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Christoph Bernhardt

On Municipal Governance, Urban Housing and Construction in Nazi Germany*

This article takes up recent discussions of the role of “ordinary Germans” and municipal actors played in the National Socialist regime, with a particular focus on antisemitic persecution in the housing and construction sector. It first retraces how a new regime of governance was introduced at the municipal level and then discusses the interplay between popular violence and administrative and legal repression against Jewish people in different segments of urban society. Furthermore, the Nazi governance of planning and construction is discussed with special reference to some crucial legal initiatives, many of which failed. Finally, some personal continuities and ruptures in the post-war period are discussed, with particular attention to the time lag in the critical public debate on the local scale of the Nazi regime, which only emerged from the 1980s onwards.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, research on National Socialism has considerably widened its scope beyond earlier, well-established approaches such as “polycracy” (Hans Mommsen) or “destruction of urban self-government” (Horst Matzerath).¹ In contrast to these mainly institutionally oriented, state-centered concepts, which were focusing on the dichotomy between a totalitarian dictatorship and the democracy that preceded it, recent studies have adopted new, complementary perspectives. On the one hand, more attention is now paid to the “self-mobilization” of socio-professional elites, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in the “Volksgemeinschaft,” and the activism of local party

* This paper is based on previous research, most recently in a project I co-directed with Harald Bodenschatz from 2019 to 2023 and whose findings were published in Christoph Bernhardt and Harald Bodenschatz et. al., Städtebau und Politik: Altstadterneuerung und Bau neuer Städte, in Die Unabhängige Historikerkommission „Planen und Bauen im Nationalsozialismus“ (ed.), Planen und Bauen im Nationalsozialismus: Voraussetzungen, Institutionen, Wirkungen, Vol. 2, Nuremberg 2023, pp. 532-651. See also Christoph Bernhardt, Wohnungspolitik und Bauwirtschaft in Berlin (1930-1950), in Michael Wildt and Christoph Kreuzmüller (eds.), Berlin 1933-1945, Berlin 2013, pp. 177-192.

¹ Martin Broszat, Der Staat Hitlers. Grundlegung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung, 11th ed., Munich 1986; Hans Mommsen, Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Gesellschaft. Ausgewählte Aufsätze, Reinbek 1991; Horst Matzerath, Nationalsozialismus und kommunale Selbstverwaltung, Stuttgart 1970.

members and ordinary citizens.² Wolf Gruner, Bernhard Gotto, Rüdiger Fleiter, Sabine Mecking and Andreas Wirsching, Winfried Süß and Malte Thießén, and others show that local initiatives were crucial to the murderous logic of the destruction of democracy and anti-Jewish persecution.³ As a result, notions of a centralized totalitarian dictatorship have been supplemented and partly revised by a new emphasis on the contribution of “ordinary Germans,” local party members, and municipal bureaucrats to the National Socialist agenda.

On the other hand, the interferences and networks of public actors across the different scales of the state administration and the NSDAP have been discussed in a related strand of research. Concepts like the “precarious state,” elaborated by Sven Reichardt and Walter Seibel,⁴ approach the National Socialist political system as a hybrid socio-cultural type of governance in the sense of current political science.⁵ In a similar vein, Hachtmann has coined the term “new statehood”, which intends to better understand the commonalities and differences between democratic and authoritarian regimes and to grasp the transformation from one to the other.⁶

This paper adopts these two recent approaches and brings them to bear on the analysis of municipal affairs, and housing and construction policies in particular. It first retraces how a new regime of governance was introduced on the municipal level and then discusses the interplay between popular violence and administrative and legal repression against Jewish people in different segments of urban society. Third, aspects of the National Socialist governance of plan-

² Oliver Werner (ed.), *Mobilisierung im Nationalsozialismus. Institutionen und Regionen in der Kriegswirtschaft und der Verwaltung des ›Dritten Reiches‹ 1936 bis 1945*, Paderborn 2013.

³ Cf. Wolf Gruner, *Die Kommunen im Nationalsozialismus. Innenpolitische Akteure und ihre wirkungsmächtige Vernetzung*, in Sven Reichardt and Wolfgang Seibel (eds.), *Der prekäre Staat. Herrschen und Verwalten im Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt 2011, pp. 167-212; Bernhard Gotto, *Nationalsozialistische Kommunalpolitik. Administrative Normalität und Systemstabilisierung durch die Augsburger Stadtverwaltung 1933-1945*, Munich 2006; Rüdiger Fleiter, *Stadtverwaltung im Dritten Reich. Verfolgungspolitik auf kommunaler Ebene am Beispiel Hannovers*, Hannover 2006; Sabine Mecking and Andreas Wirsching (eds.), *Stadtverwaltung im Nationalsozialismus. Systemstabilisierende Dimensionen kommunaler Herrschaft*, Paderborn 2005.

⁴ Reichardt and Seibel, *Der prekäre Staat*.

⁵ Gunnar Folke Schuppert (ed.), *Von Staat zu Staatlichkeit. Beiträge zu einer multi-disziplinären Staatlichkeitswissenschaft*, Baden-Baden 2019.

⁶ Cf. Rüdiger Hachtmann, *Systemzerfall oder “Neue Staatlichkeit”?* Thesen zur Struktur des NS-Regimes, in Hachtmann and Winfried Süß (eds.), *Hitlers Kommissare. Sondergewalten in der nationalsozialistischen Diktatur*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 89-100; see also Thomas Schaarschmidt, *Multi-Level Governance in Hitler’s Germany: Reassessing the Political Structure of the National Socialist State*, *Historical Social Research* 42 (2017), pp. 218-242.

ning and construction are treated with special reference to some crucial legal initiatives. Finally, the article, which due to space limitations focuses on the pre-war period 1933-1939 and on the case of Berlin, offers a brief outlook on some post-war trends.

2. Institutional Ruptures and Personal Continuities, 1933-1937

The National Socialists seized power in 1933 through coordinated violent campaigns against left-wing municipal councilors, public and trade union companies, and Jewish citizens, which went hand in hand with authoritarian legal reform. The new urban institutional regime was triggered and executed by National Socialist cadres, some of them veterans of the party's expansion in the late 1920s. At the same time, it was accepted and supported by a majority of the employees and many leading representatives of the Weimar-era municipal administration. While some mayors of big cities, such as Konrad Adenauer (Cologne) or Karl Scharnagl (Munich), were suspended or forced to resign, others, such as Heinrich Sahn (Berlin), Carl Friedrich Goerdeler (Leipzig), and Karl Lautenschlager (Stuttgart), collaborated with the new regime. These collaborators counted nearly 100 out of 252 big-city mayors, who, according to Horst Matzerath's evaluation, remained in their position⁷ and accepted or even supported the criminal repression against Jewish citizens and other victims of the regime. The same goes for many heads of municipal planning and construction departments, even more of whom remained in office, such as Fritz Beblo (München), Paul Wolf (Dresden), Moritz Wolf (Leipzig), and others. All in all, more than 90 % of the municipal employees continued their work: in Berlin, 95 % out of 24,000 municipal employees remained in their positions; in Münster, that was the case for more than 99 %.⁸ Institutionally, the destruction of municipal self-government was completed by the Prussian Municipal constitutional law of December 15, 1933. Following the "leadership principle" ("Führerprinzip"), this law degraded the municipal council to an informal, non-public consultancy, whereas the mayors held uncontrolled executive power. The other

⁷ Cf. Christoph Bernhardt, *Nationalsozialistische Machteroberung in Kommunalpolitik und Städtebau (1930-1937): Akteure und Institutionen im NS-Städtebau*, in *Unabhängige Historikerkommission, Planen und Bauen*, pp. 539-545, here p. 542; Matzerath, *Nationalsozialismus*, p. 80.

⁸ Cf. Christian Engeli and Wolfgang Ribbe, *Berlin in der NS-Zeit*, in Wolfgang Ribbe (ed.), *Geschichte Berlins*, Vol. 2, Munich 1987, pp. 927-1024, here p. 939; Sabine Mecking, *Erstklassige Verwaltungskarrieren bei zweitklassigen Voraussetzungen. Die städtische Funktionseleite der westfälischen Gauhauptstadt Münster*, in: Detlef Schmiechen-Ackermann and Steffi Kaltenborn (eds.), *Stadtgeschichte in der NS-Zeit*, Münster 2005, pp. 66-78, here p. 71.

German federal states soon adopted this rule.³⁷

As a result, the new National Socialist urban regime was in actual fact based on a coalition between traditional municipal elites, National socialist activists within the administration, and party officials from outside, among them so-called “old fighters” (“alte Kämpfer”), who had already been party members in the 1920s. The latter were often given key positions, from which they directed and dynamically developed the municipal governance of the city in question. Examples include the new mayors Karl Fiehler in Munich, Karl Strölin in Stuttgart, Wilhelm Hesse in Braunschweig, and Adalbert Pfeil, the head of Berlin’s construction department.⁹

Beyond this seizure of established political and administrative institutions, the specific “National Socialist statehood” or mode of governance was characterized by the close cooperation of these traditional municipal administrations with new institutional actors. This was especially true with regard to the large non-profit sector of construction and housing (“gemeinnützige Bau- und Wohnungswirtschaft”), whose companies were mostly incorporated into the newly created, powerful “German Labor Front” (“Deutsche Arbeitsfront,” DAF).¹⁰ The DAF thereby gained a strong economic basis and, after dismissing the incorporated companies’ management and often staff, was able to provide attractive jobs for NSDAP members.

The powerful regional party leaders (“Gauleiter”) complemented and supervised the new conglomerate of public administration and party institutions. They intervened in many local plans and projects, took decisions on filling key municipal positions, and organized architectural and planning competitions. In the course of the 1930s, these new leaders increasingly accumulated formal political competencies. Furthermore, they were developing a quasi-feudal concept of regional government, which included strategies to establish regional capital cities (“Gauhauptstädte”) that were encouraged by Hitler and his circle.

3. Anti-Jewish Discrimination and Prosecution in the Housing and Construction Sector

The campaigns for anti-Jewish discrimination and prosecution showed the interplay between popular violence and legal repression, which the regime intentionally instigated. These campaigns, which escalated over time, mainly unfolded in three subfields of the housing and construction sector: the discrimination of professional activities and enterprises; the repression and expropriation

⁹ Cf. Bernhardt, *Nationalsozialistische Machteroberung*, p. 542.

¹⁰ Rüdiger Hachtmann, *Das Wirtschaftsimperium der Deutschen Arbeitsfront 1933–1945*, Göttingen 2012.

of Jewish landowners; and the discrimination, eviction, and deportation of Jewish tenants.

The discrimination of professional activities and enterprises in the construction sector started with the eviction of public servants and staff of commercial and non-profit companies in the first period of antisemitic persecution between the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” (“Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums”) of April 7, 1933 and the Nuremberg Laws (“Nürnberger Gesetze”) of 1935. Similar mechanisms of discrimination and repression targeted Jewish members of the liberal professions and entrepreneurs, such as lawyers, architects, and managers of construction companies and banks. In these businesses, legal repression and market mechanisms such as competition, which were intentionally used to privilege non-Jewish actors, went hand in hand.¹¹ In Berlin, the major municipal company for housing and construction, GSW, formally excluded “non-Aryan” contractors and sub-contractors.¹² The wide spectrum of discriminatory regulations and actions ranged from excluding these businesses from tenders for public works through evicting Jewish members from boards of directors to the compulsory sale of shareholdings below market price.¹³ As a result, by 1938, more than 50 % of formerly Jewish enterprises in mid-sized towns such as Göttingen or Heidelberg had been “Aryanized.” At the same time, this process of “Aryanization” was rapidly unfolding even in big cities such as Hamburg and Berlin, where Jewish businesses had, for some time, found better conditions for their own survival.¹⁴ Old antisemitic stigmatizations of “land speculation” were used to transform the land development business. Former members of Berlin's high society from this economic sector, such as Herbert Gutman, Adolf Sommerfeld, Kurt Haberland, Julius Berger, and others, were evicted from their positions, expropriated, and forced to emigrate with their families or else killed in concentration or extermination camps.¹⁵

Repression and expropriation of Jewish landowners were especially far-reaching in old inner-city districts, where projects for urban renewal were used

¹¹ Cf. Sylvia Necker, *Konstanty Gutschow 1902–1978. Modernes Denken und volksgemeinschaftliche Utopie eines Architekten*, Hamburg 2012, pp. 164–165.

¹² Cf. “Vorbemerkung zur Abgabe von Angeboten an die Gemeinnützige Siedlungs- und Wohnungsbaugesellschaft Berlin mbH”, n. d., Landesarchiv Berlin, A Rep. 009, Nr. 31423.

¹³ Cf. Christoph Bernhardt and Kerstin Thiel, *Neuorganisation des Städtebaus im Zeichen von Aufrüstung und Krieg (1937–1942)*, in *Unabhängige Historikerkommission, Planen und Bauen*, Vol. 2, pp. 545–551, here p. 550.

¹⁴ Cf. Frank Bajohr, *Die Zustimmungsdiktatur. Grundzüge nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft in Hamburg*, in *Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg* (ed.), *Hamburg im »Dritten Reich«*, Göttingen 2005, pp. 69–121.

¹⁵ Cf. Bernhardt, *Wohnungspolitik*, p. 182.

to trigger land transactions. In the center of Berlin, in the small strip of land between the Berlin Castle and Alexanderplatz alone, more than 225 properties were robbed from their Jewish owners.¹⁶ In 1938, a series of legal regulations was set up to exclude Jewish entrepreneurs from land property trading and to extensively register Jewish ownership. Again, a wide range of specific actions was used to implement this strategy, such as compensation below market price in cases of expropriation and a public pre-emption right to buy Jewish land. These were executed by extended networks of tax officers, land registry offices, notaries, lawyers, and municipal bureaucrats. Legal and administrative persecution went hand in hand with police raids and antisemitic riots, which grew in 1937 and 1938.

The regime's strategy to take up and instigate popular antisemitism on an everyday level and combine it with administrative repression and legal persecution clearly transpires from the discrimination, eviction, and deportation of Jewish tenants. Right from the start, this strategy was used to counteract the critical housing shortage. Jewish tenants' apartments were regarded as a reserve and increasingly appropriated by the regime, especially in Berlin. As early as 1933 and 1934, the Berlin municipal administration cast its eye on numerous new small flats, which had been gained by separating large apartments. Probably, the vacant large apartments had been taken over from Jewish émigrés, but this has so far been overlooked in the lively scholarly debate on Berlin's housing problems during the early 1930s.¹⁷

These small-scale, everyday antisemitic strategies become very obvious in various bureaucratic documents. From 1935 onwards, the public housing companies asked every applicant for an apartment about their "Aryan descent." At the same time, any rental arrears of Jewish tenants or other insinuations were carefully registered. They were taken as pretexts to target the tenants concerned and get rid of as many of them as possible, as Adalbert Pfeil, the head of the municipal construction department, was reporting to State Commissioner Julius Lippert.¹⁸ Direct intervention from public companies against their tenants worked better than rigid legal rules, he argued, because they allowed for a more flexible policy of repression. The GSW company highly appreciated the social pressure of the collective of National Socialist neighbors, which, according to all experience, effectively motivated Jewish tenants to leave their flats.¹⁹

¹⁶ Cf. Franziska Nentwig and Stadtmuseum Berlin (eds.), *Geraubte Mitte. Die »Arisierung« des jüdischen Grundeigentums im Berliner Stadtkern 1933–1945*, Ausst.-Kat., Berlin 2013, p. 7.

¹⁷ Cf. Bernhardt, *Wohnungspolitik*, p. 182 f.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 185.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 186.

These internal conversations clearly show the intentional division of labor in antisemitic campaigns between popular aggression and administrative repression.

In the following years, these campaigns were escalated as “Aryan” tenants increasingly found their Jewish neighbors objectionable, a view for which they received support from landlords and the courts. In early 1939, major public housing companies in Berlin proudly reported to have terminated nearly all rental contracts with Jewish tenants. A few months later, the “Law Concerning Jewish Tenants” (“Gesetz über die Mietverhältnisse mit Juden”) of April 30, 1939 legally codified and generalized this policy of violent displacement and set the start for the final step, namely, the compulsory concentration and deportation of the German Jews. The creation of so-called “Jew Apartments” (“Judenwohnungen”) or “Jew Houses” (“Judenhäuser”) in Berlin as well as the campaigns of Speer's “General Building Inspection” (“Generalbauinspektion”), which in 1941/42 organized the deportation of the last Jewish people from Berlin in order to distribute their flats to “Aryan tenants,” have been documented in all their horrifying and tragic detail in earlier studies.²⁰ Since 2023, a digital exhibition, a large accompanying program, and a comprehensive book have elucidated the living conditions in the “Forced Homes” (“Zwangsräume”) and the fates of their inhabitants.²¹

4. Destructing the Rule of Law in Planning and Construction

The specifically National Socialist mode of governance (“nationalsozialistische Staatlichkeit”) in municipal affairs, housing, and construction also had a more formal side. Some of the legal changes that the Nazi regime introduced or attempted to introduce can illustrate this. Several failed legislative initiatives demonstrate that the regime was strongly hostile to rule-based policies and was incapable of pursuing them itself. The new general municipal law (“Deutsche Gemeindeordnung”), which was introduced on January 30, 1935, was the only relatively solid and coherent reform in this field, as it was developed with the help of the remaining conservative legal experts from the Weimar period. In the crucial political question of reconfiguring power rela-

²⁰ Johann Friedrich Geist and Klaus Kürvers, *Das Berliner Mietshaus 1862-1945*, Munich 1984; Susanne Willems, *Der entsiedelte Jude. Albert Speers Wohnungsmarktpolitik für den Berliner Hauptstadtbau*, Berlin 2002; See also Bernhardt, *Wohnungspolitik*.

²¹ Cf. *Forced Homes. Antisemitic Housing Policy in Berlin 1939-1945*, <https://zwangs-raeume.berlin/en> [November 11, 2024]; Akim Jah and Christoph Kreutzmüller (eds.), *Zwangsräume. Antisemitische Wohnungspolitik in Berlin 1939-1945*, Berlin 2024, https://metropol-verlag.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/jah_kreutzmueller_zwangs-raeume_ebook_offen.pdf [November 11, 2024].

tions, it gave the National Socialist state an unlimited right of supervision (“Aufsichtsrecht”) in municipal affairs and granted the NSDAP the mandate to intervene in any personal and political decision taken by municipal bodies.²²

The next legislative initiatives in the field of planning and construction that the regime launched clearly showed its inability to achieve comprehensive legal regulation. The first initiative, which was started in 1935, was a draft law called “Reich Law for Measures to Cure Ills through Urban Planning” (“Reichsgesetz für städtebauliche Gesundheitsmaßnahmen”), which was meant to regulate the field of urban renewal and, especially, to solve the critical question of financial compensation for the expropriation of landowners. The draft was first elaborated and published by the German Academy for Urban, Regional, and National Planning (Deutsche Akademie für Städtebau, Reichs- und Landesplanung), but was then very controversially discussed amongst experts and receded to the background over the following two years.²³ Instead, the strong inclination to subordinate legal principles to the party’s short-term political interests and to privilege Hitler’s favorite planners, such as Albert Speer in Berlin, Hermann Giesler in Munich, and Konstanty Gutschow in Hamburg, became obvious in a law passed on January 30, 1937. This seemingly small but far-reaching new rule created the “General Building Inspector” (“Generalbauinspektor”) agency for Berlin and gave its head Speer unlimited authority. Complicated legal problems concerning the cooperation between municipal and state actors or the legal principles for expropriation were simply suspended by establishing Speer’s agency as a commanding office to all other institutional actors.²⁴ A second law, the so-called “Law on Redesigning German Cities” (“Gesetz über die Neugestaltung deutscher Städte”) of October 4, 1937, completed the institutional transformation of rule by law into an arbitrary personal system, as it gave Hitler the right to declare urban areas in 23 major cities special zones with low standards for expropriation. In practical terms, this meant that securing the “Führer”’s support became decisive for local and regional actors who wanted to realize major urban development projects.²⁵

Another of the regime’s legislative initiatives, which was intended to regulate monument protection (“Gesetz zum Schutz der Kulturdenkmale”), was discussed between 1935 and 1938 but halted after intra-administrative struggles, thereby continuing the series of failed legal initiatives that proved too complex

²² Cf. Matzerath, *Nationalsozialismus*.

²³ Cf. Bernhardt, *Nationalsozialistische Machteroberung*, p. 543 f.

²⁴ Cf. Erlaß über einen Generalbauinspektor für die Reichshauptstadt, in *Reichsgesetzblatt* 13:1, 1937, p. 103; see Bernhardt and Thieler, *Neuorganisation*, p. 546.

²⁵ Cf. Gesetz über die Neugestaltung deutscher Städte. Vom 4. Oktober 1937, in *Reichsgesetzblatt* 109:1, 1937, p. 1054 f.; see Bernhardt and Thieler, *Neuorganisation*, p. 546.

for the regime to pursue. The project of a comprehensive national construction law (“Baugesetz”), which had been drafted in 1940 by the National Ministry of Labor, was suspended for similar reasons in the summer of 1941.²⁶ The decline and destruction of the state order in the field of planning and construction was completed in October 1942 by the hostile takeover of the highest department of housing in Germany by a newly established Nazi institution: Robert Ley, who in 1940 had become the Reich’s special commissioner for housing (“Reichswohnungskommissar”), managed to take the Department for Housing and Settlement (“Hauptabteilung für Wohnungs- und Siedlungswesen”, HA IV) out of the National Ministry of Labor (“Reichsarbeitsministerium”), where it had supervised public housing policies since the early 1920s. The entire department with its staff was incorporated into Ley’s agency.²⁷

5. Reconfiguring National Socialist Governance during the Bombing War (1942–1945)

In the context of the escalating war and the growing destruction of German cities since around 1942, another type of urban governance emerged in which municipal administration regained influence as part of a multi-level emergency regime. Malte Thießen has retraced the emergence of new central state agencies on the one hand, such as Speer’s well-known “Working Staff for Reconstruction Planning” (“Arbeitsstab für Wiederaufbauplanung”), Ley’s office as “Reich Commissioner for Social Housing Construction” (“Reichskommissar für den sozialen Wohnungsbau”), and other institutions.²⁸ Then again, local party organizations and municipal authorities took on a key role in organizing the removal of debris and tackling problems of housing and reconstruction. Newly built local public offices, especially the “War Damage Offices” (“Kriegschädenämter”, KSA), had to provide friendly advice and practical assistance to desperate and bombed-out citizens.

For nationwide problems in managing the urban crisis caused by the Allied bombs, the German municipal association (“Deutsche Gemeindetag”) offered consultancy services and rapidly gained influence as a hub for information and networking.²⁹ When the national government collapsed at the end of the war,

²⁶ Cf. Bernhardt and Thieler, *Neuorganisation*, p. 547; Bernhardt, *Nationalsozialistische Machteroberung*, p. 541-542.

²⁷ Cf. Karl Christian Führer, *Wohnungsbaupolitische Konzepte des Reichsarbeitsministeriums*, in Alexander Nützenadel (ed.), *Das Reichsarbeitsministerium im Nationalsozialismus. Verwaltung – Politik – Verbrechen*, Göttingen 2017, pp. 177-213.

²⁸ Cf. Malte Thießen, *Krisenmanagement und Gewalt im Bombenkrieg (1942–1945)*, in *Die Unabhängige Historikerkommission* (ed.), *Planen und Bauen*, Vol. 2, pp. 551-558, here p. 552.

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 554.

local administration remained one of the few outposts of public order.

6. *Shadow Lines in the Post-war Period*

A brief look at the post-war period can help to identify some institutional and personal continuities and ruptures on the local scale as well as patterns of remembrance. After the end of the war, only a few leading National Socialist officials like Albert Speer and some mayors of large cities were sentenced in court. In the emerging socialist system in East Germany, most former municipal mayors and councilors for housing and planning were suspended, except for some rare individual figures, for instance in Potsdam and Dresden.³⁰ In contrast, Speer's experts succeeded in occupying key positions in West German municipal administrations, especially as town planning officers ("Stadtbauräte") in cities like Düsseldorf, Hannover, and Hamburg.³¹ Former National Socialist companies for housing and construction were continuing their business within a new legal framework and partly with new staff but often preserved their pre-1945 organizational design, as was the case for the large housing trust "Neue Heimat."³² Most of their former Jewish and socialist employees had been murdered or driven into exile. Almost none of them returned, safe for a few exceptions, such as Frankfurt's former town planning officer Ernst May, nor was there any form of critical public remembrance in the first decades after World War II.

A detailed look into local constellations would reveal contradictory settings of personal continuities and ruptures, as can be shown for West Berlin. Here, the top position of the Senate's town planning officer was for several decades occupied by Social Democrats such as Hans Scharoun, Rolf Schwedler, and Werner Düttmann. On the second administrative level, however, National Socialist veterans such as the director of construction Hans Stephan were still active. In the architectural department of the Technical University, which served as a hub for planning and construction in West Berlin, Scharoun met leading figures from the National Socialist period such as Werner March.³³ The

³⁰ Cf. Frank Betker and Harald Engler, *Wohnungspolitische und städtebauliche Weichenstellungen in SBZ und DDR bis 1955*, in *Unabhängige Historikerkommission, Planen und Bauen*, Vol. 3, pp. 984-1081.

³¹ Cf. Werner Durth, *Deutsche Architekten. Biographische Verflechtungen 1900-1970*, Braunschweig 1986.

³² Cf. Hachtmann, *Das Wirtschaftsimperium*; Peter Krämper, *NEUE HEIMAT. Unternehmenspolitik und Unternehmensentwicklung im gewerkschaftlichen Wohnungs- und Städtebau 1950-1982*, Stuttgart 2008; Bernhard Stier/Martin Krauss, *Drei Wurzeln – ein Unternehmen. 125 Jahre Bilfinger Berger AG*, Heidelberg 2005.

³³ Bernhardt, *Wohnungspolitik*, p. 190.

biography of the former powerful National Socialist town planning officer and adjunct Berlin mayor, Adalbert Pfeil, reflects the unwillingness of urban societies in post-war West Germany to cope with National Socialism's criminal past: Pfeil was dismissed from his position but was assessed as someone who had been "not involved" in the Nazi regime ("nicht belastet"). He continued to work as an architect in Berlin until the 1960s and has until recently been ignored by scholarship and the public alike.³⁴

All in all, in the public debate on planning and construction there was practically no critical awareness of National Socialism's heritage and memory for almost 40 years. In more recent research, several possible explanations for this time lag have been discussed. Apart from strong pragmatic motives to reuse the National Socialist-built heritage in the post-war emergency situation, specific patterns of public remembrance seem to have contributed to a culture of concealment. Among these patterns, a discourse of self-victimization among the German population, together with a penchant for assigning blame to a small group of National Socialist leaders, has been put forward by Wolfram Pyta et al.³⁵ Wolfgang Hofmann, the dean of modern German urban history, has argued that the effort to re-establish democracy in 1950s West Germany redirected attention to models of democratic urban governance in the early 19th and 20th centuries.³⁶ For the GDR, the socialist narrative of a fundamental break with National Socialism and the suggestion of a new start from "zero hour" have been taken as possible explanations for the lack of a broader debate.³⁷ Ignorance and exculpation of National Socialist debt and crimes in 1950s West Germany even extended to the key role Albert Speer had played in the deportation of Berlin Jews, which only became known to a wider public and to most experts since the 1980s.³⁸ It took another three decades, until the 2000s, for the active part of local National Socialist party committees and municipal actors in the criminal repression and racist propaganda, including town planning officers from Munich and Augsburg all the way to Hannover and Hamburg, to be

³⁴ Cf. Christoph Bernhardt, Biographie Adalbert Pfeil, in Unabhängige Historikerkommission, *Planen und Bauen*, Vol. 4, p. 1230.

³⁵ Cf. Wolfram Pyta et al., *Planen und Bauen im Nationalsozialismus. Intentionen, Institutionen, Implikationen*, in: Unabhängige Historikerkommission, *Planen und Bauen*, Vol. 1, pp. 5-41, esp. p. 31 f.

³⁶ Cf. Wolfgang Hofmann, *Es begann mit Stein*, in Hofmann, *Bürgerschaftliche Repräsentanz und kommunale Daseinsvorsorge. Studien zur neueren Stadtgeschichte*, Stuttgart 2012, pp. 363-408, esp. pp. 382-391.

³⁷ Cf. Pyta et al., *Planen und Bauen im Nationalsozialismus*, p. 30.

³⁸ Cf. Hans J. Reichardt and Wolfgang Schäche, *Von Berlin nach Germania. Über die Zerstörungen der Reichshauptstadt durch Albert Speers Neugestaltungsplanungen*, 3rd ed., Berlin 1985; Magnus Brechtken, *Albert Speer – eine deutsche Karriere*, Munich 2017; and footnote 24 of this paper.

revealed. Only recently street names after some key figures, like Hannover's town planning officer Karl Elkhart,³⁹ have been removed. We still await a broad, comprehensive survey and public debate on the National Socialist regime at the municipal level, in the field of planning and construction.

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³⁹ Cf. Fleiter, Stadtverwaltung; Joachim Perels, Ein Machtträger der NS-Diktatur als Namensgeber in der Nachkriegsdemokratie: Probleme einer Umbenennung der Elkartallee in Hannover, in Kritische Justiz 41:1, 2008, pp. 95-100.