



Mietskaserne

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palace prison Mietskaserne

Meyer's Hof (*1875 Berlin † 1972 Berlin): misery vs. utopia

abstract

The 'Mietskaserne' emerged as an urban block scheme in the early years of industrialisation. Berlin provided fertile soil for the rise of 'rental barracks' with several buildings on a single plot separated by small courtyards. This building type was supposed to house a maximum number of tenants - mostly workers. Coping with the fast growing need for workers' homes was but one reason for the rise of large tenements. Landlords saw the opportunity to draw immense profit with rental incomes. Mietskasernen serve as symbols of capitalism in its early days in general and speculation in particular. A case study of Berlin's biggest Mietskaserne "Meyer's Hof" (indented text body) disclosed general issues of mass accommodation with a focus on sociological aspects. Three chapters illustrate how the built structures of the Mietskasernen - that is: the architecture - largely contribute to the formation a 'milieu' - the tenants' social environment. Meyer's Hof was perceived by its tenants as both prison and palace. The latter notion is widely overlooked in publications.

The chapter MIETSKASERNE examines the genesis of the building type with regard to its basic principles. A Berlin specific situation is closely linked to the city's urban planning efforts directed by civil planner James Hobrecht and his master plan in the 1860s. General propositions on mechanisms of collective housing such as segregation are checked against the reported and documented reality of Meyer's Hof. Its social structure is compared to models of collective housing in Paris such as the 'maison mixte' - a type of a heterogenous inhabitant structure with vertical segregation.

The chapter PRISON goes beyond the commonplace notion of Mietskaserne as a place of misery. Instead from the viewpoint of the individual human being the focus is shifted towards the mental state as imposed by a lifestyle in detention. Problems in the daily life of tenants appear as related to control mechanisms imposed by the landlord and executed by concierges. Surprisingly Frederick II of Prussia appears as the "father of the Mietskaserne". He had changed the Berliners housing conditions for the worse a hundred years before Industrial Revolution already by introducing a barrack-like lifestyle to civil apartment buildings. Most citizens had to face the same mechanisms regarding discipline and punishment as soldiers. The massive reduction of the individual's freedom was but one common trait of prisons and Frederician rental barracks as precursors of the Berlin Mietskasernen.

The chapter PALACE is dedicated to neglected characteristics of Mietskasernen: philanthropic notions and social conceptions that seem utopian at first glance. Investigations into vitae of selected tenants suggest that Meyer's Hof in fact rendered social and economic advancement possible. Surprisingly the architecture of the Berlin Mietskasernen enabled the evolution of an initially rigid type towards a vital and liveable microcosm - often referred to as 'city inside the city'.

Mietskaserne

In late 1872 Jacques Meyer - owner of a textile factory - hired young architect Adolf Erich Witting (* 1849) to design apartment houses for his plot situated in Berlin's borough of Wedding. The building site in Ackerstraße 132/133 has enormous dimensions: 40 metres wide and more than 140 metres deep.

The motivation of Meyer and other landlords: taking the opportunity to durably secure financial wealth by means of rental incomes. To maximise the landlord's income the task for architects was simple to describe: put as many people on the plot as possible. The envisioned tenants were people who had escaped from rural areas and moved to Berlin to find jobs in newly established factories. The early days of industrialisation in Germany started in the 1840's - referred to as 'Gründerzeit'. This period of industrial blossom marks the transition from an agricultural society towards an urban industrial society with workers as an emerging new class.

The city of Berlin faced an enormous population growth. With 220,000 inhabitants in 1825 the population more than doubled over a mere 30 years to reach 447,000 in 1855. The quantity of accommodation was an issue that the new citizens had to deal with. However from the land owners' point of view, housing corporations and several other parties the housing shortage was first of all a welcome opportunity to gain economic wealth.

In February 1873 architect Witting submitted a first planning application that sought to exploit the available space to the maximum: seven slabs built parallel to Ackerstraße separated by six courtyards were to be built. After immediate rejection a modified third major design was approved in October 1873. It features one central axis of vaulted passages cut through each slab that gives access to the rear buildings in the back of the plot. The six main buildings plus one annexe slab were erected throughout 1874 starting from the back of the plot one by one towards the front building facing Ackerstraße. On New Year's Day of 1875 the apartments in Meyer's Hof were ready for occupancy.

The first six buildings each feature six storeys including a souterrain floor with only small windows. A seventh building at the end of the plot is two storeys high. It served a triple purpose: depot, bath house and office for administration. In the centre there was a machine house with a chimney 19 metres tall. Taking a bath was free of charge for tenants of Meyer's Hof.

units

229	kitchen, parlour ¹ , chamber ²
8	kitchen, 2 parlours, water closet
7	kitchen, 2 parlours, shop, chamber
5	kitchen, parlour, water closet
3	kitchen, 2 parlours, chamber, sleeping berth, water closet
2	kitchen, 3 parlours, chamber, sleeping berth, water closet
2	kitchen, 3 parlours, chamber, water closet
1	kitchen, 4 parlours (administration)
257	total number
plus	
5	toilet houses with 8 toilets each
3	workshops
2	carriage houses
1	bakery
1	bath house with 12 bathrooms plus bath attendant's apartment
1	machine house

• figure: units and rooms in Meyer's Hof immediately after completion

¹ the antiquated term 'parlour' is supposed to refer to a room equipped with a stove - German term is "Stube" - an outdated noun, too

² the term 'chamber' serves as translation for the German noun 'Kammer'. This outdated noun refers to a living room without heating

The vast majority of units was without water closets. Toilet houses were located in the first, third and fifth courtyard. Police regulations in Berlin defined the minimum dimensions of courtyards at 5,30 metres by 5,30 metres. Gates for accessing the courtyards had to comply with the requested minimum width of 5,30 metres, too. This measure was calculated so that in case of fire water pumps could be used and turned inside the courtyard without difficulty. The courtyards in Meyer's Hof exceeded this requirement with a length of 10 metres and a width of 40 metres by far.

the production of city

To cope with Berlin's fast growing population the Prussian Interior Ministry set up a planning commission in 1858, which was given the task of developing a far sighted extension plan for the city. The extension of the railway network was put on the agenda as well as other improvements to the infrastructure. The newly established suburbs were supposed to be connected to the existing city centre. Based on an envisioned population growth towards two million inhabitants³ the task was to compose a master plan for decades to come - similar to the work of Georges-Eugène Haussmann in Paris. However it was clear that the Berlin master plan must distance itself from the radical approach of Haussmann. For the city of Berlin it was the first attempt ever to guide construction activity by means of one comprehensive plan. Since 1830 there was the "Bebauungsplan für die Umgebungen Berlins" - a zoning plan for Berlin's surroundings. The actual urban area inside the city's cordon was not included in these plans. Solely the urban hinterland was charted by dividing it into five parts⁴. Each part had its own plan. In 1857 the police department proposed a new division of the outskirts into 14 parts instead of the previous five, which officially came into force in 1858.

the Hobrecht Plan

The building inspection department in 1858 hired a 32-year young civil planner, James Hobrecht, who was appointed head of the department the year after. The work of the commission resulted in a zoning plan that came into force in 1862 - often referred to as the "Hobrecht Plan". This master plan defined an extended street system with ring roads and radial roads connecting the sprawling suburbs. A characteristic of the Hobrecht Plan was the wide mesh of roads, which had deep plots such as the one of Meyer's Hof in Ackerstraße as its byproduct. Apparently an important aspect was the intention to minimise the cost of road making regarding the municipality's weak economic situation. In fact the team around Hobrecht combined two projects in its work on the plan. On the one hand there was the project of establishing a properly working sewerage system - on the other hand there was the necessity to guide the city's sprawl by means of an integral approach. Related to the former in 1860 he went on trips to Paris and London in order to study canalisation techniques. This engineering task matched the scope of Hobrecht's academic education well. The urban planning project went beyond his previous occupations. In spite of involving land surveying - an area of expertise of him - the main task was to a large degree of architectural nature. The commission was supposed to provide fertile soil for new homes for thousands of new Berliners in anticipation of a rise of large-scale residential buildings. Farmland outside the city limits was supposed to get covered with buildings. Street names such as Ackerstraße ('Acre Street') - Meyer's Hof was located on this street in 'Abteilung IX' - make reference to the previous use of land. The department led by Hobrecht had to deal with a relatively new challenge. 'Terraingesellschaften' is the German word for corporations that sought to financially exploit the preparation of land for building. Their field of activity was acquiring large areas of unbuilt land outside the city limits, making it accessible and finally selling single plots to "civil servants, artists, businessmen" (Geist 1980; 484) that wanted to erect buildings on the plots. Hence the terrain corporations were not involved in the the actual construction. Corporations such as 'Waaren-Credit-Gesellschaft' founded in July 1856 made economic history based on the fact that they did not possess own capital. Instead they issue shares of stock to gain capital mainly from private shareholders. The business model was based purely on speculation. Terrain corporation emerged in the 1850s on a broad front. As new stakeholders in the urban development their interest at times clashed with the position of the authorities. However these corpora-

³ population of Berlin in 1858: 458,637

⁴ referred to as 'Abteilung' - this German term translates to 'partition' as well as to 'department' - the latter meaning suggests that there was separate teams working on just one plan each. This would mean that the task of recording and projecting by means of drawing plans was fragmented until 1858

tions were able to develop territory to a degree that the municipality of Berlin could not have afforded without speculators.

During the work on the master-plan Hobrecht was occupied mainly with the rational task of setting up an efficient infrastructure. Feasibility had top priority and not visionary ideas or aesthetic considerations. Hobrecht was aware of the impact of his plan on the standards of dwelling for hundreds of thousands of Berliners. The Mietskaserne was central to Hobrecht's attitude towards the issue of mass accommodation. The fact that the Hobrecht Plan was also referred to as "Mietskasernenplan" may be regarded as evidence. In a 1868 publication Hobrecht reveals his position on housing. He describes a situation in English cities where wealthy inhabitants would live in their villas in West-end districts. (Geist and Kürvers 1980) They would be completely separated - spatially and socially - from workers. Hobrecht rejects the English model with its strict spatial separation of classes on the scale of districts. Instead he illustrates the Berlin model, in which Mietskasernen play a crucial role. He describes the Mietskaserne as a multi-storey building with the following structure of dwelling units and respective rent prices:

floor IV:	3 units à 100 Taler
floor III:	2 units à 150 Taler
floor II:	3 units à 200 Taler
floor I:	1 unit à 500 Taler
ground floor:	2 units à 200 Taler
basement or rear building:	units à 50 Taler

It appears as a surprise that Hobrecht in first place characterises the Berlin Mietskaserne as a vertically layered structure. The presence of rear buildings as a typical Berlin phenomenon suggests taking a horizontal structure into account, too. In the example given by Hobrecht the highest rent price per unit is ten times the lowest one. This ratio alludes to the presence of sharp contrast in the tenants' economic situation. It is worth analysing how these extremes manifest in both the social structure and the built structure of the Mietskaserne.

rich facades - hidden poverty

The front building of Meyer's Hof is equipped with a richly decorated facade. Over the course of three planning applications the elevation drawings show substantial changes. The first proposal featured two vaulted passages at either side of the front building for accessing the courtyards.⁵ Each passage's portal is decorated with pilasters at both sides. The windows on the first floor are richly decorated with a distinct cornice. On the floors above, cornices are simplified gradually. Witting chose plaster with horizontal and additional vertical engravings that simulate stone masonry. The second version⁶ has a single passage as its main difference. It is placed in the centre of the facade. In combination with a sculpture and a flag on the rooftop, the passage forms an accentuated vertical axis in the centre of the facade. It serves as symmetry for the facade composition. The entrance to the passage with its additional columns and its triple arch is more opulent than the previous version. So is the cornice. The third and final version was successfully submitted for planning application in April 1874. In comparison with previous design proposals the facade is enriched to the highest level of sophistication. The centre is accentuated by means of a risalit, which on the upper floors includes four out of sixteen windows in total. The third and fourth floor are visually united in the facade design by means of seventeen Corinthian pilasters next to the sixteen windows on each floor. Additionally the cornice has grown in size and level of finesse with a splendid frieze.

Obviously architect Witting spent a significant amount of time on the design of the front building's elevation facing Ackerstraße. The result is a splendid facade whose

⁵ The overall design concept dating from February 1873 was focussed on attracting industry. Two passages were supposed to enable more efficient supply of goods by means of carriages than just one passage. The carriages would enter the courtyard through one passage and leave using the other passage in a loop. This approach saves time due to the fact that the carriages do not have to be turned inside the narrow courtyards.

⁶ submitted for planning application in October 1873

composition borrows stylistic elements from works of Karl Friedrich Schinkel. The richness of details is reminiscent of palaces and representative public buildings.⁷ This is surprising to detect in an apartment building. Most likely the display of luxury is supposed to represent the wealth of the building's owner Jacques Meyer. This is all the more remarkable given the fact that Meyer never lived in Meyer' Hof himself. Instead many of the poorest people lived in the basement of the front building hidden behind the sumptuous facade.

A look at the front building's backside facade reveals the trick. The windows are not blessed with decorative elements. There are neither pilasters nor friezes. The plaster has only horizontal engravings. Merely the two staircases on either side are designed beyond the guidelines of necessity. They are accentuated as risalit. In comparison with the street facing facade however the backside is simple in terms of decoration. The five rear buildings and the annexe building are even more spartan in their appearance. The staircases are not accentuated as risalits. Else the transition from facade to roof comes without a cornice.

In conclusion it is clear that at Meyer' Hof the front buildings' facade towards Ackerstraße is an exertion. In sharp contrast with the other facades the rich composition of the street elevation reminds of a palace. Thereby it disguises the real identity of the building complex with its small, moist and dark single-room apartments in the basements, which were shared by many of the poorest families. Hence the street facade may be considered a concealing euphemism. A case of Potemkin villages?



• figure: façade elevations of front building: street side(left) - courtyard side (right)

James Hobrecht describes life in a Mietskaserne in a rather romantic fashion. He gives examples of mutual help using names and details from the person's vita. "Wilhelm Schuster from the attic and old bedridden Miss Schulz from the rear building, whose daughter does sewing and cleaning jobs for a makeshift living, become personalities well known on the first floor." A sick person would receive a cup of soup and pieces of clothing would be given away. Moral uplifting is mentioned as a motivation for the donor. Hobrecht continues to render the tenants of the third and fourth floor - "the civil servant, the artists, the academic, the teacher" - as pillars of society. Even more so they are supposed to serve as examples for their fellow tenants. Thereby Hobrecht unconsciously raises an issue. The education of the lower classes beyond public educational institutions such as schools appears as goal of urban planner and civil engineer James Hobrecht. Is this to be seen as an expression of philanthropy? Answering this question in the negative leads to the hypothesis that Hobrecht has a moral education in mind, which utilises the aforementioned tenant groups living on the third and fourth floor to the benefit of the upper class, which Hobrecht himself was part of. The mechanism would be the proclamation of advancement to the poorest fellow tenants. Civil servants serve as shining examples for their working class neighbours. The day-to-day presence of an academic irradiates hope to a worker that advancement is possible and - even more - within reach when adopting attitudes of the supposed paragon. Proximity of paragons appears as a promising concept because it stimulates motivation to the degree that advancement seems within grasp. This way the educational model envisioned by Hobrecht would not have the promotion of other people's welfare at its foundation. Instead the goal could be exerting control over the poor tenants living in rear buildings, in attics and in basements. Affirming the status quo could be the real goal rather than changing the

⁷ the authors of 'Das Berliner Mietshaus' draw comparisons with the facades of Berlin's town and Kaiserhof - the most luxurious hotel in Berlin at the time

general living condition for the better. The statements by Hobrecht however do not confirm the hypothesis that his notion on mutual education in the Mietskaserne is to his own benefit. Still it is worth keeping an eye on the issue of moral education related to the Mietskaserne and its tenant structure. The presence of philanthropy - real or feigned - should be examined thoroughly.

Hobrecht preferred a mixed social environment. He cautions against working-class neighbourhoods, which he claims to have observed in trips to English cities. Accordingly he recommends keeping the existing well-mixed Berlin system and proposes improvements to the Mietskasernen. He postulates bigger courtyards using the "more air and more light" battle call. Furthermore he calls for abolishing basement dwelling. Eventually he defines disestablishing the barrack-like character of existing Mietskasernen as a future goal - unfortunately without further explanation. The focus in Hobrecht's 1868 publication however is on the social structure. Instead of segregation he strongly supports a "recommendable mixture"⁸ as standard housing condition.

maison mixte

In early nineteenth century Paris multi-storey houses typically provided shelter for both owners and tenants. The French term 'maison mixte' refers to the heterogenous resident structure. The principal floor of the house is called 'bel étage' - the noble floor. These lifted ground floors are often inhabited by the landlord's families and relatives. A separate staircase with just a few stairs leads to the beautifully decorated ground floor apartment with its splendid rooms - 'salons' for example. To a large degree the rooms served the function of representing the owner's high ranking in society.

Above the belétage there are several floors with apartments for tenants. The poorest of which would live immediately below the roof. The rule of thumb is: the higher the floor the lower the social status. Such a vertical distribution is referred to as vertical segregation.

Gilles Barbey describes the 'maison mixte' as a model representing social mixture rather than segregation. He claims that the cohabitation of wealthy owners and unpropertied workers is based on a philanthropic ideal: the rich serve as 'guardian angels' for the poor. The latter are continuously struggling to earn enough money to pay for the rent and more importantly to get sufficient food. According to Barbey the owners of 'maisons mixtes' offer their tenants the opportunity to do small jobs for them. In return the tenants will either receive money for performing extra tasks or they receive discount on the rent prices.

Hence the tenant's dependancy on the landlord is similar to that in the previous agricultural period. The serf's hindered freedom continues after having moved to the city. The German saying "Stadtluft macht frei" ("city air makes you free") misrepresents the actual situation. In fact the relationship model between landlord and serf continues within in the city limits on a different level. Companies running factories may have replaced landlords as actual employers, but in Berlin the housing shortage reestablished the landlords' power over their tenants. This raises the question to which degree the owners of Mietskasernen exerted control over their tenants.

⁸ in German: "das empfehlenswerte Durcheinanderwohnen"

prison

the issue of control

In 1875 Jakob Bernstein, a retired train operator, served as first administrator of Meyer's Hof. His main task was collecting rents on behalf of landlord Jacques Meyer. Unlike many Parisian house owners, Meyer himself did not live on Meyer's Hof but in a villa in the new Kielgan neighbourhood in the borough of Schöneberg. Mister Iwanow was the successor of Bernstein. According to the 1877 Berlin address book he lived in the front building and had an office in the annexe building at the end of the plot. In 1878 merchant Otto Meyer, the son of Jacques Meyer, took over the administrator job at the age of 27. Until his death in 1920 he served the function working in his office in the annexe building. At the beginning of tenancy in 1875 a police office had been installed in the front building of Meyer's Hof. Police lieutenant Thiele lived in the same building.

The question arises how the presence of authorities in the Mietskaserne affects the daily life situation of tenants. The surveillance by the administrator and even a police office as in the case of Meyer's Hof clearly represents a threat to a tenant's freedom. Even more so as in most cases the gateways were locked at night. Was the administrator a kind of jail guard? In Parisian 'maison mixtes' the concierge represented the owner's interest in case the latter was absent. Located at the main entrance, a large part of the concierge's work may be considered the task of a gatekeeper. Undoubtedly he was in charge of controlling the tenants. Which impact did this have on the tenants' lifestyles? Did tenants accept the surveillance?

father of the Mietskaserne

An important stakeholder in the genesis of the Mietskaserne surprisingly appears in the person of Frederick II. Known as Frederick the Great he is considered the origin of housing misery in Berlin. (Hegemann 1930)

Frederick II was born in 1712 as the first son to Frederick William I and his wife Sophia Charlotte of Hanover. Frederick William ascended the throne to become King of Prussia in 1713. Politically his main concern and desire was to establish a powerful and large Prussian army. He was known as authoritarian father. Sophia Charlotte embodied the counterpart: she was interested in humanities and science. Frederick adored his mother and shared her interests. Mother and eldest son communicated in French generally. Frederick obviously became a man of 'bel esprit'. He developed a passion for French literature. In 1740 his father Frederick William I died. Frederick succeeded his father onto the throne to become King of Prussia.

The new emperor avoided the empire's capital Berlin whenever possible. Following the French example of "Versailles" he established a luxurious private residence outside capital's walls: between 1745 and 1747 palace "Sanssouci" was built in Potsdam at a distance of 28 kilometres from the the royal residence 'Berliner Stadtschloss' located on the Spreeinsel right in the centre of the city. The new palace's name derives from French term 'sans souci' which translates to 'without trouble'.

According to Hegemann, Frederick perceived spending time in Berlin as compulsory labour, as "worse than a crusade". After returning from visits to Berlin he is said to have sighed with relief. Highly visible deficits called for the emperor's action. Housing was one of the biggest problems the vast majority of Berlin's population had to cope with. Frederick II however ignored the need for new buildings. In contrast he even worsened the situation of tenants by means of his 1748 reform of the mortgage system. In addition Hegemann sharply accuses Frederick's ignorance in terms of urban expansion. Not even the infrastructure projects were carried out. This is remarkable since Frederick himself suffered from his own inactivity in terms of road making. His carriage struggled with the gravel roads between the centre of Berlin and Potsdam and thereby made the trip long and onerous.

Hegemann claims that both the new mortgage system and the omitted urban expansion led to exorbitant rents. The enormous lack of affordable rooms led to congestion in existing apartments. The average housing number of Berlin climbed to 21,8 inhabitants per building in 1784 - a European record that beat London by far. However the situation did not escalate. Berlin faced only a modest growth in population during Frederick II reign. At times statistics even reveal a decline in population.

Frederick's bellicosity to a large degree contributed to this. Frederick sent his Prussian armies into four wars. Immediately after entering the throne in 1740 he embarked on a war against Austria known as the 'First Silesian War', which lasted until 1742. Ensuing wars known as the 'Second Silesian War' (1744/45), the 'Seven Years' War' (1756-1763 the third Silesian war) and finally the 'War of the Bavarian Succession' account for an enormous total wartime under Frederick's reign.

The exorbitant rental prices made multi-apartment house attractive. These buildings became the object of speculation. Above all, owners of armament factories invested their large earnings to build apartment houses with three or four storeys. This way they benefitted double from Frederick's policies.

Frederick himself erected a total of 300 buildings from 1769 until 1786 - an annual average of just 17. These figures point to the absence of a well considered urban planning strategy. In fact Frederick's interventions show a high degrees of arbitrariness in the choice of locations for the newly erected buildings. The genesis of several of Frederick's residential buildings reveals further absurdity. Often he would order tearing down randomly chosen private houses with one or two storeys without the owners' approval. Then he would pay for the construction of three or four storey apartment buildings as a replacement. These 'gifts' in most cases calmed the owners' initial rage.

Frederick showed major building activity only in two areas. In Potsdam he pushed the extension of palace complex Sanssouci. On the other hand he initiated the construction of barracks to facilitate his ever growing army. The number of soldiers increased from 19,500 in 1763 to 36,000 in 1786. The latter figure accounted for one fifth of Berlin's total population.

Kasernierung

The design for the Potsdam palaces was copied from French examples. Likewise the typology of military barracks was transferred from France to Prussia's capital Berlin under Frederick II. The French system aimed at accommodating as many soldiers as possible under one roof. In this centralised approach all facilities were integrated into the barracks.⁹

The construction of barracks in Berlin diminished the housing shortage to some degree. This was due to the fact that the wives and children of married soldiers found their new homes in barracks together with their husbands. In general each family was provided a parlour and a chamber. Often the rooms had to be shared with young single soldiers at the expense of an invaded private sphere for the families. Women and children were forced to comply with the strict rules and regulations that the infamous Prussian army set up for its soldiers. In 1786 Karl Friedrich von Klöden - who would become a distinguished pedagogue, historian and geographer - was born in such circumstances. His father served the Prussian army as sergeant and lived in a Frederician barrack together with his wife. Just like many other children at that time, Karl Friedrich was born inside the barrack. In his biography he states that his mother perceived life in the barrack as "hell". (Hegemann 1930) To his mother the biggest source of displeasure was the fact that two other soldiers were allocated to von Klöden's chamber. She described these two as "the worst foreigners". Sergeant von Klöden had to observe them in order to avoid their desertion. Sergeants were threatened with severe punishment in case soldiers managed to desert. The list of punishment methods for the local army members included running the gauntlet, blows by stick or swords and a typical Prussian method called "Krummschließen". In this atrocious variant to fettering the delinquent's hand would be chained to the opposite side's ankle.

Von Klöden's report reveals that the cohabitation of sergeant and foreign mercenary soldiers is a well-considered disciplinary principle. It assumes that seniors provide moral education to the juniors. Von Klöden underlines the necessity of such ethical endeavours. He points out that one third of the soldiers were foreign mercenary soldiers that served the army only to escape custodial sentences. Another third were proven notorious rascals. This is evidence to suggest that barracking was considered a method to stabilise the in-homogenous formation of the Prussian army. Adaptation is

⁹ England chose the opposite strategy establishing decentralised barracks.

expected from both local soldiers with their family and foreign mercenary soldiers. The threat of punishment applies to both.

Furthermore the question arises to which degree barracks resembled prisons. Von Klöden points out that his mother perceived the barrack as “Zuchthaus”, which translates to prison.¹⁰ The emphasis on discipline indeed is a key characteristic of Prussian barracking under Frederick II. At night all gates were locked so that nobody could leave the barrack or even desert. In daytime passing through the barrack gates was permitted to selected soldiers only. Therefore a written permission called ‘visum’ was mandatory. Such visa were difficult to obtain. Even to the most reliable and reputable soldiers visa were handed out infrequently.

Mietskaserne: deprivation of liberty

Just like in Prussian barracks the front gate of Meyer’s Hof was locked at night. Additionally the house rules prohibited unnecessarily remaining next to apartment doors, in the courtyards, on staircases and in corridors.

The above mentioned conditions paint a gloomy picture of living in Berlin’s biggest Mietskaserne. If applied strictly the house rules impede informal communication between tenants. At worst it could mean the isolation of neighbours. This restriction is usually forced upon convicts in prisons: “The first principle was isolation. The isolation of the convict from the external world, from everything that motivated the offence, from the complicities that facilitated it. The isolation of prisoners from one another.” (Foucault 1977) A hypothetical connection between Mietskaserne and prison motivates further investigations into the lifestyles of tenants with a focus on their social environment - referred to as ‘milieu’ in sociology.

In 1893 the ‘Worker’s Sanitary Commission’ launched a comprehensive enquiry about the housing situation of workers in Berlin. Sorauer Straße was chosen by the commission as case study area for the investigations. Two questionnaires were used: The first form covered 22 questions about the buildings, most of which were erected in the early 1870s. The second form gathered information on the scale of one dwelling unit. Eventually the probe recorded 805 apartments with a total of 3.383 inhabitants. Beyond quantifiable data such as dimensions, rent prices, number of windows or beds the form asked the inhabitants about their lifestyle and health status. The assumed bad sanitary conditions were one major reason for launching the inquiry because the city of Hamburg at that time suffered from epidemic cholera.

One conclusion of the enquiry was that in 70 percent of the apartments the inhabitants had less space - referred to as ‘air’ - than a convict in Berlin’s Plötzensee prison.¹¹

Schlafgängerwesen

The 1893 enquiry reveals another phenomenon that is typical of Berlin Mietskasernen: In three out of ten apartments ‘night lodgers’ found a permanent place to sleep. This number illustrates the gravity of the housing problem in Berlin. The actual tenants could not afford to pay the rent and therefore decided to sublet a bed to a person even poorer. The lodgers - by definition not family members - in general paid for a place to sleep at night. Often their beds were not actual beds but small berths located above doors or in corners. Furthermore, the lodgers were allowed to use neither facilities such as toilets, kitchens nor accessing the ‘Stube’ - the living room equipped with a stove. Breakfast was not provided to lodgers. The ‘Schlafgänger’¹² were mostly male workers that had to use sanitary facilities in their factories. Thus the service was on the lowest possible level and should not be confused with a hotel. In fact the subtenants did not have a real home.

¹⁰ In fact the German term ‘Zuchthaus’ finds a more accurate rendering in ‘house of disciplining’ - equivalent to the French noun ‘maison de correction’.

¹¹ At the time the air volume per inhabitant was considered an important measure to describe the housing situation. German prison hygienist Baer called for a minimum of 22 m³ per solitary prison cell. Plötzensee prison offered 28-29 m³ per convict. The enquiry furthermore presents the air volume per ‘sleeper’ - taking only bedrooms into account. In this category the situation is even worse: Only in one out of eight apartments the ‘sleepers’ have more air volume available than a convict in Plötzensee prison.

¹² German term for ‘night lodger’

Even tenants of small single-room apartments found a way to gain the much required extra money by facilitating lodgers. They sublet their only bed in the daytime to workers that had worked in night shifts. Without doubt this symbiosis of tenant and lodger deeply violates the privacy of both symbionts. Against this background, the existence of such a way of cohabitation must be considered an imposition of financial emergency.

The Berlin Mietskasernen borrow the system of cohabitation from Prussian barracks. The reports of Karl Friedrich von Klöden on involuntary cohabitation in a late 18th century Frederician barrack could easily be used one century later to describe the way of life in a Berlin Mietskaserne. What Klöden's mother described as "hell" and "prison" is still a valid transcription of the cohabitation system during the Kaiserreich¹³. In both barrack and Mietskaserne it is referred to as "Schlafburschenwesen". This German term is composed of the three German nouns translating to "sleep", "lad" and "entity". It assumes that the lodger's are male. This was true in the barracks with its mercenary soldiers sharing rooms with the families of local soldiers. But the 1893 enquiry discloses a significant share of female lodgers in the Sorauer Straße Mietskasernen. Thus the gender-neutral noun "Schlafgänger" is more appropriate when referring to the lodging phenomenon in the Berlin Mietskasernen.¹⁴ In any case one must acknowledge a massive loss of privacy due to lodging. The 1893 enquiry assesses the spread of the lodging system to reach 30 percent of all apartments. Other sources evaluate the Schlafgängerwesen as unsolved societal problem related to a housing shortage "en masse". (von Saldern 1995) In the eyes of the middle-class the 'lodging culture' was considered objectionable for ethical and hygienic reasons. However there was not even a remotely promising solution to the problem. "The existing homes for single persons were merely a drop in the ocean"¹⁵

The misery of the proletarian tenants in Meyer's Hof manifested in multifaceted forms of appearance throughout the period of the Kaiserreich. "Hidden and invisible" (Geist 1984) behind rich façades, most tenants faced existential problems, which mostly belonged to one of the two main categories: health and hygiene related problems or monetary problems. Tenants of Meyer's Hof tried to cope with the latter by subletting rooms or beds to lodgers as outlined above. Officially sub-rent was prohibited by landlord Meyer. In fact the situation at Meyer's Hof was the same as in other Mietskasernen in spite of administrator and later owner Otto Meyer trying his best to kick lodgers out. In a police report from 14 August 1889 master baker Neumann was accused of illegally sub-renting inappropriate basement rooms to two journeymen bakers and one apprentice boy. The police ordered Neumann to evict his staff from the small, dark basement room. Neumann found ways to postpone the eviction until April 1890. In this case the police could eventually stop the lodging based on the fact that the height of partially just 1,50 metres in the basement room was insufficient to comply with building regulations. The Schlafgängerwesen however continued to exist as a common way of tenancy at Meyer's Hof, too. In view of the high rent prices due to shortage of affordable small dwelling units, large parts of the proletariat were forced to generate additional income beyond wages. In 1909 a mechanic working for Siemens earned seven Mark a day. The monthly rent prices at Meyer's Hof at that time were 120 Mark for a single room, 240 Mark for one room plus a kitchen and 360 Mark for two rooms plus a kitchen.

¹³ The term 'Kaiserreich' denotes the unified German state founded by Otto von Bismarck in 1871 after victory in the war against France. The official name for the state governed by a constitutional monarchy was "Deutsches Reich" (German Empire). Often referred to as "Zweites Reich" (Second Empire) it lasted until the Novemberrevolution in 1918 after Germany's military defeat in World War I. The abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II. marks the end of monarchy in Germany. The Weimar Republic was subsequently established as the first German parliamentary democratic state on 11 August 1919.

¹⁴ However in German the term 'Schlafbursche' (male) is more common than the gender-neutral noun 'Schlafgänger'.

¹⁵ quotation van Saldern 1995 page 72.

illegalities and order

With such a ration between wages and rent prices it comes as a surprise that Meyer's Hof attracted workers. But even before its actual opening in 1875 the building was more than just occupied. It was overcrowded with people whose ways of life according to Otto Meyer resembled gypsies when he became administrator in 1878. Only few of them actually paid the rent. Even worse many tenants devastated their rooms. Meyer in a newspaper report published in 1910 gave two examples to illustrate the state of things. A potter had deinstalled the tiled stoves in his apartment and sold them. An other tenant offered Christmas trees for sale. He had removed the wooden floor planks in his apartment and cut them with a saw to finally use the wooden pieces to create stands for the Christmas trees. Meyer successfully got rid of some of the worst tenants so that after initial overpopulation Meyer's Hof saw a period of relatively high vacancy. In order to attract financially stronger tenants, Meyer followed a double tracked strategy. On one hand he invested money in the conversion of apartments into spaces adequately suited to facilitate small business.¹⁶ The 1881 address book displays for example the settling of two cabinet makers and two other workshops. Often Meyer himself ignored laws and police regulations when carrying out construction work without planning permission. On the other hand Meyer paid tenants a premium for finding new tenants that proved to be solvent and reliable. The strategy has turned out satisfactory according to Meyer. However he still carried a revolver day and night when walking through his building complex. At times he hired security staff to tour the courtyards in cycles of thirty minutes.

Besides the conversions carried out under order of Meyer, reports filed in the police department disclose illegal conversions of apartments into workshops. The police intervened when safety regulations were not met. Criminal charges were pressed for example in conjunction with the use of toxic chemicals. Several cases of fire were filed in police reports, too.

The incidents outlined above show a plurality of illegal action from both tenants and owners in such a way that assigning offender and victim does not follow simple schemes. Proletarian tenants in dire straits violate the law in minor cases to cure their misery. Landlords take measures to secure rental income in non legal ways. The most interesting aspect is the shifting of power relations when for example tenants exert power over lodgers. Landlords set up strict house rules to keep order and hire security services for surveillance. In spite of the existence of the police authority an alternative legal system of its own emerges within the walls of the Mietskasernen. Unlike in barracks, the provision of moral education to prevent crimes does not work its way top-down from the landlord who is seemingly on top of the power hierarchy. In terms of a separation of powers the actual executive branch - the police - is unable to fully perform its task in view of the multiplicity of minor violations of law. Instead a system of mutual control secures a stable order of the Mietskaserne as a quasi-organic social entity.

barrack and Mietskaserne

Frederician barracks and Mietskasernen during the Kaiserreich share common traits. The reign of Frederick the Great from 1740 until 1786 saw an enormous expansion of the Prussian army. Along with the increasing number of soldiers and barracks a new task emerged. The availability of adequate men reached its limit. Filling the Prussian army up with foreign mercenary soldiers and notorious rascals was both necessity and threat. Stringent disciplining was the chosen measure. Military drills were supposed to create a strong homogenous army. The goal of moralisation of the new recruits led to forced cohabitation of local sergeants and the "worst foreigners". Married sergeants shared their rooms with both wives and other soldiers. This deprivation of liberty is but one of the elements that is subsumed in the German term 'Kasernierung'. Discipline, drill, continuous surveillance including a system of mutual control are other elements. With the front gates locked at night and most of the daytime, the barracks were closed entities. This assessment is backed by the presence of an internal penal system independent of public jurisdiction.

¹⁶ A report published in 1901 states that Otto Meyer took the initiative by contacting the fire brigade and the horse tramway corporation in order to convince them to establish new headquarters in Meyer's Hof.

One century later the Mietskasernen in their internal structures resemble Frederician barracks. Doors are locked at night, compliance with the strict house rules is checked by security staff. The Schlafgängerwesen is a common standard that restricts the liberty of the proletarian tenants. Even single room apartments are shared with lodgers so that a single tenant in fact has less space than a convict in Berlin's Plötzensee prison at the same time.

Frederick II of Prussia is the father of the Berlin Mietskaserne. This assessment by Werner Hegemann published in 1930 is widely overlooked in publications both in German and in English. Instead the rise of the Mietskasernen is described as closely related to the 1862 zoning plan developed by James Hobrecht. Undoubtedly the latter had a large stake in Berlin's urban development in the context of industrialisation. Hegemann considers Frederick II. a dilettante in all domains. Concerning habitation in Berlin he accuses Frederick II. of misdoing in two areas: On the one hand the introduction of a new mortgage system in 1748 led to speculation and exploding property prices along with exorbitant rents. On the other hand Frederick ignored the need for urban expansion and remained idle in road-making and other infrastructural works. Together these two factors led to an enormous housing shortage in the city of Berlin for many decades to come. The paradise for investors was a threat to the existence of poorer groups of the population. Therefore Hegemann calls Frederick II the origin of misery. However Frederick II plays an even more crucial role in the development of the Mietskasernen than outlined by Hegemann. Beyond known quantifiable consequences such as supply of flats and lease prices the emperor's policy was of important influence in terms of social aspects. At the time of the Great Emperor's death in 1786 the Berlin troops reached their peak number with 36.000 men - accounting for more than one fifth of the city's total population. Thereby the barrack lifestyle was established as a common standard and eventually passed over to apartment houses, whose tenants dwelled in a state of quasi-imprisonment. Kasernierung in private households persisted in Berlin's Mietskasernen during the Kaiserreich from 1871 until 1918 and even beyond.

In that sense Frederick II is not just the father of the Mietskaserne. He is the origin of the miserable, dependant, captive lives in 'civil rental barracks' that many Berliners perceived as prison. Besides the great expenses for his army, Frederick II spent enormous amounts of money on palaces for himself and selected family members.

palace

Textile factory owner Jacques Meyer retired at the time of construction of Meyer's Hof. He moved from his villa on his factory's plot to a villa in Berlin's newly built Kielgan quarter in order to enjoy living there as a pensioner among other wealthy neighbours. The rents earned in Meyer's Hof and collected by his son Otto were his source of livelihood. In that sense he should be considered profit-oriented. However a look at his curriculum vitae reveals that he had gained a reputation as philanthropist. Based on the fact that he set up a health insurance for workers, Jacques Meyer got decorated with a medal for his social involvement. His son Otto in a newspaper report stated that his father had erected the building complex with "the most humane intention". In search of arguments supporting the claimed social deed, one detects that taking a bath was free of charge for all tenants of Meyer's Hof. In 1879 a reading room had been installed to offer free access to both entertaining and educating publications to all inhabitants of the quarter.¹⁷ Specifically intended for workers, it was open in the evenings from 8:00 pm until 10:30 pm as an alternative to pub visits.

social utopia

The question of philanthropy requires a closer look at the emergence of Mietskasernen with socially mixed inhabitation such as Meyer's Hof. Are they to be seen as social deeds? The cohabitation of wealthy citizens and members of lower income groups inside the same building has been the subject of great controversy. One common notion supporting heterogenous inhabitant structures is the vision of the rich serving as 'angels' for their unprivileged housemates. The latter "could acknowledge their gratitude towards their protectors by providing small services in return. This tradition of mutual help appears as a mean of reducing the latent friction between the propertied and the non-propertied" (Barbey 1980). The cohabitation was supposed to have moral dimensions, too. In general the poor were considered as ethically inferior. Socially mixed dwelling in the eyes of its advocates would yield moral uplifting. On the long run cohabitation could lead to a harmonisation of seemingly incompatible lifestyles. Ideally in this model the boundaries between classes would blur or even disappear completely.

The advocates of social segregation however argue that the gaps between wealthy and poor inhabitants are too big to be bridged. In mid-nineteenth century Paris the 'maisons mixtes' are successively being replaced by civil 'rental barracks'.¹⁸ These barracks are built to accommodate lower income groups only. Hence a paradigm shift from early nineteenth century 'maison mixte' heterogenous tenant structure towards the barracks' homogenous tenant structure took place in France and particularly in Paris. One explanation is the failure of the philanthropic 'maison mixte' notion of one "grand family" under the same roof. However the new approach yielded other problems that Barbey describes as "a climate of rivalry". Conflicts and related incidents were a daily occurrence in the rental barracks.

segregation in the Mietskaserne

The question arises whether segregation is important at all with a view to the development of socially successful housing types. Probably the main problem is not segregation but mass accommodation in general as Barbey suggests. Thus overcrowding of buildings¹⁹ would cause the issues, which often made rental barracks unlovely places to live.

Adelheid von Saldern (1995) comes to the following conclusion concerning segregation inside the Mietskaserne: "The structuring was so delicate that the borders between social segregation and social mixture were blurred and accordingly segregation becomes evident only to thoroughly observing eyes."²⁰

¹⁷ However the reading room was closed soon thereafter due to lacking interest.

¹⁸ the French term is 'caserne locative' - 'caserne' translates to 'barrack', 'locative' to 'rental'.

¹⁹ Barbey describes large city houses in the 'Ancient Regime' as resembling ships in case of emergency due to overloading.

²⁰ Unfortunately the term Mietskaserne is used for apartment houses regardless of whether the tenant structure is heterogenous or homogenous.

Since the beginning of tenancy in 1875, Meyer's Hof accommodated tenants from different income groups. Hence it represents the heterogenous 'maison mixte' type. Harry Kompisch was born in 1921 and lived in Meyer's Hof with his parents and grandfather since 1924. Their three-room apartment was located on the first floor of the first building. Kompisch remembers that "those in the front building were better-off - staffers, clerks, jobs in better positions than the workers in the back - the difference was noticeable. He mentions the linoleum covered staircase, the presence of curtains and the more beautifully painted walls as characteristics of the wealthier front building tenants.

Inge Mann was born in 1924 and moved to Meyer's Hof in 1932 with her parents and sister Hilla after her father was put out of work. Before he had worked at AEG in Ackerstraße as a varnisher. The Manns' main room was next to the Kompischs' one. Inge Mann remembers that as a child she did not dare to enter the front building. Tradesmen like carter Hockenholz or bakery owner Jahn lived there. Doctor Moses and his family occupied half of the first floor. The family consisting of doctor Leopold Moses, his wife Olga and two sons was of Jewish faith and had a reputation for its elegance. Inge Mann discloses that initially she stayed away from the Moses' floor because she regarded the Moses family as "way too fine". She remembers the staircase leading to the first floor of the front building as "so beautiful". Both apartment with balcony and the doctor's surgery were located on the same floor. Doctor Moses is said to have gone along with making house visits at any time. He would even examine free of charge in case the patients could not afford paying.

His sons Wolfgang and Hans-Herrmann were not allowed to play with the other children in the courtyards. Instead other kids were invited to play with them inside the apartment. Miss Kompisch received well preserved garment of the Moses boys as a gift. She re-tailored it to make it fit her son Harry.

Meyer's Hof clearly represents a 'maison mixte' type in terms of the tenant structure. As outlined above the differences between wealthy and proletarian tenants were "noticeable", but not as extreme as proclaimed by advocates of segregated workers housing. Instead a system of social adaptation was established beyond rules and regulations. The provision of services to the poorest was often free of charge as in the example of doctor Moses. Similarly the purchase of food involved an informal system of balancing unequal financial power. In general regular customers did not pay for purchased goods immediately. Instead the purchase price was put on slate. In fact often special prices were written down without other customers noticing. Favourite customers would always receive more than billed for. Fridays were 'paydays'. But in case good customers faced a temporary lack of money they could postpone the payment without problems and without having to pay interest. Hence James Hobrecht's vision of mutual help in heterogenous Mietskasernen in fact existed. And even more it went beyond neighbourship. It was embedded in trade albeit in-officially. Performed with a benevolent wink from the vendor's side, handing out more goods than put on slate was common and widely accepted. In fact it equals the adaption of the prices to match the customer's financial situation.

Another aspect of the cohabitation of wealthy and poor tenants should not be overlooked. The mere address determined a tenant's reputation. In case a factory worker could state he lived in Meyer's Hof he could expect his listeners to respond with respect. Hence all tenants benefitted from the reputation of doctor Moses and other front building tenants. We must assume that a good reputation of one's place of residence was an advantage when searching for a job, for example. The role of reputation and standing in society in Berlin during the Kaiserreich period can be traced in several documents. One example is Berlin's annually published address book. Comparable to today's telephone books it listed citizens with their place of residence and occupation. The street names were listed in alphabetical order. Filed under the street name, the house numbers were displayed in ascending order. The respective house owner's name - and address if applicable - was listed followed by the residents' names sorted by building. For Meyer's Hof the 1877 address book has only 86 entries in total. Given the fact that there was 257 apartments at that time, it becomes evident that workers and workless tenants were ignored completely.²¹ This ignorance is to be seen as evidence of

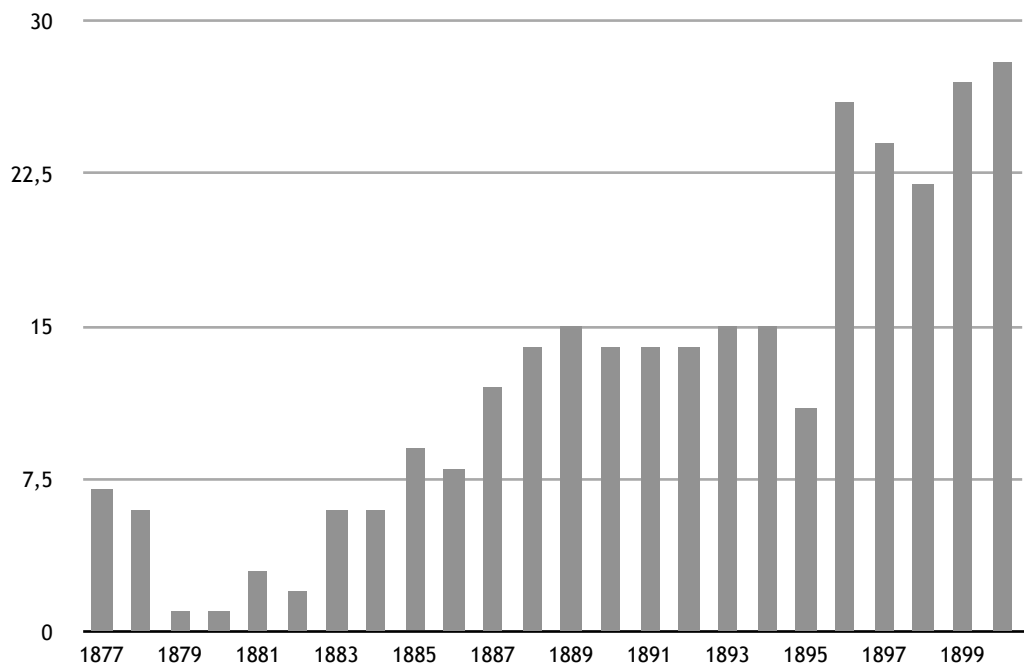
²¹ Complete resident lists did not get published until the 1920s.

lacking acceptance in society. ‘Having an address’ was helpful in many ways. Based on the good reputation of wealthy cohabitants, ‘maison mixte’ type Mietskasernen did provide favourable addresses even to proletarian tenants.

flourishing small business

Just like other Mietskasernen Meyer’s Hof initially was meant to absorb the flood of people migrating from the countryside to the city of Berlin in search for job opportunities. In the plans only one and a half floors were meant to accommodate business. The first generation of tenants however caused major problems. Many tenants brought relatives with them without permission and without actually having enough space for themselves. Hence on the floors, in the basement and in the attic there was masses of people sleeping without the owner’s permission. In its early days Meyer’s Hof was overcrowded. Hundreds of people are said to have lived a gypsy lifestyle there. Problems related to sanitary issues emerged. Incidents between official tenants and ‘stowaways’ became common occurrences. Since only few tenants paid the rents, owner Jacques Meyer decided to alter the situation. His strategy in finding better tenants also involved attracting small business. With this goal in mind Meyer’s Hof was converted into a ‘Wohn- und Gewerbehof’. The evolution towards a building complex for both dwelling and business was put in execution when Otto Meyer took over the administrator job in 1878. The fifth building was chosen to be converted into the place for manufactories. The number of companies located in the fifth building rose from just one in 1879 to fifteen in 1889. Several joiner’s workshops, a mustard factory, a stationery manufactory and a sculptor’s workshop took up residence in the fifth building. With the help of police reports the history of changes made to the building can be traced. Rather than one major conversion, Meyer took several small steps in renovation, many of which were carried out without the necessary planning permission. In buildings other than the fifth there was also a growing number of apartments converted into business locations. However in these cases only units on the ground-floor were affected whereas the fifth building eventually accommodated manufactories on all floors. This development led to the installation of a lift in 1910, which finalised the transformation of the fifth building into an industry-only slab.

development of enterprises



• figure: number of business units in the fifth building of Meyer’s Hof

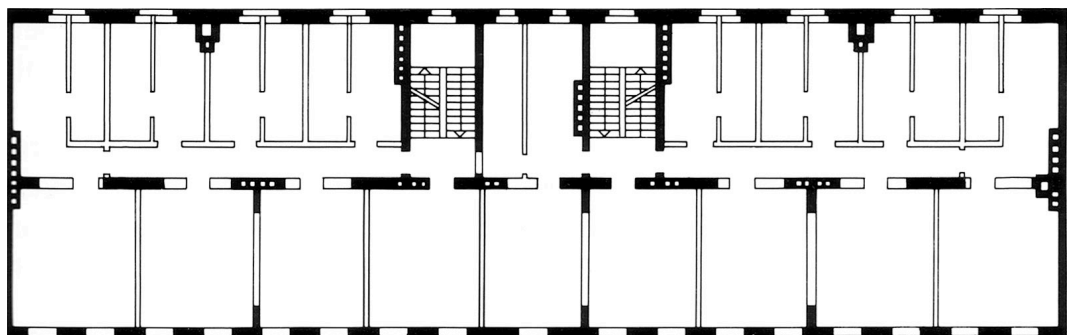
courtyards

The courtyards at Meyer's Hof were their playgrounds to the children. Notwithstanding the absence of playground equipment such as swing, slide or sandbox, the courtyards largely contributed to the perception of life at Meyer's Hof as paradise. Harry Kompisch in retrospective states that he "had a gorgeous youth" adding that "for us kids it was a paradise to play."

The manufactories in the back buildings of Meyer's Hof benefitted from the courtyards, too. The delivery of goods by means of carriages was made possible. Thanks to the large dimensions of the courtyards with about 400 m² each, several carriages could be loaded and unloaded simultaneously. Other buildings similar to Meyer's Hof had courtyards that fulfilled only the requirement of a minimum size of 5,30 m by 5,30 as postulated by the building police. Such small courtyards circumvented the establishing of business in back buildings. Instead entrepreneurs would have to hire rooms in the more expensive front building to receive and send goods directly from the pavement. Hence traders depending on carriage delivery saved money at Meyer's Hof thanks to the large courtyards. This feature was especially important for starting up companies that could not afford renting business space in front buildings. Also the courtyards were used for the storage of goods. And even more the courtyards gradually developed into market-places of its own. Potatoes or coal was sold under the open air without a salesroom. The evolution of the courtyards into vital market squares was fostered when the toilet-houses located in the first, third and fifth courtyard became obsolete in the 1920s. The former toilet-house on the left-hand side in the first courtyard was transformed into the butcher's shop of Anton Herrmann. The toilet-house on the opposite side in the 1930s served as horse stable. Carter Alfred Hockenholz used the two former toilet-houses in the third courtyard as horse stables, too. Pictures taken in the 1930s depict chicken inside a courtyards, too. It is unknown whether the latter were raised for commercial purposes or for self supply. In any case it illustrates the tremendous diversity present at Meyer's Hof, which specifically became apparent in the courtyards. The second courtyard in the 1930s was destined for domestic use. The left-hand side featured clotheslines whereas the opposite side served as playground and location for meetings. The major part of activity inside the courtyards however derived from the industry. An ever growing amount of billboards mounted at each of the passages testified to the expanding business activities in Meyer's Hof.

blossom

During the "Gründerzeit, which witnessed the growth of vast fortunes, massive industrial development and building booms" (Hvattum 2004), not only the number of companies in Meyer's Hof increased rapidly, but also successful firms grew in such a way that they required more space. Owner Meyer in many cases could provide bigger units by removing interior walls thanks to the fact the only the walls parallel to Ackerstraße were load-bearing. All transversal walls except for those delimiting the staircases could be removed without affecting the structural integrity.



• figure: typical floor plan - load bearing walls are filled black

Also staircases were converted into additional business spaces. This was made possible thanks to the fact that initially each building had two staircases. The redundancy was later used to reduce the amount of staircases in favour of additional retail or industry

space. This opportunity was gratefully embraced especially by small firms. Thereby the actual building helped writing success stories. A typical scenario would look like this. Tenants from the second or third building became minor entrepreneurs by starting a business in their private rooms initially²². Later they would have two or three employees and sourced the company out by hiring a unit in the fifth building. If business turned out to be very successful the entrepreneur would move into a better apartment in the front building. Such vitae can indeed be traced in the annual address books. Living and working in Meyer's Hof was common. Locksmith Krüger had his workshop in the fifth building, but lived in the front building. The same goes for Mister Kraatz, who owned a manufactory producing combs in the fifth building. But also for employees the Mietskaserne simultaneously served as both home and work place.

In a few extreme cases initially small factories eventually grew out of Meyer's Hof and moved into larger 'Gewerbehöfe' in the outskirts of Berlin. These building type also featured large courtyards ('Höfe') to fit the needs of factories. Units could only be rented by companies, residential use was not possible.

clusters

An interesting phenomenon was the emergence of smallest-scale enterprises that were connected with each other. Tobacco cutter Schuhmacher from the fifth building prepared the tobacco for further processing. The cigar makers Finke (first building), Sassenberg (first building), Höhne (first building), Ludwig (second building), Neumann (fourth building) and Hodde (fifth building) purchased cut tobacco to produce cigars. We can assume that the rolling took place in private rooms. Most likely the work was carried out as one-man business - probably with some additional help of family members. It is important to notice that the production chain did not stop with the mere cigars. Packaging was required and at Meyer's Hof there was small business producing wooden boxes as well as sacks or cardboard. Carters were available to transport larger amounts of boxed cigars. Scissors grinder Stets in the fifth building might have had tobacco cutter Schuhmacher as client. These local interrelations between firms is to be seen as a symbiotic system. Instead of presuming fierce competition between the various cigar makers symbiosis one has to come to acknowledge the enormous mutual benefits of the network. Without a certain amount of customers, tobacco cutter Schuhmacher could not exist. Without tobacco cutter there would not be cigar makers in Meyer's Hof. Removing one element might cause a system crash. Short distances in such a symbiotic local area network are important if not indispensable for successful business. Given the enormous dimensions of Berlin, proximity mattered.

The example of cigar production shows the formation of clusters. In furniture production, electronics and other branches there were similar networks of highly specialised enterprises located in Meyer's Hof. Presumably one-person firms performed relatively simple tasks that require few equipment. This was an opportunity for many to start a business without high financial resources. Eventually this offered the chances for economic success and social advancement with it. A certain degree of self-determination was rendered possible at Meyer's Hof. On the scale of society class penetrability was enabled by opening proletarians a fair chance to become successful entrepreneurs - a first step towards a classless society.

place of community

Jacques Meyer introduced an annual feast in the courtyards of Meyer's Hof. Based on the traditional Berlin harvest home, the feast was celebrated on 8 August. Clotheslines were replaced by garlands. A trailer served as stage. For children there was a special program in the afternoon. In the evening comedy and cabaret was brought on stage. The tenants and paying guests danced to the music of a band. A 1929 newspaper report illustrates "how lovingly the feast is decorated" with the contribution, support and presence of the whole "tenant-ship" (Geist 1984). A strong sense of solidarity between tenants can also be read in the retrospective reports from tenants of Meyer's Hof. One

²² In general the commercial use of apartments was not impeded. However for security reasons the use of several machines was prohibited. In 1880 for example the police filed charges against two joiners, which had set up their workshops in their private rooms. They did not meet the requirements related to glue mixing.

possible explanation can be found in daily life cohabitation. Not only did tenants share facilities such as toilets and kitchens, but also private matters - albeit involuntarily. Apartments were not separate units back then. Instead a long central corridor separated kitchens on the north side and combined living and sleeping rooms on the south side of each building. A typical unit in Meyer's Hof during the Weimar Republic from 1919 until 1933 comprised of one kitchen and one room. Hence the interjacent corridor was a shared circulation area where tenants inevitably met. Even more the corridors were closed off with one door detaching the units from the staircase. A shared door bell completes the formation of residential communities of four to six families on one floor. Using the same door, doorbell, corridor and toilet results in better familiarity with fellow tenants and accordingly leads to closer relationships. Former tenant Inge Mann tells that one knew each other. Birthdays were celebrated together with all tenants from the same corridor.

microcosm

At peak about 2.000 tenants lived in Meyer's Hof.²³ In 1929 a newspaper published a report on "Berlin's biggest Mietskaserne" with the subtitle "a city inside a city". This perception is justified in view of the plurality, which grew inside the initially rigid building complex. In its evolution towards a 'Wohn- und Gewerbehof' residential and commercial use were combined. By 1910 at Meyer's Hof there was "a diversity, which one cannot imagine in such limited space from today's point of view" (Geist 1984). This applies to the stores and manufactories as well as to the tenants themselves. They cover a wide range of social groups. With the police office and a church a simulacrum of society can be found. On the other hand Meyer's Hof was one entity as indicated by the solidarity among tenants. The basic human needs were served by the bakery in the front building, a butcher in the first courtyard and a milk shop. Meyer's Hof was a microcosm.

²³ Newspaper reports even estimate 2.500 tenants at peak.

epilogue

“[A]ppaling poverty and exploitation” were characteristics of the ‘Gründerzeit’ in Germany (Hvatum 2004). In 1871 the German Empire was set up with Prussia as its leader. In search for work masses of people moved to the capital Berlin. The inrush surpassed the city’s intake capacity in terms of available accommodation facilities and job offers by far. A booming business development enormously improved the labour situation, but the housing shortage remained a major problem. Speculation even worsened the situation of lower income groups with the agency of rising property prices. Eventually proletarians were squeezed into auxiliary accommodation under miserable sanitary conditions.

The origin of misery can be seen in the person of Frederick II. More than one century earlier he had caused a similar housing shortage by introducing a new mortgage system and ignoring the need for urban expansion. He had remained idle in road-making and other infrastructural works. Instead Frederick II invested into his army. Soldiers accounted for one fifth of Berlin’s total population. Barracks absorbed the housing shortage to some degree because the wives and children of soldiers were allowed to live in the barracks. However this involved a controlled lifestyle with continuous observation and punishment. Families were forced to share their room with mercenary soldiers. Thanks to a massive deprivation of liberty, living in barracks was perceived as prison.

The Gründerzeit saw the emergence of Mietskasernen - civil rental barracks - based on the familiar Frederician barracks. Unfortunately the lifestyle was similar to its military predecessors’. Hence Frederick II. is considered the “father of the Mietskaserne”. The administrator’s of the building complexes with several buildings separated by courtyards exerted control over the tenants. Many tenants still could not afford paying the rents for their single room apartments with shared facilities. Hence subletting rooms was a common phenomenon with a similar impact on privacy as the equivalent cohabitation system in Frederician barracks.

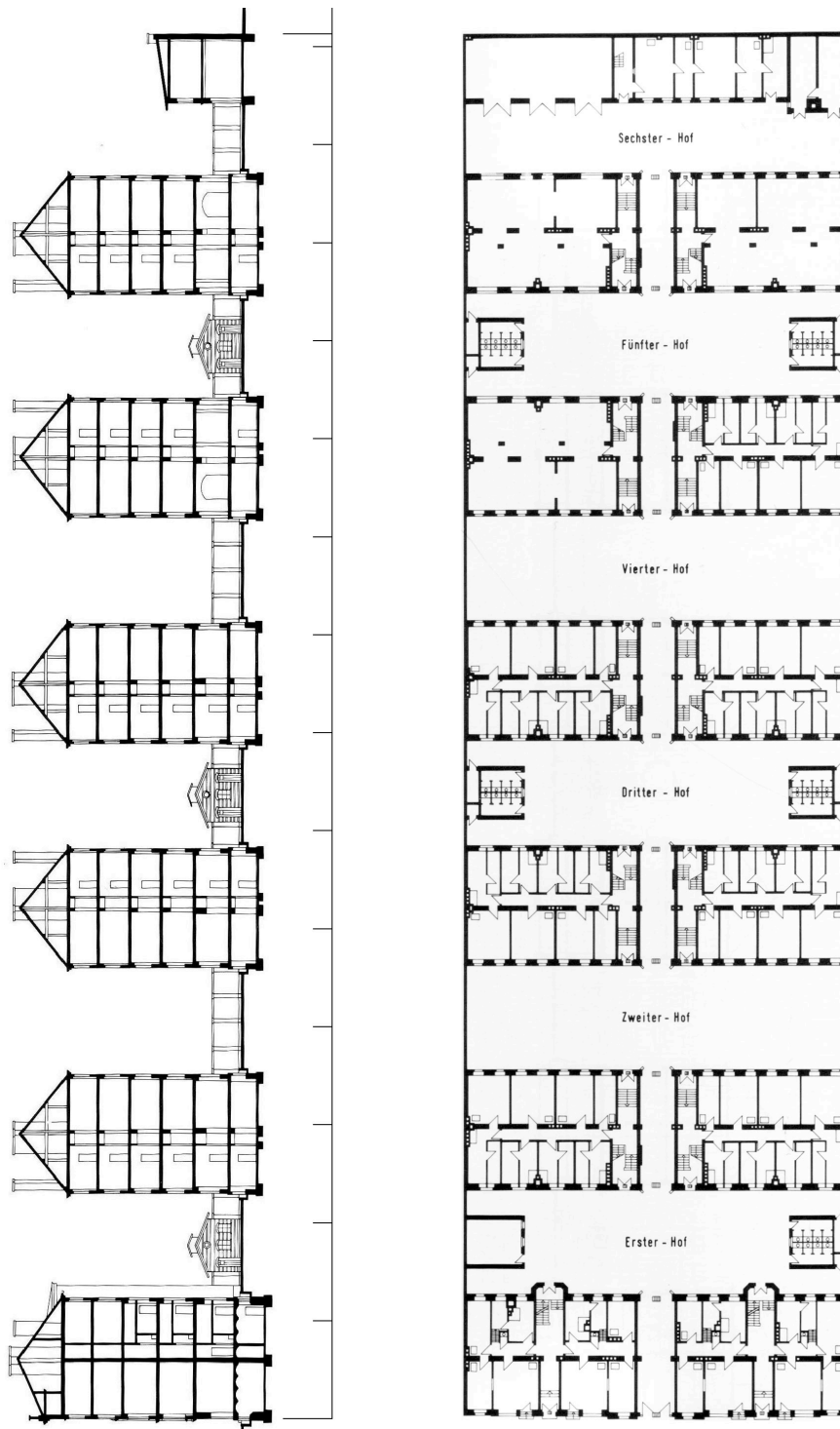
Meyer’s Hof was a Mietskaserne erected in the early days of the German Empire. Similar to Parisian ‘maisons mixtes’ it featured a heterogenous structure with wealthier tenants living in the more expensive front building. James Hobrecht had envisioned the Mietskaserne as social utopia. Mutual help was at the core of his notion. To which degree did the Mietskaserne embody an architectural utopia as equivalent to Hobrecht’s notion?

Otto Meyer based his Mietskaserne on philanthropic ideals. Comprehensive surveys investigating into the misery related Mietskasernen concluded that in many cases Berlin’s Plötzensee prison offered better housing conditions. Meyer’s Hof initially had moist, dark single-room apartments, too. But a remarkable continuous evolution raised the living standards to such heights that children perceived life on Meyer’s Hof and specifically in the courtyards as paradise.

The most important contribution was the gradual conversion into a combination of both residential and commercial use. Tenants could start a business in their apartment, which supported existing stores, factories and workshops in Meyer’s Hof. The actual building was constantly adapted to facilitate the needs of small business thanks to its flexible structure. Several curricula vitae prove that social advancement was possible. In that sense Meyer’s Hof provided fertile ground for self-determination. Good neighbour-ship was not limited to business relations. Mutual help was a core component of daily life in its varicoloured forms of appearance. Exceptional in its dimensions, Berlin’s biggest Mietskaserne hosted diversity in several aspects. Meyer’s Hof was a microcosm. Especially the courtyards as places of community largely contributed to an atmosphere that was remembered by former tenants as amazing. In that sense Meyer’s Hof was a palace.

In synopsis Meyer’s Hof was both prison and palace to its tenants. This Janus-faced character seems to be inherent to utopian concepts just as Thomas More’s Utopia was. However thanks to an organic evolution at Meyer’s Hof the focus over time was shifted towards the positive, the desirable. In retrospective former tenants mainly describe a place worth living. Heavily damaged in World War II, the final demolition of Meyer’s Hof in 1972 in any case marks the loss of a piece of ‘Heimat’.

Meyer's Hof



• figure: section & plan ground floor - plot length: 141,32 m

courtyard houses

“Thirty spokes unite at the single hub;
It is the empty space which makes the wheel useful.
Mould clay to form a bowl;
It is the empty space which makes the bowl useful.
Cut out windows and doors;
It is the empty space which makes the room useful.”

Laozi - chapter 11 of Tao Te Ching²⁴

The history of courtyard houses can be traced back more than 5000 years.²⁵ At the turn of the 4th to the 3rd millennium BC in Mohenjo-Daro - located in present day Pakistan - houses were built with an open courtyard in the centre. Rooms were grouped around the courtyard. Surprisingly there were already types constructed with two-storeys. At the same time similar buildings were erected in the early settlements in India and China. Also in the ancient Sumerian settlement of Ur²⁶ early types of courtyard houses in the centre were found. Located at the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia, these buildings were almost square in plan with edge lengths of about 10 metres. Constructed with fired bricks laid two storey high, the ground floor comprised of entrance hall called “Liwan”, kitchen and washing room, whereas the private rooms were placed on the upper floor. A surprisingly sophisticated drainage system was used to lead fallen rainwater from out of the courtyard by means of pipes.

In the first millennium BC in Greek settlements such as Delos and Priene more advanced houses with a single courtyard were built. Columns surrounding the open space were introduced as a new element that supports the roof and simultaneously creates a covered passage surrounding the actual open courtyard. In Etruscan civilisations a similar development can be traced, which has its climax in the fifth century BC.

domus

The ancient Roman ‘domus’ - a city house as opposed to the Roman ‘villa’ - finally brings the development to full blossom. Significantly larger than its predecessors, the enriched Roman type has two courtyard.

The first courtyard was called ‘atrium’. Based on the Latin word “ater” (“black”) it refers to the presence of a hearth, whose smoke coloured parts of roof black. Initially the hearth indeed was located at the centre of a building with only a small opening above it. Later the atrium evolved with openings in the roof growing. Ultimately the hearth moved into a separate kitchen room. The atrium however continued to be “the centre of domestic life”²⁷ even without a hearth. Rainwater falling through the large roof opening was gathered in a sunken pool called “impluvium”.

The second courtyard was called ‘peristyle’. Like in the Greek examples, colonnades surround all four edges of the rectangular open space. The centre of the peristyle was filled with flowers that formed little gardens.

A domus was home to a single family. However back in the days these families included several generations and additional servants. Inside the city, Roman atrium houses were placed next to each other so that the side walls could not be equipped with windows. Instead the rooms received light and air only from the courtyards in the centre. Beyond functional aspects such as ventilation and circulation the atrium served as spiritual centre, too.

²⁴ found in Weidinger (2007) - Chinese philosopher Laozi is said to have lived in the sixth century BC

²⁵ Blaser (1985) - other sources however claim that the

²⁶ today part of Iraq

²⁷ Blaser (1985)

Mietskasernen

In Berlin's 19th century Mietskasernen the courtyards did not serve as centres. Nor are social activities or functions related to them. Instead the courtyards had degenerated into left-over spaces crushed by flats that seek to occupy as much space as possible to deliver maximal rental income for the landlords. It is the building police that protects the courtyards from shrinking towards nothingness. The definition of minimum dimensions however is supposed to ensure safety in case of fires. Courtyards are not treated as valuable cultural achievement.

At Meyer's Hof the courtyards were much larger than asked for by police regulations. This is due to the fact that landlord Jacques Meyer initially planned the building for business. The envisioned use of carriages required more space. An economic crisis however crossed the landlord's plan. Meyer's Hof at completion was a residential building. The subsequent evolution towards a hybrid of business and residential use eventually brought the courtyards to full blossom.

Mietskaserne today

Completed in 1875, Meyer's Hof stayed for almost 100 years until it was eventually demolished in 1972. The building complex was heavily damaged in World War II. In the aftermath only the front was rebuilt. In this 'castrated' state the building fell victim to a rather radical urban renewal in Berlin's borough of Wedding. The tenants' fierce resistance against demolition in spite of the building's bad condition alludes to the presence of substantial qualities. So does the extraordinary lifetime of Meyer's Hof. The combination of business and residential use helped cultivating a vivid atmosphere. However the courtyards must be considered the most important contributor to the vitality that can be best described as "microcosm". Ultimately the courtyards fostered the generation of a social body in Meyer's Hof.

In 2010 there is plenty of Mietskasernen still standing in Berlin. In several boroughs other than Wedding Mietskasernen survived both World War II and urban renewal. Unfortunately however these specimens differ from Meyer's Hof. Not only was the latter extraordinary in its dimensions. The remainders also lack the vitality related to shops and other business activities. Following the modernist paradigm of functional separation they are 100% residential buildings with homogenous tenant structure. Additionally the courtyards are comparably small.

Bruno Taut in 1931 called for taking the "surrounding outdoor area" environment into account when designing flats (Speidel 1995). He assigned the same importance to the actual design of both apartment and outdoor space. For the latter he introduced the term "Außenwohnraum", which translates to "outdoor living room". Referring to the 'Hufeisensiedlung'²⁸ designed by himself in collaboration with Martin Wagner, Taut states: "The yards have in every way been accentuated and preferred". This suggests a notion of courtyards as outdoor living room. According to that, great courtyards could be seen as extensions of flats. This particular character seems to be lacking in remaining Berlin Mietskasernen.

Hackesche Höfe

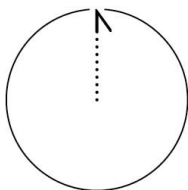
In the centre of Berlin a network of courtyards is a new tourist trap. Eight courtyards in the borough of Mitte form a maze called 'Hackesche Höfe'. They belong to a Mietskaserne originally built between 1904 and 1906. After laborious restoration activities finished in 1997 the building complex host both dwelling units and business in a rich diversity. In that sense it is comparable to Meyer's Hof and thereby capable of getting an idea of what Meyer's Hof might have been. Albeit a polished version, the vitality is amazing. Hackesche Höfe calls for continuing the more-than-5000-year-old tradition of courtyard houses, which can be found in various cultures on several continents and regardless of the occupants' religious beliefs. Apparently there is many reasons for extending Laozi's words of wisdom with the verse:

Integrate a courtyard into your building;
It is the empty space which makes the building useful.

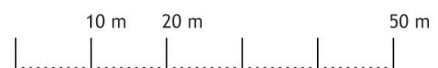
²⁸ Located in Berlin's borough of Britz, the Hufeisensiedlung ("horseshoe settlement" referring to the shape in plan) is a social housing scheme completed in 1933. As of July 2008 it was declared UNESCO World Heritage Site as part of six "Berlin Modernism Housing Estates" in total.

Hackesche Höfe

Berlin



scale 1:1000



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