

**ESTATES  
AFTER  
TRANSITION**

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**COMPARING THE GOVERNANCE  
OF LARGE HOUSING ESTATES  
IN ESTONIA, GERMANY, AND RUSSIA.  
WHAT CAN BE LEARNED?**

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## COMPARING THE GOVERNANCE OF LARGE HOUSING ESTATES IN ESTONIA, GERMANY, AND RUSSIA. WHAT CAN BE LEARNED?

This report summarizes the findings of the Work Package 2, “Governance Analysis,” of the comparative research project “Estates After Transition.” This 3-year research project compares six Large Housing Estates in three countries: Russia, Germany, and Estonia. The paper at hand provides initial ideas about the question of how the different governance experiences in the six cases observed can meaningfully be brought into relation to one another. It focuses on the themes of property relations, state capacities, civil society participation, and planning types. The report concludes that the frameworks for these four themes are so different in the three countries that knowledge-transfer can only be successful or useful when it is done in a very context-sensitive way. At the same time, each of the governance formations observed provides both potentials and problems, the analysis of which can support thinking about governance and planning issues in Large Housing Estates “elsewhere.”

<sup>1</sup> This discussion paper is based on the case study reports delivered by all three research teams and discussions within the consortium of the project. It includes collective work that, therefore, goes beyond a single authorship. Moreover, the report has greatly benefited from several rounds of productive comments and critiques provided by Kadri Leetma, Oleg Pachenkov, and Madlen Pilz.

### Introduction: Why Study the Governance of Housing Estates in Central and Eastern Europe?

Housing Estates have been a recurrent theme of international urban research in recent decades, and matters of governance and management have been an integral part of this research (see for example Power 1997, Social Exclusion Unit 1998, Musterd et al. 1999, Murie et al. 2003, Dekker and van Kempen 2004, van Kempen et al. 2005, Musterd and van Kempen 2007, Rowlands et al. 2009, Hess et al. 2018). The main reason for this is that solutions for problems faced by the Estates can only be meaningfully implemented if the interests, structures, and procedures underlying decision-making for the Estates are properly understood.

In retrospect, however, it appears that although governance issues have commonly been regarded as crucial for the development of Large Housing Estates, they have mostly been dealt with in a rather fragmented way and focused on the respective constellation found in the country studied. It seems that two interrelated shortcomings have impeded a genuinely international debate. First, while many contributions emphasize the need for a differentiated perspective, ideas about governance have mostly been developed from the cases studied. Given that the bulk of studies stem from North-West Europe, this has led to an imbalance in the state-of-the-art of research that by and large reflects experiences from there, typically including fairly developed state interventions and planning capacities. Moreover, although the last decades have seen the wide-reaching privatization of formerly publicly-owned properties in the welfare states of North-West Europe, public (or quasi-public) ownership is still typical for Housing Estates there.

Second, and closely related, the issue of segregation stands very much at the center of many debates in North-West Europe and is usually dealt with as a matter of state responsibility. Advice given in academic contributions on Large Housing Estates are also usually developed against this background. Common for much of the research is, thus, an advocacy for diversified tenure (to be achieved by providing more non-rental, non-public flats), for a greater social mix (by making Estates more attractive to middle-class households), better design, and more sophisticated and nuanced state interventions.

The cases we have studied reflect these topics of the capacity of the state to intervene and recent segregation trends to some degree, but they also provide a more nuanced, and to some degree different, picture of the main drivers of change and governance networks in European Housing Estates. The following table (Table 1) sketches out some of the major differences in the governance contexts that the North-Western and Central and Eastern European Large Housing Estates face today.

Characteristics	North-Western Europe	Central and Eastern Europe
Market share	Low	Medium to high
Dominant tenure	Socially rented	Owner-occupied or privately rented
Income situation	Low to low-medium incomes	Broad variety
State intervention	Long history of regeneration programs in most countries	Severe austerity, low capacity for state intervention

*Table 1: The current context for the governance of Large Housing Estates in North-Western and Central and Eastern Europe compared.*

In this scheme, the current German experience comes closest to what is seen in studies on North-Western European Housing Estates. However, as will be discussed below, there are crucial differences to be found too. The perceived “normality” experienced in North-West Europe is foreign in Estonia and Russia, especially regarding the practice of comprehensive regeneration with the involvement of strong public actors. Also, the variations in the market share and tenure composition provide a diverse set of contexts for understanding governance arrangements across Europe.

Against this background, this paper aims to reflect the variety of governance structures underlying the management of Housing Estates in Estonia, Germany, and Russia. In this paper, urban governance is understood as an analytical term that draws attention to the interplay between a broad range of public and private actors in determining the common affairs of cities. We use a broad definition of governance, understanding it “...as a process blending and coordinating public and private interests. Governance refers to the process through which local authorities, in concert with private interests, seek to enhance collective goals” (Pierre 1999: 374). Urban governance is, thus, the interplay of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process and includes formal institutions as well as informal arrangements and conflicts. “Governance” includes constellations of actors, along with how they act and why. The essential goal of governance research is to understand how particular combinations of interests and powers shape an outcome.

Studying the governance arrangement in eight case studies (2 from each country: Marzahn in Berlin and Halle-Neustadt in Germany; Sosnovaya Polyana and Severnaya Dolina in St. Petersburg, Russia; and Tallinn-Lasnamäe and Tartu-Annelinn in Estonia) we have applied a historic approach, i. e. we have observed how constellations of actors, interests, and institutions have changed over the previous three decades. We have followed and documented the major urban policy and planning initiatives in our case study districts and analyzed the major actors and their patterns of interaction, the structural conditions underlying the different policy initiatives, and the normative frameworks (goals, values, etc.) around these. Thereby, we have applied a common analytical framework that has been structured around a standardized set of questions. Most importantly, these included the following:

- What are the institutional set-ups for the development of the Estates?
- How can the interplay of public and private actors be described?
- How are the Estates influenced by urban policies at the regional, national, and global scales?
- What are the consequences of these constellations?

In other words, we have asked the classic question: “Who gets what, when, where, how, and with which consequences?” (Lasswell 1936).

The comparison between the cases has been designed around a wide, instead of a narrow, understanding of what comparison is about. As other scholars have argued (Robinson 2016), the opportunities for comparing cities in a methodologically rigorous way are severely limited. Urban experiences are just too complex and often unique (Amin and Graham 1997) to allow for a control of all the variables impacting on the way cities (and neighborhoods) and their governance develop. As a consequence, it has been suggested that the actual benefit of comparison lies in the opportunity of “seeing cities through elsewhere” (Robinson 2016), i. e. better understanding the specificity of frameworks underlying the development in different locations and uncovering inappropriate generalizations.

In our research, we enormously benefited from discussions among the project partners, which helped us to see the governance in our own countries through a view “from elsewhere.” In this sense, the following chapters provide an overview of the variety of constellations of a select number of issues that we find to be central to understanding governance arrangements in Housing Estates in East Germany, Estonia, and Russia. These reveal both considerable contrasts to the bulk of the available literature, and also between the cases observed.

## Privatization and Property Structures

The privatization of state and collective properties has been the single most important public policy applied to housing in all the cases we studied. It was embedded in the systemic shift from socialism to capitalism throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

Under socialism, owning and managing housing in Large Housing Estates was almost completely a state-run affair (Urban 2011). Housing formed a key nexus in the socialist economic and social models (Smith 2010). The construction of dwellings was, therefore, publicly mandated, managed, and paid for by the state. The distribution and management of housing was under public control as well. However, there was some variety in the way this was organized. In the Soviet Union (which included the geographic areas of Estonia and Russia today), most of the homes were the property of the state, except for a few projects where private capital was involved in constructing cooperative housing in order to solve the lack of housing faster in Soviet cities. In East Germany, by contrast, private property was allowed, but only relevant in the inner cities. In newly built Estates, however, two other types of owners dominated: a) municipal administrations and b) cooperatives, which were usually tied to specific employers. Both, however, worked under the auspices of the state.

When the transition from socialism to capitalism started in Central and Eastern Europe, there was a wide consensus among policymakers that state ownership and control would need to be overcome, and that private property should be introduced and made the general rule in housing. There were different assumptions underlying this strategy. First, it was commonly believed that private property would be the foundation for a functioning market that could guarantee an effective allocation of housing. Second, many studies have argued that privatizing state-owned properties was also driven by a desire to shift the costs for maintaining and modernizing housing off the public payroll. Third, especially in the former Soviet Union, privatization was also seen as a way of allowing an “average person” to participate in the redistribution of what used to be state assets, which was supposed to transform them into a responsible citizen. It is important to emphasize that the actual reasonings were in flux since the reforms were often implemented amidst ideological and power vacuums (Stephens et al. 2015). In most post-socialist countries, the outcome of the reforms was, therefore, rather a hodgepodge of different approaches, rather than a homogenous and coherent policy. Nevertheless, privatization has been interpreted as a part of a wider manifestation of “policy collapse” (Pichler-Milanovitch 2011), in which the role of the state has been greatly reduced and supplanted by the market.

While this correctly reflects the direction taken in East Germany, as well as in Russia and Estonia, it is important to emphasize that the way this was achieved followed fundamentally different trajectories.

In Russia and Estonia, state-owned homes were privatized on very favorable terms (e.g. using privatization vouchers, or restitution schemes in Estonia) or for free (in Russia) to their sitting residents. The privatization process, however, took longer in Russia (where it is still not completely finished) than in Estonia. Consequently, owner-occupancy became the norm. The homeownership rate in Estonia is now close to 100 percent (Leetmaa et al. 2018, 404), thus, far exceeding the rates in Northern and Western Europe. In Russia, it is estimated that more than 80% of all residential apartments have now been privatized<sup>2</sup>.

Privatization has not only led to a transfer of assets, however, but it has also resulted in an enormous degree of fragmentation with regard to ownership, income, and asset strategies. It is not uncommon today to find, even in one building, families who occupy the flat they privatized, others who bought the flat on the market (using a mortgage or private wealth), and those who rented the flat from a private owner who lives elsewhere; and even state tenants who decided not to privatize their apartment, as seen in Russia. “Scattered” property and tenure structures have become a common feature.

This situation has not only complicated the upkeep and modernization of buildings, it has also severely complicated the opportunities for the strategic development of Housing Estates.

Only since the late 1990s in Estonia and since 1996 (the law being updated in 2005) in Russia have “apartment associations” been formed. These are associations of flat owners of a building that collect contributions from single owners and organize the maintenance and renovation of the building. The composition and the capacities of the apartment associations are, however, fairly variegated. In Estonia, the capacity of apartment associations to coordinate the common management democratically gradually increased during the 2000s and 2010s, when trainings and other capacity building activities were systematically supported by the National Association of Apartment Associations, city administrations, and ministries (see Leetmaa et al. 2018, 403f.). In Russia, by contrast, the management of apartment blocks is usually organized by a hired management company. Moreover, as a rule of thumb, most apartment associations face enormous financial and organizational difficulties in Russia. As a consequence, resi-

<sup>2</sup> This situation stands in stark contrast to much of the projections and advice of the literature, in which a diversification of ownership and more “diversified” tenure is argued for. Russia and Estonia have already become cases of “super-homeownership societies” and there is hardly any public ownership and tenure left to be “diversified” and “mixed.”

dents are often not willing to form such associations, leaving the maintenance and management of the buildings in the hands of the municipalities (although financially funded by the homeowners).

As a consequence, the coverage of these organizations is still different between the two countries: In Estonia, all buildings have an obligatory apartment association by now (since 2018), whereas in Russia the rate (of what is called the “Owner Association”) is estimated at less than 1% (31,000 associations for 3.6 million buildings). In St. Petersburg, this number is a little bit higher: about 6% of houses are run by associations (1474 associations for 23,240 houses in the city)<sup>3</sup>. A common problem of many Russian apartment associations is a lack of administrative skill, vague legal knowledge, and a lack of adequate resources. The shape of these problems, however, differs tremendously between existing neighborhoods like Sosnovaya Polyana, where apartment associations are either formed by residents or the management is organized by the city (in St. Petersburg over 60% of houses are run by the city-owned management company) and newly built areas like Severnaya Dolina, where the developers provide their management services as part of the sales contract for the flats purchased. In summary, this has led to a broad variety of constellations in which the success and the management capacities of a particular association depend on random factors, for which there is no spatial logic.

In addition to these problems, the power of the apartment associations is usually limited to the maintenance and management of a building (a block, or a set of blocks) in Estonia and Russia. When it comes to more general planning issues, e.g. the development of public spaces, infrastructure provision, and new construction, the role of apartment associations is negligible.

A major reason for this is the ownership of land. In Estonia, land ownership was not coherently reformed when the privatization of flats took place in the 1990s. As a consequence, the regulations changed in terms of how the plots around apartment blocks should be privatized, with information for the apartment associations on the long-term pros and cons of privatizing smaller or larger plots. The outcome has been a mishmash of land distribution, with varying sizes of privately owned parcels and left-over public land in-between. The public land often had the status of “unreformed state land” until very recently, meaning that even cities (municipalities) did not have the power to reorganize these parcels. The situation became even more complicated when some of the land owned by the municipality or state was sold to developers.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics provided by the NGO “MINZhKKh”: <http://mingkh.ru/sankt-peterburg/>

In Russia, the situation is not less complicated. When privatization took place in Russia in the early 1990s, land underneath houses was detached from private apartment ownership, remaining city owned. Since 2004, when a new law (the Housing Code of the Russian Federation) allowing private ownership of the land under the Large Housing Estates was launched, homeowner associations were allowed to register the land underneath their houses as their property. Nevertheless, there are multiple issues that have complicated the implementation of collective land ownership in urban areas. First, the registration procedure involves additional costs and taxes, and not all owners are ready to share these costs. Second, the size of the plot is controversial and is decided very differently by building. For instance, the land can be measured by the perimeter of the building, not giving owners any extra land for their collective use (though this could be disputed later in court by the association). With newly built apartment buildings the situation is different: once they are completed, the plot of land underneath the building that the developer rented or bought for the construction purpose and period, automatically becomes the collective private property of the owners, regardless of whether there is an association of apartment owners or not. The roads become municipal, though. So, the inconsistency of the situation with ownership can be seen in the fact that most of the land around houses with 90–100% of privately owned apartments is owned and run by the municipalities.

In East Germany, the situation is completely different. There, the existing municipal housing administrations and cooperatives were simply reorganized as commercial companies. The sale of flats to sitting tenants was a rare exception. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of residents remained tenants and the housing stock they inhabit is managed by public, cooperative, or private companies. As a general rule, these companies hold hundreds or even thousands of flats. In a typical Estate one would only have found a very limited number of owners, until very recently, that were closely connected to the location and had a long-term interest in developing their properties. Often these companies worked at arm’s length from the municipalities in which they were located and developed their stocks with the help of public subsidy programs.

This constellation changed to some degree during subsequent decades. Two rounds of privatization have led to the sale of around one third of the total housing stock to private investors in the Estates studied. These investors, in general, have short-term interests, often use all means to maximize their profits, and are not bound to this specific business long-term. In contrast to municipal and cooperative companies, the new owners are often integrated into global financial channels and their whole business is directed towards funneling liquid capital into undervalued assets. For them, the properties

acquired were not seen as a long-term business investments, but as part of a portfolio that was managed with the goal of maximizing revenues over the short- to medium-term. Table 2 summarizes some of the differences between the actors.

	Municipal and Cooperative Housing Companies	Financial Investors
Type of business	Long-term provision of rental flats, mostly as social housing	Short-term profit using leverage effects based on low prices, low interest rates, and low maintenance and service costs
Major source of finances	Internal budgets, public subsidies	Private equity, institutional and private Investors
Relation to the state	At arm's length, close collaboration	None

Table 2: Types of housing actors in large prefab Estates in East Germany (see Bernt et al 2017)

The arrival of new investors has considerably changed the governance configuration in both German Housing Estates studied in this project and “splintered” the governance of urban development into a part that remains “para-statist,” based on a close collaboration of local administrations with municipal and cooperative housing providers, often based on national, regional, and European subsidy programs, and a “free market” part in which there is little interaction between public planning and the investment, letting, and management strategies of the owners.

Summing up, fundamental differences between the ownership structures in Russia and Estonia, on the one hand, and Germany, on the other, are obvious. In the first two countries, fragmented ownership is the norm and most flats are owner-occupied. In Germany, in contrast, next to all the housing stock is held by landlords who own all flats in a building and usually have more stock in the area too. Especially for municipal and cooperative housing companies, business

interests include the long-term development of the areas where the properties are located. Ownership of flats, buildings, and land overlap in these cases; this facilitates coordination and makes the implementation of development goals easier. However, this picture has changed to a considerable degree in recent decades, as private investors interested in short-term profits have bought up large parts of the Estates.

Differences can also be observed regarding the financialization of housing. The overwhelmingly homeowners-based property market in Estonia, but also in Russia, attracts international financial investors relatively less, as it takes a large number of individual transactions with single apartments to acquire a considerable property portfolio. In Germany, by contrast, massive stock transfers have taken place that have shifted municipal and cooperative properties into the hands of financialized investors, making housing a more “liquid” asset. However, larger state-organized reconstruction projects in Russia, like Sosnovaya Polyana, or new housing construction sites (like Severnaya Dolina), also attract developers and investors.

In summary, the levels and the ways in which the retreat of the state from housing construction, distribution, and management has been organized in the three different countries has not followed a common logic, resulting in very different and highly path-dependent outcomes. Comparing these three countries, it seems fair to characterize the outcomes of the reforms as “housing systems by default” (Stephens et al. 2015), characterized by peculiar “marriages” (ibid) of homeownership, landed property, and asset financialization.

## State Capacities and State Interventions

Considerable differences can also be observed regarding the role of the state in the three countries. Here, surprisingly, not former-USSR Russia or Estonia, but Germany is without doubt the case in which state intervention and state support has played the biggest role for the development of the Estates in recent decades. There are different reasons for this.

One is that the dominant feature of the German housing system is its character as a highly regulated “unitary rental market” (see Kemeny, 1995). In cities, most households rent their apartments, making by far the dominant tenure, around which the whole housing policy has been developed. Both the social and the private rental sector are highly regulated in Germany, resulting in tenants enjoying a high degree of protection (at least compared to Estonia and Russia).

Second, much of the German housing and urban development system has been developed in close relation to the “social market economy” model (*Soziale Marktwirtschaft*) developed by conservative German “Ordo-Liberals” in the 1940s and 1950s. This model can be described as a combination of the free market with social welfare. State intervention is seen as necessary, but it should be designed in a “market-conforming” (*marktkonform*) way. Two principles are fundamental to the “social market economy:” solidarity and subsidization. The principle of solidarity is even emphasized in the German Constitution, where it is said that “Property entails responsibilities. Its use shall serve the public good” (§ 14 (2), Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany). What this implies, is an obligation to protect private property and economic interests, but also a justification for state intervention.

One of the outcomes of this orientation is a long history of central state intervention in urban development in Germany. Cities are not left “standing in the rain” and the dynamics of uneven development are counteracted to some degree. Most importantly, this is achieved by intensive fiscal equalization between the nation state, the individual states, and the municipalities. However, in addition to this, the nation state has also always provided a large variety of subsidy programs to support urban development. The structure, the foci, and the conditions of these programs have changed considerably over time, so that it is next to impossible to provide a clear statement about the impact of this policy in general. However, in each of the Estates studied, it can be estimated that the volume of direct public subsidies for urban development provided since 1990 is worth between 100 and 200 Million Euros. This support has not only covered much of the costs for the renovation of flats, infrastructure, and green spaces, but it has most importantly only been provided to concepts that embedded individual projects into wider plans for the

development of the neighborhoods. In general, this has enabled planners to have a comparatively high influence and has led to the advanced integration of spatial and social development goals.

A second issue in which the state intervenes in the development of Housing Estates in Germany is maintaining control over municipal housing companies. In East German Estates this is particularly important, as the municipal administrations and cooperatives that have built and managed Housing Estates under socialism have survived system change and were transformed into public or quasi non-profit companies. In Halle-Neustadt and Marzahn in Berlin, municipal companies, which usually hold around one third of the stock in the Estates, are very closely tied to the goals of local governments and are used extensively by them<sup>4</sup>.

While state intervention has remained a central feature in the development of Large Housing Estates over the years in East Germany, the capacities and financial resources have successively been reduced throughout the subsequent decades. This is partly due to the already discussed privatization of public property, and partly an outcome of the weak economic situation in East Germany (and the resulting unfavorable situation of public budgets), but also an outcome of austerity politics at the national level, which have banned new indebtedness for German states (*Bundesländer*) in 2020. This has led to massive cuts. Thus, while the total volume of public subsidies for the development of Housing Estates is still way above what is spent in Russia or Estonia, it has still been massively reduced and is far from what was invested in the 1990’s. Put metaphorically, one could say that the state is still the key actor in the development of Housing Estates in East Germany, but its ambitions have been tempered and its muscles weakened.

The situation is completely different in Estonia, where the full privatization of apartments was followed by a planning and investment vacuum. After the political change in 1991, almost no public resources were allocated for housing. Consequently, both housing construction and maintenance were severely reduced and infrastructure remained unfinished. The socialist-era urban planning and construction system (professional planning bureaus at the national level, building factories producing standard construction details, regular annual funds to fulfill annual construction plans, etc.) collapsed, and new planning capacities with new actors such as homeowners, homeowner associations, and cities with democratically elected local governments were still in their infancy.

<sup>4</sup> This, however, does not necessarily lead to the same strategies. In Halle (Saale), the two municipal housing companies are obliged to contribute an amount of 7 million Euros to the municipal budget annually. At the same time, in Berlin, housing companies receive enormous financial support to engage in new constructions and provide affordable flats.

The major characteristic of Estonian urban, social, and housing policies in the early transition period was extreme austerity. Compared to East Germany (and most countries in North-West Europe), the general trend was not state-withdrawal, but an absence of the state. The consequences of this were rather dire, social stratification developed rapidly, leading to a fast increase in spatial segregation. Already in the 2000s, and even more so in the 2010s, when new choices (suburban districts, gentrification) in the housing market became available, Housing Estates gradually started to lose their former reputation as comfortable living environments, especially for people with a higher socioeconomic status. Although the expectation was that homeownership is the best model, which should motivate residents to improve their housing conditions, many people were severely hit by economic restructuring (losing their jobs and regular incomes), as well as by the fast increase in urban housing costs (former public subsidies were withdrawn). In the 1990s, Housing Estates even lost people of lower socioeconomic status, for example, many people moved permanently to their former summer homes when they had lower maintenance costs and opportunities for subsistence gardening.

The absence of the state could only be incompletely been made up for by the emergence of apartment associations as a form of collective, locality-based urban institutions. These only emerged step-by-step and hardly have the capacity to deal with issues of a larger spatial scale. Therefore, it took a while before the first associations were founded, since housing privatization had proceeded in the 1990s without any existing model for how single homeowners could start to make decisions collectively regarding their residential buildings and surroundings. This resulted in a gap between the privatization of flats and the introduction of the necessary planning and management apparatus for their maintenance, renovation, and inclusion into neighborhood development strategies. In summary, there was neither the organizational capacity nor the management experience necessary in newly created apartment associations and the state was by and large absent. However, over the last quarter century, the national and city governments, as well as umbrella organizations for apartment associations have invested greatly in capacity building and the organizational development of apartment associations.

As a consequence, apartment associations, as for homeowner associations, have made the voice of single owners influential in decisions related to the management of residential buildings in Housing Estates (daily maintenance, larger investments, renovations, etc.). They have become key players who hold the power to take renovation decisions over the single owners (members of

associations)<sup>5</sup>. The downside of this governance model, however, is that tenants (renting dwellings mostly from private owners) are completely excluded from the decision-making. This “invisible” group of residents (private tenants) find themselves in an extremely weak position, as they do not have any say in decisions concerning improving the house or its surroundings. As many former residents in Housing Estates have decided to leave, the share of private rental apartments is also relatively high; in 2011, it was 21 per cent in Tallinn and 26 percent in Tartu.

Moreover, relying on apartment associations alone is an inadequate organizational model to engage local actors in broader district planning and public space design. Homeowner interests mainly relate to their immediate residential building. For many years, the public space around buildings was left as a so-called “no man’s land.” These parcels partly had the status of “unreformed state land” until very recently (the late 2010s), and city governments did not have a direct obligation to take care of these areas. A belief that municipalities needed to be more present in Housing Estates only occurred in the 2010s in Estonia. Since then, both in Tallinn and Tartu, city governments have initiated public policies and smaller planning initiatives to reorganize open spaces around the buildings, e. g. parking master plans, vision competitions for public spaces, reorganizing green yards between blocks, and investing in new playgrounds and pedestrian facilities. Additionally, larger municipal investments like renovating schools and kindergartens, stadiums and sport halls, and public transport reorganization have taken place, which have improved the living conditions in Housing Estates.

Since the end of the 2000s, national funding for urban regeneration has also become more generous. However, much of the funds spent for urban development in Estonia are based on resources originating from the EU cohesion funds or international greenhouse gas trading. At the national level, the foundation KredEx is funding energy efficiency related renovations that apartment associations plan to undertake in their buildings. Even though the tempo of these renovations has increased considerably in recent years, the majority of buildings in Housing Estates are still in a poor condition, technically.

To summarize, while fundamental differences in the degree of state intervention remain, the initial neglect policy and extreme austerity have been replaced by new public planning and investment interest towards Housing Estates in Estonia, and the state has come back as an actor.

<sup>5</sup> Although theoretically this could lead to a displacement of less affluent people, this is typically not the case in larger apartment blocks where the income differences are rather moderate.

In Russia, the state plays a somewhat paradoxical role in the development of the Estates. At the same time, there are fundamental differences between the two cases studied. In this respect, the most important features are explored in the following.

In existing Estates, as a general rule, privatization has not been completed in Russia. For this reason, the city still holds properties in many residential buildings. Usually, these are inhabited by the original residents or given to low-income households as a form of social housing. When homeowner associations are formed, the city government is usually part of these, as one of the owners. In addition, however, the city (or, to be more exact, different departments of the city government) also has responsibilities for providing heat, electricity, and water. In newly built Estates (like Severnaya Dolina), all flats are privately owned, and the management of the building and the facilities is provided by a service company (which is usually connected to the developer). As a general rule, the developer is also responsible for providing social and technical infrastructure, and the role of the city is reduced to land provision and monitoring. In other words, the role of the state varies. In practice, moreover, there is often a lack of coordination between different administrative branches and a degree of inconsistency between the strategies and approaches they follow and, therefore, numerous contradictions emerge.

Given the complexity of the situation, it is difficult to say anything general about the governance constellations underlying the development of Large Housing Estates in Russia. Chancing the danger of oversimplification, two issues nevertheless seem crucial.

The first issue is that there are contradictions between a strong tradition of “state legacy welfare” (Stephens et al 2015) and a “weak state” (Mendras 2012).

In the Soviet Union, housing was a right for citizens and rents were kept stable and very low. Eviction for non-payment was practically impossible. At the same time, improvements to individual housing situations were often done in the form of DIY-investments, such as equipping balconies with windows to gain additional living space, repairing leaks in the roof, etc. Together, this led to a widespread sense of entitlement to affordable housing that still characterizes the mindset of many Russians today, and coexists with neoliberal and conservative narratives (see Zavisca 2012). This results in a paradoxical situation, where the home inhabited is seen as one’s individual property but at the same time residents have high expectations of the state. Unfortunately, these high expectations are met by notoriously low financial and organizational capacities on the side of state administrations. Contrary to many Western images, Russia is in many respects a “weak state” (Mendras 2012). Usually, the city of St. Petersburg

(to stay with our case study areas) does not even have the financial means to fulfill its legal obligations (for instance, providing roads and social infrastructure for newly built Housing Estates), and the outcome is a very visible under maintenance and neglect with regard to all public infrastructure. This situation makes the city very dependent on private initiatives and likely to engage in partnerships with private investors – and this is where the second contradiction comes into play.

Thus, notwithstanding privatization and neoliberal market-orientation in general, the planning approach dominating many Russian city administrations is marked by a strong emphasis on technical issues, a high degree of centralization, and an expert-centered style of decision-making embedded into a strictly hierarchical system of government. This has facilitated a rather functional planning style, in which much emphasis is placed on physical developments and functional zoning definitions, are to be performed under the strict auspices of different hierarchical layers of the government, with only little public participation (Golubchikov 2004, Trumbull 2012). This is also reflected in very detailed targets for housing production developed by the central government, which need to be fulfilled by the regions (in the case of St. Petersburg, about 5.5 million m<sup>2</sup>; currently the city produces around 3.5 million m<sup>2</sup> per year). In order to fulfill these goals, the city needs to partner with big investors who have an interest in, and are capable of, constructing the targeted meters of living space. However, the interest of these investors is usually short-term and ends after the flats constructed are sold (almost all flats are built for owner-occupation). Long-term considerations about infrastructure, social mixing, and spatial design are only of interest here when they add to the immediate marketability of the flats. This leads to continuous tensions around the inclusion of public goals into the private development agenda and a dependency of government policies on private viability considerations.

The outcome of this mutual dependency is a rather specific kind of “entrepreneurialism” in which public authorities are closely tied to private developers for large-scale development projects. Russian planning is, therefore, strongly “top-down,” and very much driven by state-interests. Yet, at the same time, public goals can only be implemented through private investors, and the state is widely dependent on their goals, interests, and calculations for larger projects. The outcomes of this paradoxical situation are usually lax regulations, weak enforcement capacities, corruption, and the wide-spread failure of projects and programs. As the studied cases show, this situation creates numerous difficulties and hardly provides the conditions for a sustainable development of the Estates in Russia in the long-term.

In summary, it becomes clear that the role of the state, its goals, and its capacities (money, staff, ownership) vary fundamentally in the three countries studied. These differences account for different states, but also for the role of the state in different neighborhoods. Moreover, the policy directions and frameworks have changed over time. It would, therefore, be too simple to describe the differences along a continuum ranging from more welfare-oriented interventionist policies to market based solutions, or as a democratic vs. a more authoritarian systems (as is often done in the literature). Rather, we see three very different formations that each influence the development of Housing Estates in fundamental ways and are prone to change in very path-dependent ways.

## Participation and the Role of Civil Society and Expert Discourses

One of the consequences of this situation is that the constellations of rights and interests, the chances for implementing any specific strategies, and the conflicts that possibly emerge from these are varied. In all three countries, forms of civic participation are observable. These, however, include a wide variety of topics and issues, include different people, are organized in different ways, and have considerable differences in terms of their impact.

In order to systematize this bewildering variety, it may be helpful to distinguish the role residents play in decision-making concerning their homes, neighborhoods, and Estates. Here, three different roles can be observed.

First, residents can be seen as *citizens*. This is usually done by state decision-makers. The underlying idea is to give those who are affected by public actions a vote (in addition to elections). In the three countries observed, this is most often the case in Germany. This can, however, hardly come as a surprise because the degree and intensity of state intervention in the development of the Estates are incomparably higher in Germany than in Estonia and Russia. In recent decades, the German state has designed a broad variety of subsidy programs for the Estates we studied and, as a general rule, these programs were accompanied by more or less intensive participation activities, such as common hearings, roundtables, working groups, and participatory budgeting). While there are considerable differences between programs, times, and locations, the goal has always been to enhance the legitimacy of the proposed or planned projects and to ease their acceptance. Due to this long history, public participation has by now become a normality in area-based planning in Germany and is handled in an experienced and sophisticated way<sup>6</sup>. Similar area-based urban regeneration programs are missing in Estonia. However, recently major initiatives have been started here too, e.g. architectural vision competitions or thematic master plans, planning and building larger infrastructure objects. More systematic public involvement is also being organized such as seminars, meetings, and roundtables. In Russia, in contrast, public participation beyond elections is still in its infancy. However, important initiatives in this field can be found in St. Petersburg, though not in our case study areas.

A second role for citizens is their identity as *consumers*. Usually this is connected to new construction or the redevelopment of existing built structures. The goal here is to improve the marketability of the product by including the requirements of

<sup>6</sup> This does not, however, always guarantee greater influence of the residents on decision-making. Critical contributions (Fritsche 2011) have, described how conflicts have been micro-managed, critical voices sidelined, and marginalized groups excluded in some seemingly participatory planning projects in the context of Stadtumbau Ost.

potential buyers. The downside of this approach is that it is limited to the product under consideration, as well as to the potential groups of buyers. Neighborhood development issues that go beyond investment returns, and groups of people who are either not interested in the product or don't have the necessary purchasing power, are usually neglected. This is visibly the case in the newly built high-rise Estates on the outskirts of St. Petersburg (like Severnaya Dolina), where infrastructural matters have been neglected either in the planning process or at the stage of actual construction, and the housing provided is cheap and of limited quality, suitable for potential customers with limited financial resources and limited access to mortgages. In Estonia and Germany, participation as consumers is irrelevant, as no comparable new Large Housing Estates have been built since the transition. To some degree, participation as citizens and participation focuses on consumers aligning on matters of participation such as public infrastructures (community centers, parks, etc.), where residents have an interest both as potential consumers and citizens. However, this is mostly only the case with public initiatives.

The third role that people play is as *experts*. The major rationale for this kind of participation is that planners and decision-makers have a necessarily limited knowledge. Even if they know a lot, there can always be aspects that might potentially be important for the project that are not known or have not yet been considered. Including more people in the decision-making process can, thus, lead to a better understanding of the situation and improving the quality of the outcome. For this reason, planning has moved away from top-down, hierarchical procedures in many countries and is often done in a more open, collaborative, and inclusive way today. This is also observable in the Estates we have studied. In both Marzahn and Halle-Neustadt, neighborhood forums, neighborhood conferences, and networks have been founded at which planners, administrative decision-makers, housing companies, local politicians, and (some) residents meet on a more or less regular basis to discuss their perspectives and strategies.

In Estonia, the same development can be observed, albeit with a time lag. Since the 2000s, neighborhood movements and associations have been formed in many urban neighborhoods across Estonian cities, which have become a fruitful platform for the discussion of neighborhood issues on a regular basis. While initially Housing Estate neighborhoods seemed to be more passive in terms of community activism, in our case study districts, neighborhood associations were formed in the late 2010s and they have now come to play a crucial role in public discussions. Interestingly, many neighborhood initiatives were started by professional urbanists, architects, and planners who have, for example, held seminars on the future of planning in Housing Estates, organized vision competitions, and introduced new community activities like urban gardening or outdoor cinema

sessions. All these activities have resulted in bringing local people together and encouraging citizens to make their voices heard. Both in Tartu and Tallinn, active neighborhood associations have become important partners for the city governments in urban planning and cultural issues.

In Russia this role of residents as experts is much less recognized by developers and the state. The reason for this is often found in the authoritarian and expert-centered style of planning and decision-making that still dominates Russia's planning landscape today. New tools for participation, aimed at increasing identification and bringing residents' expertise into the agenda of urban development, have been emerging in Russian cities in the last few years (participatory budgeting, participatory planning), but they still represent an exception rather than the rule. However, the situation is changing.

Summarizing, that the expert knowledge of residents plays a role in the three different societies studied, but to varying degrees. Moreover, in Estates, we were able to identify platforms where communications between local activists and administrative and commercial stakeholders can take place. Naturally, however, the functioning of these forums is very dependent on the local situation and culture. There are different styles and traditions in organizing public dialogue, and so there is no "best practice" that could have a common value. In addition, especially with long-running forms of coordination and communication, there is easily a "club-effect" in which voices from outside the established participants are easily overheard and sidelined.

Finally, and most importantly, residents can be addressed or seen as *stakeholders*. This is most obviously the case with homeowners, or homeowner associations in Estonia and Russia. As land and property owners, they have a very strong legal position, and it is next to impossible to implement development plans without their consent. It is in this field that fundamental differences between Germany and Estonia and Russia can be observed. In the latter two countries, ownership and residency overlap to a wide degree. As owners, residents exercise a strong bargaining power and, as the case of Sosnovaya Polyana shows, are capable of complicating, impeding, or even stopping developments. While it needs to be emphasized that this preferable position only holds true for owners (tenants are a kind of "forgotten minority" in Russia and Estonia), this provides enormous structural power for residents. In Germany, where next to all residents are tenants, this is not the case. This is vividly demonstrated by the *Stadtumbau Ost* program, where it was mainly up to the housing companies and the municipalities to decide if a house should be demolished. The residents of the flats affected were barely included and didn't receive much compensation.

In summary, participation is not a matter of “more or less.” Advantages in one area (e.g. citizen participation) can be easily counterweighed by lack of participation in another (e.g. bargaining power as a stakeholder). The situation in the three countries studied is quite varied and the same is true even when comparing different participatory events in one neighborhood. Risking the danger of oversimplification, it seems as though techniques and procedures for including residents as citizens and as experts are fairly advanced in Germany and (based on less comprehensive and more piecemeal interventions) in Estonia. In both cases, participation rests on public interventions. In contrast, residents enjoy far more substantial rights as owners in Estonia and Russia and enjoy bargaining powers that go way beyond the invited, but controlled, participation in Germany.

### Strategies, Planning Styles, and Types of Intervention

Varying property relations, different forms and styles of state-society relations, and dissimilar planning and participation approaches have, among other issues, had a fundamental impact on the substance of planning initiatives in the Estates we have studied.

Previous studies on Large Housing Estates (e.g. Hess et al. 2018: 23f.) have used the distinction between “place-based,” “people-based,” and “connectivity-based” policies to characterize different ways to approach the challenges of Large Housing Estates. In this understanding, “place-based” policies mainly focus on upgrading the physical environment of Large Housing Estates. People-based policies, in contrast, aim to reduce poverty and create opportunities for education and employment. A third group of interventions can be termed “connectivity based,” as they do not focus on the neighborhood but try to reduce the separation between a particular area and the rest of the city. These interventions can be very physical (e.g. building a tramline), but they can also include “soft” forms of bringing people together<sup>7</sup>. Needless to say, all these types of intervention have their potentials and problems. Moreover, the effects are often interconnected. Building a new tramline, to give but one example, can go together with an upgrading of public spaces around the tram stops, and at the same time improve the accessibility of employment and leisure opportunities in the inner-city, thus, enabling poor households members to take new jobs and achieve higher incomes.

All three types of interventions can be observed in the neighborhoods studied, but to fundamentally varying degrees. The following table provides a short overview about the most important interventions:

<sup>7</sup> As the stigmatization of socialist housing estates has become a sensitive question in many locations (Kovacs and Herfert 2012), interventions which “lure” people from outside to visit the housing estates (like cultural events and facilities, commerce and services) have become increasingly popular.

	Place-Based Interventions	People-Based Interventions	Connectivity-Based Interventions
<b>Halle Neustadt (Germany)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public support for renovations</li> <li>• Demolition of buildings</li> <li>• Upgrading of public and green spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in planning</li> <li>• Investments in schools, training, and counselling activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of a tramline connecting Halle-Neustadt to the city center</li> </ul>
<b>Marzahn, Berlin (Germany)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public support for renovations</li> <li>• Demolition of buildings</li> <li>• Upgrading of public and green spaces</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in planning</li> <li>• Investments in schools, training, and counselling activities (mostly on the basis of specific programs such as <i>Soziale Stadt</i>)</li> </ul>	---
<b>Lasnamäe, Tallinn (Estonia)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New social housing projects</li> <li>• New market-rate homes on infills and at the fringes of the Estates</li> <li>• Renewing and designing yards, reorganizing parking</li> <li>• Thermal insulation of residential buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support to community movements – neighborhood movements are partners for the city and district government in social, cultural, and planning issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular investments in public transport improvements – Lasnamäe is well connected to the rest of the city</li> <li>• New commercial and public (municipal) services have been opened in Lasnamäe in recent decades, which could also be interpreted as finishing the planned infrastructure of these districts</li> </ul>

<b>Annelin-Jaamamõisa, Tartu (Estonia)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New market-rate homes as infills and at the fringes of the Estates</li> <li>• Renewing and designing yards, new playgrounds, cleaning and maintenance of open areas, and reorganizing parking</li> <li>• Vision competition for redesigning public spaces and subsequent investment in public space improvements</li> <li>• Thermal insulation of residential buildings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a remarkable part of the electorate lives in Housing Estates, municipalities regularly finance social policy costs, educational facilities, and the like in Housing Estates</li> <li>• Acceptance of the Annelinn neighborhood association as a partner by the city government</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular investments in public transport improvement – Annelinn is well connected to the rest of the city</li> <li>• Many new commercial and public (municipal) services have been opened in Annelinn in recent decades, which could also be interpreted as finishing the planned infrastructure of these districts</li> </ul>
<b>Sosnovaya Polyana, St. Petersburg (Russia)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Controversial) Demolition of “morally and physically degraded” houses</li> <li>• Construction of new high-rise residential buildings</li> <li>• Upgrading of the public spaces around the newly built houses (planned)</li> </ul>	---	---

Table 3: Most important public interventions in the neighborhoods studied (Note: Severnaya Dolina was excluded from this table, since it has only recently been built, so it can hardly be compared to the other neighborhoods in this regard).

On closer inspection, one immediately notices that most interventions aim to improve the physical environment of Large Housing Estates. This is by and large done by renovating existing homes as well as public and green spaces, and mostly done with the help of public subsidies. However, there are important differences between the subsidy programs and the actors, measures, and strategies included (even within the same Estate).

In Germany, the sheer financial volume of support provided for place-based approaches is incomparably higher than in Estonia and Russia. Both the power of the German economy and the “Ordo-Liberal” construction of German statehood have fostered a widely accepted perception of state responsibility that is reflected in a close to completely renovated building stock and good-quality public spaces.

In Estonia, the degree and intensity of renovations is considerably smaller. The two major reasons for this are the individualized property structures, on the one hand, and lower state capacities, on the other. The renovation of the housing stock has, thus, only gained ground after the accession of Estonia to the EU and is still far from being finished. It is mainly driven by homeowner associations. In Estonia, public spaces in general, have a sort of in-between character. They are a public responsibility, and there is a widespread consensus that there is a need for a stronger role of municipal investments in their maintenance, renewal, and development, yet this has hardly been realized. Municipalities still too often take a “wait-and-see” position and tend to rely on homeowners to take responsibility for the surroundings of their homes, rather than developing their own policies.

In Russia, as a rule of thumb, renovation activities are small-scale and mostly driven forward at the level of individual apartments. Public and green spaces are often neglected. Low state/city capacities, ineffective government structures, and economic insecurity severely complicate public interventions in the existing built environment. The exception for this are large-scale redevelopment projects like the *renovatsiya*, which include the demolition of “khrushchevka” buildings and their replacement with new high rises, or the wholesale construction of new Estates. These projects are usually based on public-private partnerships between the local government and big business developers. They are completely market-led and financially based on increasing the number of homes in an area and the sale of new built apartments to new residents. Consequently, these approaches are biased towards new construction and short-term physical upgrading, both at the cost of long-term sustainability and existing structures.

In implementing these projects (especially in already built up areas), the fragmentation of property structures becomes a major problem. Together with

weak state capacities, this regularly impedes the implementation of more ambitious goals, and leads to a high number of projects that have failed to be realized.

Both in terms of frequency and regarding the money spent, people-based interventions play a more minor role. Contrary to the advice given in much of the scholarly literature, this type of intervention still is seen as difficult, and it seems that there is a bias towards “hard” and “physical” policies in many Estates. Even though people-based interventions are less expensive, their application is severely limited and most of what is done is either based on the physical upgrading (or new building) of educational infrastructure or specific neighborhood programs (as for the *Soziale Stadt* in Germany). It seems that there are several reasons for this:

- a) Improving the social situation of residents takes time and is often prevented by the counteracting dynamics that work beyond the neighborhood (e.g. unemployment levels, immigration, segregation). Success is easier to demonstrate with place-based approaches.
- b) The approach needs to be sensitive towards local contexts and local needs: “one size does not fit all.” This is intensely reflected in the design of public programs like *Soziale Stadt*, which are based on the development of “integrated development plans” for individual neighborhoods.
- c) The necessarily localized character of people-based (yet at the same time area-based) interventions makes it difficult to integrate the approaches into the structures of policies that work across locations. This often leads to tensions between different governmental departments (e.g. planning vs. welfare). The planning and distribution of schooling and childcare capacities, and the distribution of refugees are vivid examples of this.

In Russia, people-based intervention, also hardly seem to make sense because social segregation (or the concentration of particular social problems in certain areas) has not yet progressed. “People-based” interventions aimed at the “improvement” of the “quality of population” residing in particular areas of the city, do not really apply to the situation at hand.

Additionally, connectivity-based policies can be distinguished between “hard” (i.e. investments into infrastructure) and “soft” (i.e. image and marketing campaigns) interventions. In general, many of the existing Estates were already well-connected to the city center by public transport connections when they were built. The exception is Halle-Neustadt, yet the construction of a tramline was completed in the 1990s. The situation is very different in newly built Estates in Russia (like *Severnaya Dolina*), which often lack adequate transportation fa-

cilities. Solving this problem remains a central task for the future of these settlements. “Soft” connectivity-based policies, in contrast, can be found in many different forms in almost all Estates we looked at. In Germany, image and marketing campaigns for Housing Estates are organized on a regular basis as part of state or municipal programs, however, the outcome is difficult to gauge. In Estonia and Russia, it seems that image policies are more driven by activist and neighborhood organizations that try to counteract the stigmatization related to their neighborhood. They focus first on the local community, so they feel good in their own neighborhood.

## Conclusions

Comparing the governance of Large Housing Estates in Estonia, Germany, and Russia, it becomes obvious that the conditions for urban development vary fundamentally both between the six cases reviewed, but also between the cases and much of the literature.

In all the cases, private ownership plays an important, if not dominant, role. State capacities allowing coherent long-term interventions are only strong in Germany. In Estonia, they are being developed and in Russia the constellations remain very complicated, with most of interventions being developer-led and dependent on business interests (which imply the construction of poor quality new housing, rather than the improvement of the existing urban environment). Moreover, planning experiences and the strategies applied differ widely between the Estates studied. A first conclusion is, therefore, that premature generalizations about strategies should be avoided. It has become very clear that “one-size-fits-all” approaches don’t lead very far, and this seems especially to be the case when North-West European Estates are taken as point of reference.

At the same time, the comparison between the planning histories and governance challenges regarding the development of the six Estates we have studied in Russia, Estonia, and Germany enables us to draw some conclusions.

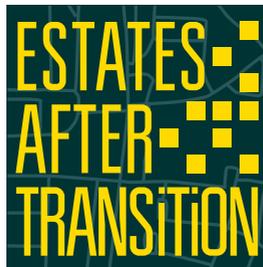
- 1) In general, privatization has impeded the chances for the long-term integrated development of the Estates. This is especially visible in Russia and Estonia, where the fragmentation of property rights has led to sustained problems of coordination and activation. Yet, even in Germany with its large housing companies, the sale of municipal and public stocks has led to a “dualization” of property structures, in which around one third of the housing stock is of bounds for public planning.
- 2) In order to overcome coordination problems and provide support for not-immediately profitable infrastructure, state intervention is indispensable. Marzahn and Halle-Neustadt provide useful examples that demonstrate how even extreme developments (like strong population losses or dynamic population growth) can be managed with acceptable quality by dedicated public programs. The two Russian cases, in contrast, show that the implementation of long-term development goals and infrastructure provision is rather difficult with public-private partnerships, where strategic decisions and care for public concerns are delegated to businesses.
- 3) Participatory approaches need to balance the different possible roles residents play, which are embedded in the different histories of post-socialist transitions in the three countries. Both planning culture and political tradi-

tions, but also veto-rights connected to ownership, are crucial to the ways in which meaningful participation can be achieved. Consequently, context sensitive approaches are essential.

Summarizing, it should be emphasized that Large Housing Estates will remain a key challenge for the social, economic, and ecological development of cities throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Policy interactions and coordination are key for this. In this sense, the study at hand provides a basis for thinking about the conditions under which solutions found in one location can be applied elsewhere. The major “take-away” messages from the study are a warning against naïve “best practice” exportation, and a call to take path dependencies and political frameworks seriously when thinking about strategies for the future of Large Housing Estates.

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