

Review on the thesis of Jakob Marcks

***Urban Development in the Global Cold War. East Germany in UN-HABITAT, 1976-1989***

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Jakob Marcks presents his dissertation in German Studies entitled *Urban Development in the Global Cold War. East Germany in UN-HABITAT, 1976-1989*, prepared at Charles University, Institute of International Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, under the supervision of Professor Václav Šmidrkal. The thesis is written in English and comprises 132 pages of text plus appendices.

The main aim of the thesis is to analyse the role of urban planning as an essential tool for socialist states in the global competition for development. This question is addressed through an analysis of the GDR's participation in the UN-HABITAT programme from 1976 to 1989. The thesis follows a three-stage plan that narrows the focus. The first section, entitled 'Development', traces the history of this concept, focusing on the socialist countries and opening up the chronological framework from before the Second World War and the Cold War to the end of the 1980s. The second section, 'The Global Urban Question', narrows the focus to urban planning, outlining the difficult beginnings of HABITAT in the late 1970s and the way in which the GDR attempted to play a role until 1989. The final section, 'Practice', presents five case studies in an attempt to move beyond the rhetoric to a better understanding of what East Berlin experienced through HABITAT at various levels, in terms of training, concrete projects and communication.

The author's archival research took him to 8 archives in Europe (Germany, Czech Republic), Africa (South Africa) and North America (USA). This international dimension is reflected in the bibliography, which includes books and articles in English, German, Czech and French. The main problem of inaccessibility of the expected archive collection, that of HABITAT, has therefore been overcome by this research work, which aims to bring together different perspectives on the subject. The specificity of the sources studied, in particular the reports of the field of delegations to the supervisory ministries in East Berlin, is clearly identified and demonstrates the author's ability to distance himself from the sources by discussing their limitations. The absence of oral

sources, justified on p.15, could be discussed. Similarly, one point that may be discussed during the defence will be that of the audiovisual archives (photographs, newsreels, etc.) which could have constituted a set of complementary sources - in addition to the three photographs published in the thesis.

The introduction provides an understanding of the approach based on a historiography linked primarily to the history of development and the Global Cold War, urban planning and East Berlin's involvement in the Global South. The question of expertise, from a historical perspective, would have deserved to be more present in the bibliography and in the state of the art, in order to complete an already rich and nuanced panorama. The author explains his approach, which is institutional rather than project-based, in order to measure the extent to which urban planning remained an important political and economic instrument during the Cold War. The focus on the GDR is explained by the leading and coordinating role East Berlin played for the socialist countries within HABITAT. The period studied covers Late Socialism and the 'lost decade' of the 1980s, and follows East Berlin's ability or otherwise to adapt to a changing economic and political situation.

The first section provides a general overview of the emergence of the concept of development and the different interpretations that scholars have offered. It was important to go back before the period at the centre of the thesis, and the developments on the interwar period and the 1950s and 1960s are welcome. We would have liked the author to explore more deeply the question of the specificity of the USSR and the socialist countries on this issue. For example, the role of Central and Eastern European intellectuals is mentioned (p. 24), but too briefly. The development of the arguments used in the East ('anti-colonial solidarity', 'alliances between the peripheries', etc.) is clearly and interestingly described. The increased emphasis on business interests is well described - and will be analysed again later in the thesis. The issue of HABITAT remains at the heart of this section, showing in particular that it was one of the NIEO's areas of discussion.

The second section describes the long and difficult creation of HABITAT, which seems to have seen the light of day against all odds. Here we would have liked to understand better the reasons for the involvement of the Colombian Enrique Peñalosa, who seems to have played such a decisive role. It is interesting to see the different logics at work and the many disagreements within the countries of the Global South and the 'Eastern bloc'. This is followed by an analysis of the way in which East German participation in HABITAT was established and developed. Two phases are clearly identified, linked to the personalities of the two East German delegates, Gerhard Kosel until 1984 and Gottfried Wagner thereafter. Again, it would have been useful to develop the career of the latter in particular. Even in an institutional history, the role of individuals must be defined. The author stresses the inadequacy of the information found in the archives - hypotheses could have been put forward to explain this or that change in policy and personnel. He concludes that in the 13 years between the 1976 Vancouver Conference

and 1989, participation in HABITAT had little concrete impact and was primarily a matter of political positions and rhetoric.

The final section, however, offers five examples of actions taken by the GDR in connection with HABITAT to counter the idea that participation had no effect: speeches and political statements without any real concrete commitment; attempts to reform the way in which experts in the fields of architecture and urban planning worked and were trained in the GDR; promotion of the Wall Panel Column system in Tanzania to accommodate South African refugees; organisation of three annual HABITAT seminars in Berlin and Dessau from 1987 to 1989. Although the archives used emphasise the East German (see West German) point of view, space is also given to the perspective of the partners - particularly on the subject of the seminars (p. 126). These passages are particularly interesting in terms of the institutional approach and international solidarity in practice, with all its limitations.

The conclusion is mainly a summary of the three sections, and it is regrettable that the author does not present a possible opening of his work by placing it in a broader reflection that would invite further research.

This concise dissertation, which is a pleasure to read, covers a new and very interesting chapter in the history of the GDR, focusing on issues of development, urban planning and international circulation. Naturally, it invites discussion and, above all, further exploration of many of the points raised in its pages - particularly around the notion of expertise, but also dissension within the countries of Eastern Europe and the emerging chronology of the 'lost decade'.

I therefore strongly recommend this dissertation for defence.

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Prof. Caroline Moine

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