30 November 1987, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10901, Box 1/2.
The programme was stopped in 1988, see: Knuth an Persike, 08 January 1988, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10901, Box 1/2.
[280] Arbeitskonzeption zur Studie zur Unterstützung der Erarbeitung technisch-kommerzieller Angebote für Bauleistungen - Arabische Republik Ägypten, 26 February 1985, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10901, Box 2/2.
[281] Aufgabenstellung zum F/E-Thema Grundlagen der Exportprojektierung, 18 December 1984, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10901, Box 2/2.
[282] Studie über den Baumarkt der Arabischen Republik Ägypten (Bauinformation), 1984 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/23201; Studie über den Baumarkt der Vereinigten Arabischen Emirate (Bauinformation), 1983 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/23019; Studie über den Baumarkt des Irak (Bauinformation), 1982 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/23018; Studie über den Baumarkt der BR Nigeria (Bauinformation), 1983 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/23020.
[283] Hinweise zur Exportprojektierung 6/83, 1983 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/4835, Box 2/2.
[284] Hinweise zur Exportprojektierung 3/84, 1984 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/4834, Box 1/2.
[285] The contracting process was complex insofar as building projects usually required three contracts: one between the foreign client and the respective GDR foreign trade organization (mostly Limex), one between Limex and the Academy (represented by MEP), and another one between MEP and other institutes of the Academy that were involved in the project. Such contractual matters were also the topic of one of the newsletters (Hinweise Zur Exportprojektierung 5/84, 1984 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/4834, Box 2/2)

same time, MEP also analyzed trends in the Western European building industry,[286] as well as the specific technologies of Western competitors, drawing conclusions for its own technologies and offers targeted at clients from newly independent nation-states.[287]

These endeavours seem typical of the period in question. In 1985, for example, another institution, the University for Architecture and Construction in Weimar (Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen, HAB), established its own department of Tropical and Overseas Construction (Tropen- und Auslandsbau), bundling knowledge for experts within and beyond the university through seminars and panel discussions. A case in point is their *Tropical Building Letters* (*Tropenbaubriefe*), a newsletter that ultimately only appeared twice, though.[288]

Next to market research and improving its capacities, the Academy also invested in adjusting its "portfolio" for clients abroad, emphasizing housing. A case in point is MEP's cooperation with Baufa, a GDR company specializing in designing and manufacturing smaller prefabricated houses. The aim was to adjust two building types widely used across the GDR (the types "Stralsund" and "Werder") to the conditions of other countries – for instance, regarding different building norms, physical-structural demands, or their suitability for shipping.[289] There is no evidence of the success of Baufa on international markets, and when MEP analyzed all offers submitted by the Academy between 1980 and 1984, they revealed that clients abroad generally had little interest in prefab panel construction (like that which Baufa specialized in).[290]

As MEP architects and planners soon realized that the climate and the legal, sociocultural, and other conditions in the target countries were too diverse to simply scale up the domestic approach of typified constructions common for housing. Simply put, the conditions in countries like Mozambique, Iraq, and Algeria were too disparate; each would require its own regional typifications, thereby cutting the desired scaling effects of typification. Against this background, MEP moved from typified solutions to so-called "principle solutions". Their starting points were specific scenarios (e.g., single-family homes for humid climate zones), for which they designed a set of

---

[286] Aufgabenstellung zum Entwicklungsthema Baufa-Variant, 1985 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/5268.
[287] Analyse Wybunit-Bauweise, 30 June 1983, BArch, Berlin, DH2/4850.
[288] Andreas Butter, "Tropenbaubriefe (Faksimiles)", in *Architekturexport DDR - Zwischen Sansibar und Halensee*, ed. Andreas Butter and Thomas Flierl (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2023), 94–117.
[289] Aufgabenstellung zum Entwicklungsthema Baufa-Variant, 1985 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/5268.
[290] Staatsplanaufgabe Massenwohnungsbau in Nationalstaaten, 30 March 1984, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10900.

proposals detailing appropriate building technologies and potential floor plans. The principle solutions did not reach the level of a final construction plan, but they should have served as a basis for project offers and they still required adjustments for each client.[291] These principle solutions resulted from a separate research programme,[292] anchored in a special national programme of the central planning commission (Staatsplanaufgabe Massenwohnungsbau in Nationalstaaten), which underscores the economic value assigned to housing projects in so-called developing countries.

Next to developing principle solutions, the Academy invested in so-called *Initiativforschung*. A case in point is the institute's research on mudbrick architecture, which MEP delegated to one of the other institutes of the Academy (the Institute for Technology and Mechanization, ITM) and which Bauakademie also tried to promote through HABITAT, as mentioned in chapter 3.4. In the GDR itself, mudbrick was used as a construction material only in the immediate postwar period and was abandoned shortly after, when efforts were concentrated on the rationalization of the building industry in response to the postwar housing shortage. At the same time, mudbrick remained an important construction material in many parts of the world as a traditional, cheap, and locally available resource with favourable thermal properties (protection from cold and warmth). The Academy's main idea was to connect these advantages with the East German expertise in rationalizing mass housing production. By improving the structural-physical characteristics of mudbrick[293] and by mechanizing construction processes, the involved architects wanted to make mudbrick ready for mass housing construction – in the words of the Academy, to use new mudbrick technologies "as a synthesis between the old and the new."[294] In the second half of the 1980s, the GDR invested between 200,000 and 250,000 marks annually in the research programme, and Bauakademie filed two patents stemming from the research programme in 1984.[295] ITM engineers encouraged the revival of mudbrick architecture also within the GDR – not just as a showcase to help sell the technology to potential clients abroad but also in light of the economic and environmental impact of the construction industry. ITM engineers

---

[291] Hinweise zur Exportprojektierung 2/85, 1985 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/4847.
[292] Wohnungsbau in Entwicklungsländern: F/E-Bericht zur Arbeitsstufe A2 - Teilthema Erzeugnisentwicklung, 1985 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/5268.
[293] Especially mudbrick's vulnerability to water, which limits its load capacity
[294] Die Lehmbauweise als eine traditionelle und zukünftige Bauweise, n.d., Barch, Berlin, DH2/10121.
[295] Ibid.; Einschätzung der zu erwartenden Nutzeffekte für die F/E-Aufgabe wissenschaftlich-technische Grundlagen der Exportprojektierung, 1985 (n.d:), BArch, Berlin, DH2/10901, Box 2/2.

claimed it would be shady (*zwielichtig*) to recommend mudbrick constructions to clients abroad while neglecting its opportunities at home. Nevertheless, except for one domestic test facility, no efforts were undertaken to introduce the technology at home, and the research programme remained targeted solely at countries in warm climate zones. Eventually, the desired breakthrough of the technology did not materialize, neither through HABITAT nor through other channels. A 1988 report points to the lack of a "unique selling point." Technologies offered by competitors are relatively similar, meaning that the Academy could convince clients either through the price or through good marketing – whereas the latter was inhibited by the lack of showcases and an insufficient marketing strategy.[296] The Academy contacted 12 countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East as potential clients, yet only two concrete business opportunities emerged. The FTO Limex prepared a contract for a pilot project with Ghana for three residential buildings worth USD 145,000 (it remains unclear whether this contract materialized). Another offer for a 10,000-resident mudbrick settlement in Ghana was rejected by the client.[297] Furthermore, Yemen's government contracted the Academy for a study on mudbrick worth USD 70,000.[298] Bauakademie continued its marketing efforts on mudbrick; this included promoting the technology through UN-HABITAT.[299]

Another arena in which the Academy intensified its ambitions in the 1980s was international organizations, including HABITAT, ECE, and UNEP. Andreas Butter argued that East Germany availed itself of the International Union of Architects (UIA) and other international organizations as an international stage to showcase the achievements of East German architecture.[300] Another international organization that the GDR tried to exploit economically was the ECE. The Economic Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Abteilung IÖO) admitted in 1986 that the economic benefit of such cooperation was not always measurable, yet still relevant. In this context, they

[296] F/E-Bericht außenwirtschaftliche Verwertung von F/E-Ergebnissen der Lehmbauweise, 1988 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/10121.

[297] Technisch-kommerzielles Angebot Wohnungsbau in Lehmbauweise - Republik Ghana, 1985 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DH2/13882.

[298] Zum Stand auf dem Gebiet der Weiterentwicklung der Lehmbauweise sowie der außenwirtschaftlichen Verwertung der F/E-Ergebnisse, 12 October 1987, BArch, Berlin, DH2/10901, Box 1/2.

[299] Report of the Commission on Human Settlements on the Work of Its Eleventh Session, 10 June 1988, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1299-92.

[300] Andreas Butter, "Showcase and Window to the World: East German Architecture Abroad 1949-1990", *Planning Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (2018): 249–69.

referred to the Building Committee in ECE, where GDR professionals learned about modernization technologies for the housing sector and could gain insights from discussions on standardization – which was even more relevant, as the GDR was not a member of ISO. Yet, international standards have become increasingly important for building and planning projects abroad.[301] Another example from ECE is free access to software. By joining an ECE research programme called SCP (Statistical Computing Project), they received free Software licenses for their architects to work with. Compared to developing the software on their own, the GDR would save three to four years of development and millions of development costs.[302] In general, one of the biggest economic benefits of international organizations in architecture and urban planning would be that East German researchers gained new insights and opportunities for exchange, eventually contributing to the GDR's innovation capacity, the Ministry claimed.[303] At the same time, despite these unmeasurable economic benefits, the measurable impact (i.e., hard currency income) remained too low. Causes included East German underrepresentation in the UN administration (e.g., in the HABITAT secretariat) but also insufficient communication between the East German embassies, the UN delegations, Bauakademie, and the different ministries involved.[304]

Whether capacity-building programmes, increased market research, advancing principle solutions and *Initiativforschung*, or cooperation with international organizations, the 1980s marked a decade in which the Academy developed a much more strategic approach towards potential contracts with customers abroad. However, it is difficult to assess whether this strategy had any effects, either directly (i.e., for Bauakademie's own projects and its involvement in HABITAT), or whether indirectly (i.e., for the larger industry, since Bauakademie's role was to support the industry through research and developing new technologies).

---

[301] Information zur Mitarbeit der DDR in der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen und im Baukomitee der Europäischen Wirtschaftskommission der UN, 20 January 1987, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2318-88.
[302] Ergebnisse bei der Nutzung wirtschaftspolitischer Aktivitäten des UN-Systems für die Lösung außenwirtschaftlicher Aufgaben im Jahre 1983, Abteilung IÖO, 1984 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2480-87.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.

4.3 Dakawa (1986–1989)[305]

The weaknesses of the East German architecture and urban planning industry described in the previous chapter also mirrored in the next case, the Dakawa project. Dakawa was the GDR's first project with HABITAT that yielded tangible economic results, it mirrors the pragmatic approach that was followed under Gottfried Wagner. At the same time, the Dakawa project also revealed the East German unpreparedness and lack of knowledge about the local conditions. Eventually, it was not that the GDR competed with other bidders for this HABITAT project, but this project came only into being because it built upon a cooperation with an East German long-term partner, the African National Congress.

In 1982, in a period of growing violence in apartheid South Africa, the Tanzanian authorities handed over a remote and undeveloped plot of land to the African National Congress. Here, the ANC established the Dakawa Development Centre, a residential and educational centre for South African refugees. ANC architects and managers emphasized self-help and the ambition to build the place with their own workforce, yet they also sought foreign donations and construction expertise – and managed to gather architects and other specialists from both the East and the West. One of these contributions was an East German project partly financed by UN-HABITAT. In Dakawa, Bauakademie and other East German partners introduced a lightweight self-help panel housing construction system called the WPC (Wall Panel Column) system, which East German propaganda presented as a generous technology transfer in the interest of the anti-imperial struggle.

The contribution of the GDR and HABITAT in Dakawa was only a small part of a much bigger project of the ANC that involved various national and international contributions. The overall framework for these contributions was the Dakawa Development Plan from 1984. As the central planning document for the future development of Dakawa, it envisaged a decentralized settlement approach. Ten small villages should have been created swiftly and consolidated as functioning units. Two villages were always grouped together, with basic infrastructure and facilities provided directly there (see Figure 4). This rather ambitious plan, which foresaw more than 5,000

---

[305] This chapter is an adjusted version of a previously published article (Marcks, "Self-Help Architecture in the Global Cold War: East German Panel Technology for the ANC, 1982–1992")

residents, has never been fully implemented: by 1990, Dakawa had 1,200 residents, and many of the "disaster houses" that should have solved immediate shelter problems during the early stages remained until the end. Instead of ten villages, the revised 1990 Development Plan has been limited to four villages and parts of the centre.[306]
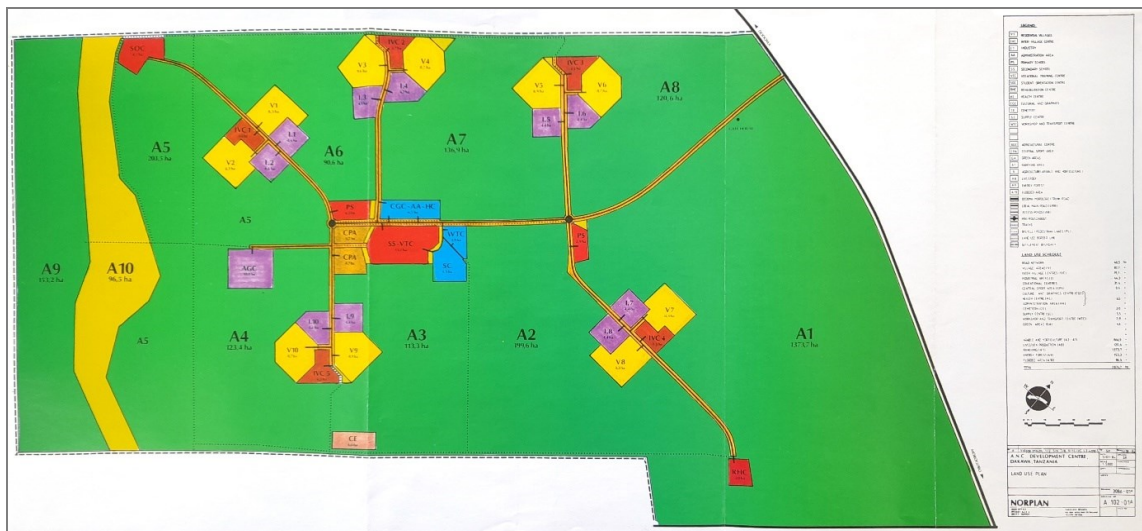

Figure 4: 1984 NORPLAN ground plan for Dakawa – ten villages were always two of them clustered around "Inter-Village Centres" and small industries, Source: ANC Archive, Fort Hare, GMB/28/201

At the suggestion of Spencer Hodgson, the ANC's chief architect in Dakawa, the camp was officially named the Dakawa Development Centre – a name that mirrors the specific function of Dakawa, which was closely related to Mazimbu, another ANC facility, located around 50 kilometres away. Dakawa served as an extension of Mazimbu and its Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO), an educational institution that the ANC founded in 1977 for vocational and academic education. Dakawa was supposed to complement certain functions that SOMAFCO needed, most notably the reception of newly arrived younger ANC members, whose personal, educational, and security backgrounds were checked before being sent to SOMAFCO. However, there was not only a formal distribution of functions between Mazimbu and Dakawa, but residents and the management of Dakawa also repeatedly described the camp as a "dumping ground" where people who were "problematic" in Mazimbu and elsewhere were pushed off. From the beginning, Dakawa was faced with heavy alcohol

---

[306] Seán Morrow, Brown Maaba, and Loyiso Pulumani, *Education in Exile - SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992* (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2004), 145; Dakawa Zonal Youth Section Report for the Third Dakawa Seminar, 07 April 1989, Archive of the African National Congress (ANC Archive), Fort Hare, DDC/17/6/13.

and marijuana consumption, including the leadership, and it often saw violent incidents. The living conditions in Dakawa were relatively poor, and the balance between authoritarian leadership and democracy in the camp remained a constant struggle, often leading to discontent among the residents.[307]

In 1989, the Dakawa Zonal Youth Section, a group with a relatively critical stance toward the leadership, expressed its disappointment with the overall situation in the camp. Repeating the argument of Dakawa as a "dumping place", they called the entire project a failure and pointed – among other things – to the lack of sufficient welfare. The *umphando* system meant that Dakawa residents were supplied with basic necessities regardless of their labour situation, while workers received only small compensations for their work – too little to cover even the basic necessities, according to the Youth Section. These problems were further reinforced by blending the roles of students and workers. As a consequence, students were often reluctant to contribute labour that was not directly related to their education.[308]

This situation also impacted the construction activities in Dakawa. An internal report claimed that heavy drinking, stealing, avoiding work, and disappearing to nearby villages had significantly affected work progress. Water shortages inhibited construction efforts, and in 1988, the Construction Department warned that the motivation of many construction workers further decreased as problems with salary payments occurred. Against this background, the Youth Section concluded in 1989 that almost nothing had been achieved in terms of housing.[309]

Spencer Hodgson analyzed that both planning and construction at Dakawa were complicated, far more so than they were during the early phases of SOMAFCO at Mazimbu. For Hodgson, these problems began with the lack of infrastructure and nearby towns, limited access during the rainy season, and problems with water and electricity supply. Poor soil conditions and the unavailability of crushed stone as a construction material further hampered the construction progress. Moreover, he raised

---

[307] Morrow, Maaba, and Pulumani, *Education in Exile - SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992*, 143ff.

[308] Dakawa Zonal Youth Section Report for the Third Dakawa Seminar, 07 April 1989, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/17/6/13'.

[309] Ibid.; Report on the Present Dakawa Situation, n.d., ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/13/12/31; Dakawa Construction Department, Construction Report, 29 November 1986, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/13/7/1; Dakawa Construction Department, Report to the Directorate, 26 February 1988, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/13/7/3.

concerns that the planning and construction leadership was still based at Mazimbu and still grappling with completing work on SOMAFCO, which hindered progress in Dakawa. For Hodgson, one of the biggest challenges was the lack of skilled manpower, "coupled with the decision that we build Dakawa primarily with our own hands"[310] – a decision that met with many obstacles in practice, as we will see later.

Given East Germany's special relation with the ANC, it is unsurprising that there were East German links to SOMAFCO and Mazimbu even before Dakawa. The FDJ has been sending voluntary teachers to SOMAFCO since 1981, and Mazimbu (and later also Dakawa) has been directed by the ANC's Oswald Dennis, an engineer who had graduated in the GDR. The first ideas for an East German contribution to Dakawa date back to 1982, the year of the camp's foundation. At this point, the GDR's Ministry of Foreign Affairs negotiated with the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva about a potential contribution of prefabricated buildings for a vocational training project in Dakawa, a project later known as the Vocational Training Centre (VTC). Diverging financial expectations hampered the envisaged ILO-GDR cooperation. ILO and the Ministry kept negotiating in the following years but could not agree. In 1985, the ANC took matters into its own hands and approached the GDR's Solidarity Committee, with whom they had a long-standing relationship. Circumventing ILO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the ANC requested that the Solidarity Committee fund the Vocational Training Centre either directly or by pushing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to use East German funds-in-trust at the United Nations Development Programme. Interestingly, the head of the Solidarity Committee was unaware of the ongoing negotiations between ILO and the Ministry, learning about these talks only through the ANC. Eventually, none of these plans materialized. The Solidarity Committee rejected direct funding for the Vocational Training Centre, as it exceeded its financial capacities, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not come to an agreement with ILO.[311]

---

[310] Dakawa Technical Department, ANC Development Centre - Planning and Construction Process Briefing, 12 April 1985, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, GMB/28/201/3.

[311] Dietze an Reichardt, 20 May 1985, PA AA, Berlin, M 83/2418-88; Reichardt an Dietze, 18 April 1985, PA AA, Berlin, M 83/2418-88; Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, SV Genf, Vermerk über ein Gespräch mit Herrn Tournier, Stellvertretender Leiter der Equipro, und Herrn Sjolema, Verantwortlicher Mitarbeiter für technische Hilfe für Nationale Befreiungsbewegungen (...), 02 July 1982, PA AA, Berlin, M 83/2418-88.; Junge an Sjollema, 08 January 1985, PA AA; Berlin, M 83/2418-88; Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten, SV Genf, Vermerk über ein Gespräch mit Herrn Sjollema Vom IAA, 21 January 1983, PA AA, Berlin, M 83/2418-88; Staatssekretariat für Arbeit und Löhne, Vermerk über ein

Nonetheless, these failed talks marked a turning point, as they raised the attention of the Solidarity Committee for the first time. The ANC and the Committee soon started another cooperative project, this time without the ILO but partly financed by UN-HABITAT and with Bauakademie as an architectural partner: the WPC factory in Dakawa. The factory was supposed to produce lightweight panels and columns that could be modularly assembled into different building types, as shown in Figure 5.[312]

While the Solidarity Committee coordinated the overall project, Bauakademie was in charge of the development and practical implementation of the WPC factory. UN-HABITAT partly financed the East German contribution, most notably the staff costs of Klaus-Peter Wurbs, a Bauakademie architect who repeatedly spent periods in Dakawa, where he cooperated closely with Spencer Hodgson. Wurbs was in charge of establishing the WPC factory and supervising the ANC construction workers who were supposed to work there. The Solidarity Committee financed the factory as a gift for the ANC. The Committee reportedly raised 1.1 million GDR marks for Dakawa through popular fundraising. Moreover, FDJ, the Socialist Party's youth movement, was involved through a friendship brigade. The brigade comprised electricians, metalworkers, and other professionals who supported Wurbs and the Academy in setting up and running the WPC factory. Upon the explicit wishes of the ANC, the brigadiers also contributed beyond WPC with vocational training. Next to these institutions a dozen other East German organizations were involved, such as construction companies and the Institute for Tropical Building of Weimar University (HAB), as well as the writer's association, which considered granting stipends to East German authors for stays in Dakawa.[313]

Gespräch mit Herrn Sjollema, Leiter der technischen Anti-Apartheid-Projekte in der Abteilung Gleichheit der Rechte des Internationalen Arbeitsamtes (IAA) der ILO, 11 April 1983, PA AA, Berlin, M 83/2418-88.

[312] Peter Wurbs, "Aufbau des ANC-Entwicklungszentrums Dakawa in Tansania", *Architektur der DDR*, 1989; Helge Majchrzak et al., "WPC - Eine Montagebauweise für Entwicklungsländer", *Architektur der DDR*, 1987.

[313] Report of the Meeting between ANC and FDJ Held in Dakawa, 03 June 1986, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/13/12/9; Bericht über die Durchführung der Solidaritätsaktion der DDR (…) zum Internationalen Jahr Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen, 24 May 1988, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347; Project Document Promotion of Construction Methods in Low Cost Housing for the ANC Dakawa Development Centre in Tanzania, 1986 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, B513/52; Leskien an Kerndl, 28 December 1987, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347.
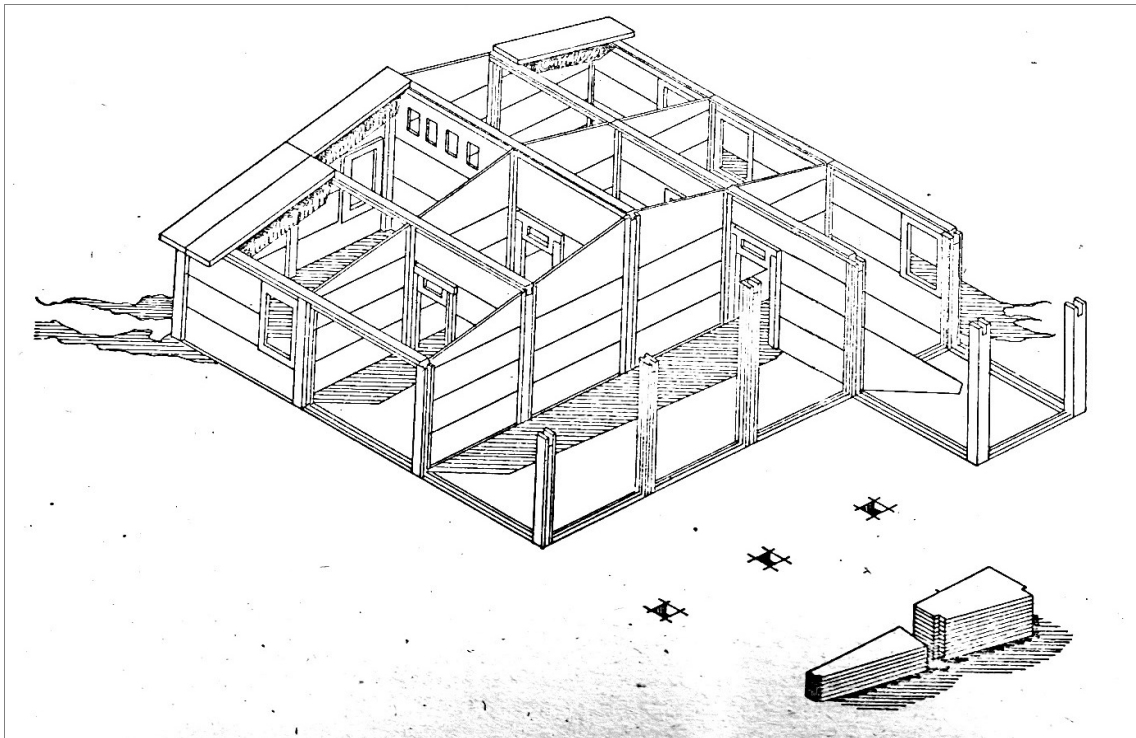
Figure 5: The WPC system. Source: IRS, Erkner, A2_2_71

While notions of solidarity were important for organizations like the writer's association or FDJ, Bauakademie also had a clear business interest in the project. With the WPC factory in Dakawa, they believed to have an effective export advertising for this construction method, and they attempted to use it as a reference project for other potential customers. The ANC showed a general interest in purchasing additional factories for other camps, yet this never materialized.[314] Bauakademie also targeted other governments – such as Iraq, where they saw tremendous potential after the devastation of the war.[315] Beyond WPC, the Academy was convinced that Dakawa increased the East German reputation in the HABITAT administration. In the GDR's final years, the commercial exploitation of HABITAT became a strategic priority of Bauakademie. Reportedly they already received offers for further cooperation as a direct result of Dakawa.[316] One such offer was a HABITAT invitation to participate in the

---

[314] Bericht über die Durchführung der Solidaritätsaktion der DDR (...) zum Internationalen Jahr Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen, 24 May 1988, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347.
[315] Konzeption zur Sicherung der Erfüllung der Außenwirtschaftsaufgaben der Bauakademie im Fünfjahresplanzeitraum 1986-1990, 15 October 1987, IRS, Erkner, A1_109_12.
[316] Exportrapport, 06 November 1986, IRS, Erkner, A1_109_11.

extension of the Ardhi Institute in Dar es Salaam alongside the USSR (see chapter 3.2).[317]

When Wurbs arrived in Dakawa in 1987, they faced several practical challenges, resulting in a six-month delay of the entire project.[318] The misrouting of one of the containers with the WPC equipment was presented to HABITAT as the primary reason.[319] Additional reasons for the delay were discussed in a letter from Wurbs to his supervisor, Gottfried Wagner, in May 1987. In the letter, Wurbs complained that the FDJ brigade was "*so far 90 per cent busy with its own problems (building its shelters)*", and he continued, saying that "*Spencer's office is completely understaffed. I am doing all the pre-construction work on my own at the moment.*"[320] In internal reports, Bauakademie later accused the ANC of lacking commitment to their agreements. Not even half of the ANC members trained in Bautzen actually worked in the WPC factory. The panel production could have reached 80 or 90 per cent of the factory's capacity, yet in practice, the performance ranged between only 20 and 50 per cent, the report claimed. At the same time, the Academy specialists were also aware of their own faults, such as a too-narrow schedule and a too-high workload. The poor quality of the delivered equipment and wrongly delivered tools impeded the implementation and could only be remedied through improvisation and the personal commitment of Wurbs and his colleagues.[321]

In May 1988, when Wurbs had already left, a team from Weimar University visited Dakawa (the university had been involved in Dakawa earlier through a student competition). They remarked that it was challenging for the ANC to run the factory without support, and they proposed sending an architect from their ranks to Dakawa. While these plans did not materialize, all parties were indeed aware of the challenges in

---

317 Bericht über die Experten- und Konsultativberatung der Gruppe der osteuropäischen sozialistischen Staaten zur Vorbereitung der 11. UNCHS-Tagung, 1988 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, A2_2_30_15.

318 Wurbs an Reichardt, 22 Juni 1987, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347.

319 UNDP Project Performance Evaluation Report, 29 September 1987, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347.

320 Author's own translation from the German original: "FDJ-Brigade ist bisher zu 90% mit ihren eigenen Problemen beschäftigt (Aufbau ihrer Unterkünfte) […] Spencers Büro ist völlig unterbesetzt. Alle bauvorbereitenden Arbeiten führe ich im Augenblick alleine aus" (Wurbs an Wagner, 26 May 1987, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_89). This observation has furthermore been confirmed by an interview with Wurbs presented at the Bauhaus Lab exhibition in Dessau.

321 Wagner an Reichardt, 18 November 1987, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347; Kinderzentrum Dakawa Dokumentation, 1988 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DZ8/346; Bericht über die Durchführung der Solidaritätsaktion der DDR (...) zum Internationalen Jahr Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen, 24 May 1988, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347.

Dakawa. Acknowledging the lack of East German expertise, Oswald Dennis even managed to secure funding from a Danish NGO for another six-month stay of Wurbs, a plan that never materialized.[322] Later, in September, the East German side discussed sending Wurbs to Dakawa again on their own costs – this time formally not as a Bauakademie representative, but on the ticket of the FDJ friendship brigade, as they already had once before. At this time, two months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the WPC factory was defunct and out of use. FDJ, the Solidarity Committee, and the Ministry of Construction agreed on a plan to reestablish the factory, highlighting the reputational damage that would otherwise be caused.[323]

Half a year later, following the political changes in East Germany, the Solidarity Committee's executive board dissolved itself. Shortly thereafter, a legal successor was established, which continues to engage in development aid to this day under a new name. The new institution also took over the responsibility for the Friendship Brigade in Dakawa. Similarly, Bauakademie was formally dissolved before the German reunification.

With these fundamental political changes, Dakawa and WPC became less of a priority for all three institutions. However, this did not spell the end of WPC. The ANC's Construction Department reported that the production of WPC prefab panels resumed in January 1990, and by April, their WPC team consisted of eight ANC workers.[324] Moreover, two (out of 12) members of the friendship brigade were still present in Dakawa in the summer of 1990, now officially on behalf of the Solidarity Committee's successor organization. While the new institution had funds to cover their stay until the end of the year, financial insecurity dominated their work, further aggravated by the reported theft of USD 1,700 from the brigade's cash reserves. With the changing political situation in South Africa, the ANC reorganized its construction activities in Dakawa in 1991 in favour of a new Maintenance Department, which also took over the

---

[322] Schunke an Reichardt, 17 May 1989, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_14.

[323] Schunke to Morodi, 17 July 1989, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, Fonds Dakawa Development Centre, DDC/44/148/3; HAB Weimar: Bericht zur Reise in die Vereinigte Republik Tansania, 30 May 1988, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347; Reichardt an Schubert, 08 July 1988, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347; Schubert an Reichardt, 02 August 1988, BArch, DZ8/347; Reichardt an Willerding, 08 July 1988, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347; Willerding an Reichardt, 31 August 1988, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347.

[324] Dakawa Construction Department, Report to the Administration, 02 February 1990, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/13/7/15.

production of prefab panels.[325] Dakawa was closed in 1992, and the ANC handed the land back to the Tanzanian authorities. Before, the ANC sold most movable parts in Dakawa to cover its expenses.[326] It remains unsure whether the WPC factory was among these sales or whether it remained in Dakawa.

Spencer Hodgson and his team at the Dakawa Construction Department envisaged using the system for all buildings in one area of the camp. They constructed a creche (a related kitchen/administration building) and a tuck shop with the WPC technology. When it turned out that WPC was relatively costly compared to traditional construction methods and the quality of the produced panels remained below expectations, Oswald Dennis at some point suggested using the WPC system only for farm buildings and fences in Dakawa, which might explain the continued use of the factory until at least 1991.[327]

From the beginning of the camp, the ANC leadership emphasized ideas of self-help and self-reliance in the construction process – concepts that became dominant in development aid discourses from the 1960s and 1970s. For liberation movements and the governments of newly independent nation-states, self-help promised to overcome colonial power relations and their patterns of investment and repression. Instead, self-help was supposedly based on solidarity and equality among all involved parties.[328] In Dakawa, the ANC's vision to "build the camp with our own hands"[329] and labour shortages resonated with WPC as a technology that – in theory – was less labour-intensive than traditional construction methods. Moreover, the idea of self-help implied that the ANC could handle the factory on its own, which should have been achieved through the ANC's involvement in erecting the prefab factory, as well as extensively training ANC construction workers both on-site and in Germany.

---

[325] Dakawa Vocational Training Centre, Monthly Report to the Administration, 19 June 1990, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/13/12/5.

[326] Seán Morrow, "Dakawa Development Centre: An African National Congress Settlement in Tanzania, 1982-1992", *African Affairs* 97, no. 389 (1998): 497–521.

[327] Danchurchaid, Visit to and Evaluation of the ANC School Centre, SOMAFCO at Mazimbu and the ANC Development Centre at Dakawa, Tanzania, 1989 (n.d.), ANC Archive, Fort Hare, TMO/42/37.

[328] Hubertus Büschel, *Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2014).

[329] Dakawa Technical Department, ANC Development Centre - Planning and Construction Process Briefing, 12 April 1985, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, GMB/28/201/3.

Sean Morrow describes the philosophy of the ANC as "Education with Production" and as "Ending the Divorce between Manual and Mental Labour."[330] In this idea, Dakawa was a place where ANC members received vocational training and implemented their new knowledge in the development of their settlement, whether in the construction of housing, agriculture, or other small industries. For the regional treasurer, housing was the most critical issue where self-help could help improve one's own living conditions:

> *The alternative of prolonging the existing conditions of people living in tents cannot be allowed. We must promote self-help. The community must be mobilized and organized to provide their own accommodation. The organization must ensure the supply of materials, expertise, and supervision. This will engender a sense of achievement and personal satisfaction and contribute to a more homogenous and involved community.*[331]

The ANC's focus on self-help in Dakawa was also a consequence of the experiences made in the construction of Mazimbu, which has been mostly developed by Tanzanian contractors. In Dakawa, the leadership did not want to repeat this – with mixed results. In Dakawa's agriculture, for example, there were 110 Tanzanian workers compared to 20 ANC members as of 1990.[332] In terms of housing, the slow construction speed of the ANC's own workforce has been recognized not only by the ANC, but also by its donors. A 1988 report of Spencer Hodgson's Construction Department claims, in a mix of frustration and disappointment, that

> *now one of the donors has said 'enough is enough. We want to see our materials being used. We know you people need housing; it is either you give some of the houses on contract or you don't get any money for the next year. […] The question we must ask ourselves is, what is going to happen to the comrades if we have to give most of our work out on contract? Are we going to sit and wait for other people to do the building for us or are we seriously going to change the situation in the interest of the revolution?*[333]

---

[330] Morrow, "Dakawa Development Centre: An African National Congress Settlement in Tanzania, 1982-1992", 507.

[331] Regional Treasurer, Preparatory Meeting for the Dakawa Donors Conference, 12 April 1985, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, GMB/28/201/5.

[332] Morrow, Dakawa Development Centre.

[333] Construction Department, Report to the Administration, 27 July 1988, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/13/7/7.

In the context of labour shortages, paired with the ANC's self-help ambition, prefab construction technologies seemed to be a promising solution. In fact, two different prefab systems were used in Dakawa, WPC, and a similar Swedish system. WPC seemed to match Spencer's requirements: The WPC system was supposed to meet the technical conditions of so-called developing countries and hot climates: it did not require heavy machinery, and the heaviest panel module to be produced weighed only 150 kilograms. The factory itself was supposed to be robust, and the panel buildings should have considered sun and wind conditions for natural cooling. The WPC system was supposed to be designed as standardized as possible, with the smallest possible amount of different panel modules to be produced. This reduced construction efforts and the need for different types of equipment, and moreover, it simplified the preparation of technical drawings. According to Bauakademie calculations, building with WPC was also cheaper than using the traditional methods of the region[334] – a claim that other experts in Dakawa challenged, as will be outlined further below. In addition to the provision and installation of one WPC factory in Dakawa with a maximum annual output of buildings covering 5,000 m^2, the GDR's contribution furthermore included initial support in running the factory and training of ANC staff to empower them to take over. For this purpose, 12 ANC members received two months of training at a panel factory in Bautzen, East Germany.[335]

In practice, the idea of WPC as a self-help instrument met with several obstacles. Hodgson's Construction Department repeatedly pointed to the shortage of manpower as a key problem for the construction of housing; at some point, only three workers were assigned to WPC, compared to the 12 who had been trained in Bautzen.[336] Moreover, despite being a prefab technology that should reduce construction efforts, windows, roofs, and other elements were not included and had to be designed and constructed separately, which corrupted the envisaged benefits of the technology. In light of these difficulties, Oswald Dennis even warned in 1989 that the ANC was "failing to meet even the minimum commitment to our friends [from the GDR]."[337] A Danish engineer who consulted Oswald Dennis concluded that "*looked upon from a distance, the [WPC]*

[334] Kinderzentrum Dakawa Dokumentation, 1988 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DZ8/346; Bericht über die Durchführung der Solidaritätsaktion der DDR (...) zum Internationalen Jahr Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen, 24 May 1988, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347.

[335] UNDP Project Performance Evaluation Report, 29 September 1987, BArch, Berlin DZ8/347.

[336] Report on the Present Dakawa Situation, n.d., ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/13/12/31.

[337] Construction Report for the 3rd Dakawa Seminar, 1989 (n.d.), ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/17/6.

buildings appear as logical, simple, and handsome structures with the characteristics of the slender columns creating the life of light and shade in the facades. Looked upon nearby, the system has got certain limits."[338] He then described several technical insufficiencies and recommended clarifying for which functions WPC should be used (mostly simple constructions) and for which ones not (e.g. dwellings or more complex buildings).[339] The Academy and the East German foreign trade company Limex acknowledged some of these constraints, e.g., that the WPC system itself was less suitable for the conditions in Tanzania than planned, and even though the weight of the panels was limited, in practice they were still too heavy for manual construction. Bauakademie architects eventually concluded that the panel production was too complicated, making it difficult to run the factory without their presence.[340] The Danish engineer has also confirmed this. While his report highlights that WPC can be helpful in terms of self-help and training industrial workers and craftsmen on-site, this would require the continuous presence of instructors like Wurbs, who was already gone at that point.

A Swedish company had provided the other prefab system used in Dakawa, the so-called tilt-up system. For Bauakademie, the Swedish presence was striking, as they perceived them as a direct competitor, with some exaggerating the rivalry. In an article for the Solidarity Committee, the ANC's Rita Mfenyana described this competition as follows:

> *Two technologies were used: the Swedish and the GDR. They are not different in the idea: to be able to make the prefab panels on the spot, mould them, and build the houses. The two methods differ in mode of execution. […] Both methods were still at the initial stage. Though everybody pretended to be impartial, each of us was curious – which method will prove more suitable?*[341]

According to the East German interpretation, WPC eventually won this competition. The Swedish model, they claimed, was only applicable to residential buildings, required

---

[338] A Technical and Qualitative Report of the Building Activities and Infrastructure Present and Past to Be Found at Dakawa and Mazimbu, 1988 (n.d.), ANC Archive, Fort Hare, TMO/41/29/1.
[339] Ibid.
[340] HAB Weimar, Bericht zur Reise in die Vereinigte Republik Tansania, 30 May 1988, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347; Bericht über die Durchführung der Solidaritätsaktion der DDR (...) zum Internationalen Jahr Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen, 24 May 1988, BArch, DZ8/347; Dakawa Projektbeschreibung, 02 May 1990, BArch, Berlin, B514/52.
[341] Rita Mfenyana, Dakawa, 1987 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347.

more materials, the walls were not suitable for the climate conditions in Dakawa, and the floor plans were unflexible. Moreover, unlike WPC, the Swedish system required hydraulic equipment to assemble the buildings. At the same time, once Wurbs left Dakawa, Bauakademie raised concerns that the Swedish competitor might quickly exploit this vacuum. ANC documents show that this fear was unjustified. ANC construction workers considered the Swedish system a "failure" early on, due to its technical insufficiencies; its continued usage can only be explained by the poor communication between the management and the workforce.[342] An evaluation report confirmed these findings: the tilt-up system was technologically insufficient and inflexible. It was unsuitable for the labour and construction conditions of a place like Dakawa, and had a high risk of even fatal accidents. As a result, the report recommended abandoning the Swedish tilt-up system.[343] Tensions within the East German team emerged when the FDJ members "switched sides" and supported the ANC in handling the Swedish prefab system while neglecting their commitments to the WPC system.[344]

Despite these challenges, both WPC and the tilt-up system were the most important construction methods for Hodgson and Dennis. Other relevant construction systems included so-called disaster houses imported from Zimbabwean, Danish, British, and other construction methods. While the ANC acknowledged certain advantages of WPC (e.g., that it came closest to the idea of self-help), both WPC and the Swedish tilt-up system turned out to be more expensive than the common local way of building with cement blocks – which remained the ANC's preferred construction method:

> *It has for quite some years proved to be appropriate to the builder as well as to the user of the building, [and it] can always be altered and improved during the stage of planning, and to a certain extent also at a much later stage. The system is well-known to craftsmen and workers available [...]. At present, there is no*

---

[342] Dakawa Zonal Youth Section Report for the Third Dakawa Seminar, 07 April 1989, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/17/6/13.

[343] A Technical and Qualitative Report of the Building Activities and Infrastructure Present and Past to Be Found at Dakawa and Mazimbu, 1988 (n.d.), ANC Archive, Fort Hare, TMO/41/29/1.

[344] Aktennotiz über ein Gespräch mit dem FDJ-Zentralrat über Maßnahmen zur WPC-Bauweise in Dakawa, 06 February 1989, IRS, Erkner, IRS, A2_2_14.

reason to believe that any other system for persistent minor structures should be faster or cheaper for building in Tanzania.[345]

Whether vis-à-vis East Germans, the Swedes, or Norwegians, or the different UN bodies in Dakawa, the ANC's approach is characterized by a sense of agency, a motif that has been observed by various Cold War and architectural history scholars in recent years.[346] In preparation for a 1985 donor's conference, the ANC's Project Department recommended that "*we should not limit ourselves to a few friends, governments, and non-governmental organizations*", and pointed also at Western European governments.[347] In addition, the ANC relied on significant UN funding, leading to a mosaic of different donors, which became increasingly difficult to handle for the management.[348] The ANC's growing focus on Western assistance contradicted the GDR position that the ANC should limit its cooperation with the West. Conversely, the ANC used this East German fear of Western influence in Dakawa to mobilize GDR support. In 1985, before the East German commitment to Dakawa was agreed upon, the ANC explicitly highlighted, vis-à-vis the Solidarity Committee, that socialist countries were absent at their construction sites and that the sites were dominated by capitalist countries – only to be followed by a concrete request for GDR support. At the same time, the ANC promised the Solidarity Committee to limit cooperation with capitalist companies, yet refused to be drawn into any confrontation in this regard – and finally, Western companies remained dominant in Dakawa until the end.[349] Another case in point are tensions around the Vocational Training Centre, in which some FDJ friendship brigade members also served. In 1989, the head of the brigade even complained in a letter to Berlin that the director of the VTC would prefer aid from capitalist states and was allegedly even trying to push the brigade out of the camp.[350]

---

[345] A Technical and Qualitative Report of the Building Activities and Infrastructure Present and Past to Be Found at Dakawa and Mazimbu, 1988 (n.d.), ANC Archive, Fort Hare, TMO/41/29/1.

[346] e.g., Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*.

[347] Projects Department, Preparatory Meeting for the Dakawa Donors Conference, 12 April 1985, ANC Archive, Fort Hare, GMB/28/201/6.

[348] UNDP Project Document - Project Coordination and Management Development Unit, 1991 (n.d.), ANC Archive, Fort Hare, NYM/35/166/9.

[349] Bericht über die Verhandlungen des ANC, FINNSOLIDARITY und Solidaritätskomitee der DDR über Pläne und Projekte des ANC und die Zusammenarbeit 1985/1986, 04 April 1985, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/318.

[350] Eric Burton, "Solidarität und ihre Grenzen. Die 'Brigaden der Freundschaft' der DDR", in *Internationale Solidarität. Globales Engagement in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR*, ed. Frank Bösch, Caroline Moine, and Stefanie Senger (Göttingen, 2018), 169.

East German propaganda presented WPC as a showcase of East German solidarity, as the selfless sharing of construction expertise with so-called developing countries. In fact, the Academy's ambitions of exporting building projects and services were limited by their ability to translate their expertise to conditions other than their domestic ones and their lack of knowledge about the specific requirements for building in, for example, Africa – as outlined in the previous chapter. This relative lack of knowledge about building conditions in the non-European context may at least partially explain the significant adjustments that East German and ANC architects made to WPC before implementing it in Dakawa. Internal reports later acknowledged that WPC had been developed first and foremost for the conditions in East Germany.[351] In fact, the ANC experimented with prefab and low-cost technologies prior to WPC; at some point, Hodgson's Construction Department developed a low-cost housing scheme that called for standardized elements to simplify the construction and make it cheaper – which seems like a blueprint for WPC. They defined three different house types, including general construction principles, materials, and how these buildings should be integrated into the village community to bundle specific functions.[352] In 1986, when the WPC project was still in its planning phase, Spencer Hodgson travelled several times to East Germany, where he also met with Peter Wurbs and his supervisor Gottfried Wagner. At the meetings, they discussed how the WPC system needed to be adjusted for the conditions in Dakawa. Amongst other things, Spencer pointed to the impact of whirlwinds in Dakawa and suggested adjusting the footing to provide additional protection against termites, along with addressing other construction-related issues.[353]

In addition to personal meetings, the three had an extensive mail exchange during this period to discuss construction details. Hodgson proposed significant alterations in these exchanges and often included technical drawings with his letters. For example, discussions on doors and roofs saw Hodgson suggesting the use of the ANC's Mazimbu standard and adjusting the WPC system with its standardized measurements to fit this standard.[354] In some cases, this collaborative process improved the system; in other

---

[351] ANC-Entwicklungszentrum Dakawa (VR Tansania), 1990 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, B513/52.
[352] Low-Cost Housing Project Proposals, n.d., ANC Archive, Fort Hare, TMO/41/24/1.
[353] Beratungen im Solidaritätskomitee mit dem ANC-Vertreter Mr Spencer Hodgson, 24 July 1986, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/346; Beratung mit dem ANC-Vertreter Mr Spencer Hodgson in Dresden, 25 July 1986, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/346; Protokoll Planung und Projektierung gesellschaftlicher Einrichtungen in WPC-Bauweise für ein Flüchtlingslager des ANC in Dakawa/Tanzania, 11 November 1986, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_89.
[354] Hodgson an Wurbs, 26 May 1986, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_89.

cases, the outcome was more of a bad compromise – like with the roofing, where the attempt was to combine the Mazimbu standard trusses (designed for a spacing of 120cm) with the WPC system's fixed distance of 180 cm between the columns. As a consultant of Oswald Dennis remarked, "*This has gotten out of hand*", pointing at the incompatibility of both approaches.[355] Eventually, these observations contradict the idea of WPC as an out-of-the-box solution.

The specificity of their cooperation is further underlined by the fact that Wurbs and the FDJ members resided directly in Dakawa. At the time of their arrival, some Dakawa residents lived in tents, and most of them in 67 disaster houses. Five of these houses were occupied by the East Germans, one by a Tanzanian government representative, and the rest by ANC members.[356] Interestingly, the Scandinavians are not mentioned, which leads to the assumption that they were housed in Mazimbu or elsewhere. At the same time, being housed in Dakawa directly with the ANC became a recurring theme in the FDJ's propaganda. They usually emphasized that they and their ANC counterparts were in this together and thus they would not dare to demand special treatment. One of the brigadiers reportedly said, "*The activists from our youth organization were not deterred by the abnormal and difficult conditions and went to work straightaway. They had come to Tanzania to practice anti-imperialist solidarity. 'If one is on the spot, one really notices just how much help is needed. One thinks of oneself last of all.*'"[357] While emphasizing this kind of fraternity, FDJ in fact considered postponing their mission due to the living conditions – especially since at first they considered sending married couples with children, a plan that the ANC saw negatively, as they could not guarantee that there would be electricity and that the living conditions would not be suitable for children.[358] Moreover, tensions emerged when Jürgen Leskien, an East German author and metalworker who spent some time in Dakawa with FDJ, complained about poor leadership and racism among the brigade. He moreover pointed to the scarcity of housing, emphasizing that it was unfavourable that a certain number of the new houses were occupied by the FDJ brigade, while many ANC members continued to live in tents – in this particular FDJ group, he continued, the idea of solidarity "has long turned into

---

[355] A Technical and Qualitative Report of the Building Activities and Infrastructure Present and Past to Be Found at Dakawa and Mazimbu, 1988 (n.d.), ANC Archive, Fort Hare, TMO/41/29/1.
[356] Report on the Present Dakawa Situation, n.d., ANC Archive, Fort Hare, DDC/13/12/31.
[357] A GDR Precasting Plant for a Camp in Dakawa, n.d, BArch, Berlin, DZ8/347.
[358] Report of the Meeting between ANC and FDJ Held in Dakawa, 03 June 1986, ANC Archive, DDC/13/12/9.

a farce."[359] Tensions also emerged between the Academy specialists and the FDJ Brigade, with the former accusing the latter of being indifferent towards the project, focused only on vocational education instead of WPC.[360]

To conclude, the Dakawa project was the first major East German HABITAT project under Gottfried Wagner, and it was the first time that the GDR managed to go beyond promoting socialist urbanism and its advantages for solving the global housing crisis. It was the first time that a HABITAT project yielded tangible economic results, albeit small ones. At the same time, it also mirrors the weaknesses of the East German architecture and urban planning industry in the global competition described in the previous chapter. Rather than selling advanced knowledge and skills, this project was a form of mutual learning and co-production – partly due to the specific ties that the ANC and GDR had, where East German architects became "comrades" and "friends" on site, and partly due to the technological insufficiencies of the WPC system and the lack of knowledge about the local conditions.

4.4 The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (1987)

Based on a Sri Lankan initiative, the UN General Assembly declared the year 1987 to be the "International Year of Shelter for the Homeless" (IYSH). In the words of the UN, IYSH should contribute "*to improve the shelter and neighbourhoods of some of the poor and disadvantaged by 1987 according to national priorities, and to demonstrate by the year 200 ways and means of improving the shelter and neighbourhoods of all of the poor and disadvantaged.*"[361] The means to reach these goals were national programmes, improved national housing policies, as well as the setup of a pool of good practice solutions. In total, 800 projects in 139 countries were realized under the roof of IYSH.[362] To follow up on IYSH, Under-Secretary-General Arcot Ramachandran

---

[359] Jürgen Leskien, *Schreiben über das nahe Fremde* (Hamburg, Münster: LIT Verlag, 1994).
[360] Aktennotiz über ein Gespräch mit dem FDJ-Zentralrat über Maßnahmen zur WPC-Bauweise in Dakawa, 06 February 1989, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_14.
[361] Shelter for the Homeless - On the Global Situation in the Field of Human Settlements, 28 November 1983, PA AA, Berlin, M 83/2314-88.
362 Press Briefing by Executive Director of HABITAT, 06 October 1987, UNA, New York City, S-1051-0028-06.

introduced a strategic process for a global shelter strategy to the year 2000, which was intended to incorporate the results of IYSH.[363]

For IYSH, HABITAT asked all delegations to contribute practical showcase solutions to housing problems in developing countries. The programme requested self-help technologies for buildings that did not require external assistance, thus empowering people in developing countries to create shelter.[364] Bauakademie submitted the WPC technology as a good practice to IYSH and was chosen for funding by the HABITAT secretariat, making it an official GDR contribution to IYSH. The IYSH label meant that Bauakademie could get HABITAT's financial support for the Dakawa project despite not making any voluntary contributions to HABITAT,[365] and the GDR team turned this label into a cornerstone of its "PR strategy" for the Dakawa project. In their narrative, which repeatedly appears in publications and speeches related to IYSH, housing is a global problem – and from the GDR's perspective, it is first and foremost a problem of the non-socialist world. The East German example, the narrative goes on, shows how the country escaped the devastation of World War II through systemic solutions: nationalizing the construction industry, making housing a constitutional right of every citizen, and establishing a housing programme that promoted mechanized and industrialized construction.[366] WPC, then, was a result of this journey, exemplifying how the GDR's progress also benefitted their partners in their attempt to liberate themselves from colonialism.

Besides the WPC project, the GDR launched several other IYSH-related activities, most of which can be understood as communication and outreach instruments. This included, for example, a special leaflet and a short film about East Germany's ambition to provide housing for every citizen, which was addressed to the delegates of the tenth UNCHS

---

[363] HABITAT Secretariat Nairobi to Bauakademie, 05 January 1988, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_90; Evamaria Schulze, "Wohnungen für Alle - Strategisches Ziel der UNO bis zum Jahr 2000", *Architektur der DDR* 38, no. 5 (1989): 7–8.

[364] United Nations Commission on Human Settlements, Resolution HS/C/RES/9/12, International Year of Shelter for the Homeless: Guidelines for a Selective Approach, 1986.

[365] IYSH is explicitly mentioned in the project document that set the financial obligations for the WPC system between ANC, Solidarity Committee, and HABITAT (Project Document Promotion of Construction Methods in Low Cost Housing for the ANC Dakawa Development Centre in Tanzania, 1986 (n.d.), BArch, Berlin, B513/52)

[366] Wurbs, "Aufbau des ANC-Entwicklungszentrums Dakawa in Tansania".

session, as well as a 1987 seminar on housing for urban planning professionals from Africa and West Asia, which was tagged with the IYSH label (see chapter 4.5).[367]

In West Germany, IYSH seemed less visible. Since simple, lightweight self-help constructions, as requested by IYSH, came with limited business potential for the West German construction industry, their focus was on NGOs whose projects were selected competitively for co-funding by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.[368] Still, the Bauakademie (and even the state security) monitored the West German activities for IYSH.[369] The West German approach was typical of most Western countries, which left NGOs in charge of IYSH. In the United Kingdom, for example, a self-built project won the IYSH competition organized by a UK NGO: the Building and Social Housing Foundation. In the United States, it was also primarily NGOs working on IYSH. Next to construction projects, a man identifying himself as President of the National Union of the Homeless in the USA contacted HABITAT's New York office to announce a demonstration at the UN Headquarters. As the officer-in-charge reported to his superiors two weeks before the intended demonstration, *"Because of the IYSH, it has been decided to hold the demonstration at the United Nations Headquarters [...]. The plan seems to be to march up to the gates of the UN compound and 'crash' into the premises. If the marches are not let into the compound, they will try to get in by force. According to Mr Kanoi [the caller], these homeless people have nothing to lose, and if they have to spend a night in jail, they will be happy because at least they will have a roof over their heads. What they would like is to have a space in the UN premises where the homeless people can testify to their suffering and a warm place where they can have their lunch, which will be donated by several charitable organizations."*[370]

The socialist approach to IYSH was much more focused on state-led tangible interventions and educational programmes. Next to Dakawa, the GDR also framed its 1987 HABITAT seminar (see next chapter) as an IYSH event titled "Solving the

---

[367] Bericht der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über die Aktivitäten zum Internationalen Jahr Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen, 16 December 1986, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_90.

[368] Kurzprotokoll der gemeinsamen Arbeitsgruppe des Ausschusses für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau und des Ausschusses für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit, 09 November 1988, BArch, Koblenz, B134/40718.

[369] HABITAT International Council, n.d., Stasi Records Agency (BStU, BArch), MfS ZAIG 29738.

[370] UNCHS New York Office Note by H.D. Nargolwala, 30 January 1987, UNA, New York City, S-1051-0028-07.

Housing Question in the GDR – Its Relevance for Developing Countries." Seminars were among the most common contributions of socialist states to IYSH. The USSR, for example, conducted a 20-day seminar for construction specialists from French-speaking countries in Africa, a seminar which HABITAT Secretary-General Arcot Ramachandran also attended. Despite problems during the seminar ("some seminar participants from Upper Volta, Cameroon, and Gabon had to leave the seminar early because of provocative behaviour"),[371] the USSR intended to turn the seminar into a long-term programme. At the same time, Hungary planned to engage in the education of architecture and urban planning professionals from developing countries and submit to IYSH building technologies that support the production of building materials without complex equipment and for the construction of simple residential buildings. Other socialist states that were less active included Bulgaria, which announced at a meeting of the socialist delegations that their contribution to IYSH would merely be to provide planning services "upon demand."[372]

At the same time, IYSH was an important instrument for the involved East German institutions to legitimize their activities towards domestic audiences, both professional and general. For IYSH, Wagner and his team organized five events at universities and other institutions, aimed at informing the general public about IYSH; two of them co-organized with VISION HABITAT, the regional information office of HABITAT in Budapest.[373] Moreover, in an article for *Architektur der DDR*, Gerhard Kosel, now former head of the GDR's UNCHS delegation, introduced IYSH to the GDR's architects and urban planners. He described the necessity of IYSH (global overpopulation and rapid, uncontrolled urbanization in many parts of the world, not only in Africa, but also Western metropolises), and how the socialist states, with their expertise, could help solve these problems: "*In contrast, in the socialist states, the development of settlement structures is planned in the interest of the general public and the individual, in harmony with the development of the national economy and the protection of the environment. The overpowering growth of grid cities is prevented in favour of the systematic development of medium-sized cities and agricultural centres.*

---

[371] Bericht über die Beratung von Delegationen sozialistischer Länder zu Fragen der Teilnahme an der Tätigkeit der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS) (…) 1983 in Rackeve (UVR), 12 October 1983, BArch, Berlin, N2504/287.

[372] Ibid.

[373] Bericht der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über die Aktivitäten zum Internationalen Jahr Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen, 16 December 1986, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_90.

There will be no unemployment and no land speculation."[374] Newspaper articles targeted at the general public further supported IYSH's impact on domestic audiences. As to the general public, the World HABITAT Day, which was organized on a regular basis, was even more important. To implement the World HABITAT Days in East Germany, the HABITAT Team at Bauakademie coordinated activities by their academies, universities, ministries, and other institutions. This included, for example, symposia and film screenings, as well as drawing competitions with kindergartens.[375] Moreover, on the occasion of the 1986 World HABITAT Day, Wagner and his team organized a symposium for 100 national and international students, together with HAB Weimar (Weimar University for Architecture and Construction). In a student competition, the participants designed low-cost housing types for hot climates, the results of which were presented at IYSH and handed over to HABITAT.[376] In 1988, another competition was organized, this one targeting younger pupils, who were called to submit drawings about "our neighbourhood", the winners of which were presented at a symposium in Berlin.[377]

4.5 The HABITAT Seminars (1987–1989)*[378]*

Another important milestone in the GDR's cooperation with HABITAT was a series of seminars organized between 1987 and 1989, targeting urban planners from newly independent nation-states and liberation movements.[379] These seminars reveal how the East German attempts to make money through HABITAT became increasingly systematic. They also reveal how these attempts were hindered by the lack of

---

[374] Author's translation from the German original: "Im Gegensatz dazu verläuft in den sozialistischen Staaten die Gestaltung der Siedlungsstrukturen planmäßig im Interesse der Allgemeinheit und des Einzelnen, im Einklang mit der Entfaltung der Volkswirtschaft und dem Schutz der Umwelt. Das übermächtige Wachstum der Großstädte wird zugunsten einer systematischen Entwicklung mittlerer Städte und landwirtschaftlicher Zentren verhindert. Es gibt keine Arbeitslosigkeit und keine Bodenspekulation" (Kosel, "1987 Internationales Jahr - Wohnung für die Obdachlosen")

[375] Bericht über die Teilnahme der DDR-Delegation an der 2. Konsultation mit dem Büro VISION HABITAT in Budapest, 11 October 1982, BArch, Berlin, DH2/4169.

[376] Information über die Durchführung des Welt-HABITAT-Tages 1986, 23 October 1986, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_90.

[377] Information über die Durchführung des Welt-HABITAT-Tages 1988, 10 October 1988, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1301-92.

[378] This chapter is an adjusted version of a previously published article (Jakob Marcks, "'The Local People Do Not Favour Residing in Apartments': Bauakademie's UN HABITAT Seminars on Housing for the Global South, 1987–1989", Střed 14, no. 2 (2022): 91–111.).

[379] Information über ein Gespräch mit dem Leiter der Delegation der UdSSR in der Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen der UNO, Gen. J.N.Sokolov, 07 June 1978, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/2346-86.

knowledge about the conditions for urban development in less developed countries (which calls to mind the experiences in Dakawa described in chapter 4.3 and the capacity-building efforts described in chapter 4.2). On the other hand, these seminars mirror how the professional discourse has shifted. The discourse in Vancouver about socialist New Towns was driven by a belief in socialist modernism. In the meantime, the discourse changed. The crisis of the socialist modern city (which impacted not only the GDR, but also many other socialist countries),[380] was not directly addressed in the seminars, because they were not a place for self-criticism (like HABITAT in general). However, seminar speakers indeed discussed how "intensive urbanism" had replaced "extensive urbanism" in the GDR and the field trips included not only Halle-Neustadt but also Halle-Hohewarte, a revitalized inner-city area.

The first seminar was eventually organized in 1987, and two seminars followed in 1988 and 1989. They took place in different East German cities (Berlin and Dessau), had a duration of around two weeks, and were co-organized by Bauakademie and UN-HABITAT. The seminars were usually attended by approximately 20 participants representing architecture and urban planning authorities from countries such as India, Ethiopia, and Yemen, but also from liberation movements like the ANC and PAC.[381] In terms of the format, the seminars consisted of lectures and field trips organized by the Bauakademie's HABITAT team at the Institute for Town Planning and Architecture (ISA) – headed by Mr Wagner, with Mr Wurbs and other experts from the Academy and beyond contributing as lecturers and with Mrs Schulze being in charge of practical and organizational matters. These field trips mainly dealt with East German achievements deemed relevant for developing countries, ranging from building technologies to housing policies. On the other hand, all participants provided country briefs, i.e., presentations about their country's specific situation and the housing challenges they experience and want to tackle.[382] Thematically, the three seminars all revolved around housing, which is mirrored in titles such as "Solving the Housing

---

[380] Bernhardt, "Planning Urbanization and Urban Growth in the Socialist Period - the Case of East German New Towns, 1945-1989"; Roubal, "Krize Urbanistické Moderny v Socialismu. Případ Plánování Prahy od Šedesátých do Osmdesátých Let 20. Století".

[381] Teilnehmerliste, 30 October 1989, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1301-92.

[382] Bericht über das HABITAT-Seminar der DDR über Erfahrungen der DDR bei der Lösung der Wohnungsfrage und ihre Nutzanwendung für Entwicklungsländer (…) am Bauhaus Dessau, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, A2_2_30_17.

Problem in the GDR – Its Relevance for Developing Countries" (1988),[383] as well as a seminar on the UN Global Shelter Strategy to the year 2000 (1989). A seminar on rural settlements planned for May 1990 was postponed to October 1990 upon the request of HABITAT, and eventually cancelled. The Academy considered turning the seminar series into a long-term programme. Bauakademie developed plans for further seminars up to the year 1993 on topics such as how to facilitate urban planning through ICT tools or the use of domestic raw building materials.[384]

Figure 6: Participants of the 1987 seminar, source: HABITAT News 09, August 1987 (Source: IRS, Erkner, A2_2_88)

The seminars were co-organized by HABITAT and the Academy. In practice, this means that they were financed by HABITAT in convertible currencies (at least in 1987 and 1988) while Wagner and his team were in charge of delivering the seminar contents based on themes predefined together with the HABITAT secretariat and concluded in agreements between HABITAT and the GDR Ministry of Construction. HABITAT invited participants following a proposal from the Academy regarding the countries or liberation movements that HABITAT should approach. In practice, this meant that the

---

[383] Project Document, Seminar on Solving the Housing Problem in the GDR - Its Relevance for Developing Countries, 1988 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1301-92.
[384] Programm der Zusammenarbeit zwischen der DDR und dem HABITAT-Zentrum, 12 December 1989, PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1301-92.

GDR could only choose where the participants came from, but they had no influence over the exact choice of participants. This is essentially different from bilateral education projects, where the social background of participants has often been an important selection criterion.[385] Two HABITAT employees usually joined the seminars and provided presentations framing the respective seminar in the context of HABITAT's strategic goals.[386]

As to financing, the 1987 and 1988 seminars were financed by UN-HABITAT in convertible currencies – that is, through East German UN contributions that were returned to the GDR (funds-in-trust). For the 1988 seminar, for instance, the GDR's foreign trade company intercoop received USD 117,000 from the UN for the seminar. At the same time, the actual costs of the seminar (e.g., for accommodation and local travel) were paid in non-convertible GDR marks. Whenever possible, East Germany's Interflug or other airlines from the Eastern Bloc were chosen for international travel to avoid expenditures in convertible currencies. As a result, the seminars became an important economic factor and source of income for Bauakademie, as will be outlined below.[387] For the 1989 seminar, problems emerged as the Ministry of Construction continued to insist on financing in convertible currencies, while the UN aimed to pay the seminar in non-convertible GDR marks from the East German funds-in-trust at the UN. It remains unclear how the situation was eventually solved, but the ongoing discussions about financing were one reason why the seminar was postponed.[388] According to the Academy's economic plan, cooperation with HABITAT had to yield income in convertible currencies, and the HABITAT seminars covered a significant share of ISA's hard currency income.[389] Additionally, the seminars were understood as a networking opportunity that should have generated new business contacts, as set out

[385] Alena Alamgir, "Mobility: Education and Labour", in *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization*, ed. James Mark and Paul Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 290–317.
[386] Bericht über das 2. HABITAT-Seminar der DDR zu 'Erfahrungen der DDR bei der Lösung der Wonungsfrage und deren Bedeutung für Entwicklungsländer' (…) am Bauhaus Dessau (Entwurf), 1988 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1301-92.
[387] Exportrapport, 06 November 1986, IRS, Erkner, A1_109_11; Information zum Stand der Vorbereitung des HABITAT-Seminars 1988 am Bauhaus Dessau, 10 June 1988, BArch, Berlin, DH2/20672.
[388] Bericht über die Teilnahme an der 12. Tagung der UN-Kommission für Menschliche Siedlungen (UNCHS/HABITAT), 09 June 1989, BArch, Berlin, DH1/33634.
[389] Exportgruppe, Zuarbeit zum Geschäftsbericht des ISA 1988, 02 January 1989, IRS, Erkner, IRS, A1_109_9.

by the Ministry of Construction as one of the critical objectives of the seminar.[390] In practice, this materialized insofar as, at the end of the seminar, all participants were asked about "prospects of cooperation with the GDR." The Academy envisioned individual consultations and follow-ups with the participants. The participants' answers often included training for specialists, either in the GDR or at home, but also specific technologies, like WPC, that could be introduced in their countries.[391] The seminars were an instrument for Bauakademie to intensify relations with the respective authorities in developing countries and provide access to UN-financed development projects in these countries.[392]

In official East German publications, the seminars were often presented as anti-imperial solidarity. For them, providing architects and urbanists in developing countries with GDR expertise meant empowerment, as the participants were equipped with the proper knowledge to overcome housing shortages and related problems in their countries. The GDR presented itself as a successful and generous provider of expertise, pointing out how GDR experts had already contributed to improving housing conditions in North Korea, Vietnam, Cuba, Tanzania, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and Yemen and they now continue this mission through the seminars.[393] For the 1987 seminar, the Ministry of Construction formulated three overarching goals: firstly, to acquaint the participants with the capabilities of the East German building sector and teach them how to use East German knowledge in their home countries; secondly, to inform the participants about the GDR housing programme; and thirdly, to contextualize this practical expertise from a geopolitical perspective – that is, presenting socialism and anti-imperialism as a prerequisite to overcoming homelessness.[394] As one of the organizers put it, the main aim of the seminar was to discuss housing provision not only as a construction task but

---

[390] Direktive zur Durchführung des Seminars Erfahrungen der DDR bei der Lösung der Wohnungsfrage und ihre Nutzung für Entwicklungsländer, 19 May 1987, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_30_23.
[391] Bericht über das 2. HABITAT-Seminar der DDR zu Erfahrungen der DDR bei der Lösung der Wonungsfrage und deren Bedeutung für Entwicklungsländer (…) am Bauhaus Dessau (Entwurf), 1988 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1301-92.
[392] Vorlage, Konzeption für die Vorbereitung und Durchführung des internationalen HABITAT-Seminars am Bauhaus Dessau, 30 March 1988, IRS, Erkner, A2_2_30_14.
[393] Informationen für das Sekretariat des ZK der SED, Betreff: Beschluß zur Durchführung eines Internationalen Seminars für Baufachleute aus Entwicklungsländern zum Thema Erfahrungen der DDR bei der Lösung der Wohnungsfrage und ihre Nutzung für Entwicklungsländer, 07 January 1987, BArch, Berlin, DY30/6236.
[394] Ibid.

as "a complex task with political, economic, settlement policy, construction industry, and democratic-administrative aspects."[395]

The East German housing programme was repeatedly emphasized in different seminar lectures and presented as the logical outcome of the GDR's socialist development path and as a good practice with high relevance for developing countries. The narrative, as presented at the seminars and in publications and speeches related to IYSH, claimed that housing was a global problem – and, first and foremost, a problem of the non-socialist world. East Germany, at the same time, would represent a good example of overcoming housing shortages and could inspire developing countries.[396] This narrative described postwar East Germany as a country that lacked raw materials and a workforce to rebuild the war-destroyed housing stock. According to this narrative, the key requirement for fast reconstruction was the decision to nationalize the construction industry, establish a constitution that sets a right to housing (and the state's duty to control the distribution of housing), and streamline building processes. Later, the national housing programme was launched, outlining the path towards removing all housing shortages and quality problems until 1990 – based on industrialization, rationalization, and turning construction sites into assembly sites, underpinned with sociopolitical provisions, such as low rents or socialist land-use policies.[397] The Academy also promoted the WPC system through the HABITAT seminars and repeated their narrative that WPC was a result of their journey towards affordable, high-quality housing for all, which they now shared with developing countries.[398]

One of the themes repeatedly presented at the seminars was the GDR's housing programme, a programme that was typical for this period. The year 1971 saw a significant shift. Ulbricht's 1960s reforms failed as his ideas of implementing market

---

[395] Author's translation from the German original: "(…) war es das Hauptanliegen des Seminars, darüber zu diskutieren, daß es sich bei der Lösung der Wohnungsfrage nicht nur um eine Bauaufgabe handelt, sondern um eine komplexe Aufgabe mit staatspolitischen, volkswirtschaftlichen, siedlungspolitischen, bauwirtschaftlichen und demokratisch-administrativen Aspekten" (Evamaria Schulze, "HABITAT-Seminar am Bauhaus Dessau zum Internationalen Jahr 'Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen'", *Architektur der DDR* 37, no. 2 (1988): 51)

[396] Wurbs, "Aufbau des ANC-Entwicklungszentrums Dakawa in Tansania"; Gottfried Wagner, "Aufgaben und Ziele des Internationalen Jahres 'Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen'", *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen* 33, no. 3 (1987): 99–101.

[397] Entwurf für den Bericht der DDR zum Wohnungsbau Anlässlich des Jahres der Obdachlosen, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, A2_2_90.

[398] Bericht über das HABITAT-Seminar der DDR über Erfahrungen der DDR bei der Lösung der Wohnungsfrage und ihre Nutzanwendung für Entwicklungsländer" (…) am Bauhaus Dessau, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, A2_2_30_17.

elements in state socialism did not yield the desired results. The ultimate consequence was his being replaced by Honecker, who promoted the "unity of economic and social policy", using instruments reminiscent of the second half of the 1950s, namely an ever more centralized system and the prioritization of the population's material needs. In contrast to Ulbricht's growth and technology campaign, the new central task defined by the Eighth Party Congress in 1971 was to "raise the material and cultural standard of living."[399] Similar economic policies were introduced in almost all Eastern Bloc countries at this time. The underlying rationale was: should we foster growth and technology first to catch up with the West and satisfy the population's needs only then and from this position (Ulbricht's approach), or should we first satisfy material needs and thus motivate people to become more productive (Honecker's new approach)? This new political situation provides the context for the GDR's national housing programme from 1973. Its main ambition was to "solve the housing issue as a social problem by 1990."[400] While in 1970, investments in housing accounted for only 7 per cent of the country's gross investments, this figure grew to 12 per cent by 1982. The goal was to construct, renovate, or update approximately three million homes by 1990 to significantly enhance housing availability for the population and ultimately eradicate housing shortages by that time. Despite increasing investments, the GDR did not succeed at fulfilling its goals as formulated in the housing programme: only 60 per cent of the initially planned renovations and constructions were completed, and the lack of indicators other than the total number of dwellings led some municipalities to build small apartments or remain below the desired quality in order to fulfil the plan. Nevertheless, the housing programme was repeatedly promoted through the HABITAT seminars and other international forums as a testimony to the advantages of centralized planning.[401]

Another key principle that steered GDR urban governance and was introduced to the seminars was the concept of "democratic socialism." First developed by Lenin, SED's interpretation promoted the centralization of power within the state and limited democratic input from citizens. SED sought to eliminate regional diversity and promote a centralized system of government. This system of democratic socialism was criticized for being more centralist than democratic and for limiting the autonomy of citizens and

---

[399] "Erhöhung des materiellen und kulturellen Lebensniveaus"
[400] "bis 1990 die Wohnungsfrage als soziales Problem lösen"
[401] Steiner, *Von Plan zu Plan - Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR*, 165–78, 208.

regions. Within three years of the state's foundation, the system abolished the five Länder, or regions, from which the GDR was initially constituted. In 1952, municipalities lost their self-government status, and these reforms also translated to urban planning – the decisions on how to plan cities, what guidelines to follow, and what hierarchy to adhere to were all dictated centrally. Urban planning was a local responsibility, but it was also closely tied to the construction industry, which was part of the economy and thus subject to central planning. The State Council, the Council of Ministers, and the Ministry of Construction made significant organizational choices. The plans, principles, and objectives were determined by the Communist Party, the Politburo, and the Central Committee, with key decisions being made every five years at the Communist Party Congresses of the SED. These resolutions, which outlined the direction for the building industry, had to be referenced in specialized publications, and most importantly, they had to be implemented. The resolutions of the Party Congresses were considered as laws. Moreso, they had a "quasi-religious status."[402]

The seminars highlighted that the participants could learn from this very East German experience and benefit from their expertise, framing the seminars as a one-directional East–South knowledge transfer. Interestingly, Wagner was aware of the Academy's lack of capacity for building projects in developing countries, as described in more detail in chapter 4.2.[403] This knowledge gap became apparent during the seminars as well: asked for potential future forms of cooperation with the GDR, the participant from Botswana at the 1987 seminar gave a plain and simple reply:

> *I leave this area of consideration for the discretion of the seminar organizers (GDR) because before I say anything in this regard, I feel it would require that the GDR should make in-depth research or studies to understand our social, political, and economic system so that they could be able to work with us.*[404]

The participant from Tanzania had similar feedback, claiming that:

---

[402] Frank Betker, *Einsicht in die Notwendigkeit: Kommunale Stadtplanung in der DDR und nach der Wende (1945-1994)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 112.

[403] Exportkonzeption des ISA, Entwurf, 1982 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 4.

[404] Feedback Notes of the Botswanian Participant, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1.

There is [a] need for added exposure of GDR personnel to the situation in developing countries so as to be able to effectively tie in the GDR situation with that of developing countries.[405]

While Wagner and his colleagues aimed to showcase East German achievements and their applicability in other world regions, some participants contested the second part of this ambition (the transferability). In the handwritten feedback that Wagner collected during the 1987 seminar, most participants confirmed that they saw the East German construction industry as progressive and advanced. However, some participants raised concerns regarding the adaptability of the East German achievements presented during the seminar. A case in point was the feedback of the Ghanaian participant, who claimed that the presentations of the East German experts and the country briefs provided by the participants were more of a comparative analysis of interests and developments. According to the participant, there was little room for discussion, and the country briefs remained isolated presentations ("It appeared such presentations came in to fill gaps",[406] another participant remarked). He was expecting Wagner, Wurbs, and the other lecturers to relate their expertise to the country briefs and discussions to allow for mutual comparisons and learning among the participants. Without this kind of exchange, the seminar remained rather descriptive, informing about achievements and challenges in the GDR and the participants' countries.[407] The participant from Botswana made a similar proposal insofar as he suggested holding future seminars in developing countries instead of the GDR, studying real examples of how the East German experience can be adopted in practice.[408] Some participants highlighted the seminar's usefulness, pointing towards similarities between the East German perspective and their own. The participant from Seychelles – a single-party socialist state at that time – highlighted overlapping experiences in both countries concerning rural settlement planning and rural health infrastructure. He was also impressed by East German panel housing and the high rises he saw during the excursions. Such buildings could solve the

---

[405] Feedback Notes of the Tanzanian Participant, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1.
[406] Feedback Notes of the Tanzanian Participant, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1.
[407] Feedback Notes of the Ghanaian Participant, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1.
[408] Feedback Notes of the Botswanian Participant, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1.

housing problems of Seychelles "in no time." However, the introduction would have "to be gradual, as the local people do not favour residing in apartments."[409]

Next to such content-related comments, many participants also provided feedback on practical matters, such as poor time management, which was a recurring criticism of the participants. After the seminars, Wagner usually delivered two reports – an official one for HABITAT, which framed the seminars as successful events and highlighted positive feedback from the participants, and an internal report. The latter also referred to difficulties that were encountered, yet only regarding practical matters. Conceptual feedback from the participants – e.g., by those who challenged the transferability of the East German model – was omitted in both reports.

Still, these reports – especially the internal ones – are insightful. They show that the Ministry of Construction and Bauakademie expected to increase the GDR's international reputation through these seminars, and when problems occurred, they feared reputational damages. After the 1988 seminar, for example, the organizers acknowledged that they had supply problems with fish, fruits, and vegetables and that they could not respond to the dietary requirements of all participants (e.g., participants who did not eat either pork or beef for religious reasons). Other practical issues discussed by the report include accommodation and problems with the transportation to field trips across the region – which was carried out with a public transport city bus instead of the promised higher-quality long-distance coach.[410] At the time of drafting, Wagner's internal report even caused a conflict with Bauhaus Dessau, whose director requested they change the sections on the accommodation at the Bauhaus and the food problems – fearing reputational damage for his institution.[411] Indeed, the different parties involved in the seminar invested great effort into showing the country from its best side – some of the apartments at the Bauhaus were upgraded with hot water just for these seminars (especially the ones where the two HABITAT representatives were hosted), a temporary connection for long-distance calls was installed, and when the hot water supply was interrupted due to planned maintenance, the Bauhaus director made a

---

[409] Feedback Notes of the Seychellian Participant, 1987 (n.d.), IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1.
[410] Bericht über das 2. HABITAT-Seminar der DDR zu Erfahrungen der DDR bei der Lösung der Wonungsfrage und deren Bedeutung für Entwicklungsländer (…) am Bauhaus Dessau (Entwurf), 1988 (n.d.), PA AA, Berlin, M 82/1301-92.
[411] Sticker notes, 23 September 1988, Bauhaus Dessau Archive (BDA), Dessau, EA264/44.

formal request for emergency hot water equipment for the "foreigners from North African and Asian countries", as he wrote in a letter to the local energy combine.[412]

While the available archival sources are rich regarding professional comments and feedback from the participants, little is known about individual personal experiences. An exception is the case of an Egyptian participant, Mrs Kamel, at the 1988 seminar. As the only female participant, she and Mrs Schulze, the only woman in the organizing team at ISA, developed a friendly relationship during the seminar. After the meeting, Mrs Kamel sent at least two letters to Mrs Schulze, thanking her for the seminar and asking about her husband and children. In the second letter, Mrs Kamel moreover asked whether Mrs Schulze could buy her a specific jacket that they had seen in a shop when walking through Berlin; one of her relatives would pick it up during his next Berlin trip. For Mrs Schulze, it was challenging to answer: she had no approval to travel to non-socialist countries at that time, and this entailed that she was formally not allowed to answer the letters. With special approval, she finally wrote a reply – drafted not entirely by herself but involving her supervisors at the Academy. Disguised as a personal letter, Mrs Kamel received a business offer. Internal correspondence reveals that Academy officials hoped to increase the trustworthiness of the offer by framing it as personal correspondence.[413] After a few words about family and the weather, the letter soon switches to business, offering various kinds of follow-up seminars for Egyptian specialists – already with a price tag of USD 110 per person and day.[414]

Mrs Schulze's letter exemplifies the business prospects that the Academy tied to HABITAT in general and the seminar series in particular. For the Academy, the seminar series was both a source of income and an opportunity for networking with potential clients. Especially in the context of the 1980s as a "lost decade" for development, acquiring new (and potentially HABITAT-funded) projects through the seminars was a means to circumvent the economic challenges of that time. Conceptually, the main aim of the organizers was to present East Germany, its housing policy, and its construction

---

[412] Kuhn an Knitschke, 10 February 1988, BDA, Dessau, EA264/62; Niederschrift über die Beratung zum Stand der Vorbereitung des HABITAT-Seminars, 27 April 1988, BDA, Dessau, EA264/62; Einrichtung eines zeitweiligen Fernsprechanschlusses, 10 May 1988, BDA, Dessau, EA264/88.
[413] "In diesem Anbahnungsstadium wäre es ungeschickt und wenig aussichtsreich, wenn ein solcher Vorschlag offiziell von der Bauakademie an Frau K. herangetragen würde, […]"
[414] Wagner an Kontrollgruppe, 23 January 1989, IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1; Schulze an Kamel, 18 January 1989, IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1; Kamel an Schulze, 10 December 1988, IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1; Kamel an Schulze, 20 September 1988, IRS, Erkner, Estate of Gottfried Wagner, Unprocessed, Box 1.

industry as an advanced example of the solution to housing problems. Developing countries could learn from their development "story", from their experience of turning a war-ravaged country into a modern socialist state that offers affordable, high-quality housing for all. For the organizers, the seminars had a clear division of roles between "teachers" (East German experts) and "learners" (the participants). This also materializes in titles such as "Solving the Housing Problem in the GDR – its Relevance for Developing Countries" and perpetuates imperial modes of thinking rather than following the proclaimed anti-imperial agenda. The seminar participants did not generally contest the East German narrative of an advanced socialist country presenting its achievements in the field of housing. However, concerns were raised regarding the applicability of East German knowledge to each specific context. Moreover, while East German achievements in housing were acknowledged, some participants questioned East German knowledge of the conditions in their home countries – and thus indirectly also the East German idea of the seminars as a one-directional knowledge transfer.

4.6 Summary

The chapter presented five cases of East Germany's HABITAT membership: the Vancouver conference in 1976, capacity-building attempts throughout the 1980s, the WPC project in Dakawa from 1986–1989, the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (1987), and the HABITAT Seminars (1987–1989).

These five cases illustrate my main argument that urbanism became an important tool in the development competition, which had distinct advantages compared to other forms of development. On the one hand, urban development embodies questions of social organization. Therefore, especially in the early years of HABITAT, the GDR promoted the socialist city through HABITAT, which materialized, for example, in the discussion about socialist New Towns in Vancouver. The first years were dominated by a strong political focus that welcomed the "progressive" tenor of the Vancouver declaration and highlighted systemic differences between East and West and their impact on urban development.

With the generational change from Gerhard Kosel to Gottfried Wagner, which coincided with a shifting professional discourse and with changing economic conditions, the GDR's work in HABITAT became a new focus. Economic ambitions now became increasingly important, as the cases of Dakawa and the seminar series

show. Additionally, Bauakademie undertook significant efforts to support the economic exploitation of HABITAT, e.g., through its "Initiativforschung" and related initiatives. With these efforts, Bauakademie attempted to close the knowledge and skills gap regarding urban planning and construction projects in postcolonial nation-states, yet the results remained limited, and Western competitors remained in an advanced position. Likewise, the focus now shifted from the promotion of the socialist modern city, which was increasingly challenged by urbanists and the public alike, towards smaller interventions.

At the same time, the cases from the second phase show how the new pragmatism and the new economic ambitions met with obstacles in practice. The ideas presented at the seminars found only limited response among its addressees. In general, the lack of experience and knowledge about the conditions in the countries of potential clients inhibited winning new contracts for urban planning projects abroad. The feedback of the participants at the HABITAT seminars in Berlin and Dessau reveals that many of them did not see an added value for their own specific context ("*There is need for added exposure of GDR personnel to the situation in developing countries so as to be able to effectively tie in the GDR situation with that of developing countries*"). They challenged the GDR's idea of a unidirectional knowledge transfer, and some did not feel respected as equal partners. Likewise, the project in Dakawa was rather a co-production in which both sides worked hand in hand as "comrades" and learned from each other, rather than a knowledge transfer from East Germany to Tanzania.

Despite this shift between the Kosel period and the Wagner period, propaganda remained an important element, yet it seemed increasingly like empty catchphrases in the later years. Regarding Dakawa, Bauakademie promoted the WPC technology as the outcome of 40 years of experience in mass housing, now translated to the conditions of rural Tanzania. A similarly historicizing narrative was promoted through the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. In this narrative, the East German example shows how a progressive modern country can be built from the ruins of war based on nationalization and industrialized construction, making housing a constitutional right of every citizen, along with a housing programme that promotes mechanized and industrialized construction.

Conclusions

In this dissertation, I sought to shed light on a relatively underexplored facet of the Global Cold War: the urban dimension of the development competition. As newly sovereign states across Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America endeavoured to navigate the complexities of the postcolonial world order, both socialist and Western camps leveraged development projects not merely as instruments of economic growth but also as ways to secure their global political, economic, and security interests.

I argue that urban development played a specific role that made it distinct from other development domains – and that socialist states like the GDR understood and made use of these specificities. For this purpose, I examined the GDR's relationship with UN-HABITAT between 1976 and 1989. I chose HABITAT because it was a platform for the Global Cold War development competition, because it allows observing a long period with continuities and changes. It enables an examination that goes beyond individual projects, people, or places, focusing instead on the institutional dimension (i.e., it allows answers on a more general level as to why socialist states like the GDR used *urban* development in the Global Cold War development competition, what their strategies were, and how they followed their aims in practice).

There were two main specificities of urbanism that made it particularly relevant as a tool in the development competition. Firstly, urban development mirrors and catalyzes whether a society has socialist or capitalist labour and production patterns. Rather than being the result of the accumulation of capital, developing the socialist city is an inherent part of the planned economy – or in Zarecor's words, "*The universal aspiration for socialist cities was their continuous operation as synchronized instruments of economic production and social transformation in physical space*."[415] In consequence, promoting socialist urban development in newly independent nation-states means promoting socialism – whereas other forms of development, such as machinery or factories, always require a detour via a technological, unpolitical "vehicle." These concepts dominated in particular in the first years of the GDR's HABITAT membership, when the delegation was led by Gerhard Kosel, an architect trained in the

---

[415] Kimberly Zarecor, What Was So Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe, Journal of Urban History 44/1 (2018), pp. 95–117.

interwar period, one of the "spiritual fathers of industrialised construction"[416] who believed in the (socialist) modern city like many other urbanists of his generation. During this period, the East German delegation used HABITAT primarily to promote its vision of the socialist city on a global scale, whereas economic aspirations only played a minor role and were not underpinned by any coherent strategies.

The specific advantage of urbanism as a tool in the development competition lost importance when criticism towards the socialist city intensified in the 1980s (in some countries, even earlier) and when the professional discourse shifted. Instead, economic considerations gained importance – which is the second advantage of urban development. Unlike machinery, factories, or other "regular" development tools, urban development (distinct from construction) requires neither material resources nor technological competitiveness – e.g., when we think of developing master plans, advising land-use and other policies, or supporting institution-building. These features of urban development became even more important when the 1980s brought a debt crisis in Latin America and Africa, impacting socialist economies like East Germany, which lost crucial hard currency income, further accelerating the economic downward spiral. This era also saw the diminished global appeal of the socialist development model, a concept that was still admired for its achievements at rapid industrialization and development in the 1960s. Accordingly, the East German HABITAT delegation now focused less on promoting the modern socialist city. Instead, the changing professional discourse (from "extensive" to "intensive" urbanism) was reflected in their HABITAT contributions. Likewise, the GDR started exploiting the economic opportunities within HABITAT more systematically. A case in point is the HABITAT seminars (1987–1989), which proactively aimed to establish business relations with the participants and the countries they represented. This shift was also evident in the Dakawa project (1986-1989) and the various activities aimed at equipping East German architects and urban planners with the skills and knowledge needed to compete on a global level. This change was accelerated by the generational shift from Gerhard Kosel to Gottfried Wagner, an urban planner who acted in a rather pragmatic manner and who had an international track record with previous assignments in Nigeria, Yemen, and other locations.

---

[416] Architektur der DDR Editorial Team, "Prof. Dr. Gerhard Kosel zum 80. Geburtstag", *Architektur der DDR* 38, no. 2 (1989): 51.

Abbreviations

ANC (African National Congress)

CIAM (Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne – International Congress of Modern Architecture)

DAG (Deutsche Arbeitsgruppe)

ECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe)

ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council (of the United Nations))

FTO (Foreign Trade Organization)

GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs)

GDR (German Democratic Republic)

HAB (Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen; University for Architecture and Construction)

HTCP (United Nations Housing, Town and Country Planning Section)

ILO (International Labour Organization)

IMF (International Monetary Fund)

ISA (Institut für Stadtplanung und Architektur; Institute for Town Planning and Architecture)

IYSH (International Year of Shelter for the Homeless)

KoKo (Kommerzielle Koordinierung; Commercial Coordination)

MEP (Muster- und Experimentalprojekt; Model and Experimental Project Department)

NIEO (New International Economic Order)

SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands)

UIA (Union Internationale des Architectes – International Union of Architects)

UN (United Nations)

UNCHS (United Nations Commission on Human Settlements)

UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development)

UNDP (United Nations Development Programme)

UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme)

UNHHSF (United Nations Housing and Human Settlements Fund)

USAID (United States Agency for International Development)

USD (US Dollar)

WHO (World Health Organization)

List of References

Archival sources

ANC Archive (Archive of the African National Congress), Fort Hare
- DDC (Dakawa Decelopment Centre)
- NYM (New York Mission)
- GMB (Bonn Mission)
- TMO (Tanzania Mission)

BDA (Bauhaus Dessau Archive), Dessau
- EA264 (UN HABITAT)

BArch (Federal Archive), Berlin
- B513 (Solidaritätsdienst International e.V.)
- DA1 (Volkskammer der DDR)
- DH1 (Ministerium für Bauwesen)
- DH2 (Bauakademie der DDR)
- DY30 (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands)
- DY55 (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes)
- DZ8 (Solidaritätskomitee der DDR)
- N2504 (Nachlass Gerhard Kosel)

BArch (Federal Archive), Koblenz
- B134 (Bundesministerium für Raumordnung, Bauwesen und Städtebau)
- B136 (Bundeskanzleramt, Innerdeutsche Beziehungen)

BStU, BArch (Stasi Records Agency), Berlin
- MfS ZAIG (Zentrale Auswertungs- und Informationsgruppe)

IRS (Scientific Collections of the Leibniz Institute for Research on Sociery and Space), Erkner
- A1 (ISA-Direktor)
- A2 (ISA-Abteilung Information)
- C45 (Nachlass Gottfried Wagner)

NA ČR (National Archive of the Czech Republic), Prague
- Fond 1454 (Polytechna, Unprocessed)

PA AA (Political Archive of the Foreign Federal Office), Berlin

- BAV 126-LIBR (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Botschaft Libreville)
- M 82 (Deutsche Demokratische Republik, Andere Organe und Programme der VN)
- M 83 (Deutsche Demokratische Republik, Sonderorganisationen VN)

UNA (United Nations Archive), New York City

- S-0445 (United Nations Registry Section (1946-1979), Series Social Affairs)
- S-0897 (Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim (1972-1981), Series Administrative Files)
- S-1051 (Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar (1982-1991), Series Specialized Agencies and Subsidiary Bodies

Literature

Alamgir, Alena. "Mobility: Education and Labour". In *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization*, edited by James Mark and Paul Betts, 290–317. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Architektur der DDR Editorial Team, "Prof. Dr. Gerhard Kosel zum 80. Geburtstag". *Architektur der DDR* 38, no. 2 (1989): 51.

Babić, Maja. "The Yugoslav Skopje: Building the Brutalist City, 1970-1990". In *Urban Planning During Socialism - Views from the Periphery*, edited by Jasna Mariotti and Kadri Leetmaa, 66–78. London: Routledge, 2024.

Bernhardt, Christoph. "Planning Urbanization and Urban Growth in the Socialist Period - the Case of East German New Towns, 1945-1989". *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 1 (2005): 104–19.

Betker, Frank. *Einsicht in die Notwendigkeit: Kommunale Stadtplanung in der DDR und nach der Wende (1945-1994)*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005.

Bockmann, Johanna. "Socialist Globalization against Capitalist Neocolonialism: The Economic Ideas behind the New International Economic Order". *Humanity* 6, no. 1 (2015): 109–28.

Burton, Eric. *In Diensten des Afrikanischen Sozialismus - Tansania und die globale Entwicklungsarbeit der beiden Deutschen Staaten, 1961–1990*. Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2021.

———. "Solidarität und ihre Grenzen. Die 'Brigaden der Freundschaft' der DDR". In *Internationale Solidarität. Globales Engagement in der Bundesrepublik und der DDR*, edited by Frank Bösch, Caroline Moine, and Stefanie Senger, 152–85. Göttingen, 2018.

Burton, Eric, James Mark, and Steffi Marung. "Development". In *Socialism Goes Global: The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the Age of Decolonization*, edited by James Mark and Paul Betts, 75–114. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Büschel, Hubertus. *Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2014.

Butter, Andreas. "Showcase and Window to the World: East German Architecture Abroad 1949-1990". *Planning Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (2018): 249–69.

———. "Solidarität in Stein und Stahl? Der Architekturexport der DDR als Hebel einer 'antikolonialistischen' Außenpolitik". In *Koloniale Spuren in den Archiven der Leibniz-Gemeinschaft*, edited by Heinz Peter Brogiato and Matthias Röschner, 128–43. Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2020.

———. "Tropenbaubriefe (Faksimiles) ". In *Architekturexport DDR - Zwischen Sansibar und Halensee*, edited by Andreas Butter and Thomas Flierl, 94–117. Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2023.

Calori, Anna, Anne-Kristin Hartmetz, Bence Kocsev, and Jan Zofka. "Alternative Globalization? Spaces of Economic Interaction between the 'Socialist Camp' and the 'Global South'". In *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War*, edited by Anna Calori, Anne-Kristin Hartmetz, Bence Kocsev, and Jan Zofka, 1–32. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019.

Carmona, Matthew. *Public Places Urban Spaces - The Dimensions of Urban Design*. New York: Routledge, 2021.

Christian, Michel, Sandrine Kott, and Ondřej Matějka. "International Organizations in the Cold War: The Circulation of Experts Beyond the East-West Divide". *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Studia Territorialia* 17, no. 1 (2017): 35–60.

Engel, Barabara. "The Concept of the Socialist City". *City Space Transformation* 19, no. 1 (2022): 663–78.

Engerman, David. "Development Politics and the Cold War". *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 1 (2017): 1–19.

Fenk, Anne-Katrin, Rachel Lee, and Monika Motylińska. "Unlikely Collaborations? Planning Experts from Both Sides of the Iron Curtain and the Making of Abuja". *Comparativ - Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 30, no. 1 (2020): 38–59.

Gräf, Arno. "Die Zusammenarbeit zwischen sozialistischen und kapitalistischen Staaten auf dem Gebiet des Bauwesens". Dissertation, Akademie für Staats- und Rechtswissenschaft der DDR, 1980.

Hong, Young-Sun. *Cold War Germany, the Third World and the Global Humanitarian Regime*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

———. "Through a Glass Darkly: East German Assistance to North Korea and Alternative Narratives of the Cold War". In *Comrades of Color - East Germany in the Cold War World*, edited by Quinn Slobodian, 43–72. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015.

Judt, Matthias. "'Nur für den Dienstgebrauch' - Arbeiten mit Texten einer Deutschen Diktatur". In *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte*, edited by Alf Lüdtke and Peter Becker, 29–38. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1997.

Kalinovsky, Artemy. "Sorting Out the Recent Historiography of Development Assistance: Consolidation and New Directions in the Field". *Journal of Contemporary History* 56, no. 1 (2021): 227–39.

Kosel, Gerhard. "1987 Internationales Jahr - Wohnung für die Obdachlosen". *Architektur der DDR* 33, no. 1 (1984): 4–6.

———. "HABITAT-Konferenz der UNO über menschliche Siedlungen". *Architektur der DDR* 23, no. 5 (1977): 281–88.

———. "Versuch einer Darstellung der leninschen Idee der Entwicklung in architektonisch geprägter Form". *Architektur der DDR* 7, no. 35 (1989): 30–33.

Kott, Sandrine. *Organiser le monde: Une autre histoire de la guerre froide*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2021.

Leskien, Jürgen. *Schreiben über das nahe Fremde*. Hamburg, Münster: LIT Verlag, 1994.

Lopez, Alfred. "Introduction: The (Post) Global South". *Global South* 1, no. 1 (2007): 1–11.

Lorenzini, Sara. *Global Development: A Cold War History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Lüdtke, Alf. "Sprache und Herrschaft in der DDR. Einleitende Überlegungen". In *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte*, edited by Alf Lüdtke and Peter Becker, 11–28. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1997.

Majchrzak, Helge, Dieter Hantzsche, Dieter John, and Friedrich Tobisch. "WPC - Eine Montagebauweise für Entwicklungsländer". *Architektur der DDR* 6, no. 36 (1987): 36–40

Marcks, Jakob. "Self-Help Architecture in the Global Cold War: East German Panel Technology for the ANC, 1982–1992". *Comparativ - Zeitschrift für Globalgeschichte und vergleichende Gesellschaftsforschung* 33, no. 3 (2023): 421–39.

———. '"The Local People Do Not Favour Residing in Apartments": Bauakademie's UN HABITAT Seminars on Housing for the Global South, 1987–1989'. *Střed* 14, no. 2 (2022): 91–111.

Mehos, Donna, and Suzanne Moon. "The Uses of Portability: Circulating Experts in the Technopolitics of Cold War and Decolonization". In *Entangled Geographies - Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*, edited by Gabrielle Hecht, 43–74. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011.

Morrow, Seán. "Dakawa Development Centre: An African National Congress Settlement in Tanzania, 1982-1992". *African Affairs* 97, no. 389 (1998): 497–521.

Morrow, Seán, Brown Maaba, and Loyiso Pulumani. *Education in Exile - SOMAFCO, the ANC School in Tanzania, 1978 to 1992*. Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2004.

Motylińska, Monika, and Phuong Phan."'Not the Usual Way?' On the Involvement of an East German Couple with the Planning of the Ethiopian Capital". *Architecture beyond Europe*, no. 16 (2019).

Müller, Tanja R. *Legacies of Socialist Solidarity: East Germany in Mozambique*. Lexington: Lexington Books, 2014.

Muschik, Eva-Maria. *Building States - The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization*. New York City: Columbia University Press, 2022.

Muzaffar, Muhammad Ijlal. "The Periphery within: Modern Architecture and the Making of the Third World". Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007.

Pasternack, Peer. *50 Jahre Streitfall Halle-Neustadt. Idee und Experiment. Lebensort und Provokation.* Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2014.

Peñalosa, Enrique. "Birth Pangs of the New UN Agency for Human Settlements". *HABITAT International* 3, no. 3/4 (1978): 203–4.

———. "The Need for a New Development Model". *Finance and Development* 13, no. 1 (1976): 6–7.

Polónyi, Charles. *An Architect-Planner on the Peripheries: Case Studies from the Less Developed World*. Budapest: P&C, 1992.

Pugach, Sara. "African Students and the Politics of Race and Gender in the German Democratic Republic, 1957-1990". In *Comrades of Color - East Germany in the Cold War World*, edited by Quinn Slobodian, 131–56. New York: Berghahn, 2015.

Roubal, Petr. "Krize urbanistické moderny v socialismu. Případ plánování Prahy od šedesátých do osmdesátých let 20. století". *Soudobé Dějiny* 24, no. 3 (2017): 335–60.

Sahrendt, Christian. *Kunst als Botschafter einer künstlichen Nation*. Wiesbaden: Steiner-Verlag, 2009.

Schenck, Marcia C. "Negotiating the German Democratic Republic: Angolan Student Migration during the Cold War, 1976-90". *Africa* 89, no. S1 (2019): S144–66.

Schulze, Evamaria. "HABITAT-Seminar am Bauhaus Dessau zum Internationalen Jahr 'Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen'". *Architektur der DDR* 37, no. 2 (1988): 51.

———. "Wohnungen für Alle - Strategisches Ziel der UNO Bis zum Jahr 2000' 38, no. 5 (1989): 7–8.

Schwenkel, Christina. *Building Socialism - The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.

Sin, Dong Sam. "Die Planung des Wiederaufbaus der Städte Hamhung und Hungnam in Nordkorea durch die DAG-Städtebaubrigade der DDR von 1955 - 1962 - Eine städtebaugeschichtliche Abhandlung aus der Sicht eines Zeitzeugen". Dissertation, HafenCity University, 2017.

Sommer, Vítězslav, Matěj Spurný and Jaromír Mrňka. *Řídit socialismus jako firmu: Technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956—1989*. Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2019.

Stanek, Łukasz. *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War*. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2020.

———. "Miastoprojekt Goes Abroad: The Transfer of Architectural Labour from Socialist Poland to Iraq (1958-1989)". *The Journal of Architecture* 22, no. 4 (2017): 768–811.

Steiner, André. *Von Plan zu Plan - Eine Wirtschaftsgeschichte der DDR*. München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004.

Stinsky, Daniel. *International Cooperation in Cold War Europe: The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 1947-64*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

Tichý, Oldřich. "Generální plán metropolitní oblasti Karáčí". *Ročenka Terplan 1973*, 1973.

Trecker, Max. *Red Money for the Global South. East-South Economic Relations in the Cold War*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020.

———. "The 'Grapes of Cooperation'? Bulgarian and East German Plans to Build a Syrian Cement Industry from Scratch". In *Between East and South: Spaces of Interaction in the Globalizing Economy of the Cold War*, edited by Anna Calori, Anne-Kristin Harmetz, Bence Kocsev, James Mark, and Jan Zofka, 33–58. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019.

UN General Assembly. Resolution A/RES/29/3327 Establishment of the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation, 1974.

———. Resolution A/RES/32/162 Institutional Arrangements for International Cooperation in the Field of Human Settlements, 1977.

UN HABITAT. "Declaration of the Vancouver Symposium". *HABITAT International* 1, no. 2 (1976): 133–41.

Unger, Corinna. *International Development - a Postwar History*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

United Nations Commission on Human Settlements. Resolution HS/C/RES/9/12 International Year of Shelter for the Homeless: Guidelines for a Selective Approach, 1986.

van der Heyden, Ulrich, and Anja Schade. "GDR Solidarity with the ANC of South Africa". In *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War "East"*, edited by Lena Dallywater, Chris Saunders, and Helder Adegar Fonseca. Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019.

Wagner, Gottfried. "Aufgaben und Ziele des Internationalen Jahres 'Unterkünfte für die Obdachlosen'". *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Hochschule für Architektur und Bauwesen* 33, no. 3 (1987): 99–101.

Ward, Barbara. "Priorities for the New UN Centre for Human Settlements". *HABITAT International* 3, no. 3/4 (1978): 415–19.

Ward, Stephen V. "Transnational Planners in a Postcolonial World". In *Crossing Borders: International Exchange and Planning Practices*, edited by Patsy Healey and Robert Upton, 47–72. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Westad, Odd Arne. *The Global Cold War*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Wimmelbücker, Ludger. "Architecture and City Planning Projects of the German Democratic Republic in Zanzibar". *The Journal of Architecture* 17, no. 3 (2012): 407–32.

World Bank. *Sector Working Paper Urbanization*. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1972.

Wurbs, Peter. "Aufbau des ANC-Entwicklungszentrums Dakawa in Tansania". *Architektur der DDR* 38, no. 9 (1989): 51–55.

Zarecor, Kimberly. "What Was so Socialist about the Socialist City? Second World Urbanity in Europe". *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 1 (2018): 95–117.

List of Figures