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*Practices in building housing and settlements
in the Nazi era.
Case study: Breslau*

Introduction

After the National Socialists seized power in 1933, the aims and organisational structures for building new housing and settlements were revised. This article, using Breslau as case study, will examine how this happened, and those who made it happen; one such was Herbert Boehm (1894–1954), who had returned to the capital of Silesia in 1936. Boehm had worked with Ernst May in the early 1920s at the social housing association *Schlesische Heimstätte* (Silesian Homesteads), and from 1925 had collaborated in creating the *New Frankfurt*; he subsequently worked until 1941 on town planning in the Breslau city planning office. Boehm's career, with its breaks and continuities, encompassed the development of urban spaces and new districts, both in the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era.

In order to extend and refine the current state of research, this article is based on sources from the State Archive (Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu) and the Architecture Museum (Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu), both in Wrocław, and the Boehm Collection in the City Archives in Frankfurt/Main¹.

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*Change of power,
and paradigm shift*

Nazi propaganda was intended to draw a clear line under the large developments and the living concepts of the Weimar Republic. In particular, the rhetoric of Nazi cultural policies ostracized the Modernist Movement². The mayor of Breslau, Hans Fridrich announced in his inaugural speech in October 1934 that:

We will not be putting up any blocks of flats, we will not be conducting any wild building experiments, we don't want an alien housing culture designed in the overweening style of arty exhibitions [8, fol. 36].

Fridrich was referring to the model estate in the 1929 “Wohnung und Werkraum” (Living and Working Space, WuWA) exhibition; it had been much criticised³, so he was sure his words would be widely well received. During its early years, the Third Reich presented its housing programmes as a new beginning, but the “new” label applied by Nazi propaganda was intended to hide the reality that they were in fact a continuation of the emergency-driven suburban developments of the late Weimar Republic. The negative concepts of “unemployed” and “suburban estate” were replaced by the word *Heimstätten-siedlung* (an estate of homesteads)⁴ which played into the explicit main concern of Nazi housing policy, “to re-root the population in German soil”⁵.

² Ideological pioneers included Paul Schultze-Naumburg [6] and Paul Schmitthenner [7].

³ On this, see for example [2, p. 353].

⁴ Cf. [9].

⁵ Cited in: [10, p. 11]. The foundations and changes in housing policy until 1940, from the point of view of the DAF, are summarised in [11, pp. 211–228]. Cf. [5, p. 67].

The new government introduced extensive changes to the ways in which welfare housing had been provided during the Weimar Republic. Social housing associations such as the *Schlesische Heimstätte*, which had previously operated under the aegis of the Prussian Welfare Ministry, were reallocated to the Reich Ministry of Labour (*Reichsarbeitministerium*, RAM). After the abolition of trade unions in May 1933, their housing associations were taken over by the Reich Homestead Settlement Office (*Reichsheimstättenamt*) of the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF) under the direction of Johann Wilhelm Ludowici. In Breslau, this affected amongst others the subsidiary of DEWOG (German Housing Company for State Officials and Workers, Ltd.)⁶. Municipal housing developers were sidelined: between 1919 and 1932 the Breslau Municipal Housing Association *Siedlungsgesellschaft Breslau AG* had built on average 657 dwellings per year; between 1 January 1933 and 31 December 1936, only 513 dwellings were completed [12]. The story in Munich, for example, was very similar⁷.

The permanent housing association architects – in Berlin this was Bruno Taut – were no longer being commissioned. In Breslau, this affected among others Theodor Effenberger, who therefore took up a teaching position in the State Art College in Berlin⁸, and the DEWOG architect Hugo Leipziger, who emigrated because of his Jewish ancestry and began work in 1939 as a high school teacher and urban planner in Austin, Texas. There was however some level of continuity in the personnel: from 1932 until his death in 1941, Franz Auer directed the architectural office of the *Schlesische Heimstätte*. In order to practise as an architect, one had to be admitted as a member of the Reich Chamber of Culture, established on 15 November 1933; to become a member, one had to demonstrate “racial” background and political reliability.

“Reich homesteads”

The organisational alterations [...] following the political changes’ included the establishment of the “Breslau National Socialist Silesian Housing Association Ltd.”, a subsidiary of *Schlesische Heimstätte*, which started work as early as 1933 on “a very large number of suburban estates for members of the two NSDAP groups, the *Stahlhelm* and the *Frontliga*”⁹. Prospective occupants were subsequently selected not only for the estates specifically built for the core party organisations, but also more generally for state-subsidised new homes.

The funding policy was adjusted accordingly. Instead of subsidising rented accommodation provided through state or municipal welfare, private ownership was promoted through national monetary bonds, a state-run loss guarantee that enabled lower earners to take out bank

loans to build their own homes – so-called Reich homesteads (*Reichsheimstätten*)¹⁰. This financial instrument had been introduced as a crisis measure during the late Weimar Republic, but it wasn’t until the Nazi regime that it became a cornerstone of housing policy¹¹.

During the Weimar Republic the ownership patterns in housing developments had been about 70 percent public and 30 percent private, but this was now reversed¹². The housing associations might act as developers, but the individual homes were usually sold to private buyers, mostly in leasehold arrangements. Having borrowed, the owners were then tied to the land, thus forcing them to comply with the intended policy of (re)rooting them [in German soil]¹³. The loan programme also stimulated the construction industry, which boomed between 1935/1936 and 1938.

Basically, the urban expansion plans developed in 1928 for Breslau were continued after the change of government, but were realised according to designs that fitted with the revised directives. This happened, for example, in the development plan for the newly incorporated suburb Klein-Mochbern (Muchobór Mały), designed in 1930 by Heinrich Knipping. The slightly curved streetplan runs north–south and is still recognisable in modern maps of the area. The plan to build an estate of multi-storey buildings on the main road leading to Klettendorf (Klecińska Street) was abandoned. The land originally allocated to the Breslau Municipal Housing Association was sold to developers from the party-led *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* [12, p. 2f], and covered with tiny buildings, semi-detached or terraced houses, and small blocks of up to four homes.

Schlesische Heimstätte had specialised, since its founding in 1919, in standardised tiny dwellings; this housing association and its subsidiaries were therefore the main beneficiaries in Breslau of the new political situation; and it displaced the Breslau Municipal Housing Association, previously the most significant stakeholder, in the establishment of the city’s new neighbourhoods¹⁴. By the end of 1936 the society had 161 employees, of whom 118 were in Breslau¹⁵.

Like Ernst May in the early 1920s, *Schlesische Heimstätte* did not operate only as developer; in many cases it also provided building designs which were used, for example, in the estates in Stabelwitz (Stabłowice), Goldschmieden (Złotniki) and Neukirch (Żerniki) on the western side of the expanding city, which between 1933 and 1938/1939 were almost entirely covered with standardised tiny buildings, mostly semi-detached houses (Fig. 1). Most of the homes in Stabelwitz had a reduced amount of living space

¹⁰ On this, see: [16, p. 240f].

¹¹ This continuity was not denied, though the systematic approach of the Nazi era was pointed out; cf. [10, p. 11].

¹² This is reflected in many places in the Breslau archives – e.g. [17].

¹³ Cf. [18, pp. 54–61].

¹⁴ Of the 7,128 small homes built in the whole Breslau district in 1937, *Schlesische Heimstätte* built around 3,300, which represented 46.3% [19, p. 6].

¹⁵ GStA PK I.HA Rep. 151 Finanzministerium, I C, Nr. 12433: *Schlesische Heimstätte in Breslau*, Vol. 1, 1935–1939, Bericht über die Aufsichtsratssitzung am 19.10.1937. – *Schlesische Heimstätte* had branch offices in Brieg, Görlitz, Liegnitz, Hirschberg and Reichenbach [20].

⁶ Table “Bautätigkeit der Wohnungsunternehmen der Deutschen Arbeitsfront”. In: “Bauen, Siedeln, Wohnen” 1938, Jg. 7, cited in: [5, p. 145].

⁷ For the situation in Munich cf. [13, p. 299f].

⁸ Cf. [14, pp. 161–177].

⁹ [15], letter from Dworack and Hellwig, 29 Apr. 1933, “Organisatorische Veränderungen bei der Schlesischen Heimstätte”.



Fig. 1. Semi-detached house of *Nationalsozialistische Schlesische Siedlungsgesellschaft*, designed by Franz Auer, Type 11c, Wrocław-Stabłowice (formerly Breslau-Stabelwitz), Drogosławicka Street 11, 1934–1935 (photo by M. Łanowiecki, source: Museum of Architecture in Wrocław)

II. 1. Dom bliźniaczy spółki *Nationalsozialistische Schlesische Siedlungsgesellschaft*, projekt Franz Auer, Typ 11c, Wrocław-Stabłowice (dawniej Breslau-Stabelwitz), ul. Drogosławicka 11, 1934–1935 (fot. M. Łanowiecki, źródło: Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu)

of between 55 m² and 65 m²; the semi-basement, shed and toilet increased the usable space up to 80 m². The homes did not have baths, but did have a laundry in the basement. All the different patterns had the high gabled roof and small lattice windows that had characterised the houses built in the “Homeland” vernacular style of the two first decades of the 20th century: the wooden dormer windows and gables described as “Type 11c” and used in 1934/1935 in the south-eastern section of Stabelwitz (in Jagińtkowska, Przesiecka, and Jeżowska streets, for example) are similar to Ernst May’s standard blueprints in the settlement for policemen in Neustadt (Prudnik, 1922/1923)¹⁶ (Fig. 2).

Thanks to an economic boom and favourable credit arrangements, there were also increased numbers of individual family houses, which contributed significantly to the higher house-building statistics up until 1938. In Breslau there were further extensive new developments, for example south of the district of Eichborngarten (now Podróźniczka, Pionierska, Ojca Beyzyma, and Stolarska streets), in Wilhelmsruh (Zacisze) and in parts of Carlowitz (Karlówice) and Bischofswalde (Biskupin). The building designs were very similar across the whole of the German Reich and showed little in the way of variation: they either had a triangular pediment and a gabled roof, or they were cubic in shape with two full stories and a hipped roof, known familiarly as “coffee grinders”. The lattice windows, flattened arches in front of doors and windows, and the shutters were all typical, and belonged to the design repertoire of the “German home” that traced its genealogy back to around 1800 and to Goethe’s Gartenhaus in Weimar¹⁷.

¹⁶ Cf. [21].

¹⁷ Cf. [22].



Fig. 2. Semi-detached houses of *Schlesische Heimstätte*, the settlement for policemen designed by Ernst May, Prudnik (formerly Neustadt), 1922–1923 (source: [21, p. 152])

II. 2. Domy bliźniacze spółki *Schlesische Heimstätte*, osiedle dla policjantów, projekt Ernst May, Prudnik (dawniej Neustadt), 1922–1923 (źródło: [21, s. 152])

Dwellings for rent: Volkswohnungen

The Reich homesteads concept promised a privately owned home – however small – to every “national comrade” (*Volksgenosse*) and until 1936 it drove Nazi housing policy. However, as had been the case during the early 1920s, reality did not live up to the ideal. Even minimal specification houses called for uneconomic land and building costs, making it impossible to meet the housing need in the cities. Until 1937, construction went well: around 315 698 new dwellings were completed in 1937, which almost matched the 1929 figure of 317 682 under the Weimar Republic¹⁸. For a variety of reasons, however, the housing market remained stretched, especially in large cities: the “four-year plan” announced in October 1936 focused national spending on militarisation, at the expense of housing and social spending. The construction of the bunker system in the so-called Siegfried Line caused a price increase in building materials and services, as did the laying out of the motorways and the raising of monumental party edifices in Berlin, Munich and Nuremberg. These projects generated an economic revival and a drop in unemployment, fostering an increase in marriages and new families, and consequently in the number of people seeking to buy new homes¹⁹. Even when they had found work, though, those at the lower end of the earnings scale were not able to benefit from the favourable loan conditions and amass sufficient capital to get onto the private ownership housing ladder, so there was a need to build affordable homes for them²⁰.

¹⁸ The statistics are in Dieter Münk [23], based on Vierteljahreshefte zur Statistik des Deutschen Reiches, 1939, 2, and the Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich 1936ff.

¹⁹ Cf. [23, pp. 243–247].

²⁰ Cf. [11, p. 219f]. Also described in, e.g., Bericht der Geschäftsleitung der Schlesischen Heimstätte für die Aufsichtsratssitzung vom 19.10.1937 [20]. See also [5, pp. 97–100].

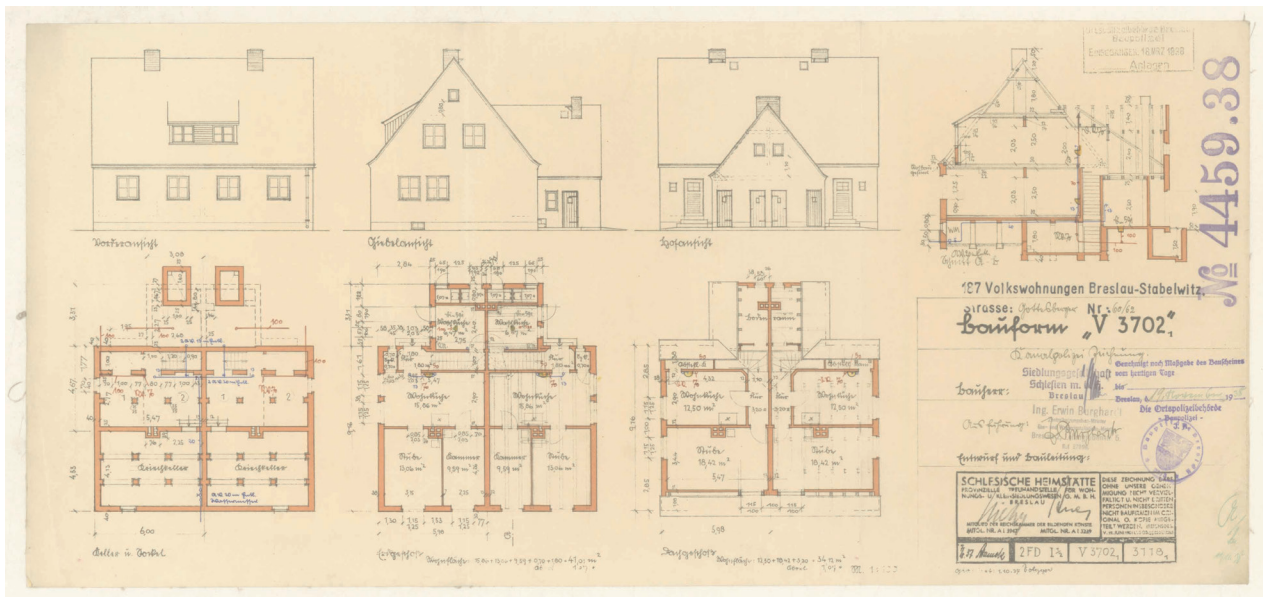


Fig. 3. Semi-detached houses (with four apartments) of *Schlesische Heimstätte*, designed by Franz Auer and Herbert Wiehr, *Volkswohnungen*, Type V 3702, Wrocław-Stabłowice (formerly Breslau-Stabelwitz), Boguszowska Street (formerly Gottesberger Strasse) (source: Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, T. 1406)

Il. 3. Domy bliźniacze (z czterema mieszkaniami) spółki *Schlesische Heimstätte*, projekt Franz Auer i Herbert Wiehr, *Volkswohnungen*, Typ V 3702, Wrocław-Stabłowice (dawniej Breslau-Stabelwitz), ul. Boguszowska (dawniej Gottesberger Strasse) (źródło: Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu, T. 1406)

Recognising this need, on 18 July 1935 the Reich Ministry of Labour announced support for the construction of [...] *very cheap homes for rental in single-storey or low-rise blocks, providing very basic levels of living space and furnishings*²¹. Nazi propaganda had redesignated the Weimar Republic “estates for the unemployed” as “homestead estates”, and now the concept of the “national flat” (*Volkswohnung*) replaced the 1920s “homes for the minimum level of subsistence”, even though the latter had been significantly better equipped. The prescribed living space was between 35 m². for the smaller flats and up to 42 m² for families with several children, and the monthly rent was to be 25RM at the most, and thus no more than a quarter of the minimum wage.

The *Volkswohnung* homes were built in Breslau exactly according to the designs and amenities specified by the Reich Ministry of Labour. Some looked from outside like the former types of small two-storey semi-detached houses, but each in fact contained two flats, one on each floor, so that the building now could accommodate four families instead of two (Fig. 3). The RAM preferred *Volkswohnung* flats to be provided in small “cosy” buildings of this type, but in the end the limitations of cost meant that they had to resort to multi-storey blocks²². In such cases, the recommended arrangement was to have three

flats per floor with stairwells (an arrangement known as *Dreispanner*), thus casting aside one of the key sanitary requirements for the construction of social housing in the Weimar Republic: the middle flat could not benefit from cross ventilation (Fig. 4).

The discrepancy between claims and reality in Nazi housing policies could not be disguised by euphemisms, as party leaders and ministerial officials were well aware; grassroots party members and the Gestapo kept them informed of mutterings among the population about the contrast between the lack of dwellings and the erection of showy “boulevards” and “palaces for the administration”²³.

Large settlements: Berlin intervenes

With the return of multi-storey blocks of rented flats, the fortunes of specialist housing associations such as the Breslau Municipal Housing Association were boosted²⁴. Many projects were drawn up to increase the capacity of existing districts, such as Pilsnitz (Pilczyce) to the south of the city²⁵.

In September 1936, Herbert Boehm returned to Breslau²⁶; he had begun his career in 1921 in the architectural

²¹ Published in [24]. For a collection of decrees on housing issues, see: [5, pp. 97–100], [23, pp. 239–242].

²² On 28 January 1936 a supplementary decree from the RAM ordered that multi-storey buildings should be promoted “where the land available for low-rise *Volkswohnung* homes was insufficient and too expensive”. Published in “Bauen, Siedeln, Wohnen” 1936, Jg. 5, p. 129; cited in: [5, p. 97].

²³ See: [16, pp. 237–239].

²⁴ Cf. the situation in Munich [13, p. 299f].

²⁵ Siedlungsgesellschaft Breslau, Geschäftsbericht 1939 (included in [20]).

²⁶ Boehm was the senior town planner in the Breslau planning department between 1 Sept. 1936 and 31 Aug. 1941; Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Boehm Collection, S/350-13. Boehm, born in 1894 in Dorpat/Tartu (now Estonia), did not follow May into the Soviet Union in 1930. After working in Gdynia/Gotenhafen from 1941 to 1945 he returned to work in the city building authority in Frankfurt.

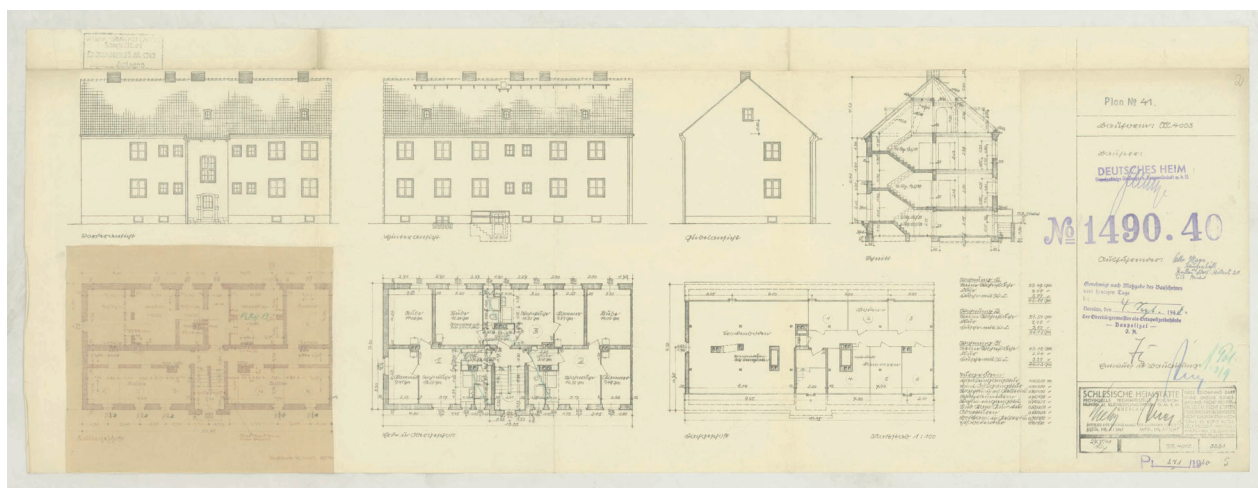


Fig. 4. Multifamily house (with three flats per storey – so-called *Dreispanner*) by *Schlesische Heimstätte*, designed by Franz Auer and Herbert Wiehr, Type SSC 4003, Wrocław-Psie Pole (formerly Breslau-Hundsfield), 1940 (source: Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, T. 739)

Il. 4. Dom wielorodzinny (z trzema mieszkaniami na jednej kondygnacji – tak zwany *Dreispanner*) spółki *Schlesische Heimstätte*, projekt Franz Auer i Herbert Wiehr, Typ SSC 4003, Wrocław-Psie Pole (dawniej Breslau-Hundsfield), 1940 (źródło: Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu, T. 739)

office of the *Schlesische Heimstätte*. In 1925 he had moved to work with Ernst May to the Frankfurt city planning office, before moving back to Breslau to take over from Heinrich Knipping in the city planning department. It is possible that Boehm was invited back by his former contacts, such as Günther Trauer, an engineer who had collaborated with Max Berg in the construction of the Centennial Hall (1911–1913). Trauer worked throughout his career for the Breslau city planning office, until his retirement in 1939; from 1925 he was director of the civil engineering department, and from 1937 he was director of both civil engineering and building construction. Trauer certainly knew Boehm as co-creator with May of the concept of satellite cities, which had been fiercely debated during the Breslau urban expansion competition in 1921/1922; the collaboration that now evolved between the two men was one they remembered with “unclouded joy”²⁷.

Boehm framed the development plan for the first large settlement in Breslau since the end of the Weimar Republic. In 1935 Knipping had planned a settlement of 350 small buildings – family houses and *Volkswohnung* flats similar to those in Stabelwitz – for a large plot in Maria Höfchen (Nowy Dwór), and submitted a loan application to the RAM [26]. Only once the funding commitment had been secured was the building plot bought from the city, for 1.3 million RM. Boehm simultaneously drew up a new development plan for a “self-sufficient community settlement [satellite]” of 2500 homes in two- and three-storey rental blocks and family houses²⁸. Boehm was reviving

both the name and the concept from the satellite cities he and Ernst May had elaborated; his design was for a fully independent community with its own infrastructure and large open spaces for communal use (Fig. 5).

Although Boehm’s draft followed the new guidelines for housing construction, mixing the types of building in order to break down social barriers and thus reinforce the cohesion of the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*), it did not meet with approval in Berlin. On 27 August 1937 the government buildings inspector, Werner, travelled from the Reich Ministry of Labour (RAM) to a meeting in Breslau. It seems clear that the development plan was too reminiscent of Weimar Republic styles: Werner was critical of the layout of the buildings in rows and complained that the design included too many blocks of several storeys and too few family houses. Boehm was directed to revise the plans or, better still, to bring in the *Schlesische Heimstätte* architects, or Professor Heinrich Blecken from the Technical University of Breslau, an architect trusted by the DAF²⁹.

Boehm and Trauer, together with the Breslau city mayor, Fridrich, were summoned to a meeting at the RAM in Berlin on 24 September 1937, in order to present a “general housing plan” and possibly to launch an associated competition. Fridrich did not agree to the competition, as he felt it would delay the start of the works; Boehm took on the whole of the programme.

Only four weeks later the RAM intervened again. Werner March, the creator of the Berlin Olympic Stadium and one of the Nazis’ star architects, was to be brought in to [...] *help achieve an satisfactory solution in terms of urban design for this large and beautiful planning*

²⁷ On the 1921 satellite concept, see among others Wanda Kononowicz [25, pp. 3–26], [2, pp. 171–175]. Quotation from the condolence letter from Trauer to Boehm’s widow on 17 Nov. 1954, Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Boehm Collection, S/350-13.

²⁸ [26, fol. 86–91], Boehm’s annotations on the development plan, submitted by Trauer on 7 Aug. 1937. Herbert Boehm, in his article [27], explicitly referred to his 1921/22 competition entry.

²⁹ [28, fol. 75], meeting with the District President and Government Buildings Inspector Werner on the development plan for Maria Höfchen, 27 Aug. 1937.

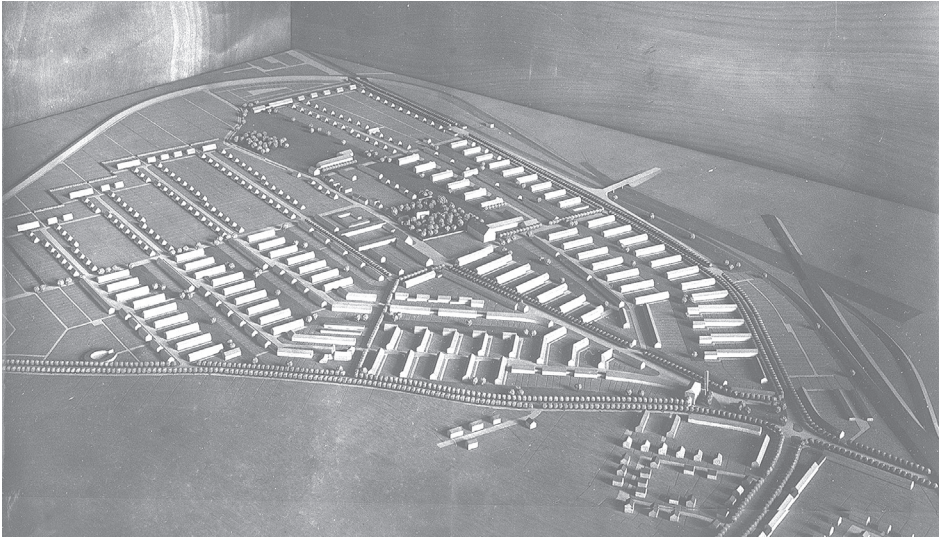


Fig. 5. Model of the settlement, Wrocław-Nowy Dwór (formerly Breslau-Maria Höfchen), designed by Herbert Boehm, 1937 (source: Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Nachlass Herbert Boehm, isg_ffm_s1-350_nr_8-22-0001)

Il. 5. Model osiedla, Wrocław-Nowy Dwór (dawniej Breslau-Maria Höfchen), projekt Herbert Boehm, 1937 (źródło: Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Nachlass Herbert Boehm, isg_ffm_s1-350_nr_8-22-0001)

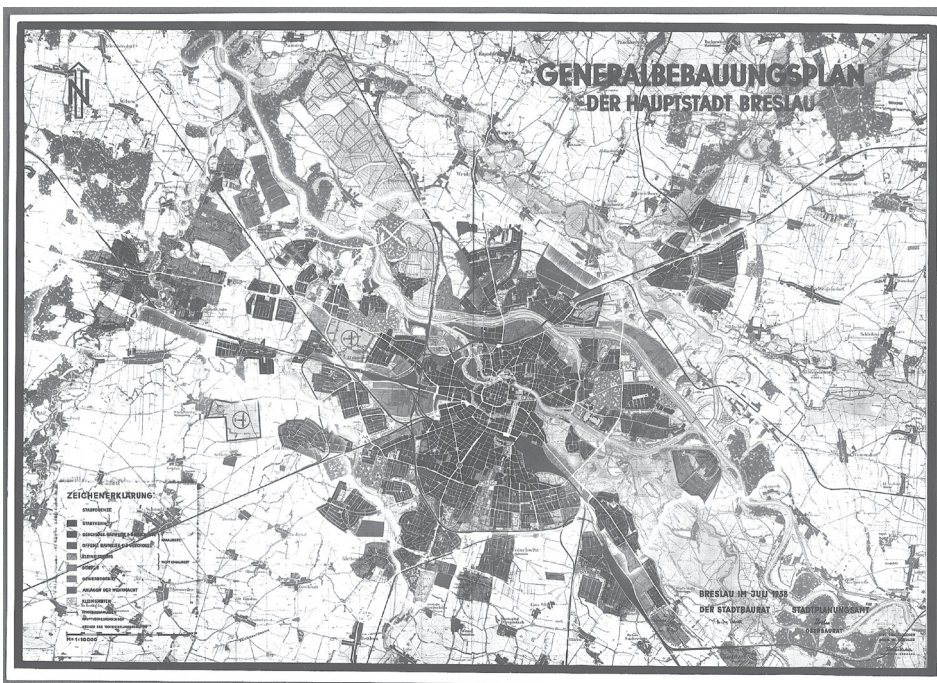


Fig. 6. General development plan for Breslau, designed by Herbert Boehm, 1938 (source: Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Nachlass Herbert Boehm, isg_ffm_s1_350_8_12)

Il. 6. Plan generalny rozwoju Wrocławia, projekt Herbert Boehm, 1938 (źródło: Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Nachlass Herbert Boehm, isg_ffm_s1_350_8_12)

task³⁰. In the meantime, on 4 October 1937, Hitler had announced the “law on the new concept for German towns”; this represented a strong intervention in local planning, and it also affected Breslau³¹.

At the end of 1937 the city mayor submitted the altered plans for the Maria Höfchen district to the RAM, this time without any low-rise elements. At the same time he submitted Boehm’s ten-year plan for housing development from 1938 to 1947, which would provide 30,000 new dwellings³². On 22 January 1938 there was a further meeting at

the ministry to examine the plans. In the meantime a new problem had arisen: the western part of Maria Höfchen lay in the approach path for the airport and for defence reasons nothing could be put there. In June, Trauer and Boehm therefore submitted a new general development plan for Breslau, which suggested moving the airport to its current location in Strachwitz, to the south-west of the city and away from the planned residential areas. Boehm had labelled it “provisional”, but this general development plan remained the only one up until 1945 [27] (Fig. 6).

Mayor Fridrich complained about the hindrance to the Reich Minister of Labour, Franz Seldte – something

³⁰ [28, fol. 107], letter from Dr. Knoll, Reich and Prussian Labour Minister, 20 Oct. 1937.

³¹ The German term was “Gesetz zur Neugestaltung deutscher Städte”; on Breslau, cf. [2, pp. 363–369], [4].

³² [26, fol. 107–120], letter from Oberbürgermeister Fridrich to the District President, 31 Dec. 1937: “Anmeldung des Siedlungsvoor-

habens Mariahöfchen [sic!]”; Anlage (fol. 110–120): Zielsetzung für die Wohnungsbautätigkeit der kommenden 10 Jahre: 1938–1947, ausgearbeitet von Herbert Boehm.

that not everyone dared to do in a totalitarian state³³. The complaint seems not to have adversely affected the Reich building loan granted for the building of *Volkswohnung* flats in Maria Höfchen³⁴.

The work on site, however, did not begin until the spring of 1939. The building companies involved were *Wohnbau* and *Deutsches Heim*, two subsidiaries of *Schlesische Heimstätte*, and the commercial company *Bau- und Finanz AG des Schlesischen Handwerks*. The *Dreispänner* design, in three storey buildings, stayed largely unaltered, in spite of the involvement of a number of architects: Albert Jaeger, Martin Helmert, Franz Auer and Herbert Wiehr [29] (Fig. 7). That Jaeger was awarded the contract may have been due to an intervention by Boehm – they had met when Jaeger had done a study placement in May's architectural practice in the early 1920s. He had been a successful DEWOG architect, but since 1934 he had not been commissioned to build any estates.

The start of the war in September 1939 further interrupted the building work. On 15 November Fritz Todt, the General Plenipotentiary for Regulation of the Construction Industry, issued a decree halting all construction



Fig. 7. Settlement Wrocław-Nowy Dwór (formerly Breslau-Maria Höfchen), designed by various architects, 1937–
(source: Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Nachlass Herbert Boehm, isg_ffm_s1-350_nr_8-22-0001)

Il. 7. Osiedle Wrocław-Nowy Dwór (dawniej Breslau-Maria Höfchen), projektowane przez wielu architektów, 1937–
(źródło: Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Nachlass Herbert Boehm, isg_ffm_s1-350_nr_8-22-0001)



Fig. 8. Model of the settlement Wrocław-Psie Pole (formerly Breslau-Hundsfield), designed by Herbert Boehm, 1940
(source: Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Nachlass Herbert Boehm, isg_ffm_s1-350_nr_8-24-0002)

Il. 8. Model osiedla Wrocław-Psie Pole (dawniej Breslau-Hundsfield), projekt Herbert Boehm, 1940
(źródło: Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Nachlass Herbert Boehm, isg_ffm_s1-350_nr_8-24-0002)

work except “war-critical” projects. This was followed by a decree on 16 February 1940 forbidding any new projects that had not yet begun on site³⁵.

The surviving documents on the construction on the Maria Höfchen land provide an excellent example of the room for manoeuvre in the construction industry. On 17 June 1940 work was halted on 100 homes by the *Bau- und Finanz AG*; on 22 October 1940 the building company informed the mayor of Breslau, however, that 42 homes

would be available for rent in the current year. On 25 January 1941 *Wohnungs- und Heimbau* reported that the application to designate the undertaking as especially urgent would probably be granted, as the Ministry of Aviation needed housing for the workers of the Breslau Vehicle and Engineering Works, Ltd. On 16 June 1941 exceptional permission was indeed granted by the RAM. The next interruption happened in February 1942, when the construction workers were conscripted for the operations of Albert Speer in his new function as Reich Minister for Armaments and Ammunition (*Reichsminister für Bewaffnung und Munition*). In a decree on 15 March 1943, The Reich Commissioner for Social Housing, Robert Ley, forbade the construction of any further new dwellings. In July 1943 work finally resumed on the settlement, after

³³ [26, fol. 140], letter from Oberbürgermeister Fridrich to the Reich Minister of Labour Seldte, 11 Jun. 1938.

³⁴ [29]: Errichtung von 144 Volkswohnungen in Breslau-Maria Höfchen, 1938–1944.

³⁵ Announced in (among other places): [30, p. 5].



Fig. 9. Multifamily house of *Schlesische Heimstätte*, designed by Franz Auer and Herbert Wiehr, Wrocław-Psie Pole (formerly Breslau-Hundsfield), Piwnika-Ponurego Street (formerly Dreyse Strasse, Hofmann Strasse), 1940–1943 (photo by S. Klimek)

Il. 9. Dom wielorodziny spółki *Schlesische Heimstätte*, projekt Franz Auer i Herbert Wiehr, Wrocław-Psie Pole (dawniej Breslau-Hundsfield), ul. Piwnika-Ponurego (dawniej Dreyse Strasse, Hofmann Strasse), 1940–1943 (fot. S. Klimek)

the handover of 150 homes [28]. Of the 2500 dwellings planned for Maria Höfchen, the three construction companies in the end only achieved around 900³⁶.

The description “war-critical building”, which gave exemption from the ban on new construction, applied to accommodation for the defence firm Rheinmetall-Borsig, a branch of which had been established in Breslau-Hundsfield in 1936. In January 1940 Boehm drew up a development plan for a large-scale settlement with its own infrastructure in the North Hundsfield area, near the train station and the arterial road (Fig. 8). It was to include an administration building, a Hitler Youth Centre, a church and community room, a school and a kindergarten, a cinema, and shops. The plans did not include any family houses, but instead 1800 dwellings in multi-storey blocks, with open green spaces between them. The buildings were arranged in rows along gently curving east–west through roads, with smaller streets going north–south creating an open feeling [31]. In presenting his plans Boehm did not refer to contemporary debates about using as inspiration the idea of the *Ortsgruppe*, the local and smallest unit in the structure of the National Socialist party; instead, he once again cited his earlier satellite model³⁷.

By the time construction work stopped in 1943, about a sixth of the originally planned development had been finished at the site of today’s Piwnika-Ponurego Street (Fig. 9). The infrastructure had not been created. The designs by Auer and Wiehr for the developer *Deutsches Heim* have similar exteriors to the houses in Maria Höfchen, with air-raid

shelter cellars, living space on two storeys, and a gabled roof. In Hundsfield there are only two flats per storey, the large ones measuring 66.10 m² to 85 m², with between three and five rooms; all the flats have kitchens and bathrooms. They were let to the engineers and craftsmen at Rheinmetall-Borsig³⁸. By now, the majority of the heavy physical work in the factory was being done by forced labourers and prisoners of war.

Leaving aside the narrow scope for creativity in Nazi housing construction, the huge contribution by the two *Schlesische Heimstätte* architects Auer and Wiehr led to a distinct lack of variety in the 1930s Breslau developments, in both the small houses and the blocks of flats. The most remarkable project of the time, from the architectural point of view, was a private one by investors at Polinkeweg (Na Polance): Inge, Jutta and the architect Heinrich Lauterbach had received a shared inheritance. In 1938/1939, on a site on the northern bank of the Oder near the Rosenthaler bridge, they built three rows of houses, each on three floors, and with four-storey wing-buildings on the side facing the river. Because of the graded heights of the elements, Heinrich Lauterbach succeeded in breaking up the monotonous lines of the foursquare design with pitched roofs. They did not include the usual lattice windows or segmented arch windows, and the glazing on the loggias and the roof superstructures unashamedly reference the Modern Movement (Fig. 10). In his memoirs, Lauterbach attributed the planning permission directly to Herbert Boehm, who certainly was not responsible for building permits: Trauer, the city planning director, must have given his support to the project³⁹.

Planning for “German housing construction after the war”

Boehm’s overall building plan, conceived as a ten-year plan to last until 1947, served as the basis for the Breslau “Preparations for German housing construction after the war”, which Hitler announced as a plan for the Reich in a decree on 15 November 1940; in the very first year after the war, 300,000 homes were to be built⁴⁰. As early as May 1940 the deputy mayor, Wolfgang Spielhagen, had notified the regional council that the city already had established plans for housing construction after the war; land had been identified for 13,500 homes, and work could start as soon as the war was finished [33]. Herbert Boehm’s personal situation, however, was deteriorating. At the beginning of 1941 Karl Hanke (1903–1945?) was appointed the new Gauleiter for Lower Silesia, and his relationship with Boehm’s mentor, Mayor Fridrich, became

³⁸ Breslauer Adressbuch 1943, Pt 2, p. 63, 155.

³⁹ Akademie der Künste Berlin, Baukunstarchiv, Lauterbach Collection [AdK], LAU-01-132: Notizen zur Abschiedsvorlesung am 30.01.1958, p. 13. The mention in the notices of a “now vanished Nazi city planning officer” who had turned down the plans as “not National Socialist” referred to Rudolf Kühn, who left the office as early as the start of 1937 and was succeeded by Trauer. On the settlement on Polinke Street: [34], [35].

⁴⁰ Reichsgesetzblatt [RGBl.] 1940 I, 1495. Cf. [36, pp. 250–270], [5, pp. 183–256]. On the case of Breslau: [33].

³⁶ Boehm [27, p. 538], wrote in summer 1939 “Structural work completed on 850 homes”.

³⁷ “The *Ortsgruppe* as the cell of a settlement” was being discussed in 1940 by Konstanty Gutschow among others; cf. [32]. Boehm spoke of “the satellite-like suburb Hundsfield”: [33, fol. 60], letter from Boehm to the District President 12 Feb. 1941.



Fig. 10. Multifamily houses, designed by Heinrich Lautebach, Wrocław-Różanka (formerly Breslau-Rosenthal), Na Polance Street (formerly Polinkeweg), 1938–1939 (source: Museum of Architecture in Wrocław, Mat_IIIb_1053_3)

Il. 10. Domy wielorodzinne, projekt Heinrich Lautebach, Wrocław-Różanka (dawniej Breslau-Rosenthal), ul. Na Polance (dawniej Polinkeweg), 1938–1939 (źródło: Muzeum Architektury we Wrocławiu, Mat_IIIb_1053_3)

acrimonious. Günther Trauer had retired at the end of 1939. There was a vacancy lasting eighteen months, during which Boehm was effectively directing the construction department; Gerhard Petrick, a close collaborator of Albert Speer's, was then appointed the new Breslau city planning director, and he began work on 1 October 1941.

In these circumstances, Boehm was no longer willing to stay in Breslau, and just then a new opportunity opened up for him: he moved in the autumn of 1941 to become city planning director in Gdynia, the modern interwar Polish port, known as Gotenhafen under the German occupation⁴¹. Soon afterwards he recruited Heinrich Lauter-

bach and the painter and interior designer Hans Leistikow, with whom he had worked for many years both in Breslau and in Frankfurt, to work with him in the Gotenhafen city planning authority⁴².

It seems that Gerhard Petrick did not develop any further comprehensive plans for Breslau.

Translation from German
by Sarah Patey

⁴¹ Although Boehm left his position in Breslau by the end of August (cf. footnote 26), he still submitted a final draft in the context of

the alteration plans for the Breslau city centre in December 1941; cf. [2, pp. 363–367]. On the plans for Gdynia, see: [37]; cf. [38].

⁴² See also the memories of Heinrich Lauterbach: AdK LAU-01-132, Notizen zur Abschiedsvorlesung am 30.01.1958, p. 13f. Cf. [39, p. 65].

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Abstract

Practices in building housing and settlements in the Nazi era. Case study: Breslau

The aim of the article is to present housing development in Wrocław, after 1933, in National Socialism period. At that time, the goals and organizational structures of societies involved in the construction of new apartments and housing estates were revised. The activities of Herbert Boehm (1894–1954), who returned to the capital city of Silesia in 1936, will be presented. Boehm collaborated with Ernst May in the early 1920s as part of the *Schlesische Heimstätte* (Silesian Homesteads) housing company, and from 1925 on the creation of *New Frankfurt*; then, until 1941, he dealt with spatial planning in the town planning office of Wrocław. Boehm’s activity included the development of urban spaces and new districts both in the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era. The article is based on sources from the State Archives in Wrocław and the Museums of Architecture both in Wrocław and in Frankfurt am Main.

Key words: housing, social housing, settlement, National Socialism

Streszczenie

Domy mieszkalne i osiedla w okresie narodowego socjalizmu. Studium przypadku: Wrocław

Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie zabudowy mieszkaniowej Wrocławia po 1933 r., w czasach narodowego socjalizmu. Wówczas to zrewidowano cele i struktury organizacyjne towarzystw zajmujących się budową nowych mieszkań i osiedli. Przedstawiona została działalność Herberta Boehma (1894–1954), który powrócił do stolicy Śląska w 1936 r. Boehm współpracował z Ernstem Mayem we Wrocławiu na początku lat dwudziestych w ramach spółki mieszkaniowej *Schlesische Heimstätte* (Śląskie Domostwo), a od 1925 przy tworzeniu *Nowego Frankfurtu*; następnie do 1941 zajmował się planowaniem przestrzennym w urzędzie urbanistycznym Wrocławia. Działalność Boehma obejmowała rozwój przestrzeni miejskich i nowych dzielnic zarówno w okresie Republiki Weimarskiej, jak i narodowego socjalizmu. Artykuł opiera się na źródłach z Archiwum Państwowego we Wrocławiu i Muzeów Architektury zarówno we Wrocławiu, jak i we Frankfurcie nad Menem.

Słowa kluczowe: mieszkalnictwo, budownictwo socjalne, osadnictwo, narodowy socjalizm