

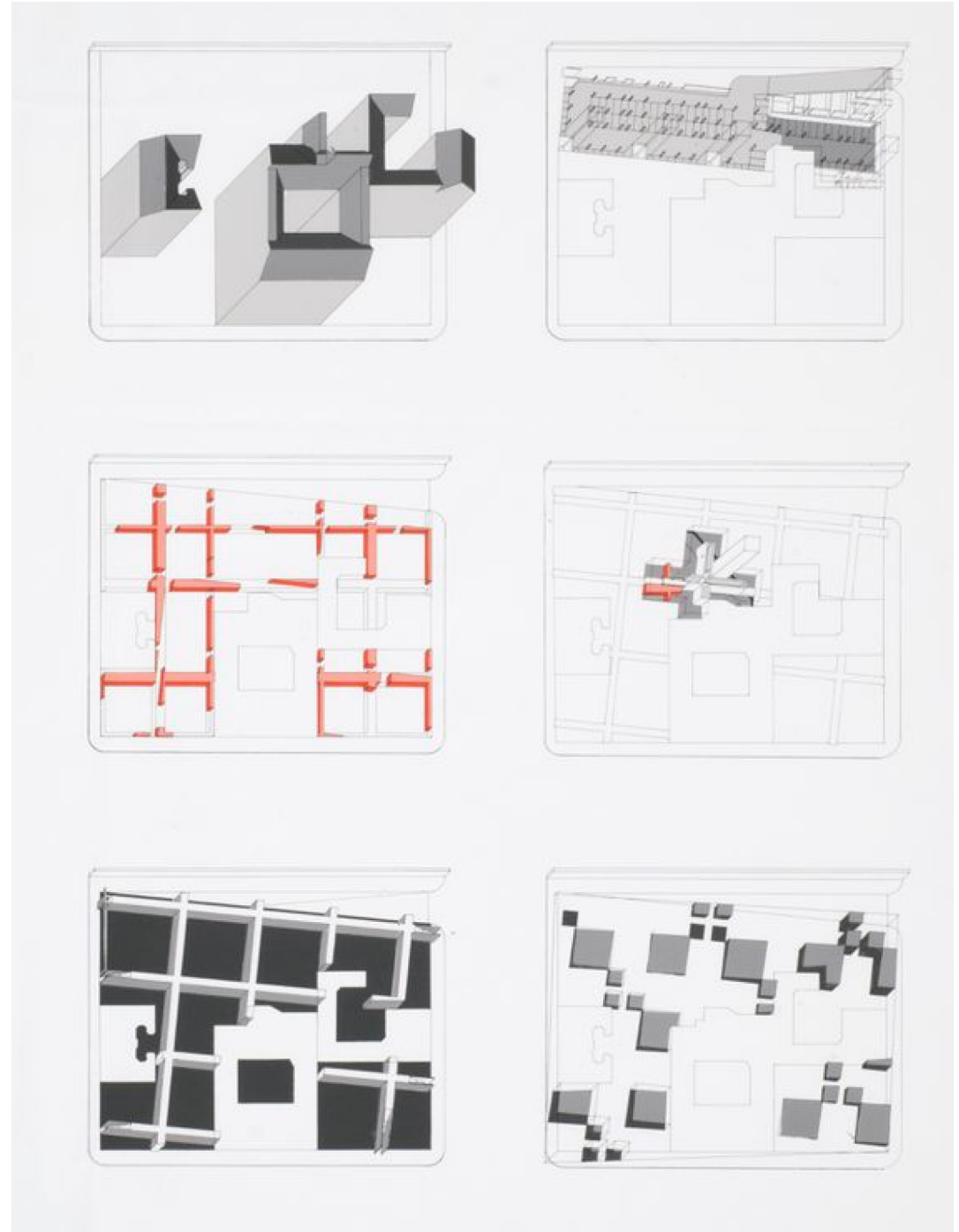
# Case Study of Social Housing in Berlin

By Graham Moitoso and Jenni Wilson  
For Fall 2021 ARCH 5115:  
Anti Displacement Studio @  
Northeastern University (Prof. Lily Song)



Spreefeld

Source: [https://www.archdaily.com/587590/coop-housing-project-at-the-river-spreefeld-carpaneto-architekten-fatkoehl-architekten-bararchitekten/54b73461e58ee5db00002e-section?next\\_project-no](https://www.archdaily.com/587590/coop-housing-project-at-the-river-spreefeld-carpaneto-architekten-fatkoehl-architekten-bararchitekten/54b73461e58ee5db00002e-section?next_project-no)



Source: <https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/archives/380476/peter-eisenman-fonds/387751/projects/393377/lba>

# Berlin: A History & Tradition of Social Housing (1920s)

(01)



**Hufeisensiedlung**  
Bruno Taut  
1925

(02)



**Weissenhofsiedlung**  
Le Corbusier  
1925

(03)



**Großsiedlung Siemensstadt**  
Walter Gropius  
1929

**Question:** how to satisfy the most essential needs of the human being, for a healthy, simple, beautiful life and lifestyle.

Incorporation of varying colors, architectural details, and community based spaces: **emphasis on individuality, amidst the collective.**

Supported by the Deutscher Werkbund: a collective, state-funded initiative for the betterment of German people and society through progressive, functional, and accessible design solutions.



1939-1945

Admish the aftermath of the Second World War, around 2.3 million housing units were deemed as **destroyed** or **"permanently uninhabitable"**

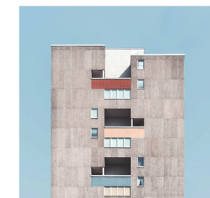


Attempt to **rebuild** and **reconcile** the city: its citizens and its own identity amidst the destruction, trauma, and immeasurable loss (socially, physically, and emotionally).



1950

Clear efforts of **publicly funded** support for citizens through housing efforts and collaborative-based initiatives. i.e. Building Savings Associations (Bausparkassen), The First Housing Act of 1950

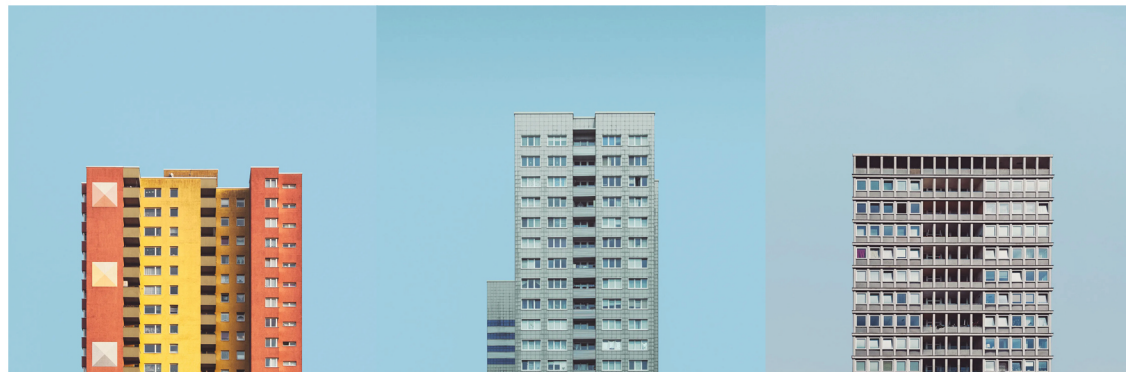


1956

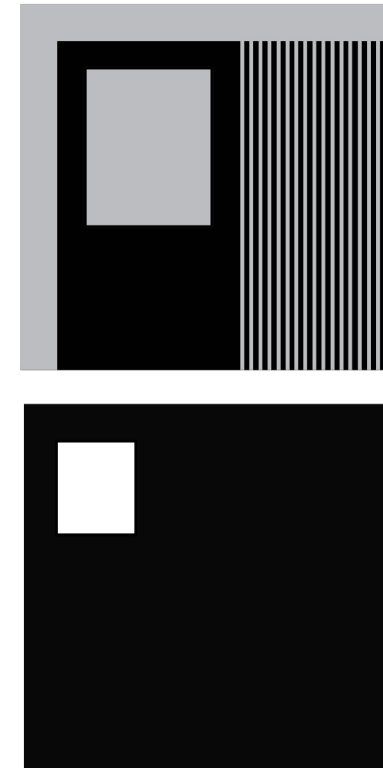
German government **halved** housing shortage (beginning with ~ 10 million refugees)

# HISTORICAL CHALLENGE: How to rebuild?

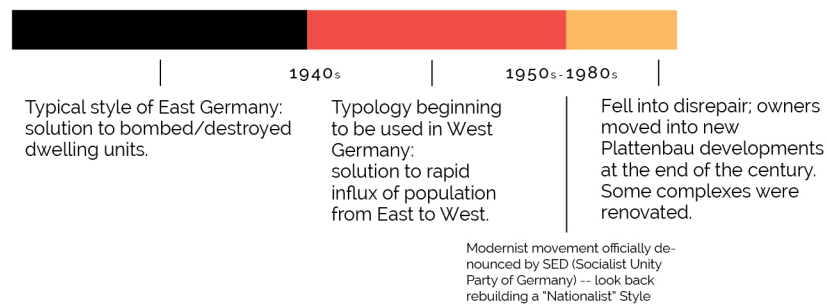
## SOLUTION: Plattenbau typology



Source: <https://www.wired.com/2016/03/stacked-malte-brandenburg/>



### PLATTENBAU:



Buildings constructed of large, prefabricated concrete slabs, largely found in areas vastly destroyed by war bombing/activity

### CULTURAL LOSS:

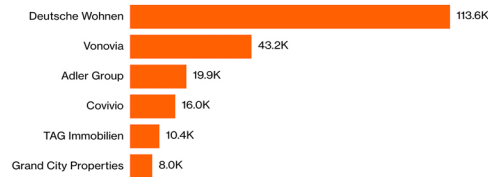
No longer seen as valuable or desirable – cheaply made, rapidly deteriorating, lack of amenities (many without hot water or private bathrooms for units).

Plattenbau disinvestment leads to decreasing population of Berlin (vacancy rate in the millions!) which leads to dereliction.

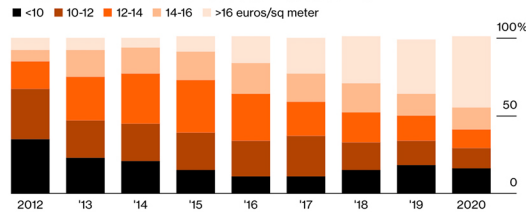
QUESTION: Are these complexes effective spaces to activate contemporary social housing -- or are they too far gone? Would this trigger trauma for older residents who remember war times?

# CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES:

**Housing Stock in Question**  
Companies that own more than 3,000 units



**Costly New Builds**  
Cheaper recently built apartments are becoming less common



Source: empirica Preisdatenbank (Based on: Value Marktdatenbank)

Source: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-09-23/berlin-referendum-targets-city-s-corporate-landlords>.

Though the government is instituting some policies to control rising rent costs, the corporate landlords have grown powerful enough to manipulate and abuse these policies to continue to exploit tenants – for example, in neighborhoods that have rent caps based on the average rents of surrounding properties, the landlords can incrementally increase values at once, effectively pricing long-time residents out of areas socially and culturally significant to them.

## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE #1

# RENTS AND COSTS OF LIVING IN BERLIN ARE SKYROCKETING AND THE CITY'S POPULATION IS RAPIDLY INCREASING

## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE #2

# THE CITY OF BERLIN WAS FORCED TO SELL SOME GOVERNMENT-OWNED PUBLIC HOUSING UNITS IN THE 2000S ECONOMIC CRISIS

## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE #3

# NEW HOUSING BEING BUILT IS OFTEN PRIVATELY OWNED AND DOES NOT QUALIFY FOR 21ST CENTURY RENT CAP POLICIES

## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE #4

# MEGA-CORPORATE LANDLORDS OWN THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE HOUSING STOCK IN CONTEMPORARY BERLIN, SUCCESSFULLY CONTROLLING THE CITY'S RENTAL MARKET

**Berlin is a renters' market: 80% of city residents are tenants**

**1989:** Post wall-fall, Berlin is seen as "reborn" with an influx of art and urban culture, especially with a **LOW COST OF LIVING** compared to other European capitals.

**2000s:** The cost of living still low, but fuel is being added to the fire and Berlin is now seen as desirable.

**2010s:** 40,000 people move to the city every year, causing rents to more than double in certain neighborhoods (for example, the Kottbusser Tor neighborhood, a large Turkish cultural area which was redeveloped at the end of the twentieth century, has seen an 86% rent increase in the 2010s).

2001: 5% of all city apartments are vacant;  
2017: only 1% of units are vacant

**CONSTITUTIONAL POLICY:**

Article 15 of the German Constitution allows the government to buy out private entities for public good.

**DEVELOPING POLICY:**

The city states that a neighborhood's average rent dictates individual property rent – an individual property's rent cannot rise more than 10% above the running neighborhood average.

**2012-2015 POLICY:**

The Alliance for Social Housing Policy and Affordable Rent, in collaboration with the Senate Departments for Urban Development and Finance, observes the importance of keeping the "Berlin mixture" of different social, cultural and economic backgrounds.

**NOVEMBER 2015 POLICY:**

A new Berlin Senate ruling declares that the government would acquire 30,000 new housing units over the next ten years through purchase from existing companies or new construction efforts.



**BUT...**

Some local government officials argue that current expropriation social housing initiatives would not fall under this article. Also, the article has **NEVER BEEN USED**.

**BUT...**

Corporations have grown large enough to manipulate scales because certain companies own so much of the stock and have the ability to collaborate with others.

**BUT...**

Direct goals include refurbishing existing buildings for energy efficiency and climate protection and adapting building stock to demographic changes, directly raising costs of building stock\*.

**BUT...**

Homes built new construction after 2018 rulings are **NOT** subject to rent controls and the rate of affordable unit construction has decreased in 2021.

# SEPTEMBER 2021

## REFERENDUM

### GOALS/INTENTIONS:

City bought back almost 15,000 apartments for about **2.46 billion** euros from Vonovia and Deutsche Wohnen  
= ~ 10% of the city housing stock

Gov. now owns about **355,000** apartments throughout the city in the name of affordable housing - about 1/5 of the 1.67 million rental units in Berlin

Financed through a **coalition** of Social Democrats, Greens and Die Linke

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"Berlin's wealth has gone on a long march eastwards. Historically, the richest parts of the city were in Berlin's far west, in villa districts abutting forests and a beautiful string of lakes. Nowadays, these neighborhoods are increasingly looking like a pretty good deal... it's right in the center of East Berlin, meanwhile, that rents have truly shot up..."

- 1) Provide affordable housing
- 2) Ensure democratic self-governance
- 3) Enforce anti-discriminatory policies
- 4) Build new, equitable housing

#### Ecological/Environmental Goals:

- 1) Renewable, climate-neutral resource used (instead of cement/steel/plastic)
- 2) Switching to solar, thermal, geothermal or biomass for electricity/heating
- 3) Building new complexes with courtyards, using communicable kitchens/dining halls, downsizing units

## Bottom-Up Movement:

Campaign organized collection team network across ALL BOROUGHES OF CITY (neighborhood status not important)

- 1) Organized demonstrations, seed-and-support methods (supporting other anti-corporate landlord initiatives)
- 2) App created to enter signatures
- 3) Special out of inner-city strategy: door-knocking campaigns, media campaign with productions/social media alternatives, admiration from press



Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/jan/08/costs-berlin-rent-housing-subway-map>

"The referendum marks a shift from the free-market model and toward one that views affordable housing as a **human right**. Public ownership of units would offer more affordable housing options. The proposal's approval also shows Berliners are interested in more drastic steps to cool the market than denser zoning or more building on the city's outskirts."

<https://www.businessinsider.com/housing-market-rental-prices-berlin-referendum-landlords-public-apartments-crisis-2021-9>

# CASE STUDY:

## CO-HOUSING BERLIN

FOUNDED BY:  
MICHAEL LAFOND

### Example: **Spreefeld**

(Located on the Spree River, downtown)

Comprised of 64 units with a common kitchen, outdoor space, veggie gardens, offices, workshops, daycare

- Inspired by Austrian/Swiss/Scandinavian models
- Former industrial space characteristic of East Berlin, ravaged by war and home to **community housing** (squatter occupation). The land was acquired in 2008 by LaFond.
- Successful example of self organized housing projects in the downtown area in the city (2008) before the city was rapidly gentrified in the 2010s.

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"Self-organization goes beyond common ideas of "participation," emphasizing bottom-up, locally-initiated processes through which people express themselves directly and develop community, gaining capacities and power for local structures such as housing projects."

"Self-organized, community-led housing for all. Experimental dwelling forms—Co-Housing Cultures—are entering the mainstream. But to what extent are they accessible and affordable for all, including people with more or less money, with or without refugee experience, with or without disabilities? Collaborative, social housing initiatives are already developing such diversifying, sustainable neighborhoods, and are not only supported by civil society, but also increasingly by apartment providers such as cooperatives." - Michael LaFond



Source: [https://www.archdaily.com/587590/coop-housing-project-at-the-river-spreefeld-carpaneto-architekten-fatkoehl-architekten-bararchitekten/54b73461e58ecee5db00002e-section?next\\_project-no](https://www.archdaily.com/587590/coop-housing-project-at-the-river-spreefeld-carpaneto-architekten-fatkoehl-architekten-bararchitekten/54b73461e58ecee5db00002e-section?next_project-no)



# CO-HOUSING BERLIN:

Successful example of self organized housing projects in the downtown area in the city (2008) before the city was rapidly gentrified in the 2010s.



SECTION A



Activists squatted in abandoned Berlin buildings to prevent demolition and live at affordable costs

Government made an agreement with the squatters to purchase the properties from absentee owners

Spaces refurbished by government and owners, serving as public housing quotas

Helps with affordability; less expensive to develop than to build anew

BARarchitekten, Carpaneto Architekten, Fatkoehl Architekten

Source (all photos): [https://www.archdaily.com/587590/coop-housing-project-at-the-river-spreefeld-carpaneto-architekten-fatkoehl-architekten-bararchitekten/54b73461e58ecee5db00002e-section?next\\_project-no](https://www.archdaily.com/587590/coop-housing-project-at-the-river-spreefeld-carpaneto-architekten-fatkoehl-architekten-bararchitekten/54b73461e58ecee5db00002e-section?next_project-no)



## Biggest challenges for American/European cities...

- Being apart of the competitive world: Berlin plagued by more investment companies/funds that discovered Berlin 10-15 years ago as an undervalued, disinvested place
  - Investors poured money into the city, increasing land values AND making it difficult or impossible for co-housing or social housing across the board.
- Challenging to make affordable housing now unless its subsidized.

## Urban possibilities...

- Working with housing activists/real estate experts to change policy.
- Recognizing that most major cities have a housing crisis -- and that we must consider **housing** to be a **right**, rather than a commodity.
- Gaining support from the government and institutions for other community land trust projects.
- **See the need to have stronger organizations/initiatives to develop and get the necessary support and solidarity to get access to (affordable) land > working with other community-based organizations to push for change.**
- Continue to support community housing in the face of corporate landlords (e.g. women and LGBT people living in Berlin's Leibig34 who were evicted due to their landlord ending their lease, displacing many and contributing to discriminatory housing/moving practices).

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