

Report to atelier d'architecture autogérée

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Introduction

R-URBAN, in my understanding, is an outstanding progression of the work done by AAA in the last years. It substantially develops further projects like Eco-BOX or 56 – both in Paris, in France as well as in international, widely recognized participatory design projects – that were theorized and practiced with the intention to function as incubators towards a truly sustainable (city- and region-wide) development and a related hands-on urbanism, while emphasizing (lived-in) democracy, economical and thus social justice. Additionally, and proven by my 2011 and 2012 visits of the R-URBAN sites and their context in Colombes and the inspirational thoughts that I brought back to Berlin, the work of AAA is generally stimulating in a mind-blowing manner through its border-crossing, network-building emphasis, and the related publications and public events, and its outreach to the local and national, and the European level.

However, even though I understand myself as a similar-minded and engaged activist-architect-builder-scientist, my Berlin life and my present ISPARA work, as well as my assistant professorship at the TU, make things look different. Anyway, and thus in general: Berlin is different from Paris, in many respects.

In terms of my R-URBAN research topic, namely to communicate, reflect, and conclude on the housing part of R-URBAN – “EcoHab” – but it is needed to be said that the biggest portion of the Berlin housing stock is not older than 150 years. The Berlin inner-city districts, which house about a third of the population (around 1,2 million people) are mostly made up by so-called Wilhelminian apartment houses, which were mainly built by private investors around the turn of the 19th century and were, most of all, homes of the working class. And, as Berlin is not doing so well economically, it is still predominantly a tenant city (about 90% of the Berlin people rent their homes).

Even though there is almost no working class anymore, it is the growing number of precarious and thus, most of all, poorly paid jobs that feed the people who increasingly work in the growing service, creative and/or academic sectors and, in parallel, are inventing life again and again – in often promising ways. In other words: the Berlin upper-class historically was and still is of minor meaning regarding the city's past, present and future – hopefully. Instead, the economically-stressed but political and thus societal progressive people predominantly made and make the city.

In terms of planning and building, simply said: no public or private masterplan that imagined an upside-down reshaping of the city was realized fully. The various German societal dramas in the 20th century and the related changes in politics/economics left unfinished almost all big Berlin plans, and thus made way for fresh-minded actors and concepts, again and again.

In recent times (this is to say in the last 40-ish years) the resulting huge number of vacant spaces became places of diverse cultures of spatial appropriation. Retrospectively understood, nowadays so-called “urban pioneering” has become a driving force in spatial and thus societal inventions, especially in the inner-city districts – another, and crucial difference comparing Berlin and Paris. In other words: the availability of space and the often resulting place-making by the means of participation, self-empowerment and management etc., let uncounted numbers of likewise minded design/build projects come along. Besides multiple locations for self-organized and self-governed social, educational and cultural etc. activities, the consequence in terms of housing was and it is the development of quite a number of alternative, self-determined and common oriented housing projects (see chapter 3). This is in fact one of the fields I am intensively engaged in since the early 1990s; and this is where my work and AAA’s work meet.

The main resulting question at this point of research seems to be: how far could my (Berlin, inner-city) theories and practices, which I have intensively experienced to this day,¹ be fruitful for the R-URBAN EcoHab project.

A preliminary conclusion: alternative housing, as one way to talk about housing that is neither public nor private but done in a self-determined common manner, unfolds best if it is understood, discussed, planned and built, and lived-in within a larger framework – philosophically, psychologically, and physically. To follow such an emphasis seems to be crucial for R-URBAN as such. By building EcoHab in Colombes, which is in the outskirts of Paris, it makes even more sense than if this had happened in a central neighborhood in Paris. At least these are my assumptions today, so let’s see how much they will change over the course of implementing R-URBAN as a whole.

In other words: amongst the many aspects I wish to share, discuss, and develop further in the next months, to implement the R-URBAN concept in Colombes is one of the major points of interest from my Berlin point of view. This is because in the German capital alternative housing projects predominantly did and do take place in inner-city districts; however, the majority of the population – two thirds of the population (about 2,4 million people) – lives in the outer districts, fairly far away from the neighborhoods of Berlin where tourists and/or the immigrating “creative classes” are increasingly colonizing. Besides the emerging gentrification processes, the housing question in Berlin is something impossible to solve in the inner-city.

Environmental and, thus, political/economical challenges alone will force us to (re-)learn and especially (re-)invent a lived-in democracy, as well as new forms of economical and social justice. In parallel, a truly sustainable development of the city and the region and related hands-on urbanism needs to become self-evident, on the local as well as on the global levels – what we achieve in Berlin may support/feed Paris, and what is achieved in Paris may support/feed Berlin...

As a start, the following text will:

1. point out my impressions and (preliminary) understandings;
2. will raise some questions, which I took home with me and thought about since my Colombes visits in 2011 and 2012;

¹ see Kastanienallee 77, K 77, and others in the list of publication

3. and will conclude with some ideas for the R-URBAN EcoHab – most of all based on my theoretical and practical knowledge about Berlin’s (inner-city) history and present of self-determined and commonly oriented housing cultures. In doing so I will also point out to some actors/projects in other parts of Europe that may as well, hopefully, stimulate the R-URBAN EcoHab conversations and developments yet to come.

1. Impressions and (preliminary) understandings

I have so far visited the R-URBAN sites and their context in Colombes twice.

First Trip

In 2011, we – AAA and myself – did “only” walk by some potential R-URBAN sites in Colombes, and talked about what could happen in the neighborhood by implementing the R-URBAN concept. Passing-by some of the possible locations – for neighborhood gardening and urban agriculture (AgroCité), for re- and up-cycling work (RecycLab), for self-determined and commonly oriented housing (EcoHab) – I got the impression that the area had some problems but, at the same time, was a kind of well lived-in neighborhood with quite some potential.

Small, medium, and big housing schemes seem to function quite well as homes for various ways of living, be it in privately-owned buildings or in (publicly owned?) rental apartment blocks. The economical diversity (ranging from lower- to lower-middle class, it seemed) seems to be reflected by the levels of maintenance – be it not-so-well-kept or well-kept façades or the amount of investment put into the open spaces. Single families are surrounded by more or less well-kept gardens, while the bigger apartment blocks are rather situated mainly within simple-minded (and not so well maintained) lawn-bushes-tree arrangements with standardized places for children to play and some areas for sports activities. However, overall I remember the neighborhood as a whole as a built environment with lots of green in-between.

And, even though one may not be able to buy everything one needs or wishes for, I remember various shops along the major neighborhood-roads, especially at the near-by crossroads. And – very importantly – the sites that AAA showed me as potential R-URBAN locations are in walkable/bikeable distance from each other, and a couple of minutes away one finds the (local) train station where public transport regularly connects the area to downtown Paris (in about 15 minutes) or, in the other direction, to other suburban towns.

A strange but charming spatial aspect of the neighborhood, I found, was the expressway that seemed to cut off this Colombes area from the outer boroughs. Related to that, I asked myself how far the site is to the Seine river, and to what extent are its riverbanks accessible. Furthermore, how far is it to the country side, also regarding the exchanges with farmers and other rural producers?

However, in sum I could see the neighborhood becoming the area of implementation for the R-URBAN concept.

Second Trip

In 2012 AAA took me to the first site of spatializing R-URBAN – the one where the AgroCité was being realized. It seemed more than convincing to start implementing the R-URBAN concept with the means of neighborhood gardening and urban agriculture. I guess, almost every (world-)citizen has an immediate idea about the edible and the forthcoming culture of drinks and food, and how essential it is to care about it, how meaningful and joyful it can be to not only have a say but a hand involved in this matter. Thus, understanding that food isn't only an individual but a common good, AgroCité might stimulate exchange on the matter between people, be it neighbors or schoolmates or colleagues. To nurture, to harvest, to store, to process, and to drink and eat adds to the potential of such existential private, as well as public, experiences, insights and actions.

We also visited the future site for the re- and up-cycling workshop, RecycLab. The spot in a dead-end road seems to be perfect; the location at the corner of a major neighborhood-road, the adjacent corner-bistro as well as the adjacent sports-field seem to be able to support the projects' visibility and related promotion. Also, the big trees on both sides of the road will not only make it have a beautiful roof (providing shade in hot summers) but will stage the RecycLab in a beautiful way. The plan to get rid of some parking and instead to bring in moveable spaces for storage of recycling materials as well as for workshops etc. is a consequential thought – the gesture is more than important as it might tell a story about peak oil etc. and the societal conclusions that need to follow.

I remember the future site of the alternative housing part (EcoHab) as being the closest to the local train station. This seems to make sense insofar as one can guess that some of its future inhabitants might want/need to keep their jobs in the inner city, and also might like to continue to be close to down-town Paris for other (urban) wishes and needs. The potential EcoHab location, as I remember it, seemed a bit squeezed-in between the neighboring lots, and fairly invisible for passers-by, the public. However, there might be thoughts about how to work with this matter by the means of programming and designing the space. In terms of the open spaces in general, the site seemed to be full of green “stuff” and, regarding its approximate length (almost reaching to the street at the back of the lot), made one to imagine a sort of big garden where not only the future inhabitants, but also the projects' guests and visitors might co-operate fruitfully. However, as we didn't enter the site, it is hard to say how things are and how they could be. In consequence, I will develop further my thoughts about the EcoHab on the following pages rather theoretically.

2. Some questions and thoughts

General

First of all, in my understanding, housing is a human right! In consequence, I imagine the EcoHab as a lived-in “showcase” to not only argue but to become a lived-in example regarding this elemental concern. In doing so, R-URBAN would contribute to a debate that is going on for almost forever (for example, the United Nations is promoting housing as a human right again and again, but politics/economics are predominantly listening and not acting). In this sense, the EcoHab would add to diverse existing but urgently needed multiples of such practices, which should prove the possibilities to overcome capitalism regarding our “second skin”.

Or, to put in other words: at least since the beginning of the industrial age, housing has been one of the most urgent questions of humankind. For example Friedrich Engels' book, "The Housing Question", is only one of numerous documents that tell about the related stories and fights of and against this elemental injustice in space – a major humanitarian burden, a "war" that we still urgently need to be overcome.

Be it housing programs in the so-called socialist States or the so-called welfare states in the 20th century, all of them didn't work out – in the end. Why? This would be another paper, at the very least. However, at this moment I would like to point out to the following: housing, in my understanding, is THE architectural programme/typology that can be read as our second skin. As such, it stands as the most intimate place in our lives. It is there that our children are born and our beloved ones die (most of the times). It is there that our bodies, minds, and souls recover and grow "overnight". It is there that we find our spaces of retreat within our everyday lives. It is there that we reflect, that we read, write, and talk about our lives, where we follow our passions – be it in the garden, in doing knitting, woodwork or so, where we listen to our music, deal with (family) photos or videos, and so on. It is there that we cook, drink and eat, where we welcome our parents, friends or colleagues. And it is thus our households that add to a societal whole, what our public lives are based upon and are nurtured from, again and again.

Sure, times are changing. Increasingly, at least within "developed" (western) societies, the nuclear family isn't the dominant way of living anymore. Husbands and wives divorce, or they do not marry at all... However, partners change again and again and patchwork families make children travel from one house to the other, day by day. Parallel single households as well as double-income-no-kid couples, and homes that are shared with friends and/or colleagues become meaningful patterns of live. In consequence, the inner-city neighbourhoods and its related social, cultural and commercial spaces can be understood as places to not only satisfy the increasing longing for a public life but, even more, as places to substitute the increasing losses of family-life and thus as places to reach-out for a sense of community – community in this case being understood as a societal envelope regarding the increasing longing for a second home, a longing for spaces because private life can't be experienced fully at home anymore.

How to tackle this means, and the housing question as such, nowadays and in the future?

A general thought: even though, since the beginning of the 20th century, unnumbered public and private non-profit housing associations around the world, amongst others, contributed hugely to the matter of housing-for-all, quite a few – and especially big-scale housing-projects – became spaces of major physical and metaphysical crisis.

One of the main misunderstandings seems to be that quite a few of such public and private non-profit housing schemes were made for too big a number of people. This might not be true for the times when housing the poor, namely the working class, was the major concern. However, given the contemporary societal developments in the (western) developed societies (see above), the big housing schemes from back then seem to not work anymore if we look at the current and upcoming ways of living (there is not one housing question anymore but a multitude of challenges to work on). And it is not only the lack of public resources to positively reactivate these systems or the changing patterns of living that make such schemes stay in the books. It is also that people increasingly want to have a say. The schemes then were systems wherein a few governed many. The collective and egalitarian housings-for-all became top-down machines, and the individual left the stage of the commons.

Consequently, the housing questions of today and tomorrow need to be understood in conjunction with the challenges regarding the means of diversification and participation. Basically, the housing questions we face need to be addressed in conjunction with the question of how to re-invent our democracies of today and tomorrow. But how to make people take action in the frame of increasing societal shifts and the resulting economical divides? How to productively negotiate and manage a universal need so that the individual can find him/herself while sharing with others? What are the scales to address the questions of equality and collectivity in housing and thus spatial democracy and justice? It seems impossible to do so on the global nor on the national scale. Nonetheless, the future of housing is about how to exactly re-practice these means in space.

The societal consensus about the commons has disappeared... Even though this seems to be a major burden, at least since the global economical crisis in 2007/2008 and its continuation until today, and facing an increasing scepticism, critic and fight against the outcomes of neoliberalism, privatization and speculation with the earth and our common goods, the societal questions seem to be of increasing re-interest. In other words: the growing number of debates about the commons may indicate an upcoming interest to re-engage along the values and related potentials that we share. And if one thinks twice, it seems that we can merge what we can contribute individuals without losing ourselves to the collective and vice-versa; what the collective can and can't do for the well-being of the private and public: the challenging societal questions seem to have become a major concern, a consensual concern, again.

The EcoHab seems to point out to all what has been said. It promises an related new model of living and being. However, in the following I would like to share some thoughts regarding how people could adapt to the concept, as far as I understand it.

3. (Alternative) Housing politics and economics

Generally, I think, EcoHab participants (and later on inhabitants), need to be interested in the housing question as such and, further, in how the project relates to the bigger picture.

This said, but also in terms of the life in the house, how will the project be legally and economically realised? Should it be organized as a building group (a group of private developers/owners, a market-rate co-op), or as a limited- or no-equity co-op?² Or should it be part of a public housing association?

Who will finance the project? Private resources only? Public resources only? Or a mix of both? And, if funded by others, what kind of funding institutions, what kind of private and/or public programs will be helpful and in what way? What are the legal and economical

² Market-rate and limited-equity co-ops: There are two main types of housing co-operative financing methods, market rate and limited equity.

“With market rate, the share price is allowed to rise on the open market and shareholders may sell at whatever price the market will bear when they want to move out. In many ways market rate is thus similar financially to owning a condominium, with the difference being that often the co-op may carry a mortgage, resulting in a much higher monthly fee paid to the co-op than would be so in a condominium. The purchase price of a comparable unit in the co-op is typically much lower, however.

With limited equity, the co-op has rules regarding pricing of shares when sold. The idea behind limited equity is to maintain affordable housing. A sub-set of the limited equity model is the no-equity model, which looks very much like renting, with a very low purchase price (comparable to a rental security deposit) and a monthly fee in lieu of rent. When selling, all that is re-couped is that very low purchase price.”
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housing_cooperative)

consequences? To what extent will the related legal and economical program/organization influence the life in the house?

I guess it is crucial to be clear about this as early as possible. Knowing from West-Berlin squats that became legalized and renovated in 1980s and did so as market-rate co-ops, I would like to point out that quite a number of them became micro-capitalists by making a fortune with the flats they once occupied for the greater good. Thus EcoHab politics and economics should be discussed thoroughly and decided on at the very beginning with the people who will move into the project. Even though the means of private ownership might be necessary to realize the project, it should at least be clear from the beginning that the means of equality and collectivity will be limited, and thus nobody will be disenchanted afterwards (hopefully). Of course, a limited- or no-equity co-op would contribute very differently and more radically to everything that has been said and might be crucial for R-URBAN as a whole.

4. House and Garden. *Number of participants, and matters of mutual trust.*

As far as I remember, the envisioned number of inhabitants is around 10. I also remember a partitioning of the house in apartments is planned – namely that a commune-like way of living is not planned. If so, how to imagine matters of mutual trust to be developed between inhabitants and the other users?

I am pointing out to these questions, based on my experience and knowledge, because a small number of people could become too intimate with one another – in the sense of knowing about not only the positive but also the negative characters of the others, and this could become a problem.

In other words: sharing a house is a delicate matter. Having a life under one roof bears the potential of developing mutual trust but also of stressing one another about peanuts.

A bigger number of people living under one roof, let's say about 20 adults and some kids, could make the participants see each other almost every day and thus could support the development of mutual trust; but with the size of a crowd one can't be intimate to everybody, and this can in fact be a fortune.

Or, if the number of inhabitants should be small, others would need to intervene in regular but sensible ways, and they should have a strong say and according responsibility as well.

What is your say?

How to become a first-hand participant, and how to become a later-on participant? Will future inhabitants be involved from the very start of the project? Or at what level will they join? What kind of say and related responsibility will they have in the becoming as well as in the future development of the project?

As EcoHab is about housing, and as housing can be understood as being our second skin, to involve the future inhabitants from the very start could be crucial. The later one gets involved in whatever project, the bigger is the risk/danger that questions of who has and who hasn't a say are decided about already.

On the other hand: If the future inhabitants will be involved from the very start, how to make sure that others (joining the project later-on), be it as later-on incoming inhabitants or as other minded users, will be welcomed?

To create a somehow equal powerplay and according agreements/structures/ responsibilities between early-on EcoHab inhabitants and R-URBAN as a whole might be a way to go. Additionally, it could be helpful to include third (supervising) parties into the matter.

Paperwork.

Related to the above: The less paperwork (contracts etc.) one likes to generate in doing sth. together the more one needs to organize the development of mutual trust.

Besides my thoughts about the number of inhabitants and when and how they have a say and according responsibilities, one thing to avoid or at least to keep paperwork small is to think about the means of sharing ideals and ideas. Also it could be worth to think about the means of initiation – what form of initiation could help form the EcoHab along the means of equality and collectivity?

However, a lot of projects I know about haven't experienced any kind of initiation but are kind of well working alternative driven housing projects – by trend, they have accumulated a lot of paperwork regulating the way live under one roof.

In sum: The matter of paperwork etc. should be discussed and decided upon thus it is crucial to get clear what kind of relationships the project shall be based upon and work along, and how they shall be known and be followed by the participants.

Ways of live.

How far that would be mixed? (private/public; live/work).

If EcoHab is about to test to live and work within the same concept: this would be kind of extrem or at least would be exceptional, and the participants would have to be intentionally minded; they would need to agree that EcoHab isn't about housing but about to live in a laboratory.

So, maybe, such an understanding would be too much, to live and work in the same space, day by day, especially if it shall be a small group who is running the project. Instead, one could see EcoHab as a space to share a collective way of sharing ideals and ideas but to live and/or work together only once and a while, and thus to establish collectivity by the means of "chance", "play" and "fun", not as a must.

Related, if some EcoHab inhabitants would participate in the AgroCité and/or the RecycLab, and beyond (in the neighbourhood as well as in the city and region): this could be perfect, would promise to keep things fluent in any direction; the housing project would be a device working on multiple levels within a larger framework, inside and outside of R-URBAN.

However, and back to the anticipated private live in the EcoHab: Guessing that like in Germany/Berlin, also in France and thus in Paris/Colombes the modes of life are diversifying, for example elder people tend not to like to move into elderly homes nor to become a burden for their kids, in how far are discourses like multigenerational living, patchwork family live, or other commonly oriented ways of live part of the concept/programme, the design/organization of the house and the garden?

Methods.

How to learn about all this? After moving in? Or before?

What kind of professional guidance, moderation and organization of the future EcoHab participants is anticipated? Besides the according tools to support people in theorizing and practicing with one and another by the means of language or, later on on the building site, an almost always productive way to get together more closely while generating some expertise is to go on (thematic) excursions.

Another way to stimulate the becoming of the project-group could be to do a summer camp, maybe in conjunction with planning/building a temporary, commonly done design/build

project to live-in in such a time. Maybe such a design/build project could become a prototypical flat of the future house? In best such a design/build project would inform the participatory final design of the EcoHab, would inform the means of private rooms, common rooms, public rooms, and the private, common, and public open spaces.

By the way, what programmes in specific, other than housing, are imagined to be included in the project? How shall they be discussed and decided upon? How should they be managed? This relates back to the aspects I have mentioned above as well as to the upcoming ones.

Neighborhood

What do the immediate neighbors think about the EcoHab and thus what do they think about their future neighbors? In how far did you present and discuss your plans with them? Do they like the EcoHab idea? Will they participate in its becoming as well as in the becoming of R-URBAN as a whole? Accordingly, what about the neighboring neighbors (within a range of about 500 meters)? How to make the EcoHab a take-and-give for all? And how does the neighborhood as a whole “profit” from R-URBAN?

And: How will the anticipated guests from somewhere else contribute not only to the R-URBAN projects but also be challenged to engage with the neighborhood as a whole? I am asking cause of the trend of traveling experts who in a lot of cases just come and go while kind of superficially communicating about certain localities afterwards.

City

How is it thought to make clear the urban design scale that frameworks the EcoHab, so that the project members understand the bigger reasons why the EcoHab can be realized, how it is contextualized and supported within the ongoings of governing politics/economics and so forth.

How is it thought to communicate the EcoHab within the Paris, French, and European discourses about housing? In how far do you think that it will be an exception or become a role model, a prototype for multiple of such projects?

Region... the „World“

How to communicate what is learned in Colombe to the inner-city? To the “world”; housing tends to become sweet home... even if it started with a big spreading-ideals and-the-word agenda.

How to challenge the bigger picture? How to involve politics/economics on the long run?

3. Recommendations, best practices...

Most of all, the list points out to co-housing actors/projects; when I say co-housing in the following, the term includes cooperative, collaborative, collective and community-oriented housing cultures, which, most of all, engage along self-organized and participative, inclusive and non-speculative means.

As said, the main portion of my theoretical/practical know-how results from my Berlin life as an activist-architect, moving back and forth between arts and politics, hands-on and discursive engagements. Consequently, the following **Berlin actors/projects** will hopefully be interesting for EcoHab within R-URBAN.

3. A. www.wohnportal-berlin.de

The website pools and features about 200 Berlin co-housing actors/projects. Its main part is a project archive, which permanently gets actualized by the hosts of the website as well as by actors/projects who, most of all, like to be included most of all for reasons of promoting their emerging projects. Additionally, the website offers addresses of initiatives, organizations, institutions, networks, planners, architects and builders, literature and links, a calendar and other thematic information.

The website (contact: redaktion@wohnportal-berlin.de) was initiated and is organized by the architect, co-housing-consultant/-manager **Winfried Härtel** (www.winfriedhaertel.de, mail@winfriedhaertel.de) and the Seattle architect/planner and community organizer **Michael LaFond** (michael@id22.net).

For the latter the website is part of his work as *id22: Institut für kreative Nachhaltigkeit e.V.* (institute for creative sustainability): a non profit-organization, which is almost the only Berlin player who interconnects the broad range of co-housing and other alternatively driven Berlin actors/projects (and thus not only housing but other purposes as well).

Parallel to the website, id22's most prominent activity is *experimentdays*, a yearly come-together of professionals, housing and other spatially engaging activists, and other people interested/engaged in the field, and who present themselves and discuss with one and another the current on-goings while participating within excursions, seminars, workshops, a conference and a fair: see

- <http://id22.net/en>

- <http://experimentcity.net/en>

- <http://www.experimentdays.de/exdays/en>

Also worth to check out is id22's recent European wide activity, see <http://experimentcity.net/en/excity-europe>, and <http://experimentcity.net/en/excity-europe/project-results>, which points to a brochure and a book about European co-housing actors/projects.

Both, **Winfried Härtel** as well as **Michael LaFond** are worth to get in contact with;

- Winfried, as he is a practitioner who has very much a clue about the legal and financial means to realize whatever kind of co-housing project;

- Michael, as he is from the Seattle/USA and based in Berlin since more than a decade, and thus has quite an understanding about alternative planning and building on both sides and, as mentioned, about the broad range of the alternatively driven Berlin scenes.

3 B. History of so called alternative housing in Berlin...

Self-Determined & Commonly Oriented Housing in Berlin in the 80ties & 90ties

(I call them the 1st and 2nd generation of Berlin co-housing projects)

The **about 300 Berlin co-housing projects** that **were realized till about 2000** emerged to a large extend from within the squatter movements in the 1980ies and 1990ties. However, no matter what the intention was, be it “illegal” or “legal”, as a group of minimum 7 persons or so one could apply for public funding for reinstatement and modernization. The most important matter one needed to manage was a contract that guaranteed a long-term stay - no matter what legal or financial organization one did choose for. The other basic condition to receive public funding was that, if it were rental projects, the costs were calculated/controlled related to the city-wide public housing rents; the higher the percentage of public funding was, the longer one needed to follow this rule, and thus housing costs in such projects stayed stable for quite a while (as far as I remember the rent control lasted min. 15 years, often 20 or more years).

1st generation: End of the 1970ties, by opposing the public housing policy - an urban renewal regime that had destroyed large numbers of West-Berlin inner-city neighborhoods via the replacement of Wilhelminian mixed-use housing schemes through modern more or less housing-only schemes since the 1960ies - an alternative housing-movement emerged, which took over about 180 vacant houses (most of all in the West-Berlin districts Kreuzberg and Schöneberg). As a result, in context of a governmental change - the Christian democrats had defeated the social democrats the first time since 1945 - as well as the so-called *Internationale Bauausstellung 1984/87* (IBA) (international building exhibition), the public planning/building agenda was, simply said, turned up side down. From now on - following the resulting terms/concepts “Kritische Rekonstruktion“ (critical reconstruction) and “Behutsame Stadterneuerung“ (cautious urban renewal) - Wilhelminian mixed-use housing schemes predominantly were not only reinstated and modernized in context of the IBA areas (mainly Kreuzberg neighborhoods) but also citywide. Consequently, public funding for reinstatement and modernization was available also to former squats, namely for co-housing projects that could manage long-term rental agreements or leaseholds with a private or public owner or to buy their sites. Overall **about 90 projects** took advantage of this public funding program; the ones who kept arguing/fighting for a radical change in housing politics and economics by opposing individual property to avoid future speculation, gentrification and displacement predominantly, got evicted.

One my favorite projects from those days is the so called **Regenbogenfabrik** (Rainbowfactory) an self-determined and commonly oriented housing project and non-profit-association social-cultural project that runs a hostel, a lunch-place and coffee-shop, a cinema, a bicycle-workshop and -rental, and other alternative minded programmes, and is active in neighborhood-politics since the 1980ties.

See <http://www.regenbogenfabrik.de/index.html>.

Another outstanding example wherein not only so called alternative housing is elemental but who parallel has quite some impact into the cities social-cultural life is the **ufaFabrik**, a former facility movie-production-facility, since more than 30 years a communal home of about 30 people and parallel a place of work for more than 180 people.

See <http://www.ufafabrik.de/en/nav.php?pid=44>.

Similar minded and organized projects worth to look up could be

<http://www.schokofabrik.de/>

<http://www.kerngehaeuse.de/>

<http://www.heilehaus-berlin.de/index.html>

<http://www.tommyhaus.org/>

<http://www.rauchhaus1971.de/index.php>

The majority of the **2nd generation** of Berlin co-housing projects emerged in context of the fall of the Berlin wall. Similarly to West-German housing policy, East-Berlin historical inner-city neighborhoods had faced devastating urban renewal or had been left to major neglect; the enormous number of vacant Wilhelminian mixed-use housing schemes became the battleground for the second Berlin squatter movement, which took over about 140 vacant houses from November 1989 till October 1990. In November 1990 13 houses - the “center” of the movement - in the district Friedrichshain were evicted by about 4000 policemen in a 3 day street-battle; the German reunification-contract - dominated by West-German politics and economics - had been signed some weeks ago. From now on “illegally” established co-housing projects could either agree to the recently elected Berlin government’s appeasement-offer that forced to reach out for long-term contracts (via a rental agreement or leasehold or buying the site) or to risk eviction sooner or later. Similarly to the 1980ties West-Berlin situation, about half of the projects agreed and managed such contracts and by doing so could apply for public funding for reinstatement and modernization: overall **about 70 projects**.

Of course, as I was a co-founder of this ex-art-squat, my favorite example from within the 2nd generation of Berlin co-housing projects is the so called **K 77**. A short story about it can be found within my text „Evolving Participatory Design. A report from Berlin, reaching beyond” (see list of publications). Further one can look up <http://www.k77.org/>, however, the website was established more than 10 years ago and wan’t really updated till today.

Other similar minded projects from those dasy woth to look up could be

<http://www.kuletheater.de/kuletheater.php>

<http://blog.lychi60.de/> and <http://www.ausland-berlin.de/>

<http://www.kinzig9.de/>

3 C. Berliner Baugruppen (building-groups)

In 2002/2003 the Berlin government stopped to fund whatever kind of housing means; co-housing projects that emerge since then - the **3rd generation** of Berlin co-housing projects - can be realized with private resources only. Consequently, the majority of the projects one finds on www.wohnportal-berlin.de organize themselves as so-called Baugruppen (building-groups, market-rate co-ops, see footnote 1): along the intention to create a social well-being (with friends, colleagues and congenial others) and more or less ambitious ideas about design and ecology, private resources get invested for the means of individual ownership/sake. Most of all, only a small portion of the spaces is commonly organized/owned, e.g. the yard and/or garden, a terrace, an assembly/party space, a guestroom. Anyhow, a further positive aspect is that such projects are quite an attractive alternative to housing done/managed by profit-oriented developers/investors. In sum one can speak almost about a Baugruppen-movement (**since 2005 circa 150 projects**), and must understand this as being attractive for young emerging architects.

Besides www.wohnportal-berlin.de, the recently published **Self Made City**, <http://www.jovis.de/index.php?lang=2&idcat=4>, introduces into the matter and discusses, most of all, more than 100 Berliner Baugruppen.

What neither the website nor the book does, is to promote so called alternative housing for the “masses”. The general housing challenges isn’t attacked nor solved: Berlin wide there are 1.6 million apartments, and more than 30 percent of the population is living in inner-city districts, which are facing increasing speculation, gentrification and displacement.

In consequence, the Baugruppen-movement can be understood as a problem, which is going on since the 1970ies, and thus it seems we have to look back to the 1920ties – till to the 1950/60ties and to reinterpret and to reactivate progressive housingschemes from then (if we want to contribute crucially to a truly sustainable future of housing).

This said, all the 3 generations can be subsumed being ‘islands of the happy’, namely as its actors and agents predominately have middle- or uppermiddle-class and academic backgrounds... and thus did not contribute the housing question as such.

Architects play an interesting/delicate role here, especially as quite a number of Berlin architects discovered the Baugruppen-movement as a market wherein they find well-educated and -minded as well as, most of all, economically well doing clients, and thus these kind of architects get angry if you tell them that we might not need such nicely done Baugruppen-architecture but instead a renaissance of the Berlin apartment-house of Wilhelminian times mixed up by the schemes of the modern (social and/or socialistic) housing history.

And then, of course, Berlin should not be anymore a city of tenants who don’t have say but are exploited by private or public owners. Instead, people must have a stronger say, need to become co-owners! And you need to organise co-ownership then not only in terms of money, but by stimulating an understanding of non-monetary based societal development – again, theories and practices along the commons might help.

Practically speaking one would need to understand how public agencies, city-politics- and -administration, public and non-profit housing companies, and planners and builders were involved in all this in the past, and how they could become progressive partners in the times to come. Or in other words: Even though bottom-up actors and agents did contribute strongly to the quality of self-determined and commonly oriented live in Berlin, to a certain extent many of them only could and can do so cause they were and are being supported by the top – through lots of (heavy) fights and thus on the long run. How did the top learn? Again and again through not let them think/do easy... and caused by some major societal crisis (see Introduction as well as my texts).

What did the bottom-up actors and agents learn? Besides to think/do political work seriously, they learned for example skills in terms of design, planning, engineering and construction, maintenance (when people become part of a building-project identification – responsibility - maintenance works better).

Consequently, in my understanding, theories and practices, methods and models, which consciously deal with the pitfalls of individual ownership and instead embrace and sometimes force means of common non-speculative ownership, must be intensively researched, evaluated and promoted on the local as well as global level; the following actors/projects may help to do so.

Mietergenossenschaft SelbstBau e.G.³

The Mietergenossenschaft SelbstBau e.G. is a non-profit housing association that was established in context of the fall of the wall in the eastern part of town. As a tenant owned and driven non-profit housing-association its mission is to share the knowledge and power with others in order to withdraw as many apartment houses as possible from the “regular” Berlin real estate market. However, as the association started with 2 houses in 1990 while following low-rent politics it is growing “only” slowly. Nowadays the association consists of about **17 apartment houses** offering **long-term affordable housing** for quite a number of people (380 apartments) and as well some retail- and workspaces.

If you would like to learn more about the Mietergenossenschaft SelbstBau e.G. you can look up <http://www.selbstbau-genossenschaft.de> or contact one of its directors/managers, **Peter Weber**, via peter.weber@selbstbau-genossenschaft.de (he is a befriended colleague of mine).

³ The Mietergenossenschaft SelbstBau e.G. must be understood as being part of the Berlin non-profit housing association movement, which is a result of the German-wide housing-fights around the turn of the last century. Since then, latest since the 1920ties, housing in Berlin was developed strongly along the means of affordability etc. Consequently, one can call Berlin a tenant’s city; till today about 90% of the Berlin population lives in rental apartments: Berlin has about 1.9 million apartments, about 1.6 are rental apartments, 270.000 are publicly owned, and about 185.000 belong to non-profit housing associations. However, the 1990ies the city administration privatized its stock from about 600.000 to the number of about 270.000 apartments while increasingly allowing its public housing companies a market-driven management. In terms of some English information about the Berlin non-profit housing association movement one could look up e.g. the brochure *Housing Cooperatives in Berlin*, see <http://berliner-genossenschaftsforum.de/101-0-Housing+Cooperatives+in+Berlin.html>

Mietshäusersyndikat (The Apartment-House Syndicate)

- advises self-organized house projects* and other interested persons
- participates in projects
- helps with the financing of projects
- initiates new projects
- continuously seeks "direct credit" for its associated self-organized projects

*Together with the Syndicate, the tenants of an apartment house establish a limited liability company, which then buys the building. The tenants now pay rent to the company, but are simultaneously responsible for all aspects of running the company, financing the purchase, and administering the building. In this way, affordable living space is preserved, and the building protected from exploitation by real-estate speculators.

The heart of the plan is the so-called "direct credit." The company (i.e., the tenants) borrows money directly from private persons (friends, acquaintances, family, etc.), offering 0 - 3% interest. This inexpensive "direct credit" is used to pay back the expensive (>6%) bank loan used to finance the initial purchase of the building. The profits earned after amortization of the bank loan are used to finance new projects.

From <http://www.syndikat.org>

Till recently the Germany wide active Mietshäusersyndikat did engage "only" to help withdraw existing apartment houses from the market. However, since a year or so a group of people is working together with **Oliver Clemens** (whom you might know from as an editorial member of the German magazine An Architektur) to realize **the first Mietshäusersyndikat new development**. The project is outstanding, especially in context of the increasing real estate costs in Berlin. E.G. to realize a Baugruppen project one needs to spend about 2000 Euro per m². The Mietshäusersyndikat new development shall be realized with about 1300 Euro/m².

If you would like to learn more about the Mietshäusersyndikat and this project, and as their website is predominantly in German, and as they generally don't promote their work extensively, you may write to Oliver: oliverclemens@yahoo.de; I am sure that we would be delighted to support your work.

Both, **Oliver Clemens** and **Peter Weber**, are not only engaging very much within the particular projects but also have quite an **insight into affordable housing in general**.

ifau & Jesko Fezer

Jesko Fezer is, as Oliver Clemens, one of the editors of *An Architektur* with whom I organized the Community Design exhibition and public talks in Berlin, 2008. It could be interesting to contact him via jeskofezer@gmx.de; actually, ifau and him (<http://www.berlin.heimat.de/home/ifau>) plus some other architects are developing a self-determined and commonly oriented housing scheme with the approach to bridge the gap between the individual ownership of the future apartments and some collectively financed and managed spaces. If I got it right, they also understand their concept and design as a model towards a new kind of modern – in the best sense – affordable and participatory housing. I am sure that Jesko would be delighted to support your work.

Die Zusammenarbeiter

A group of architects, project developers, and communication-experts who, as far as I know, started to work together only a couple of years ago while reaching out to somehow bridge the gap between market-driven-, Baugruppen-, and affordable oriented alternative housing. Accordingly, their most prominent project is <http://www.spreefeldberlin.de>, an upcoming construction at the Spree River. Right now 3 architect-offices design a 7500 m² mix-use development that should be open to become appropriated by a variety of self-determined and commonly oriented housing-cultures. Another outstanding character of the project is its conscious contextualization within the one of the most prominent Berlin urban development areas, namely an inner-city Spree River area that is long-time “battle-field” of alternative-leftist and/or so called urban pioneering activist versus big real estate ambitions.

If you would like to learn more about the Zusammenarbeiter you can look up <http://www.zusammenarbeiter.net> or contact one of its members, **Angelika Drescher**, via angelika@zusammenarbeiter.net (she is a befriended colleague of mine).

Some notes on some European contexts, and some actors/projects

The Swiss system

Long ongoing tradition regarding housing cooperatives, for example 30% of the Zürich housing stock is co-op-housing, and fresh ones contribute to this movement in interesting ways. See for example **Kraftwerk 1** (about 500 inhabitants, <http://www.kraftwerk1.ch/>), and a Kraftwerk 2 and 3 has been realized or is in the making.

Austria 1960 – 1980ties

Contrary to Switzerland, Austria had and has quite a strong public housing sector. Within this, as it was and is a top-down driven system, architects like **Ottokar Uhl** (http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottokar_Uhl), **Eilfried Huth** (http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eilfried_Huth), or **Fritz Matzinger** (<http://www.matzinger.at/>) were/are fantastic theorists/practitioners in terms of participatory planned/built housing. For example to be looked up in a compendium of Austrian participative architecture ... a history of the relation between professionals, public institutions, and users (more strongly than in Germany). However, as they were funded with extra public funding (as exceptions), these approaches didn't become part of the public housing system.

The city of Vienna was and is the main housing developer in Austria. Other than in Berlin (to a certain but crucial extent) the system didn't collapse. However, it's a story against co-ops, a story of a social democratic paternalist movement. One of the few current self-determined and commonly oriented examples is the **Sargfabrik** and **Miss Sargfabrik** (a non profit association of about 200 residents who "tricked" the public housing system, <http://www.sargfabrik.at/>). And there is a small number of similar minded projects emerging...

Netherlands

As participation is kind of part of the Netherlands everyday (participative suitcases, kind of very normative), the regarding projects are many. A good number of best-practices is documented in the projects in Jesko Fezer's and my book *Hier entsteht. Strategien partizipativer Architektur und räumlicher Aneignung*.

Besides the theories of **Nikolaas John Habraken**, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N._John_Habraken, and quite a number of resulting participatory public housing schemes by colleagues of his, an interesting example regarding self-determined and commonly driven dwelling scheme is called **Centraal Wonen** (since the mid 1970ties): Engaging in, most of all, suburban contexts, only pedestrian accessible, clusters of rowhouses (4-5 families) - conceptualised as communities, an extra common space - with a kitchen, other furniture being mobile, on top of 4-5 families - guest space: what they don't have in the square meters, they put in the common space. http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centraal_wonen.

Denmark

Like in the Netherlands, also Denmark participation is not such a big concern... the first European country institutionalising participation at state level (?).

Since the 1970ties (?) strong **cooperative housing movement**... and of course, **Cristiania**.

Sweden

Tradition of collective housing within public housing (the concept of the **one kitchen household**), according non-profit associations since the 60s. There exist ...? projects within the collective housing system. However, combination of housing and other programmes - rare...

X. Conclusion
Yet

to

come.

Publications, in German and English (Selection)

Others than mine will follow.

Mathias Heyden

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November 2009

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Jesko Fezer & Mathias Heyden

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in: *What remains of a building divided into equal parts and distributed for reconfiguration: Surface Tension Supplement No. 2*

Berlin - Los Angeles 2009

www.errantbodies.org

Mathias Heyden & Ines Schaber

„Hier ist die Rose, hier tanze! / Here is the rose, here dance!“

in: *Wer sagt denn, dass Beton nicht brennt, hast Du's probiert? Film im West-Berlin der 80er Jahre / Who says concrete doesn't burn, did you try? West Berlin Film in the '80s*

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Mathias Heyden

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(Bereich Stadtentwicklung - Thema: wie Titel)

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Berlin 2007

www.bildungswerk-boell.de

see also e.g. http://www.bildungswerk-boell.de/downloads/Doku07-Wohnen_in_eigener_Regie_-_BIW_2007.pdf

Winfried Härtel & Kristian Wulkau, Heidi Cramer, Mathias Heyden, Jörg Mauer and Herbert Schneider

www.Wohnprojekte-Berlin.info

since 2007

Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung & Mathias Heyden

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Jesko Fezer & Mathias Heyden (Hg.), metroZones 3

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English introduction: www.metrozones.info/entsteht/index.html

or

www.claimingpublicspace.net (search: Heyden)